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## SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES PROMOTE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE MINISTRY IN EASTERN AFRICA

**Abstract.** Africa in the context of the recent Synod on the Family. In the nine countries of Eastern Africa there are 160,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs), which is a significant number. The family in Africa is facing a mixture of challenges, some of them being an effect of globalization of culture, others are coming from the cultural beliefs. Traditionally marriage in Africa is not just between a man and a woman, but between two families and even two clans. The children belong to the community and not just to the biological parents. That is why it is natural for SCC to be involved in family ministry/family life apostolate/family evangelization that includes marriage ministry, youth ministry, and a variety of other pastoral ministries and spiritual ministries.

**Key words:** Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa; Synod on the Family; marriage.

### 1. TWO WORLD SYNODS OF BISHOPS ON FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

The nine AMECEA<sup>1</sup> Countries participated in the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” in Rome from 5–19 October, 2014. The October, 2014 synod—officially called the Third Extraordinary

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<sup>1</sup>AMECEA is an acronym for Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa. It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961), and Zambia (1961). The Republic of South Sudan became independent on 9 July, 2011, but the two Sudans remain part of one Episcopal Conference. Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members. AMECEA is one of the eight Regional Episcopal Conferences of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops—“defined” the *status quaestionis* (Latin for “the state of the question”) of the topics of family and marriage.<sup>2</sup> The next synod—officially called the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on the “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary<sup>3</sup> World”—to take place in Rome from 4–25 October, 2015 will “seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family.”

The total number of participants in the October 2014 Extraordinary Synod Assembly was 253, made up of representatives from the five continents divided as follows: 114 presidents of Episcopal Conferences (including seven from the AMECEA Region), 13 heads of the *sui iuris* Eastern Catholic Churches, 25 heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, 9 members of the Ordinary Council of the Secretariat, the secretary general, the under-secretary, 3 nominees from the Union of Superior Generals, and 26 pontifical nominees. Other participants included 8 fraternal delegates, 38 auditors, including 13 married couples, and 16 experts. There were 25 women. The participants included one married couple from the AMECEA Region: Dr. Jean Dieudonné Gatsinga and Emerthe Gatsinga Tumuhayimpundu, who are responsible for young families in the Focolare Movement for Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Uganda and who live in Rwanda. The married couple from South Africa was Stephen and Sandra Conway, regional heads for Africa of Retrouvaille.<sup>4</sup>

Eight themes served as guidelines for the discussions at the Extraordinary Synod taken from the *Preparatory Document (Lineamenta)*. A bishop opened each session with an explanation of the theme (topic) of the day. Then a married couple gave their witness on the theme being discussed. The final synthesis called the *Final Report of the Synod (Relatio Synodi)* is being used as the *Lineamenta (Guidelines)* for the Ordinary Synod in October, 2015. These two meetings are closely connected to the Eighth World Meeting of

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 22 lists 64 proverbs on this theme of “family and marriage.” Six of these proverbs are used in the July to September 2014 Poll on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website (<http://www.afriprov.org>).

<sup>3</sup> The English word “contemporary” has a more up-to-date, “here and now” meaning than the word “modern.” In Swahili see the difference between *kileo* and *kisasa*.

<sup>4</sup> The Retrouvaille Program consists of a weekend experience combined with a series of 6–12 post-weekend sessions over three months. It provides the tools to help put one’s marriage in order again and to rediscover a loving marriage relationship. The main emphasis of the program is on communication in marriage between husband and wife. It gives couples the opportunity to rediscover each other and examine their lives together in a new and positive way.

Families on the theme “Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive” to take place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA from 22-27 September, 2015.

On the first meeting Pope Francis stated:

This important meeting will involve all the People of God—bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful of the Particular Churches of the entire world—all of whom are actively participating in preparations for the meeting through practical suggestions and the crucial support of prayer. Such support [and input] on your part, dear families, is especially significant and more necessary than ever ... May we all, then, pray together so that through these events the Church will undertake a true journey of discernment and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

The Vatican asked national bishops’ conferences around the world to conduct a wide-ranging survey of Catholics, asking for their opinions on Church teachings on family,<sup>6</sup> marriage, annulments, single-parent families, adoptions, birth control, artificial contraception, abortion, surrogate motherhood (wombs for hire), premarital cohabitation, the culture of non-commitment and the presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary, conditional marriages, common law marriage, mixed or inter-religious marriage, same-sex marriage/unions and divorce.

This survey included the Africa-related challenges, especially connected to these 38 African family and marriages issues (listed alphabetically below):

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<sup>5</sup> “Pope Francis Writes to Families Asking for Their Prayers Ahead of October Synod,” 26 February 2014, *Tablet Website*, retrieved on 1 March, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/texts-speeches-homilies/4/296/pope-francis-writes-to-families-asking-for-their-prayers-ahead-of-october-synod>. The importance of prayer was echoed by the joint statement from the Episcopal Conference of Benin and of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM/SCEAM), inviting “all Christians, in the joy of the Gospel, to pray, to reflect and to act with the Church on the challenges of today’s family,” *International Fides News Service*, 18 June, 2014, Email message dated 18 June, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> A request on our African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Facebook Page stating: “Please contribute an African Proverb or Saying on ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ for our meeting on Saturday, 23 November, 2013,” elicited 78 responses as of 24 June, 2014. 54 examples are listed in Appendix No. 21 in Joseph HEALEY, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, that is available as a free Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 16 July, 2014, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)

Some of these proverbs are classified into the three categories mentioned later in this chapter.

abandoned babies, abusive and violent husbands due to strong temperament, alcohol and drugs, artificial methods of family planning, child abuse, cohabitation, communicating the faith to the next generation, couples living together before marriage to test female fertility, customary marriage,<sup>7</sup> divorce on the grounds of a woman being unable to have children, domestic violence, dowry or bridewealth—sometimes understood as the purchase price of the woman,<sup>8</sup> drug abuse, economic injustice, economic migration (internal and external), economic pressures occasioned by work and some cultural traditions, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM),<sup>9</sup> HIV/AIDS including discordant couples, human trafficking, immorality of abortion, infidelity of couples, material poverty, misconception of human rights linked to reproductive health, mixed marriages (including inter-faith or interreligious marriages), negative media portrait of marriage, patriarchy in African society, philosophy of relativism, polygamy,<sup>10</sup> property grabbing after death of spouse, reformulation of the very concept of family, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), rituals after death, same sex unions, single parents (single mothers and single fathers),<sup>11</sup> street children, tensions with Muslims (related to interreligious dialog), use of contraceptives, witchcraft, youth unemployment.

The importance of many of these issues was confirmed by the grassroots reports of the delegates from Eastern Africa at the “AMECEA Pastoral Department Workshop for National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life Apostolate in the AMECEA Region” that took place in Nairobi in June,

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<sup>7</sup> In the African context, this is sometimes called traditional marriage, a cultural marriage form following the traditions and customs of the local African ethnic groups. “Traditional” has many meanings. Worldwide it can refer to the marriage union between a man and a woman.

<sup>8</sup> At the AMECEA Workshop in Nairobi in June, 2014 (see above) the many different traditions and practices of dowry or bridewealth among the nine Eastern African countries were compared and contrasted, as well as the many different traditions and practices of dowry or bridewealth among the ethnic groups within a particular country.

<sup>9</sup> Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as “female genital cutting” and “female circumcision,” is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” Laurenti Magesa feels the word “mutilation” is unfortunate, emphasized by Western specialists from the outside. He comments that an African mother would never consider this cultural ceremony as a “mutilation” of her daughter. Conversation with the author in Nairobi, 19 June, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> During the AMECEA Workshop in June, 2014 (see above) Ethiopian layman Aman Desalegn posed this pastoral question: In Ethiopia there is a new Prefecture called Robe. More than 80% of the population are Muslim. Some Muslim men want to join the Catholic Church with their three or four wives. In the light of present Catholic teaching on marriage, what is the pastoral solution to accommodate these Muslim families?

<sup>11</sup> While we often refer to the reality of single mothers in Africa, the number of single fathers is increasing.

2014. This survey was part of the 39 questions in the eight-page *Preparatory Document (Lineamenta)* to the synod that is also available online. It has been translated into Amharic, Bemba, Chewa, Ganda, Swahili, Tumbuka and other languages in Eastern Africa.

Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, asked the conferences to distribute the poll "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received."<sup>12</sup> This represents a significant shift in thinking in the Vatican. Bishop Marcello Semeraro of Albano Diocese, Italy and secretary of the Council of Cardinals, "dismissed criticism of the decision to circulate a public questionnaire ahead of October's Synod of Bishops on the family. 'The beauty of this moment is that the church feels encouraged to ask questions,' he said. 'The church doesn't just have answers; it also needs to ask questions.'"<sup>13</sup>

Another shift of thinking is in the process or method of the synod. Pope Francis has indicated that the synods will be more collegial and more participatory. This will promote affective and effective communion that is a constitutive part of the collegial government of Synod of Bishops. This means practicing "effective collegiality" by granting bishops participation in the central government of the Church. Hungarian Jesuit Canon Lawyer Father Ladislav Orsy, S.J. stated: "It is reasonable to anticipate that soon, in October this year, we shall be watching a synod operating on a new pattern."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Lorenzo Baldisseri in Joshua MCELWEE, "Vatican Asks for Parish-level Input on Synod Document," *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 31 October, 2013, National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved 4 November, 2013, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-asks-parish-level-input-synod-document>

<sup>13</sup> Marcello Semeraro quoted in John ALLAN, "'Francis Revolution' Rolls On in Both Symbols and Substance," National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 30 January, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-revolution-rolls-both-symbols-and-substance>

<sup>14</sup> Orsy writes further: "From our historical vantage point, we know that John Paul II and Benedict XVI chose (without saying it explicitly) to govern monarchically. Their policy consisted of calling on the bishops for advice, in the spirit of "affective collegiality," but they never invited them to practice "effective collegiality" by granting them participation in the central government of the Church. Enter Francis. In his 1 April, 2014 letter, which is really an internal communication made public, he described bishops as his collaborators exercising effective collegiality with the Pope. As a foundational principle, he declared that he sees in the episcopal synod a manifestation of collegiality: 'The synodal activity in virtue of episcopal order mirrors [represents] that affective and effective communion which constitutes the Synod of Bishops' primary purpose . . . Then, Francis clarifies that he wants to promote affective and effective communion in obedience to Vatican II: 'I wish to give full value [*desidero valorizzare*] to this precious heritage of

Part of this new pattern is for bishops, priests, brothers, and sisters to become more of a “Listening Church.” Traditionally bishops are officially part of the “Teaching Church.” But regarding the topics of family and marriage they need to become part of the “Listening Church.”—to listen to the lived experience of lay people, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, even youth and children. Nigerian theologian Father Elochukwu Uzukwu’s describes insightfully how church leaders need to become more of a “Listening Church.”<sup>15</sup> It can be rightly asked: How much do Catholic Church leaders in Africa know about (alphabetically): families that have sexual abusers, families with abusers of alcohol, forced marriages of young girls to older men, homosexuals (gays, lesbians); marriages with domestic abuse; marriages with sexual abuse; and economically poor single mothers?

In the nine countries of Eastern Africa there are 160,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs). Some SCCs were part of this consultation process, especially through their parishes and national bishops’ conferences. SCC members in Eastern Africa contributed answers to the survey questions whose results were coordinated by the Pastoral Departments of the national bishops’ conferences in the AMECEA Region.<sup>16</sup> For example, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) answered the 39 questions in a 25-page document in which SCCs are mentioned seven times. SCC members also sent their answers and comments directly to the Synod of Bishops Office in Rome<sup>17</sup> and through other groups and organizations (like the Focolare Movement). Overall, however, this grassroots consultation was not widespread in Eastern Africa.

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the council.”” Ladislav Orsy, “Francis’ New Order,” *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 19 June, 2014, and *Tablet*, 19 June, 2014, Tablet Website, retrieved 21 June, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/2624/francis-new-order>

In an interview with the author at Georgetown University in Washington DC on 9 October, 2014, Orsy confirmed this view.

<sup>15</sup> See Elochukwu UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, and Eugene, OR: Wif & Stock Publishers, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> The AMECEA Pastoral Department synthesized the answers from the nine AMECEA countries for joint discussion and further planning at the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Lilongwe, Malawi in July, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Our report “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family Ministry/Family Life Apostolate in Eastern Africa” was received by the Synod of Bishops Office in the Vatican with this answer: “Thank you for your e-mail and the attached file which we have printed out and delivered to those who are analyzing and summarizing the responses and observations to the questions in the Preparatory Document. Please convey our appreciation for the work, effort and concern involved!”

This process has been an opportunity to talk about the pastoral needs of people in real situations in Africa. It was hoped that the two synods will provide a realistic assessment of family life today and propose concrete pastoral approaches to meeting these challenges. A 19 November, 2013 “Editorial” in the *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)* states: “There is the danger that the media-rich West could dominate the discussion. Care will have to be taken to hear the voices of families in the Global South.” Voices of lay people “on the ground” in Africa can make an important contribution to the future of the family based on and in the light of the Gospel and African cultural values. Delegates from the AMECEA Countries can emphasize key “African” priorities and points in their “Interventions” at the World Synods of Bishops in Rome in October, 2014 and October, 2015. The voice and practical pastoral experience of the African Church is very important at these universal meetings.

Yet an example of how these Vatican documents are often written from a too Western perspective is pointed out by Laurenti Magesa:

The *Lineamenta* tries to list some of the striking features of the present situation, including—to mention only those most immediately urgent in the African churches—premarital cohabitation, single-parent families, polygamy, and dowry or bridewealth. To say, as the *Lineamenta* does, that these are situations that “were unheard of until a few years ago” does not reflect the African reality. Polygamy and bridewealth as social institutions in Africa predate by far Christian evangelization, and all indications show that they are not about to disappear.<sup>18</sup>

He adds:

Implied here, it seems, is the recognition that ‘family’ is experienced differently in different places, to which experiences the Gospel should be applied. Hence the need for Local Churches around the world to bring concrete “proposals” from their own situations to this dialogical table of the universal church, confident that – as She has always consistently done—the Holy Spirit will show us the way through whatever human muddle we may be in at the moment...

Without popular involvement [of the African Churches] in the process, the “pastoral policies” arising out of it will remain simply another in the long list of those impractical Catholic curiosities as far as the life of the people is concerned.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Laurenti MAGESA, “The Synod on the Family and Africa,” Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) Website, retrieved on 6 June, 2014, <http://www.catholicethics.com/forum-submissions/the-synod-on-the-family-and-africa>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

To use the words of Pope Francis, may the African delegates at the two synods be “bold and creative.”

## 2. ANALYZING THE REALITY OF FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN EASTERN AFRICA TODAY

Before answering the questions it is helpful to use Step One “See” of the Pastoral Spiral to analyze the local reality of family and marriage in Eastern Africa today.<sup>20</sup> “Family and Faith” was the theme of Week Two in the Kenyan Lenten Campaign 2014 booklet, *How Can We Be One?... for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*. In the “Preface” to the booklet, Archbishop Zachaeus Okoth, Chairman of Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, states:

This year Pope Francis has called a special synod on the family. He wants the synod to examine the pastoral challenges experienced by families. The topic for Week 2 is “Family and Faith.” The institution of the family is continuously being challenged. In Kenya we have seen proposed laws touching on family and marriages presented in parliament that do not take into account both the African and Christian values. In our discussions we must look for ways we can fight this monster that has come to destroy the family. We need to have a unity of purpose for us to address this challenge.”<sup>21</sup>

Using the “See,” “Judge”<sup>22</sup> and “Act” method/process, the Situational Analysis Section identifies 10 challenges to the family in Kenya today:

The family today is faced with many challenges that threaten to tear it apart. They include an anti-Christian culture, divorce, busyness, absent parent figure, indiscipline, financial pressures, lack of communication, negative media influences, balance of work and family and materialism.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Editorial in the 20 September, 2014 *Tablet* states: “Accepting marriage as it is means accepting people as they are, warts and all—and their relationships as they are, stressed, broken, or harmonious and calm.” “Frowns Do Not Defend Marriage,” The Tablet Website, retrieved on 19 September, 2014 <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/200914issue.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> CATHOLIC JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION [Zachaeus OKOTH,], *How Can We Be One? . . . for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*, Kenya Lenten Campaign, 2014 (Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2014), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Calling the second step “discerning” or “interpreting” or “analysing” or “evaluating” is preferred by some because the English word “judge” is associated with the word “judgement” and “judgemental.”

<sup>23</sup> CATHOLIC JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION, *How Can We Be One?*, 19.

The AMECEA Pastoral Department based in Nairobi, Kenya in November, 2013 also identified 10 challenges or problems under the heading: “Reality of the Problem Being Addressed”:

Many families in the AMECEA Region, and indeed around the world face a lot of challenges such as: separation, divorce, cohabitation, polygamy, poor parenting, economic problems, impact of education systems, the distortion of the meaning of marriage, gender violence and other abuses that negatively affect the family.<sup>24</sup>

This research is part of its *Strategic Plan for 2013–2016* that focuses on “The Christian Family Life Campaign for the Protection of the Dignity and Value of Marriage and Family Life.”

All this local reality is within the context of (alphabetically) growing consumerism, globalization, materialism, relativism, secularization and urbanization in Africa

Pope Francis challenges us to look at and respond to the present family reality. In Africa countries where most people “can identify at once with Jesus who was poor and marginalized,” the pope said, Catholics provide loving service to “God’s most vulnerable sons and daughters: widows, single mothers, the divorced, children at risk and especially the several million AIDS orphans, many of whom head households in rural areas.”<sup>25</sup>

A recent 2013 study in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya identified the following 12 factors that contribute to the lack of marital commitment: sexual dissatisfaction; violence to children and spouse; absence of love; conflict in roles; family interference; childlessness in marriage; infidelity in marriage; failure to cooperate with each other; personality conflict; problem of mixed marriage; couples from different cultural backgrounds; and challenges of the extended family.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs. Rose Musimba, Kenyan lay woman, the former Chairperson of the

<sup>24</sup> See AMECEA PASTORAL DEPARTMENT, *Training and Capacity Building for the Coordinators of National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life in the AMECEA Countries* (Nairobi: Privately Published, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> FRANCIS, “Violence against Women Harms Society, Pope Tells African Bishops,” *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 35, Tuesday, 29 September, 2014, and on the CISA Website, <http://cisanewsafrika.com/vatican-violence-against-women-harms-society-pope-tells-african-bishops>

<sup>26</sup> Solomon GBAKI, *The Pastoral Challenge of Marital Commitment: A Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi* (Nairobi: Unpublished Long Essay at Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College, 2014).

Parish Pastoral Council of Holy Trinity Parish, Buruburu I, Nairobi and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, affirms many of these challenges and factors in the following comments on the changes in Kenya society:

There is a lack of commitment to a permanent marriage. If a couple feel their marriage is not working, they just split up. There is more emphasis on conditional marriages. If certain conditions don't work out, the two people separate and go their own way. Even with plenty of marriage counseling, many couples don't focus on the basis issues and easily give up in their marriages. If we remove God from marriage we are done. Without Christian values we are finished.<sup>27</sup>

Simon Rurinjah, Kenyan layman, evangelist and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, points out that:

Some of the challenges in Kenya threaten to tear up our Catholic families such as divorce caused by financial pressures. If a married woman is earning more than her husband there is often no compromise and the marriage is often in danger and it is hard to maintain peace and unity. The wife is often the first to go to the court and file for a divorce. There is little chance to educate the children. Couples stop praying to God who joined them together. Where there is no justice and peace how can we expect this family to be a Domestic Church Family of God.<sup>28</sup>

Tanzanian Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team based in Bukoba, Tanzania, says that one of the challenges of SCCs in Tanzania is involving men in the SCC Meetings:

A family without a father is "wounded." So is a SCC without the presence of men. Men are not against SCCs, but they need to be approached. They will be interested to come when our meetings are timely and serious. Men are like that everywhere.<sup>29</sup>

Premarital cohabitation without marriage is increasing worldwide. In Kenya it is described as a "*come we stay*" arrangement when a man and a woman begin living together without formal marriage rituals. It is especially an urban phenomenon. During a mass wedding of 34 couples at Saints Peter

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<sup>27</sup> Rose Musimba, cellphone interview with the author, 29 January, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Simon Rurinjah, conversation with the author, 29 January, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Rita ISHENGOMA, "Three Challenges of SCCs in Tanzania," Bukoba: Unpublished Report.

and Paul Catholic Church, Kiambu, Nairobi, Kenya in December 2013 the *National Mirror* reports that “Cardinal John Njue reached out to couples who have not solemnized their unions and are living in *come we stay* arrangements, urging them to take the bold step and embrace the sacrament of marriage.”<sup>30</sup> He challenged parents saying that the dowry should not be a stumbling block for financial reasons, but ought to cement the bonds of love and family. Njue said that dowry cannot be greater than God.

Njue gave an example of a father who arranged for a man to marry his daughter in the Catholic Church. The customary dowry was paid in the Kikuyu tradition. The wedding was announced and the groom asked Cardinal Njue to join them during their wedding and the cardinal agreed. With one week remaining before the wedding in the church the parents of the bride requested 200,000 Kenyan shillings (approximately \$2,325) more from the groom. He failed to raise the money and so the church wedding had to stop. The cardinal sent for the father of the bride to discuss this new demand. But the father said to the parish priest to allow the wedding to continue since he didn’t want to have to face the cardinal. Cardinal Njue informed the parents that marriage is a sacrament and not something for parents to get rich.<sup>31</sup>

There is a similar situation to *come we stay* in Uganda. *Kasefuliya*, the Ganda word for “small cooking pot,” is used to symbolize the domestic arrangement of a couple living together before they get married in the Catholic Church. The Ganda noun for the state of marriage is *bufumbo* from the verb *kufumba* that means “to cook.”

Openness to the possibility of communion for divorced and remarried Catholics is a complex issue. In preparation for the October, 2014 Synod this was the most talked about topic in Europe, especially in Germany. It is less discussed in Africa. Univision (February, 2014) conducted a scientific poll of more than 12,000 Catholics in 12 countries representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. The results represent an interesting snapshot of current opinion within the body of the Catholic Church. To the question: “Do you agree or disagree with Catholic Church policy on divorce that says ‘An individual who has divorced and remarried outside of the Catholic Church, is living in sin which prevents them from receiving Communion’”? The results were as follows: EUROPE (France, Italy, Poland and Spain) — Agree: 19%, Disagree: 75%, No answer: 6%. AFRICA (Demo-

<sup>30</sup> Kamau Gitau, “A Long Walk Down the Aisle,” *National Mirror*, 01:14 (January/February, 2014): 18.

<sup>31</sup> Reported by Simon Rurinjah.

cratic Republic of the Congo – DRC and Uganda)—Agree: 75%, Disagree: 19%, No answer: 6%.<sup>32</sup>

On the results of the poll Italian Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, the Archbishop of Bologna, Italy, observes:

75% of most countries in Africa are against allowing the divorced and remarried to receive communion. And so I ask again: which expectations are we talking about? Those of Africa or Europe? Does the Western world have the monopoly on what the Church should preach? Are we still stuck in that paradigm or have we started to listen, even just a little bit, to the poor? I am left perplexed when it is said we must go in a certain direction or there is no point in having the synod. Which direction? The direction desired by middle Europe? Well, why not the direction desired by the African community?<sup>33</sup>

During a SCCs Workshop in Lusaka, Zambia in December, 2013 Clement Mulenga, in a conversation with this author in Lusaka, Zambia on 4 December, 2013 said that he is very compassionate and empathetic with couples he knows in Zambia who had a bad first marriage, got remarried and have been living together in a happy, stable marriage for 20 years or so—and are faithful Catholics who regularly participate in Sunday Mass. He said the Zambian Bishops are open to finding ways to help these people to be able to receive communion.

In talking informally with various pastoral agents in Eastern Africa I hear suggestions that the Catholic Church should not be rigid, but flexible in dealing with these pastoral problems. Marriage cases should must be looked at on a one-by-one basis. Some comments: Young African Catholic girls can be forced into even sacrament marriages due to family, cultural and dowry pressures—often marrying men much older than them. An example was given of a couple in a valid sacramental marriage who had four children. The husband left his wife and children. The wife remained a practicing Catholic and faithfully raised her children in the Catholic Church. How can she be helped to receive the sacraments again?

Financial/economic pressures are a challenge that is constantly discussed and prayed about in our SCCs in Eastern Africa. A particular problem is “school fees.” SCCs members, especially in poorer areas, are constantly

<sup>32</sup> Univision Global Survey of Roman Catholics, Bendixen and Amandi International Website, retrieved on 9 March, 2014, <http://bendixenandamandi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> “Cardinal Caffarra Expresses Serious Concerns about Family Synod Debates,” “ZENIT: The World Seen from Rome,” email message dated 24 March, 2014.

looking for money to pay the fees and needs of their children in primary schools and high schools. Another issue is the effect of two working (and salaried) parents on the quality of family life. With fulltime jobs they are spending less and less time at home. The education of their children suffers.

A situational analysis in Eastern Africa identified various abuses in the family as an important concern. The AMECEA Report at the Continental SCCs Workshop in Karen in September, 2012 under the theme “Ways to Implement Reconciliation, Justice and Peace” stated that we need to look at the concrete situations of life in the light of the Gospel (e.g. good governance, democratic space, child abuse and child protection). SCC members have opportunities to participate in awareness building and training workshops. The Spec Training and Consultancy Centre (STCC) in Nairobi is conducting workshops on Child Protection Policies in Nairobi in 2014.

To summarize this overall analysis, here (in bold) are some aspects pointed out by the Chairman of AMECEA, Archbishop (now Cardinal) Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, speaking on behalf of the Association at the synod itself:

1. **Poverty**: material poverty forces husbands or wives to migrate within countries or go to neighboring countries or abroad, especially in the Arab world. This creates cracks in the marriage bond.

2. **Migration** is also linked to trafficking and also dispersion of children, who most of the time spill over to become street children and prone to be trafficked and abused.

3. **HIV/AIDS**:<sup>34</sup> a disease which creates division in the family and frequently divorce. Usually, both parents are affected and, sometimes both die, leaving children under the care of grandparents.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This very important challenge/problem for Africa has a surprising history. Given its serious effect on marriage, family and relationships in general, it has received very little attention. It is significant that HIV/AIDS was not mentioned in Kenya’s answers to the original questionnaire. The coordinator of the compilation of answers said that this was an oversight due to the pressure of limited time. Author’s interview with Kenyan laywoman Theresa Abuya, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2014. HIV/AIDS was not mentioned in the *Final Report of the Synod*, another indication of the Western influence on the synod discussions and documentation. Commentators in North America and Europe are merely saying that the HIV/AIDS problem is being handled by medicine (that is, the “cocktail” of anti-retroviral drugs).

<sup>35</sup> The full text of Archbishop Souraphie’s intervention is published in AMECEA OnlineNewsletter , No. 70 (14 November, 2014), AMECEA Website, retrieved 14 November, 2014, [http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/11/ethiopia-extract-of-chairman-of-amecea.html?utm\\_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=5720a96ca8-AMECEA\\_Online\\_Newsletter\\_6\\_5\\_2013&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_85fa866553-5720a96ca8-6746297](http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/11/ethiopia-extract-of-chairman-of-amecea.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm_campaign=5720a96ca8-AMECEA_Online_Newsletter_6_5_2013&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-5720a96ca8-6746297)

He balances these problem areas by saying (author's **bold**):

In order to strengthen Catholic families in the region, the positive elements of **traditional African family values** (e.g. respect for life, love of children, respect of mothers, right influence of the extended family, respect for elders, etc.) need to be taught in schools, in parishes, and in institutions... In spite of the many challenges and difficulties of married life, there is also **joy and happiness in Catholic families**. There are saints in family life: grandparents, parents, children, and even unborn children.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

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## MAŁE WSPÓLNOTY CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIE PROMUJĄCE RODZINĘ I MAŁŻEŃSTWO W AFRYCE WSCHODNIEJ

### Streszczenie

Autor w swoim eseju dokonuje analizy roli Małych Wspólnot Chrześcijańskich w promowaniu rodziny i małżeństwa w świetle Synodu poświęconego rodzinie. W dziewięciu krajach Afryki Wschodniej istnieje 160 000 Małych Wspólnot Chrześcijańskich. Rodzina w Afryce musi stawić czoła różnym wyzwaniom. Tradycyjnie rodzina w Afryce ma szersze znaczenie niż w europejskim kontekście kulturowym, dlatego też Małe Wspólnoty Chrześcijańskie mają do odegrania dużą rolę w promocji rodziny i małżeństwa w Afryce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Małe Wspólnoty Chrześcijańskie; małżeństwo; Synod o Rodzinie.