

**SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES: MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN  
TENDEN SUB-PARISH, KAPCHEROP IN ELDORET DIOCESE, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the present-day Church, Small Christian Communities embody the reality of a religious and social life founded on concern for others as seen from the original Jerusalem Community. The study examined the characteristics of Small Christian Communities in Tenden Sub-Parish, Kapcherop, Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive approach. It relied on purposive and stratified sampling to sample 12 key informants, comprising priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and SCC leaders. The study employed questionnaires and interviews to collect data. Secondary data was generated from various libraries. The findings of the study showed that majority of those who attended SCCs were aged 36-45 years. Women still formed the majority of attendees. Fewer men than women attended SCC meetings. Men who attended SCCs were selective of activities in which to participate. Most of the SCCs, though recently established, were relatively active in pastoral activities. Despite the many challenges they experience, SCCs still play an important role in elevating members spiritually and materially. Therefore, based on the study findings, there is need to encourage younger members of the Church to attend SCCs for spiritual nourishment. Moreover, professionals and other educated laypersons should also be encouraged to participate in SCCs. They can bring their skills and competences to enhance the management and effectiveness of SCCs. This paper provides insight on the current state of SCCs to help church leaders in enhancing the efficiency of these communities and lay participation in SCCs.*

**KEYWORDS:** small Christian communities, membership, participation, parish

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the images of the Church in the New Testament is that of the family of God. One way through which the church achieves this sense of family is through the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). In the contemporary world, SCCs trace their origin to primitive Christian Communities in the New Testament. As SCCs stand today, they are phenomenon of the modern day Christianity. According to contemporary Church history, they date back to 1943 and 1956 in Chile and Brazil, respectively. The above was probably triggered by shortage of Church ministers and the reluctance of the laity to do anything without them. Perhaps the greatest problem was the

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distribution of priests and even lack of them all together. The other reason for SCCs' growth was the need for the Church to rise up to the challenge of injustices facing them. This was a situation particularly in the Latin American Church, though it later spread to the entire USA and other parts of the world. In some of these developed countries, like Canada and the USA itself, SCCs are seen as welfare organisations looking out to assist the needy in the society.

From this, one can easily deduce that reasons for formation of SCCs vary from one region to the other. This phenomenon reached Africa in the 1960s. At the time, the continent faced many challenges resulting from the struggle for independence. These challenges included volatile political situations, famine, refugee problems and subsequent acute shortage of vocations to priestly and religious life in general.

In 1973, the Bishops of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) convened a study conference in St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in 1973 to evaluate such challenges facing the Catholic Church in the region and prepared for the 1980s. During this time, the Church in Rome started reducing financial support to the mission Churches. The Bishops adopted the idea of SCCs in their fifth plenary session, emphasising that through such communities every Christian would find a suitable milieu to practise faith (Conclusion of the 1976 AMECEA plenary, 1976). Therefore, in the AMECEA region, the family structure of traditional African society was adopted. This research relied on the African concept of Community vis-a-vis the Catholic teaching on the same found in Vatican II documents. Pope John Paul II sees in such communities simple people who seek to live out the daily biblical message in their concrete situations (John Paul II, 1990).

In the Tenden Sub-Parish, where this study was conducted, the communities felt the need to meet not only on Sundays but also on Saturdays to have an opportunity to chart out pastoral concerns and extend works of charity. This research, therefore, discusses the reasons for the establishment of SCCs as sociological, spiritual and ecclesiastical. The functions of these communities included prayer, fellowship, Eucharistic celebration, spiritual growth and sharing the word of God. The whole intention of putting into practice the Gospel message became a driving force. Tenden Sub-Parish, like all other Churches in Kapcherop, wanted to make the Church relevant to their lives by being available to others. They longed to relate God's word to their daily lives and experiences as well. Throughout their sessions, the SCCs are characterised by casual encounters with members often celebrating mass together with a priest in their homes. For many respondents, this is a replica of how Christ loved to sit, eat and chat with His disciples.

SCCs in Tenden Sub-Parish have mostly been a forum where members pause for a while, reflect on God's presence in their midst as they bring their challenges in prayer. All the participants often aim at building the communion. There are several pointers to this communion. Members commit themselves to compulsory or mandatory attendance to meetings. Commitment is at times strengthened by members' readiness to mark against their names on weekly register. One who fails to attend has to be concerned by sending an apology. Men are not left out of this exercise. Another level of commitment is seen from the contributions. All members of the family have their specified roles in the SCCs. The roles of women cannot be replaced with those of men. It should also be

understood that although such roles are distinct, they complement each other. In these SCCs, counselling sessions are done by men and women separately. Wherever women or men are required to work on their own, support comes from either side.

### **Fundamental Characteristics of the Early Christian Communities**

Small Christian Communities embody the reality of a religious and social life founded on concern for others as seen from the original Jerusalem Community (Tokunboh, 2006). New Testament scholar, Bernard Cooke, understood the way of the early Church as a witnessing to the true Gospel message. In fact, this was how the primitive communities saw themselves. From an anthropological perspective, the same principles and spirit that brought together these early Church should animate Christian Communities in our contexts today. The characteristics explained below made the followers of Christ in the early Church a distinct group from any other.

#### ***They held to Apostolic teaching***

Against all odds, the faithful clung to the teaching of the Apostles. The Apostles taught about the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This teaching was significant to the Community in the sense that the passion of Christ encouraged members to continue in their work. The Apostles also taught them of Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit-power to carry on apostolic work with a profound hope. This could be attributed to divine assistance enkindled in them by the Holy Spirit. There was another advantage of holding to the apostolic teaching. Since the apostles had been in contact with Jesus, His teaching and presence as indicated by the apostles was so critical to missionary work. The Holy Spirit plays the guiding and teaching role not only in the early Church but also in contemporary time.

There is a lot that the communities in parishes could learn and admire from this dynamism and harmony of the early Church. Performance of mighty works by the disciples demanded the power of the Holy Spirit as an indispensable force – *dynamo* (Kiwanuka Bishop, 1983). This was a *wonder working power* that saw members of the early Church delivered from demons, disease and physical disabilities. The early Community combined wisdom and fear of the Lord in order to communicate Christ in all that they did. In order to be an active instrument, the Church should embrace the ideals and values of African socio-religious structure into the life of the SCCs (Zemale, 1985). Leadership in the Church today needs to be infused with faith and wisdom that helped the primitive communities in the Acts of the Apostles. The brotherhood and fellowship in the early Christian Community was real and meaningful (William, 1967). Today, witness strongly reflects a need for a theology of brotherhood based on biblical traditions in the Acts of the Apostles. The early Church communities were characterised by such traditional Jewish attitudes as solidarity, gratuitousness of life, fecundity and sense of festivity. There are challenges brought about by social and political developments leading to rivalry and feuds. This at times breaks up the Christian Community and makes profession very difficult. Small Christian Communities are expected to bring about the desired harmony.

In Africa, the role played by men in bringing forth life is so crucial. They are custodians of traditions alongside women. Similarly, in the SCCs, men are supposed to be teachers of good morals and mentors. While this is the expectation put on them by the Community, they at times

fall short of the ideal hence making some Christians drop out of the fellowship. Traditionally, they were custodians of Marakwet traditions and perpetuators of life. This can be translated to mean that they brought life and happiness in their communities. Some of the challenges faced by Church membership are because African sense of goodwill has been watered down by westernization. This culture is characterised by individualism. What this means is that solidarity and concern for other does not make sense at all. Church, the family and schools need to be well grounded in order to serve as institutions of morals.

### ***They met the needs of members***

In the Acts of the Apostles, God's salvation is tied to liberation particularly of the oppressed. Those that were oppressed by diseases required healing as well as deliverance from unclean spirits and diseases. Luke has in mind the motif of New Exodus in which, through Christ, the primitive communities learnt to free themselves from demeaning conditions of life (Koda, 1995). In Acts of the Apostles, the miraculous signs reported in chapter 2:42-47 made deep impressions on people leading many of them to believe in God's healing power.

In the Marakwet cosmology, there exist such specialists as *Chepsakitia*, *Chepsogoin* or *Chepngorei* and even the clan elders who did *Ayebisio* (Names used in Marakwet Community for specialists). They were regarded as healers in their own right. Their ability to restore members back to their original health made others to respect the special role they played. In the course of freeing members from discomfort, the patient is relieved. Most of these healers in Marakwet were men. The role they can play in the SCCs could boost the service of healing required by sick members. The work of the Community in restoring these ailing members to health was seen as liberative. This study had an objective of proposing a strategy through which SCCs can be made better to attract members into it. Today's Church faces a great challenge aimed at bringing about social, psychological and physical comfort. Members who go through moments of brokenness, bereavement and utter hopelessness need liberation. Through the establishment of homes for the physically and mentally challenged SCCs gets an opportunity to serve needy members of the Community. For the Christian Community to function in a healthy manner, spiritual as well as economic healing has to take place. Probably the area of traditional healing and its place in SCCs needs to be looked into for the purpose of adaptation.

### ***They shared goods – Koinonia community***

Three passages from Acts 2:44, 4:32 and 4:34 give insight into life in common shared by believers in a given concrete situation. The Community had its own economic and social challenges (Mosheim, 1996). The above texts show that hospitality and solidarity were essential marks of the Community. There was due emphasis on sharing food, drink, shelter and clothing. From the beginning, the leaders in the early Church avoided distraction from witnessing to the word by choosing from among them deacons to serve the Community. The united Community (koinonia) was a servant Community (Walter, 1973). Within this sharing was found a sense of concern for not only those who had but more so the needy. The early Church practised charity as a calling. The role played by men in Community meetings was greatly indispensable. Though women had a special place in the early Church, Paul took a special duty to officiate at the home of Priscilla and Aquilla.

What this means is that though women were also in the meeting, the preaching and crucial service roles were set aside for men. Meetings in members' homes indicated that each one of them belonged to the entire Church. In their homes, they readily supported one another. They also challenged one another within their own contexts and attempted to give meaning to the apostolic practice of breaking bread together. This for them was the meaning of communion. In such a communion, the emphasis was on all the members of the early Church being present. House to house visitation greatly encouraged members who saw themselves as part of the universal communion. There existed a spirit of fellowship in the communities seen from the way members ate together and shared what they had gladly (William, 1967). This kind of fellowship was characterised by sincerity of heart among members. This fellowship too was strengthened by temple meeting during prayer time. What this means for SCCs today is that the Community was strengthened by willingness to share all at their disposal. The society bedevilled by such vices as nepotism, tribalism, racism and corruption makes the ideal of Community life a dream. In the face of these current challenges, the members of SCCs are to live to the recommendation indicated in this study. It is critical for the Christian Community members to live up to their Christian calling by being exemplary though this may be seen as an uphill task today.

#### ***Witnessed through lay ministries***

Members of the early Christian Community played a leading role in the home meetings as well as participating in the Eucharistic Celebration. They also facilitated bible sharing, family apostolate, and children catechesis, caring for the sick and social welfare of their neighbours (James, 1987). This came out very clearly in the case of the seven deacons appointed and ordained to serve the Community. In the Church today, members and priests need to in co-operate these ministries in order to become channels where pastoral ministry can be enriched. Through such activities, the people of God turn out to be a communion of communities. Such communion with the universal mandate to save humanity can rightfully organise SCCs from the local level. Again it is a backdrop of some priests wanting to do certain things on their own, this in most cases yield minimum results. There is a need to embrace collaborative ministry.

#### **Function of Small Christian Communities**

Bishop Patrick Kalilombe of Malawi understands SCCs as people of the same faith and values. These are people who share word of God, challenges of life and Eucharist while praying together.

#### ***Shared the word of God***

Members of the SCCs live and regularly share God's word. Apart from this sharing, they commit themselves to reconciliation and encouragement. Through this sharing, members are brought to the realization of the Church as a communion. Members discern such gifts as prophecy, preaching, faith healing and counselling (National Catholic Reporter, 2010). When Kenyans experienced hatred and rivalry due to the post-election disputes, it became apparent that healing was necessary in order for members of the Church experience reconciliation. Today, some members of the SCC cannot see each other eye to eye because of the displacement that they experienced. Some members would rather be away from these meetings than share table with their 'supposed' enemies in the Small Christian Community. This at times is occasioned by members' challenges leading up to

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political chaos. Educational background of the leaders in the SCCs is a factor that the study evaluated as a potential reason why some members do not attend.

### ***Shared prayer***

SCCs pray and sing together while paying homage to God who communicates through the needy members in the neighbourhood. When it comes to speaking in tongues the early Church took prayer as a crucial activity before they did anything. The Church on the other hand draws strength through sharing in prayer and fellowship. The Church in Jerusalem was an active Community engaging herself in all aspects as relates the members. An active Church even today should constantly pray and be found doing what pertains to the liberation of members from inhuman conditions like poverty. The members in these SCCs congregate at the agreed time to pray, fast and intercede for their needs (George, 1983). Part of the prayer arrangement includes preparation for Eucharistic celebration. In such meetings, men participate in preaching, planning and serving at table. They complete their roles by providing leadership whenever required.

### ***To promote Eucharistic celebration***

Eucharist refers to a memorial meal meant to re-enact Christ's passion, death and resurrection. Signs of bread and wine are used to signify the true presence of Christ in the SCCs. Eucharistic celebration is a sign of life. In SCCs, members of the family share talents, resources and experiences. Of great importance in the celebration is the aspect of Communion. All members are brought together in the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. Members here find in the other a source for which to thank God.

Unfortunately, some members shy away because of factors that inhibit them from fully participating in such celebrations. Admittedly, the Catholic Church needs to devise a way of making the celebration very attractive to everybody without overlooking certain doctrinal requirements that govern the service of the Eucharist. In the study, polygamy was the main hindrance that made most members passive in meetings. Though many expressed their desire to be accepted at the Eucharistic table, Church's canon law could not allow. There are ecclesiastical prohibitions barring those in polygamous unions from sharing in the Eucharistic table. The study found too that few of those in monogamous relationships yet reluctant to solemnize their union. The Church's canon law requires that they ratify their union before taking up SCCs activities unless otherwise provided as Pastoral exceptions.

### ***Fostered spiritual growth***

SCCs provide a forum through which members can freely communicate and share various realities of life. At times, some members of the SCCs shy away from such testimonies due to presence of other members of the family. They opt to be quiet and this makes meetings very boring. There is an emphasis on the power of shared prayer. In this research, members of the SCCs have their ways of engaging all other participants through sharing of testimonies without undermining any of them. As mentioned earlier, the traditional barriers that made men to be sole decision makers are broken down and all the members play a lead in SCC activities.

### ***Promoted spiritual direction***

Through the exchange of personal experiences, each member witness to what day-to-day life brings forth. Such personal discussions require considerable commitment especially whenever a member shares issues concerning his/her relationship with God. The idea of SCCs builds not only an individual within the Church but the entire family unit. The family at times goes through many social challenges that require counselling. The practise of self-disclosure heals and helps whenever counsellors are hard to come by. Even in cases where counsellors are available, SCCs play a critical role to liberate members from conditions of either social or self-conflict.

### ***Liberative function***

Pope Paul VI's Encyclical letter *Populorum et Progressio (On the development of peoples)* reflects the role that SCCs should play in the modern world. It is important for SCCs to alleviate human suffering. SCCs according to the document struggles to liberate, reconcile and prioritize option for the poor (James, 1991). The Church's participation in liberating humankind is thus explained by Pope Paul VI as an eminent specialist, as he very rightly and emphatically declares: "We do not believe in separating the economic from human or development from the civilizations in which it exists. What we hold important is man, each man and humanity..." (James, 1991).

According to this Church document, evangelising mission of SCCs should include socio-political and economic concern for the human population, which it serves and of which it is part. The Church beginning from SCCs should not only build Churches but also hostels, hospitals and schools. The call to pursue the development agenda rests with all SCCs members. Men are supposed to play a leading role the same way they are expected to do in their own families.

The steady development of the early Church as attested in the Acts of the Apostles was not without challenges. Despite many setbacks in the ministries indicated in the study, it is critical to point out how unity of purpose kept them as one family. This study was to investigate the participation of men in early Church. Such a New Testament input has been relevant because several authors on the subject have used its background to develop a Pastoral Theology based on Small Christian Communities. The Catholic Church has used the reflection of such pastoral theologians as Rodrigo Mejia to work out the establishment of Small Christian Communities (Mejia, 1990).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Much has been written concerning SCCs in the Catholic Church. There are others not mentioned above and yet they have not adequately covered aspects relevant to this study. The area that has received little attention is that of participation in SCCs. A study done by Bernard Ugeux in Zaire in 1980 shows that in SCCs the attendance and participation of women far outweigh that of men (Ugeux & Levebre, 1995). The Catholic Church teaches that the Church should reflect a family set up whereby both parents (if possible) together with their children attend SCC meeting. What Ugeux presents is an undesirable situation that needs to be addressed. In order for the Church to maintain the ecclesiology of communion based on the family where children, men and women are part, ways should be sought to make SCCs relevant and attractive to all members. SCCs will not mirror an African family if the tasks and responsibilities of the mother do not compliment the task and responsibilities of the father. SCCs have been reduced to a gathering of women and children.

The problem in Tendin Sub-Parish is on how to involve men in Church life beginning from SCCs. This is because they have an indispensable role to contribute whether financially, socially or morally to the Church ministry of catechism, healing, evangelising, Christian matrimony, justice and peace, helping the poor, Eucharist and leadership. All these demands all members to be actively present. Although there has been much effort and emphasis on full participation in SCCs by all Catholics it's apparent from previous researchers and experiences that participation by male Catholics in SCCs is poor or wanting. Previous researches have not addressed comprehensively the factors that affect male participation in SCCs activities. It is for this reason that this study sought to address these problems and suggest possible solutions for it.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was descriptive, and used structural functional approach to bring out the meaning and function of SCCs to a new reader who wishes to know or join. The structure and functions of these small units are highlighted in order to appreciate how one aspect leads to the other. Branislaw, in his Structural Functional theory, emphasises the pre-eminence of the social world over its parts. This theory was used to indicate that the parts play a crucial part in making the whole. This means that for the Church to function effectively, SCCs should be strengthened.

A sample population of 132 was used in line with the table provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). In order to obtain the information adequately the sampled population was divided into five strata representing levels of leadership in these Small Christian Communities. Purposive and stratified sampling was used within the strata to identify 12 key informants from among Church leaders deemed to have had information required for this research. These key informants were priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and SCC leaders.

The study employed questionnaires and interviews to solicit qualitative data and not quantitative. Primary data came from oral interviews and responses to the questionnaires from the sampled population. Secondary data was generated from libraries in Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Gaba Campus Library), Mitume Centre, St. Mathias Mulumba Seminary in Kapsabet, St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary-Nairobi, Margaret Thatcher Library and Diocesan archives. After data was collected it was then analysed using descriptive statistics.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

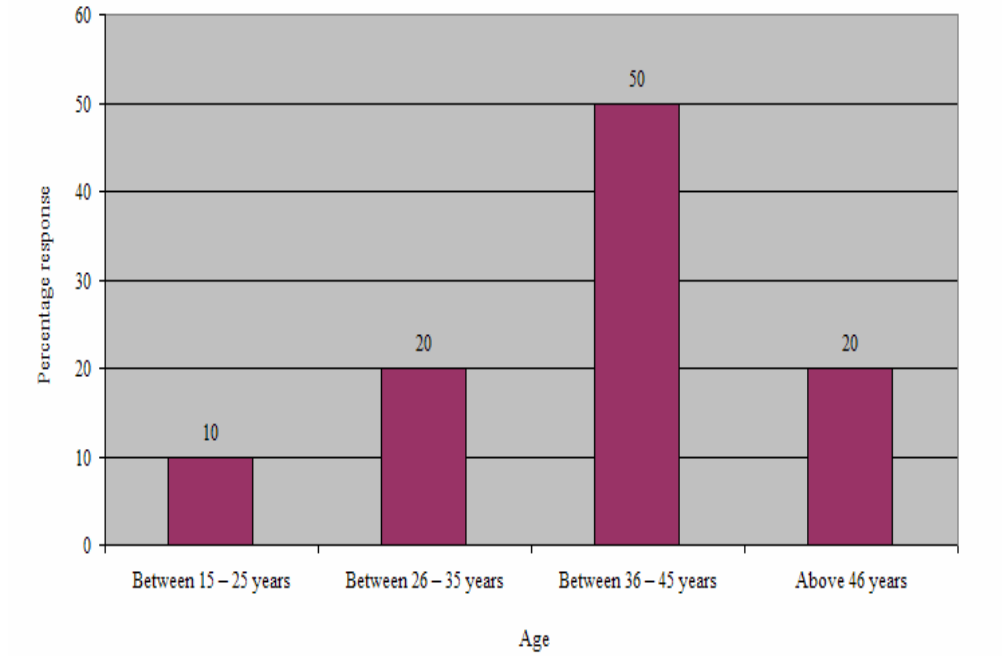
The study examined the characteristics of SCCs by exploring the demographics of the respondents and membership of the SCCs. Therefore, the research analysed information regarding the number of catechists in the sub-parish, level of education, training and gender.

### **Age of Respondents**

It was necessary to seek this information to establish the average age of most members since the level of participation is directly proportional to the age of members. It was established from the study that 10% of the members were aged 15-25 years, 20% were aged 26-35 years, 50% were



aged between 36 and 45 years and 20% were aged above 46 years. These findings were as shown in Figure 1 below.

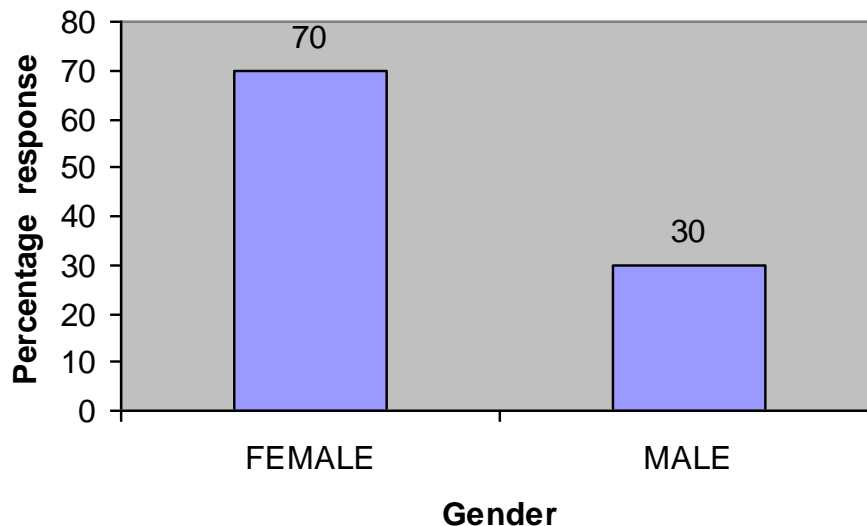


**Figure 1: Ages of Respondents**

The reasons for making an inquiry into the age of the respondents was to determine whether participation in SCCs was reflected in age. Majority of the respondents (50%) were aged between 36 and 45 years. Women still formed the majority implying that men of this age bracket did not participate for one reason or the other. Here, most people are married and settled while at lower ages most of the members are still at school or at home. At this age, there are many other activities to do outside the SCCs. Those over 45 years either did not cope with the demands of SCCs or were unable to understand what it all means to be members of SCCs.

**Gender of the Respondents**

The research sought information on gender to establish the level of gender parity at Small Christian Communities. It was established from the study that 30% of the members were male while 70% were female. This finding was as shown in Figure 2 below.



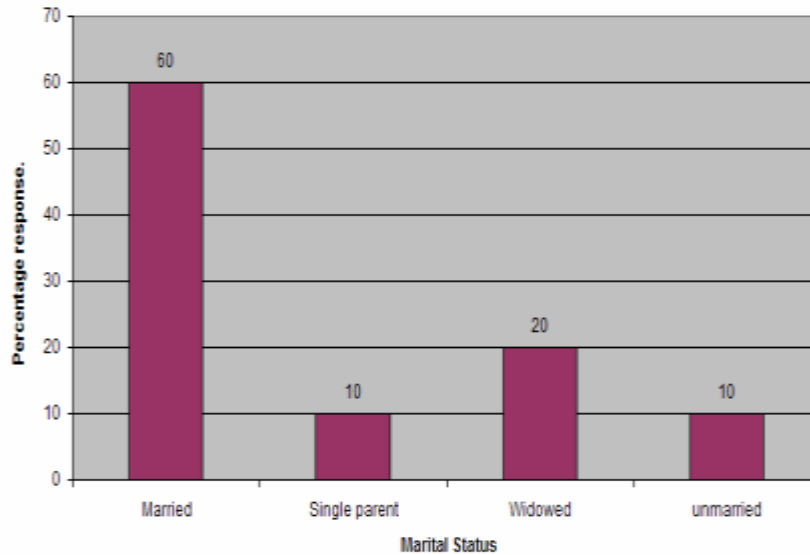
**Figure 2: Gender of respondents**

In this research, the active role played by women in SCC discussion and biblical sharing scared men. Unlike in the traditional set up where men were supposed to provide leadership by way of chairing meetings, SCCs were at times dominated by women who led and contributed a great deal in the discussion. This, according to the study, made some men uncomfortable. Another reason the SCCs might not attract men was that much of the discussions held was about family morals, prayer life, and concern for others. The research established that men would rather meet and discuss economic or political matters than those to do with families. In the Marakwet worldview, the above concerns were regarded as women talk. This research found that participation of men in SCCs in Tendin-Kapcherop was influenced by this worldview. In the research, the reasons for attending SCCs encompassed all the spheres of life and it would be difficult to isolate those that men were comfortable dealing with.

The reason for inquiring about gender was to determine whether participation of men is influenced by socio-cultural factors such as intermingling with women. It emerged that there was a significant difference between men and women in terms of participation. Domestic responsibilities were not the only factors that kept men away from SCCs. Domestically, a Marakwet woman fends for the family through engagement in small business enterprises. It was discovered through this study that, unlike men, women related the burdens of the family to those of the SCC. Despite their domestic commitments and home responsibilities, women still dominated the Small Christian Communities.

### **Marital Status**

The research sought this information to establish the level of responsibility and commitment of the members and how this affected their participation in SCCs. It was discovered that 60% were married, 20% were widowed, 10% were single parents and 10% were unmarried, as shown in Figure 3 below.



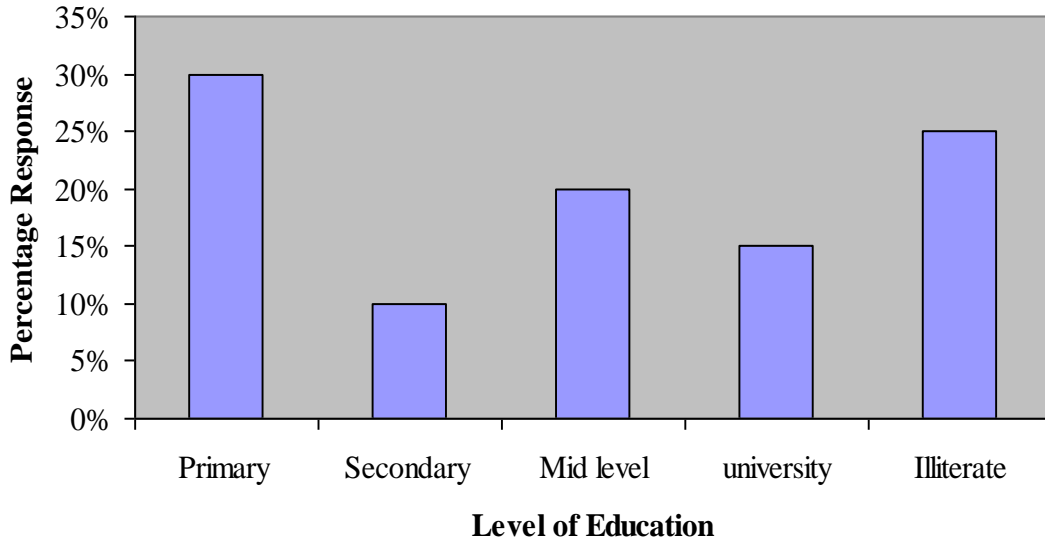
**Figure 3: Marital Status**

The above findings implied that majority of the members are married and therefore had family responsibilities. As such, they were likely to be more committed to Small Christian Community participation to nurture their families in appropriate doctrines. Another phenomenon drawn from the response was that canonically married members did not have impediments or barriers hindering them from participating actively in SCCs. The widows, widowers and single parents were sometimes barred from doing certain things or leading in SCCs. This, according to the study, made some members to avoid SCC meetings altogether.

### **Level of Education of Members**

The research sought to gather this information to establish the level of conceptualization of SCCs' issues and activities from among the members. It turned out that 30% had attained primary school level of education, 10% had attained secondary level, 20% had attained mid-level college, 15% had attained university level and 25% said they were uneducated. These findings were as shown in Figure 4 below.

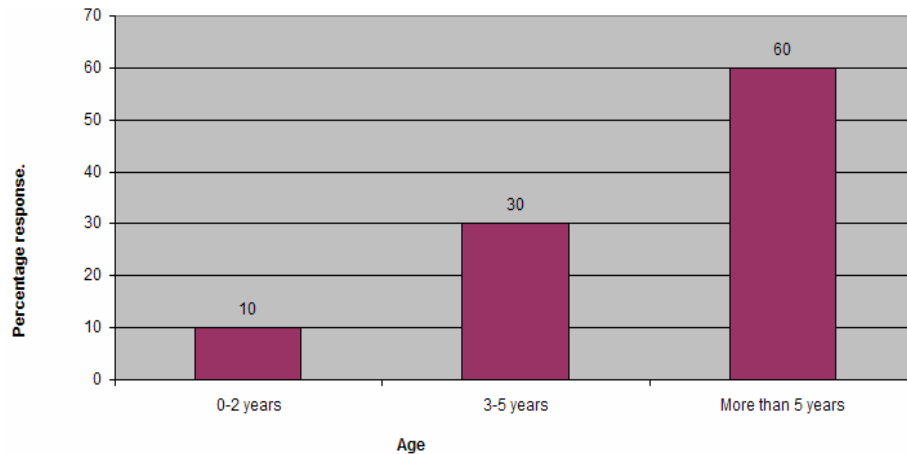
Apparently, few of the members had attained mid-level education. This limited level of education was considered a possible limitation to their understanding of pastoral issues. This also meant that the few who might have attended either training colleges, universities could not be in a position to co-ordinate SCC functions due to their areas of specializations and other career commitments. Some catechists and SCC leaders feared being challenged by learned members during Community meetings. The study established that there is a relationship between the level of education and proper planning of SCCs. Most members were not educated and thus the quality of SCC activities and discussion was greatly affected. As a matter to be taken up by SCCs the one who animates the group can invite the members to have an item for discussion while providing leadership all the same.



**Figure 4: Level of education**

### When SCC Began

The research sought to establish when Small Christian Communities were started in a bid to determine the period in which the members had participated in the SCCs. It was established that 10% of the respondents said they started it less than 2 years earlier, 30% indicated 3-5 years, 60% said they started their SCC more than 5 years earlier. These findings were as shown in Figure 5 below.



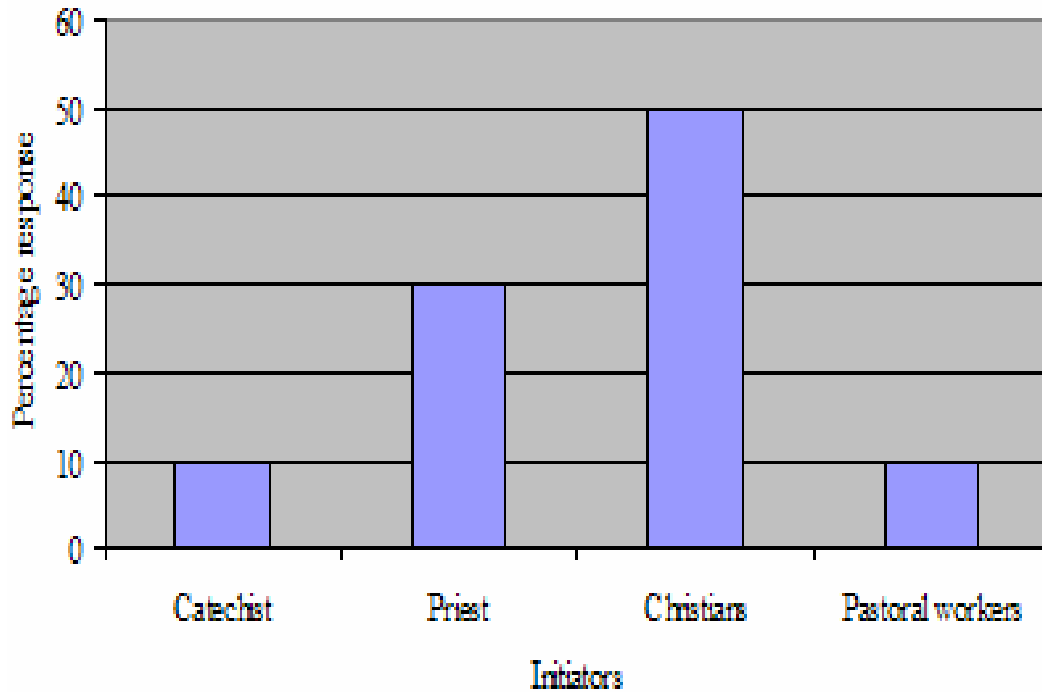
**Figure 5: Beginning of SCCs**

It was found that SCCs had over time been creative and evolved new ways to assist members solve challenges of life as they grew. SCCs established over a longer period commanded a greater

membership than the recently established ones. This implied that, over time, members had found ways to make SCCs their place of solace, particularly as relates to socio-economic and spiritual reasons.

**How the SCCs started**

The researcher sought to find out how the SCCs had started to establish the originator of the idea and its objectives. From the findings, 10% said catechists proposed to the priests the need for SCCs, 50% said through Christians’ effort, 10% said it was through the efforts of pastoral workers and 30% said through priests. These findings were as shown in Figure 6 below.

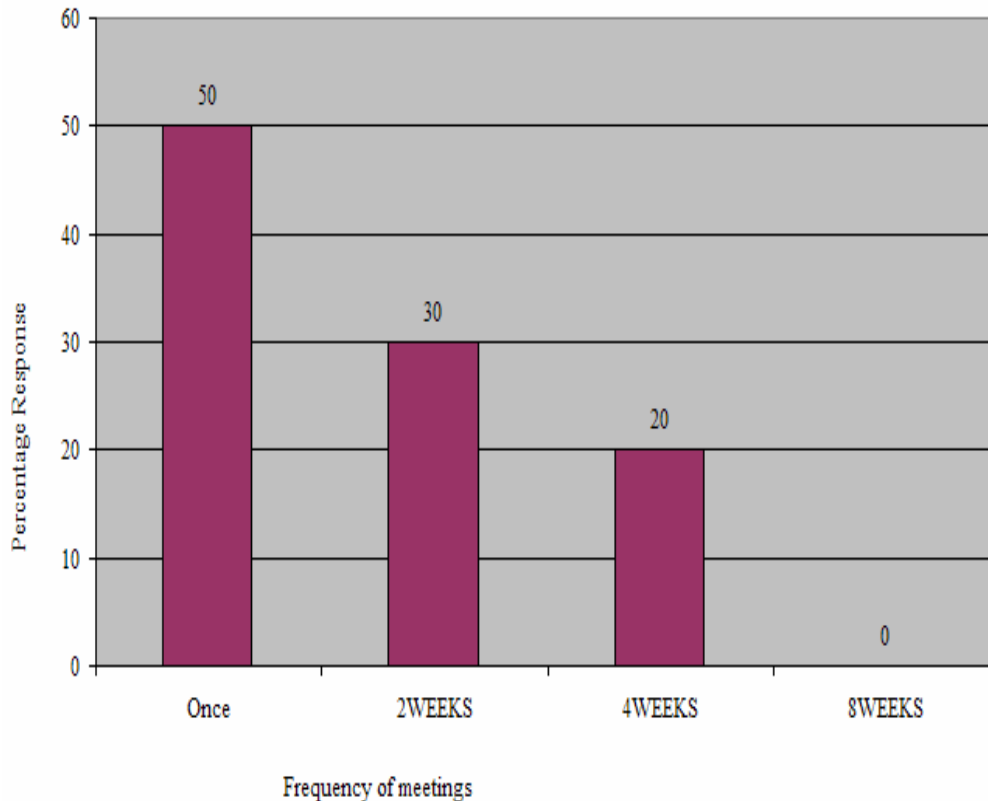


**Figure 6: How SCCs began**

Regarding the start of SCCs, 10% of the respondents interviewed agreed that they joined after catechists proposed it. Of them, 30% joined through the efforts of the parish priest who exerted pressure on them. Such pressure included delay of such sacraments as baptism and marriage if they did not identify with SCCs. A greater number of them, 50%, had been convinced by their fellow members to see the importance of SCCs. The work done by other pastoral workers was considerably equivalent to that of the catechist (10%). The fact that most of the members helped one another to see the importance of joining SCCs was significant to the study. This meant that none was compelled to some degree to join SCCs. The general finding regarding those SCCs that did very well was that members themselves should be the founders. In several cases where the initiative came from external pressure, the moment the force wanes then there is a sudden closure of the SCC.

**Frequency of SCC meetings**

The researcher sought this information to establish how pre-occupied the members of the SCCs were. It turned out that 50% met once a week, 30% met every two weeks and 20% met once a month. The fact that a greater percentage met once a week indicates a tremendous success of SCCs. These was an indication that some SCCs met either after two weeks or even a month. This was as shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Frequency of meetings in SCCs**

From the above figure, members who met once a week got a chance to share their pastoral challenges and find material assistance as needed. Therefore, SCCs played an important role in elevating members spiritually and materially. The ability to contribute comes from the wealth shared from the scripture read in these Communities.

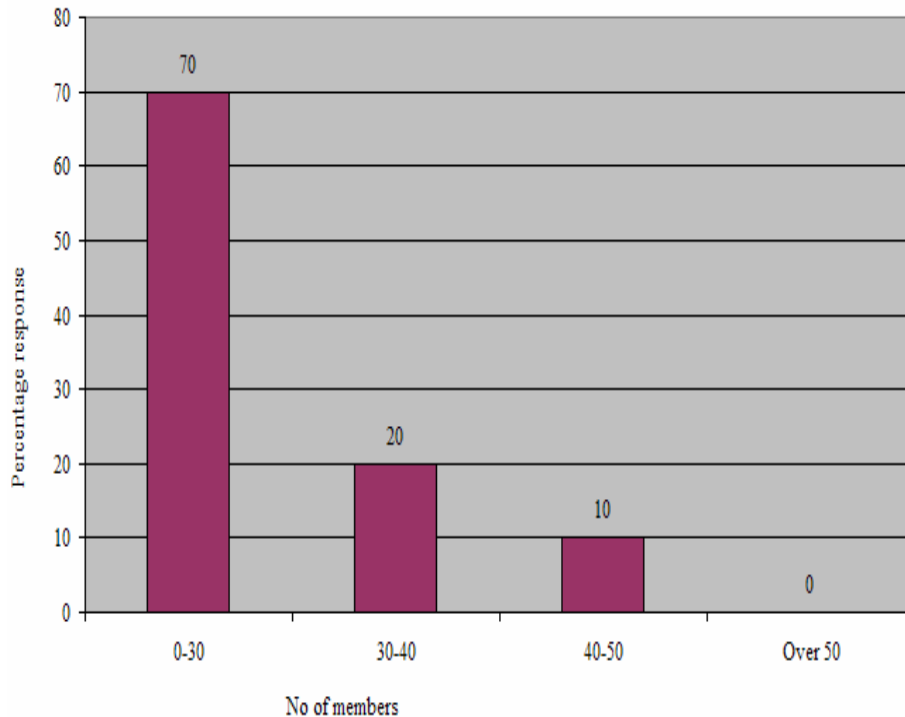
**Number of members in each SCC**

This information was necessary to know if SCC membership was sizable and manageable enough to carry out pastoral activities. It was established from the study that 70% had between 25 and 30 members, 20% between 30 and 40 members, and 10% between 40 and 50 members, as shown in Figure 8 below.

It was indicated earlier that SCCs are characterised by not more than 50 members on average. The study found that this neighbourhood Church did not exceed 50 people. Majority (70%) of the

members came from close proximity and it was supposed that they could be able to know and handle their own agenda appropriately. It was observed that the smaller the group the more effective it was for them to manage their own projects.

Most SCCs had between 20 and 25 members. The study established that some names of active SCCs in Tenden Sub-Parish included St. Joseph’s (Tenden), St. Mary’s (Chemulany), St. Mathias (Kamuseny), St. Gregory (Chebai), St. Theresa (Kaptiony), St. Christopher (Chebai), St. Joseph and St. Michael (Chepkaway), among others. Most of the SCCs, though recently established, were relatively active in pastoral activities. The total population of members ranged between 180 and 200. From the field, it was found that Tenden, Kaptiony and Chepkaway had 40-50 SCC members each. This clarified the argument raised by Bishop Kalilombe of Zambia that this homogeneous group does not exceed fifty members. This, according to the Synod of Africa document, *Ecclesia in Africa*, is thus a neighbourhood Church.



**Figure 9: Members in each SCC**

**Number of Men in each SCC**

In the SCCs studied, members generally agreed that the number of men was between 6% and 18%. The women formed between 82% and 95% of the total respondents sampled. Of the respondents, 17% said that their number at times ranged between seven and ten. A very small percentage (10%) reported that, in SCCs with well-planned and co-ordinated activities, men usually exceeded ten. This was as shown in Table 1 below.

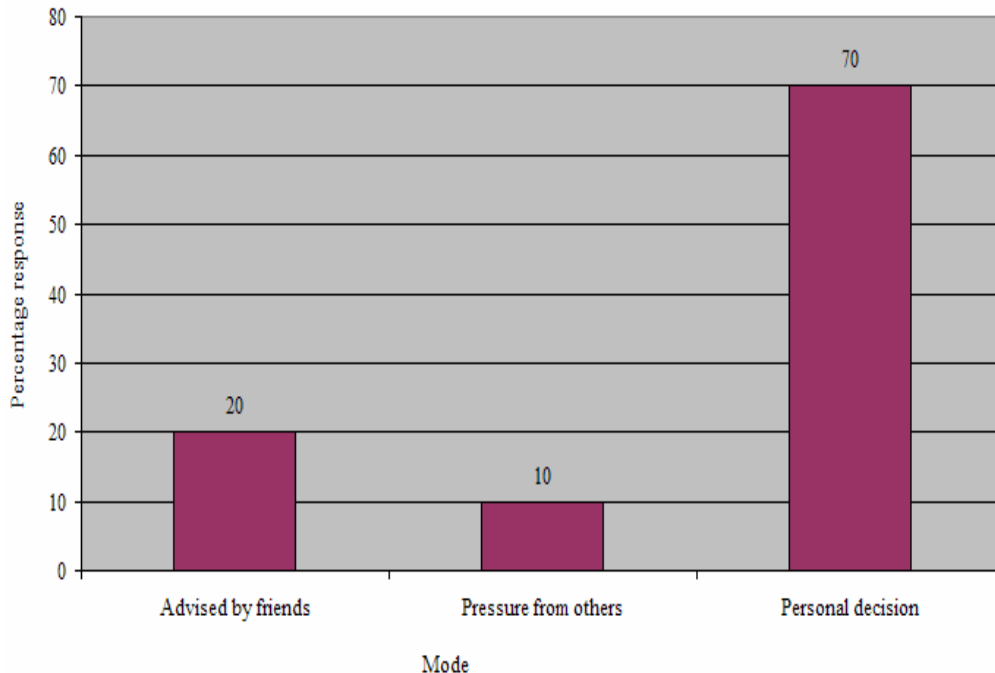
**Table 1: Composition of SCC members**

Churches	Respondents	Men (%)	Women (%)
Kapcherop	30	18	82
Kamuseny	26	15	85
Lochin	24	5	95
Kaptiony	26	8	92
Chepkaway	26	6	94

From the findings above, it was evident that the number of men was smaller bearing in mind the fact that, in the previous discussion, most of the SCCs had between 20 and 30 members. The implication here was that either there existed a challenge faced by men as SCC members or simply that theirs was a case of laxity. In order to further understand this matter in SCCs it became necessary to look into membership in general. The data from the table above supports the contention that fewer men than women attended SCC meetings.

**Membership**

It was necessary to establish how the respondents became members of SCCs to determine the level of commitment. It was discovered that 20% said friends advised them to join SCCs, 70% said it was their personal decision while 10% joined due to pressure from others. These findings were as shown in Figure 10 below.



**Figure 10: Motivations for joining SCC**

The figure above depicts the formation and sustenance of SCC by members themselves. Those who conceived this organization as a personal idea would readily support. The levels of

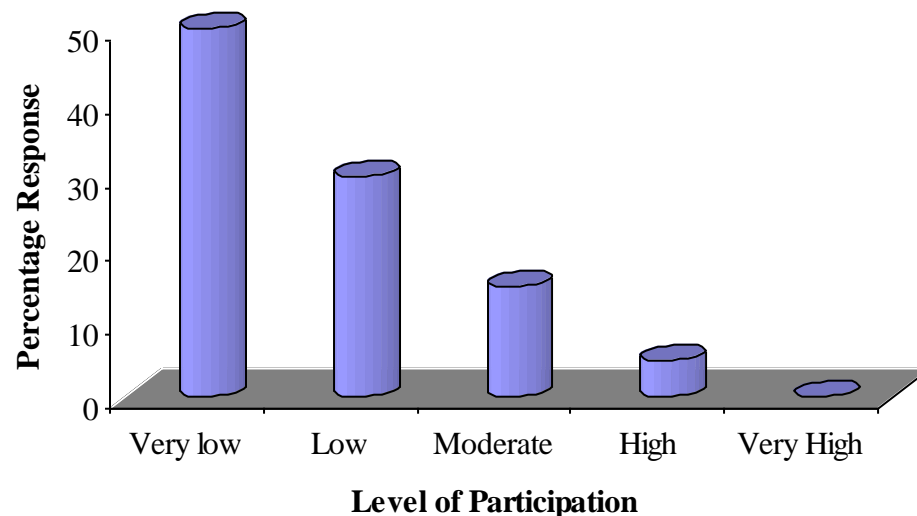


commitment from men at times waned due to other commitments. The research established that when men took on SCC responsibilities, such as self-reliance portfolio, they readily became active and involved. Most of them feared challenges posed by women in leadership. The research also found that membership to these SCCs was open to all ages, gender, marital and educational backgrounds. This meant that the leadership of some of the members of these communities must bear in mind the various groups. With the continuous presence of women, men (though few) and children, SCCs had been turned into focal points where members discovered the African sense of Community. The kind of interaction found in a *kokwet* is upset by absenteeism of some members or lack of participation altogether. SCCs essentially are places where the young get lessons from older ones. In turn, the old members learn modern trends from the young ones.

From this research, some members joined SCCs after being convinced by some priest or by their own family members. In most cases, such members would not be committed to the groups' objectives, activities or visions. Further findings on these SCCs have their base pointing to the religious or pastoral workers. It shows that they usually meet though with little commitment. Apparently, most members joined the group through their personal decision. This means they would be committed to its objectives and activities hence maximum participation in pastoral activities.

#### Level of Participation of Men in SCC Activities

The research sought to establish the level of participation of the men in SCC activities so as to relate them to the factors which influence their participation. It was established that 50% said it was very low while 30% said it was low. Of the respondents, 15% rated moderate, 5% high while none said the level was very high. These findings were as shown in Figure 11 below.



**Figure 11: Level of participation of men in SCCs**

The above findings showed that majority of respondents rated men participation extremely poor. Asked to explain further, the respondents said that they attended meetings regularly, but were selective on activities in which to participate. Possibly, due to lack of proper coordination of

activities in SCCs, men at times found it hard to attend and contribute to the changes required in SCCs. The high percentage of men who failed to attend these weekly SCC meetings was a clear indication that there existed a setback in SCCs as a tool for evangelization. From the figure above, other members met frequently and were, therefore, pre-occupied and committed to the activities of the SCC. Though the presence or absence of members in the SCCs might not necessarily indicate the level of commitment, the spirit of participation alone reflected the good will of those in the group.

The study found that when members are all gathered in the SCC the tasks assigned to participants became even simpler. This for them implied that they took a lot of time to participate in SCC activities. They gave various reasons for attendance, such as nurturing Christian doctrines; sharing Christian ideals; praying together; assisting one another; discussing self-reliance projects such as running clinics; visiting the sick; preparing for mass; meeting to do community work and assisting the needy, and to enhance group cohesion.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Majority of those who attend SCCs are aged between 36 and 45 years. Women are the majority attendees, implying that men of this age bracket do not participate for one reason or the other. Moreover, most members of SCCs are married and settled while at lower ages most of the members are still at school or at home. Fewer men than women attend SCC meetings. Men who attend SCCs are selective of activities in which to participate. Most of the SCCs, though recently established, are relatively active in pastoral activities. The total population of members in each SCC is between 40 and 50.

Few members of SCCs have attained mid-level education, meaning they are able to understand pastoral issues. This also means that the few who may have attended either training colleges, universities may not be in a position to co-ordinate SCC functions due to their areas of specializations and other career commitments. Some catechists and SCC leaders fear being challenged by learned members during Community meetings. There is a relationship between the level of education and proper planning and management of SCCs. Most members are not educated and thus SCC activities and discussions are greatly affected. As a matter to be taken up by SCCs, the one who animates the group can invite the members to have an item for discussion while providing leadership all the same.

Despite the many challenges they experience, SCCs still play an important role in elevating members spiritually and materially. The ability to contribute comes from the wealth shared from the scripture read in these Communities. SCCs are formed to strengthen spirituality and help Christ followers to hold on to the teachings of Jesus Christ. There is need for the creation of different service ministries in the Church that can readily be embraced by these members who do not partake in the sacraments. Therefore, based on the study findings, it is recommended that there is need to encourage younger members of the Church to attend SCCs for spiritual nourishment. Moreover, professionals and other educated laymen and women should also be encouraged to participate in SCCs. They can bring their skills and competences to enhance the management and effectiveness

of SCCs. There is also a need to encourage more men to take part in SCCs. Married couples should also be helped and encouraged to participate more in SCCs.

### **Pastoral implication of life in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) for the Church.**

Despite the challenges posed by non-active involvement of Men in SCCs these base communities are very critical in the life of the entire church. This can be understood from the following aspects that make SCCs meeting necessary for the life of its members:

SCCs are places for fostering relationships and community. When members share, they can be able to see how to help needy members and thereby lifting each other. The kind of relationships established from these base communities help to solidify the church. This is unlike the relationship formed by just attending mass or just an activity in the main church.

SCCs are places where new members or non-believers are easily introduced to church life before they get to the main congregation. These new members soon find a home in the community of believers in the small group. Slowly they start to know how to pray, share the Word of God or even faith sharing. They also utilise such meetings to ask pertinent questions on matters of faith.

SCCs are ideal places to care for the needs of members within the Church. When a member is struggling with a certain challenge, the rest of its members are able to come to the rescue. The rest if the members are able to detect financial, emotional, social or physical challenges and discern a better way to sort out. These communities become avenues where members help one another easily.

Members of SCCs live out their faith to the full rather than being mere hearers or listeners. They attempt to go out the whole week living the Gospel message. They use the scripture to fight spiritual battles while praying for one another.

SCCs easily provide an environment for focused prayer. The members are able to bring forward their needs as prayer items. Each of the participant ids given time to share the kind of challenge that would form the basis of prayer in the meeting. These meetings become very important in the life of its members.

SCCs are comfortable avenues to open up and share. Acts of the Apostles provide examples of how early Church was comfortable meeting in homes where they easily opened up, listened learned and grew.

SCCs is an opportunity for edification of self and others. Bible sharing gives members the opportunity to receive spiritual food other than what is preached in the pulpit. By sharing, they also learn that they have a responsibility to share with others. When they share, they assist one another and work out solutions to their challenges.

SCCs provide men an opportunity to learn while on their own. Unlike in the usual mass where they are passive in the Church, members take the lead and sort out issues that pertain to them.

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When they gather together, they get involved and participate. Active participation enables them to learn more.

SCCs help in formation of future leaders in the small cell groups. These groups enable its members to take up leadership roles in a small way until such a time that they will be chosen to take up major roles.

SCCs is an avenue for encouragement and accountability. When members go to the main church, it is easy to go unnoticed. Their place in SCCs will not just be that of simply attending. Members will be tasked with certain activities that calls for accountability when called for. Whenever possible SCCs are avenues for encouragement. By meeting there with others, they design a way of meeting their needs as members.

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