

INTRODUCTION

The Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwestern Kenya was established in 1992 with the arrival of the “Lost Boys of Sudan,” followed by Ethiopians and Somalis. Today, the Kakuma Camp and associated Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement are home to some 218,380 refugees from 22 different countries. Pastoral care for the refugees in the Diocese of Lodwar has been entrusted by Bishop Dominic Kimengich, Bishop of Eldoret, to the Salesian community in collaboration with the Missionary Sisters of Charles De Foucauld (MDF) and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS).

Inspired by the aims of the Synod, we are seeking to implement “a participative and inclusive ecclesial process that offers everyone—especially those who for various reasons find themselves on the margins—the opportunity to express themselves and to be heard...” We recognize that marginal voices may themselves be marginalized if they are simply subsumed within larger demographic groups. At the invitation of our Salesian pastor, Fr. Jose Padinjareparampil, SDB and with the assistance of JRS, the sisters have thus begun an intensive program to foster a truly “inclusive ecclesial process” in our Small Christian Communities (SCC’s). What follows is a brief description of our program which is itself being modified with the participation of the SCC’s.

OUR PREPARATORY PROGRAM

Even in our preparations, we are seeking to live the Synodal journey at the level of the SCC’s. There are currently 71 SCC’s in the camp, with members ranging from 10 to 50 in each SCC. We have divided the process into two phases:

Phase One

The first phase consists of an introductory meeting with the participation of all Christians. Since there are so many members of Small Christian Communities from different nationalities and language groups, we organized the meetings in our various substations, dividing the groups according to the language: Swahili, English, or various other languages which will be translated.

In this way, we can conduct introductory meetings for 3 different language groups in each substation. While it would be more appropriate to mix groups of different origins, the language barriers would make it very difficult for them to communicate freely.

The first meeting is based on a general presentation of the Synod, its characteristics, purposes and the attitudes necessary for living it. We begin with the very title of a “Synodal Church,” drawing upon the experience of the Small Christian Communities and their own understanding of Church.

We use Lumko method posters for this:



After those sharing have “read” and interpreted these posters themselves, we use the Synod logo to explain the idea of the Synodal Church—an idea which speaks to the heart and mind of many. Since the groups are quite large (from 30 to 80 participants), we live these moments of sharing and dialogue by dividing them into smaller groups, giving each group questions to share together and then make a report to the entire group.

We try, through dynamics and examples to explain the three words: communion, participation and mission. (For example, it is very useful in reflecting on the idea of participation to have them build a puzzle, distributing a piece to each of them. This effectively communicates the sense of the importance of each piece, ensuring that the drawing is complete. But it also underlines the importance of the difference of roles, responsibilities, talents in completing the puzzle.)

In this first phase, we emphasize their experience of their Small Christian Community: What model of Church are we living as a SCC? How can we grow to become a Synodal Church in our journey as the people of God? We then leave them three questions, one a week. They will dedicate a space of their weekly meeting to reflect on these questions:

- How do we experience *communion* and unity in our SCC? Which joys? Which problems? Has someone left the SCC because they didn’t find a united atmosphere among us? How can we grow?
- How is our real *participation* at the level of our SCC? In what should we grow? Are we active or passive?
- How do we live the *mission*, our being sent from the SCC? Is our SCC a closed group or do we have our eyes open to those around us (sick, new born, problems, new arrivals, preparation of Sacraments, etc.)?

Phase Two

After introducing these broad themes in the differing language groups of the First Phase, members of the individual SCC’s will be invited to reflect prayerfully on the questions posed for the Synod. In this Second Phases, leaders of the SCC’s will address 8 questions or “thematic nuclei” of the Synod in the context of forced displacement. We have initially identified and adapted 8 questions that seemed especially appropriate, but we will continue to refine the questions in consultation with the SCC leaders as we proceed. One question will be addressed each week so as to allow for broad participation and in-depth discussion.

Some Thematic Nuclei to be Explored

1st. Week: JOURNEYING TOGETHER

- Do we journey together? When we say: “our Church,” who is part of it? Do you feel part of it?
- What persons or groups are left on the margins, openly or as a matter of fact?

- What are the specific challenges of journey together that you see in your SCC? In your parish?

2nd. Week: LISTENING: Listening is the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices.

- Do you feel you are listened to by the Church?
- Are you able to listen to others? (different opinions, positions, ideas, culture, experience)? Or do you think you know already all that is needed to be a good Christian? Do you feel superior to some other Christians on matters of faith? Or do you believe that everyone still needs to learn? As a SCC, are we rigid in our positions, or are we able to listen to the problems and complaints of those who are a bit out of the group?

3rd. Week: SPEAKING OUT: All are invited to speak with courage and *parrhesia*, that is, freedom, truth, and charity.

- Are you free to talk in your SCC?
- What particular issue in the Church do we need to pay more attention to?
- What space is there for the voice of minorities, the young, the women, the single mothers, the divorced, the... and the excluded?
- When and how do we manage to say what is important to us? What are the places and means of dialogue within our local Church? Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen? Are they usually representative of the Christians' position?

4th. Week: CELEBRATING: "Journeying together" is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

- Do you feel the Sunday Eucharistic celebration is important for you?
- Do you succeed in feeling yourself part of the celebration?
- What are the gifts and challenges you see in the celebration of the Eucharist?
- Why have many Christians left the Sunday Eucharist?

5th. Week: CO-RESPONSIBLE IN THE MISSION: Synodality is at the service of the Church's mission, in which all the baptized are called to participate.

- Do you believe that Jesus is calling and sending **each one of us** to be a witness of His love of him? Are we missionaries?
- What can we do, here, in the camp to be missionaries? As individuals, as SCC, as substation and as Parish?

6th Week: DIALOGUE WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND RELIGIONS.

- What positive experiences of dialogue and shared commitment do we have with believers of other religions, with non-believers and with the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations?
- What are the difficulties?

- What can we do to help our Christians not to be confused and lost?

7th. Week: AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION : A Synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.

- How is authority exercised within our SCC?
- How is authority exercised within our substation?
- What are the positive experiences of teamwork and co-responsibility?

8th. Week:

- What are the difficulties, and the wounds in our local Church (SCC, substation and Parish)?
- What are the specific gifts, opportunities, blessings that you are experiencing in your local Church (that maybe were not possible in your homeland)?

Since the refugees arrive from very a different reality, with very different backgrounds,, their ideas and prior experience of the Church will be varied. These differences will emerge from their answers to questions.

SOME INITIAL COMMENTS AND REACTIONS

After our first meetings, several themes have emerged:

- A Nubian Adult Female: I was a Muslim, I became Christian after the marriage with my Christian husband. But I received very little formation. We prayed together, but I understood very little of our faith. After his death (he was killed) I came to Kakuma with my children. I approached the church, but I remained discouraged: I didn't understand English, I didn't understand Swahili. It is true, they translated something from the homily in Arabic, but I know little of it and then I didn't understand what they were talking about. Everything was foreign to me. I wasn't used to Mass, because there was no priest in our place at home, so I didn't understand what it was going on during the celebration. After a while I wanted to leave the church, not to go anymore. I thought that, maybe I could go back to Islam, I was got used to the things they do. But in that period of confusion, a neighbor lady approached me and invited me to a meeting. I went. It was St. Monika SCC, from the area where I live. A new world opened for me there. We read the word of God in our language, then we talked about it, someone helped us to understand, we could share together. I started understanding something of my faith. I started listening to the Word of God. Now I can say that I am happy to be a Christian and I feel part of the Church.

- DRC Female Adult: The fact of proposing a new vision of the Church as a people of God on the way, touched me. For me it's new. I thought more of the Church like something static, of a structure, where I have to enter. I want to understand more.
- DRC Young adult: I was moved when you said that we must not feel we are refugees in the Church, that we are part of the Church, that we are the Church here, we must not wait for others. That for the Church there are not foreigners or strangers.
- DRC Male Adult: I was impressed that the Pope said one of the temptations is to talk about the Church, perhaps criticizing it, without putting our foot inside. Yes, I feel that it's also my risk: watching from outside, to see the defects, to judge, but to go only to Mass on Sundays and not get involved in anything.
- DRC Male Young Adult: I feel so much gratitude for the Pope who thought of something like this. Usually there are only bishops for a Synod. Now I can also express what I think ... I was moved and challenged.
- DRC Adult Female: We have within us the idea that the priests, the nuns, the catechists are those who have to do things. We are on the receiving side. To change this mentality is not easy.
- Nubian Female: I really think of all of us on the way ... even with the priests, the catechists ... with the same dignity ... For me it is something new. I was more accustomed of thinking of a pyramidal structure.
- Nubian Young man : This introduction was a bit shocking for me. If I have to be sincere, within me there was a bit of the idea that the Church was something of the parish priest and that going to Church was almost like a favor that we did to him. Now to understand that not only the Church is for us, but we are the Church... it changes the perspective! I can no longer say; "This Church of Fr. Jose! ", when I want to complain, because it is my Church! This calls me to do something.
- Nubian man: I think we are a lot in the image of the *mkokoteni* [cart] pulled by priests, pushed by sisters ... and we can also include the catechists or our leaders. In any case, someone who pushes, works, makes efforts, calls ... and all the others who are passively sitting, singing or doing anything else. It's really something new for me.
- South Sudanese Woman: I am touched that we are being sent, as members of the SCC. Sometimes we are blocked by going to visit a sick person, or someone, because we have nothing to give and so we postpone the visit. In this way we lose our Christians life. I see now the call to make us present with a prayer, with the proximity of the community, even if we have nothing to bring.
- South Sudanese Woman: The call for unity among us has touched me. Sometimes someone has something against one of the group and for this reason she decides not to participate anymore. I feel that we have to learn how to do it differently. If there is a problem between two people, we are called not to be afraid to face it as a group, together, and together find the way for reconciliation. But don't passively accept divisions.
- South Sudanese Woman: Talking about participation, I realized how many gaps are left open in our SCC: for example, who is teaching the children the prayers in our mother

tongue? Who is helping the women to learn how to pray the rosary? Who is reading the Gospel in our SCC? Why are always the same people guiding our meeting?

This preparatory program has been prepared by the Sisters of the Missionary Contemplative Movement of Fr. Charles De Foucauld (known in Kenya as Missionary sisters of De Foucauld: Sr. Elisabetta Grobberio MDF, Sr. Sabina Mueni Mativo, MDF and Sr. Renata Gerbaudo, MDF in collaboration with Fr. Jose Padinjareparampil, SDB (our parish priest in the camp) and with the assistance of JRS.