

REPORT FOR MISEREOR

on

Project 100-0/133

**Programme on Basic Christian
Communities and Justice
Awareness in Africa**

1981 - 1992

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For the past twelve years I have worked on Project 100-0/133 in 12 African countries (24 dioceses). On average I have been to most four or five times. In the course of those travels I have done hundreds of workshops and shared the lives of countless ordinary Africans and numerous leaders (clerical and lay). With all of these I shared a vision of Church that received an impulse from Vatican II, that is, a vision of Church as people of God, articulated through small Christian communities. And I pointed out that this Church was showing a growing concern for justice. Indeed, I myself had been won to the cause of small Christian communities by seeing their effectiveness in promoting justice in a South American barrio (Quito, Ecuador), where I worked for long years. Not that I went from Latin America to Africa inexperienced in African culture, because, following ordination, I was appointed principal in the Salesian High School, Manzini, Swaziland, and was there for nearly four years. My work in Africa for small Christian communities took me to all sorts of places from well known universities and educational institutions to dioceses, from parishes to remote missions, villages and outstations buried deep in the heart of the bush. Sometimes I didn't see a European for days on end.

Regarding assessment, I evaluated with people after every session. I often had to take the bitter with the sweet (Africans can be alarmingly forthright), but I listened and went on continuously honing my content and technique. Basically I sought to involve all the participants in the doing of the workshop and, where possible, I was helped by local people. In latter years, particularly, I have been at pains to get people to relate all that I share to their own experience. In this way there has been a great focusing on what is relevant to them. During the past 20 months I have visited and worked in most of the places where I operated over the previous 12 years and am in a position, because of the work and wide consultation, to give an accurate picture regarding the state of small Christian communities and justice awareness in those areas. But before I look at the situation as it was in 1981 and as it stands today in 1992, perhaps I could say a brief word as to the strategy employed down the years.

STRATEGY

Small Christian communities have a tendency to multiply once established. I felt that if I worked on strategic points in Africa, the idea would spread. So North, South, East and West, I sought to enthuse people for a communitarian, participative Church and also to engage them in the struggle for integral justice. I realised that in the growth of community and a sense of justice a process is involved, a process that has to be respected. People aren't conscientised just because they have had a thorough workshop. Not indeed that this doesn't help. Every such endeavour leaves a wrinkle on our consciousness. But community growth and the development of justice awareness with its consequent action may be the work of years. The essence of this process was the continuous ACTION/REFLECTION dynamic that would penetrate ever more deeply into problem-situations. Dialogue, critical evaluation and a preferential option for the poor and oppressed were also important elements of this approach.

From the outset I saw myself as an **enabler** and not as one who would go and do the work for those who invited me. To the best of my ability (and I believe I grew more skilled over the years) I shared a communitarian vision and a concern for gospel justice. I also gave practical guidelines, yet avoided trying to spell out everything in minute detail. I wanted to leave people ample room for manoeuvre. I refrained from doing things for people that I believed they could very well do for themselves, though this sometimes led to complaints.

SITUATION IN 1981

Herewith a profile of how matters stood in 1981.

East Africa

There were nominally numerous small Christian communities in East Africa in 1981. Not, however, in the Archdiocese of Nairobi to which I first went. They were greatly talked about there, but no one realised much as to what they involved with the notable exception of Fr Max Stetter in

Thika. By reason of his activities in the fields of small communities and justice, he was regarded as something of a maverick. I think it would be true to say that all over East Africa the vision of small Christian communities was defective and that there was considerable timidity, even among priests and religious, in the matter of justice. There was the belief that once you had neighbourhood groups, you had small communities. There wasn't always the realisation that such groups responded to a Vatican II vision of the Church as community, so the groups co-existed with the old pyramidal structure. The leaders also believed that were one to stand up and be counted for justice, retribution would be swift. As for the people in general, for the first time they had their own black governments and they weren't overly critical of them. This was the situation that prevailed over most of Africa in 1981. But truth to tell, though the winds of change would not blow strongly for some years yet, even then you could sometimes sense faint rustlings in the trees. The SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) document *Seeking Gospel Justice in Africa* (1981) would be an example of this.

Southern Africa

In 1981 about 10% of South African parishes had small Christian communities. They lived in solidarity with their neighbours: cared for the sick, buried the dead, repaired roads, dug latrines, cooperated in farming ... yet in a highly-politicised country, they were not greatly involved in justice. And there were hardly any small communities in great urban centres such as Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Zimbabwe was emerging from a war situation. There were no small Christian communities.

West Africa

There was no great presence of small Christian communities in West Africa as there was in the East. Nor was justice a live issue, though Bishop Michael Francis had fired off a daring pastoral letter in Monrovia following the revolution that brought Samuel K. Doe to power. This, however, was a personal initiative rather than something that grew out of a vibrantly aware Church. I would say that West Africa lagged considerably

behind the East in the establishment of small Christian communities and somewhat in fostering justice awareness.

SITUATION IN 1992

If I could have foreseen in 1981 how matters would stand all over the continent of Africa in 1992, I could not have believed it. And I am not referring to the dramatic developments in South Africa alone but to changes in all parts. I realise, of course, that problems of disease, famine, poverty and refugees have grown worse rather than better, yet there are signs of hope.

The small Christian communities have multiplied considerably and are spreading all over Africa. So without making exaggerated claims for the impact of my own work, I would nevertheless say that the strategy outlined above was correct. Indeed as Africa approaches its long awaited Synod, the promotion of small Christian communities is high on the agenda of all the bishops' conferences. From a preparatory meeting for the African Synod that I attended in February at the AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East Africa) head quarters in Nairobi it is clear that the bishops see the small Christian communities not just as a theme, but as a methodology to achieve their purposes.

The small communities can be extremely effective *instruments for development and peace and justice*, as well as for evangelisation, catechesis, ecumenism, communication and ethics. Too often the instruments to carry out our aspirations at the grassroots are missing. It was the realisation of the potential of small Christian communities as I worked in a Latin American burrio 20 years ago that attracted me to promoting them in the first place. You can satisfy a person's hunger by giving that person a meal; the small communities, however, can tackle the problems of famine and injustice at the very roots.

As I have implied throughout this document, nearly all the small communities are involved in simple development work: taking care of needy people, repairing roads, sinking wells, building toilets, cleaning up the environment, helping each other in the fields, growing food for the old

and the handicapped and so forth. It would be a grave error to underestimate the significance of such humble tasks. They are the manner in which all communities, even those which later become deeply involved in justice issues, begin. Through ACTION/REFLECTION, people eventually find their way to deeper concerns. Where small thinking communities even exist, and form a network, the potential for growth is enormous.

Very many communities, however, are now entering into heavy-duty action. In Kenya I found them occupied in providing low-cost housing for poor families. More and more they are becoming involved with the AIDS problem. Kampala is a good example of this involvement. There the small Christian communities do a variety of chores: bring the victims to hospital, summon the mobile clinic to their homes, clean houses, do laundry, provide crafts that help victims earn a living, educate families so as to remove irrational fears and prejudices, fix up orphans, and bury the dead. What has emerged is a whole caring community without whose support the resources of the local hospital and health services would be stretched to breaking point. I feel it is providential, as the AIDS menace increases, that the numbers of small Christian communities to meet this challenge are growing. I feel they will have a major role to play in the years ahead in mitigating the suffering and dislocation caused by this dreaded disease.

In the past few years a demand for multi-party democracy has surged through Africa from end to end. Even five years ago this could not have been easily anticipated. The peaceful change over to democracy in Zambia is perhaps the greatest instance of this process, setting an example for all of Africa and even Eastern Europe. People in Zambia who themselves gave leadership in the transition assured me that the small Christian communities played a considerable role. Indeed the small Christian communities were the first forums in which democratising ideas were aired. Zambians are now discovering that the free-market economy is not an unmixed blessing as prices skyrocket and ordinary people struggle for mere survival. The prophetic magazine *Icengelo* and the small communities are now taking up the issue of a basic minimum wage to help people exist.

In Kenya too, in the run-up to multi-party elections members from small Christian communities are meeting with politicians to tell them what they think the country needs. The politicians are somewhat surprised at or-

dinary *wananchi* (citizens) being so forward. The people for their part were in awe of these "big men" at the outset. After all, they normally only saw them on television. However, they soon found their courage and their voice. A sea change from 1981.

Another area where the small Christian communities are making an interesting contribution is in the matter of social cohesion. In the big cities such as Nairobi or Lusaka, they are helping to break down tribal barriers. The extended family too which is the mainstay of rural society in Africa but disintegrating in urban settings is being replaced in those settings by a network of small communities.

So many parts of Africa are in need of reconstruction and reconciliation. In this regard one readily thinks of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, and South Africa just to mention a few. Of their very nature small Christian communities have the potential to make an enormous contribution here. This year's (1992) Lenten Programme, *A Time for Equality*, implemented by small Christian communities throughout South Africa is a good example of this potential being realised.

Development as Self-Realisation

A final word before concluding this description of the current state of affairs in Africa. It is about development. People cannot *be* developed, ultimately they have to develop themselves. Which makes me wonder if many of the well-meaning projects in the Third World do not hinder rather than promote development. The sight of once proud schools disintegrating through neglect, hospitals with foliage growing out through their broken windows and bulldozers and caterpillars rusting in ditches for want of a spare part as the bush reclaims them has only reinforced my doubts. Is the process of development not being short-circuited somewhere? Too many projects are the brain-children of well-intentioned ex-patriots or their local associates rather than being of the people. The people of course are asked to be involved in them. However, the question should not be how we involve ordinary folk in *our* projects, but how we might constructively contribute to projects that they are realising for themselves. This understanding of development could call for a whole new approach where a gung-ho activism would be replaced by a much more reflective approach.

Because of the base from which they operate, the development activities of small Christian communities tend to be a question of people doing things for themselves.

SITUATION IN 1992 - COUNTRY BY COUNTRY

Herewith an account, country by country, of the areas in which I have operated over the past 12 years.

Somalia (Diocese of Mogadishu)

Together with a Misereor-sponsored volunteer Leo Malone, I gave workshops on *Small Christian Communities and Justice Awareness* in Mogadishu in November/December 1986 at the invitation of the later assassinated Bishop Salvatore Columbo. At the time, three groups were set up. Subsequently Somalia fell apart. In the present chaos, if Christians meet in any guise, it will be as small communities. One account of Bishop Columbo's death says that he was assassinated because he was revealing to the world, through some embassies, what Siad Barre's government was doing to its own people. I have to say that this took me somewhat by surprise, because, while there, I got the impression of a certain reticence in matters political. Not without reason as it transpired.

Kenya (Archdiocese of Nairobi)

As I said above very little was happening in Nairobi regarding small Christian communities when I first went there at the invitation of Cardinal Otunga in 1981. The vision accompanying the small communities was defective and one could sense a certain timidity in the whole area of justice. All changed. There are now small Christian communities in virtually all the parishes of the Archdiocese and some of them are currently striving for multi-party democracy. Furthermore, the Lenten Campaign of the Archdiocese (1992) was focused on the theme *Justice Within the Church* and the bishops have published a marvellous pastoral letter on vital issues entitled: *Kenya 1992: Looking Towards the Future with Hope*. As with development I feel that a network of small communities is necessary for the implementation of justice. In short, the bishops can write the

most wonderful pastoral letters, yet if there aren't people at the grassroots to do something about them, what is the use? Frs Max Stetter and Rodrigo Mejia S.J. have done great work down the years to foster small Christian communities and justice at the Saint Balikkudembe Pastoral Centre in Thika. I feel that small-scale local or diocesan centres that cater to on-the-spot needs have great relevance. From my own endeavours I have found that formation work that can be related to a concrete scene has distinct advantages. Perhaps the few high-powered pastoral centres could operate more at the inter-diocesan, national and international levels. Also I think their staffs must be ready to be mobile, when necessary.

Zambia (Ndola Diocese)

Bishop De Jongh has been a great advocate of small Christian communities and has an extensive network of them throughout his diocese. As I pointed out above, they have reached such a state of development that they were able to play a considerable role in bringing multi-party democracy to Zambia. However, while working there recently, I thought I sensed a little staleness in the groups and also that they were not realising their full potential. I think that great emphasis has to be given to formation in the groups and I feel the priests are the key to this. There is an unevenness among them that is causing problems. Some are very experienced men who have worked for long years in Ndola, others have recently arrived from Eastern Europe and sometimes seem threatened by the extent of lay participation in the Zambian Church. In fine they are baffled by the Vatican II people-of-God ecclesial model. However, they are well meaning and I believe there is a great need for priests to come together and share on all aspects of small Christian communities. Why should a young East European priest do the pastoral equivalent of re-inventing the wheel while nearby there is another priest who is a seasoned practitioner. Mobile diocesan resource people could also help. These thoughts I shared with Bishop De Jongh. Having made the foregoing observations, one must hasten to add that Ndola is one of the most go-ahead dioceses in all of Africa.

Zambia (Solwezi Diocese)

I worked in Solwezi on a number of occasions, but had no great expectations of the place. It has been at something of a standstill through lack

of leadership. But lo and behold!, the vicar general informed me that small Christian communities exist in the cathedral parish and are a great help to him. They are also to be found in St Francis' Mission and at Ikelenge up near the Angola border. Fr Pio Uitendaal, ex-Kenema student, has been working with them at Ikelenge for many years. All of these communities will be engaged in the ordinary sharing and development work of which I spoke above: work that must not be underestimated because it is part of a continuum resulting from ACTION/REFLECTION that has the potential to lead one day to awareness of, and action for, justice. It will be important to bear this in mind as we go through other dioceses in which I have operated, because we find other small Christian communities at this stage in their process.

Zimbabwe (Archdiocese of Harare, Diocese of Mutare)

Small Christian communities are not at their strongest in Zimbabwe. Mutare would be the best diocese for them and there are also some in Harare. Yet there is now a great openness to small Christian communities in Zimbabwe and following some work there recently, I was earnestly requested to return. The existing communities are engaged in sharing and development work. There is an outstanding national Episcopal Peace Commission headed by Bishop Patrick Mutume who also happens to be a great supporter of the small communities. He is now stepping into the Mutare Diocese as auxiliary because Bishop Alexio Muchabaiwa is quite ill at the moment. Bishop Alexio is also a staunch supporter of the communities. Much has been achieved in the areas of reconstruction and reconciliation in Zimbabwe, yet much remains to be done. Small Christian communities could obviously play a significant role here. As in all parts of East and Southern Africa at the moment, matters are being complicated by the twin evils of drought and recession.

South Africa (Diocese of Johannesburg, Archdioceses of Pretoria and Cape Town)

Nearly all the dioceses of South Africa are busily setting up a network of small Christian communities in response to the National Pastoral Plan. Eight dioceses have opted for a three-year RENEW programme. This should issue in a network of small Christian communities. Fourteen other

dioceses have taken a more direct approach and straight off are setting up small communities. The object of both approaches is the same. There are 30 dioceses all told and the remaining eight have chosen the path of leadership training.

The dramatic changes in South Africa over the past few years are well known to all. Yet the road ahead is far from easy as a murky struggle for power now unfolds. I don't know which, if any group, is left untainted. There is obviously a so-called Third Force composed of elements within the extreme right wing, the army and the police that are trying to destabilise the country by fomenting trouble within the black townships. People at a Christian leaders' meeting that I attended expressed the fear that so well is the campaign of violence orchestrated, it may have government backing. Significantly, on April 11th H.W. De Klerk went to Mitchell's Plain, an areas near Cape Town where so-called coloured people live, to launch his National Party. Given this scenario there is an obvious need for reconciliation and reconstruction. At the political level things are better, at the social - much worse. The number of deaths through violence has soared and the rise in crime is dramatic. Not surprisingly, since six million people are unemployed, that is between 25-40% of those who are able and willing to work. Add to this a million families homeless and seven million living in squatter camps. As mentioned above, because of the great need for healing, the bishops have just issued a pastoral letter entitled *A Call to Build a New South Africa*. And better still, the National Coordinating Committee for Small Christian Communities have issued a Lenten Programme of Action that has been sent to every parish in the country. It is called *A Time for Equality*. I think this was particularly good and shared this sentiment with my contacts in South Africa. The new South Africa is not going to be built so much by politicians shouting from soapboxes or bishops preaching from pulpits as by ordinary people at the grassroots accepting one another.

Swaziland (Manzini Diocese)

A fine network of small Christian communities was established in the Manzini Diocese by Salesian Fr Sean Murphy. The communities are for the most part rural and are engaged in simple sharing and development work.

Lesotho (Leribe)

I did workshops in the Leribe diocese of Lesotho, but nothing seems to have come of it. Lesotho is one of the most Catholic countries in Africa, but it is rather traditional. However, the ideas was sown and this, in my experience, is often the first step. There is another positive factor. Fr Sean Murphy (cf. under Swaziland) has been transferred to Leribe and will most certainly launch the small communities.

Sierra Leone (Archdiocese of Freetown and Bo, Dioceses of Kenema and Makeni)

When I first went to Sierra Leone in 1981, there were really no small Christian communities properly so called and justice was not a burning issue. There are now probably 400 small communities in the country and through the ACTION/REFLECTION dynamic and interplay with DELTA are often very justice oriented. From the beginning I urged that training courses for animation of small Christian communities and youth be put on at the Kenema National Pastoral Centre and helped plan the same. Sierra Leone is possibly the West African country where small Christian communities are strongest and Kenema has proved something of a launching pad for extending small Christian communities, justice awareness and youth work to the rest of Africa and even elsewhere. In West Africa the thrust for multi-part democracy is just as strong as in the East.

Sierra Leone is undoubtedly the country where I myself have expended most effort, because I rarely made a trip to Kenema without also making a swing, often with Fr Jack McHugh, through the country itself. The recent troubles in Sierra Leone (President Momoh has just fled as I write) have really awakened the bishops to the importance of small Christian communities and they are being promoted at the moment with a great sense of urgency. Bishop O'Riordan of Kenema has long been convinced of their value as instruments of evangelisation, development and justice. And he himself in a non-flamboyant effective way, is an extremely courageous champion of justice. In my current trip (1992) I came in contact with about a dozen ex-students of Kenema Pastoral Centre and, by and large, they were constructively engaged in their areas.

Liberia (Archdiocese of Monrovia, Diocese of Gbarnga, Diocese of Cape Palmas)

I went to the Cape Palmas diocese in 1982 and gave workshops on "Small Christian Community and Justice Awareness". Nothing concrete came out of this, because at the time the diocese was desperately short of personnel. However, ideas were sown. Over the years there was no demand for further input in Liberia. Not until 1990, when I got invited to Monrovia. On the flight there I read that Liberia had been invaded from the Ivory Coast by forces led by Charles Taylor. Despite the fact that the war escalated rapidly I managed to complete my programme of workshops, except that I never made it to Tappeta, which was situated in Mano country where hostilities were fiercest. By this time all the bishops had realised their need for small Christian communities and invited me back for 1991 to carry out an extensive programme throughout the country. Alas that was not because of the chaos that ensued. Indeed, in the spring of 1991, I happened to be in Sierra Leone instead, close to the Liberian border and got caught in another war as rebels from Liberia poured into Sierra Leone. By this stage people thought I was causing these wars! Before the Liberian conflict we had small Christian communities off the ground in Monrovia, but the war put an end to that. However, they are presently picking up again. At this moment I have on my desk an urgent request from Bishop Dalieh for a series of workshops in Cape Palmas. So the seed has borne fruit. Truly the need for Christian communities, or any communities for that matter, is great in Liberia. There is so much reconstruction and reconciliation to be done. As a matter of interest, I do an annual workshop in St Joseph's Major Seminary/University. At first this was done in Gbarnga, Liberia, but now the seminary has been moved to Makeni in Sierra Leone.

The Gambia

There are small Christian communities in The Gambia. Fr Jack McHugh and I did workshops there in 1984. And Charles Jargou, ex-student of Kenema, was also deeply involved in the promotion of small communities and development: cooperation in farming, growing food on common lands for destitute people. They have also shown a concern for the *environment* by cleaning up villages and such like.

Ghana (Dioceses of Sunyani and Tamale)

In 1982 I gave workshops in Sunyani. I revisited in 1989 and did some consolidation work. In the interim between 1982 and 1989 the diocese seemed to forget about the small Christian communities as enthusiasm for the Charismatic Renewal took over. But the small communities unexpectedly persisted in the more populous areas of Sunyani town and did some down-to-earth neighbourly work: taking care of the sick and the needy (for example, coming to the rescue of a man whose little business was destroyed by fire, showing concern for the infrastructure of their areas and showing concern for youth). The Pastor of Christ the King Cathedral, Fr Emilio Gallo, OFM Conv. was truly impressed at finding the small communities so self-reliant.

In 1989 I worked extensively in Tamale visiting missions, parishes and St Victor's Seminary. In the town of Tamale it really was a matter of sowing the ideas of small communities and justice. There is no lack of openness to the justice issue nowadays, but the clergy were not as yet ready for the communities. In the rural areas there was more of a response and I would be confident that groups got started there. Great interest was also shown at St Victor's Seminary. I have since been in contact with rector and students and have sent them on some literature.

Ecuatorial Guinea (Archdiocese of Malabo, Dioceses of Bata and Ebebeyin)

As Ecuatorial Guinea was emerging from the brutal days of the Macias regime 1984, Tony Byrne and I jointly gave workshops in all the dioceses in Ecuatorial Guinea. It was a country virtually at a standstill and hungering for justice. I have not been back, but have heard from the Salesians there that some small Christian communities emerged from the workshops and were doing well.

PROBLEMS IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Leadership:** Dominant leaders present a problem. This is being coped with in various ways. Time is being given for leaders to emerge, so that they are well-known before being chosen. Then the period of leadership is usually limited to one or two years. Also the members may critically confront the dominant leader.
- Finance:** How to safeguard against financial abuse is also problematic. Finance committees are one way round this difficulty. In reality, however, finance may not be a major concern in a small Christian community. Needs arise from time to time and can be dealt with by ad hoc fund-raising efforts.
- Youth:** There is a problem with involving youth in small Christian communities, but more on this later.
- Absence of Men:** One frequently hears this cited as a problem in East Africa. However, where communities are concerned about real live issues, men do become readily involved.
- Formation:** The small Christian communities need to be continually enriched spiritually, humanly, intellectually and so forth. If leaders do not pay attention to this, groups can become impoverished and stagnate. Providing this service is not easy, of course. It is an area where the priest can do much to make sure that there are occasions to meet this need: courses, workshops, lectures, retreats, audio-visuals and so forth.
- Witchcraft:** This is deep in the psyche of even the most educated Africans and can be a great block to progress. The solution again is ongoing formation and, in the case of Christians, confronting what is negative in a culture with the truth of the gospel.

Ministries: Organising the operations of small Christian communities can present difficulties if we do not try to identify the gifts for various ministries (youth, peace and justice, development) that the members have and channel persons into appropriate activities.

In evaluating small Christian communities, the foregoing problems surface all over Africa. Most of the difficulties have profound cultural implications and, I suspect, will be around for a long time. However, the slow process of dealing with them must go on and, in time, will make its impression on people's consciousness. The problem of the small Christian communities are the problems of the Church and society generally on the continent of Africa. The Church is only in its infancy and most countries have just gained their independence within the last thirty years. We cannot expect either the Church or Society to achieve overnight what took Europeans long centuries.

YOUTH

As a Salesian the youth situation was always of deep concern to me. Youth composes the vast majority of Africans. As I pointed out, over much of the continent young people find it difficult to break into the small communities. They tend to remain silent in the presence of adults. This is a cultural reality. Noting this fact, I had the temerity early on to write to all the bishops with whom I had worked suggesting that a special network of small Christian communities be set up for the youth. This suggestion was taken up and is giving quite gratifying results in a number of places. It involves the youth concretely with the youth and people of their own areas. There is the preoccupation that they benefit others and not just come together for their own enjoyment. In Kangemi, Nairobi, for example, they organise literacy programmes. Then for various celebrations young people and adults come together. In this way it is hoped that in time cultural barriers will be removed.

Also, at my suggestion, a Youth Animation Course was set up at Kenema. In my travels I had identified this as a real need. Over the past decade, Kenema has trained many such animators.

ECUMENISM

The small Christian communities figuring in this report are Catholic. There are, of course, small communities in many Christian denominations, yet in Africa the vast majority are Catholic. Other Churches, the Anglican in Kenya for example, have declared their intent to organise themselves on the basis of small Christian communities, but have not carried their intention through as yet. However, there is a tremendous ecumenical exchange among Christians of all denominations (and with Muslims too) at the grassroots level. They readily worship together at funerals, marriages, harvest festivals and such like. The fact that Muslims would join in these occasions over much of Africa is surely a most encouraging sign for the future. All join too in development projects.

THE FUSED GROUP

The small community formula is beginning to make its appearance in all religions and, indeed, among people of goodwill who might profess no particular religion. I cite examples of this in my book *Signs of Hope*. All over the planet people are beginning to fuse in groups and form networks to build a better world. I was amazed to come across this phenomenon mentioned in the philosophy of Sartre who, giving historic examples, show how the "fused group" (or what I would call the small community) can be the key to, and instrument for, building a better world. In fact I am thinking of writing a book, practical and theoretical, that would extend the benefits of the small community formula way beyond the frontiers of Christianity. On my current journey to Africa I shared on the potential of fused groups as instruments for development in a seminar with most of the Irish volunteers working in East Africa and they were quite enthusiastic about the idea.

BOOKS AND MEDIA

I have written a total of eight books on the subjects of small Christian communities, pastoral planning and justice awareness, notably *Living Cells* and *Signs of Hope*. Within a year, *Signs of Hope*, the most recent book has gone to a reprint. These publications have been well received and have proved a tremendous back-up for seminars and workshops. Above all, the writings have helped ordinary people at the grassroots who were implementing small Christian communities. Indeed I have a couple of files with letters of appreciation from all over the world. The books have gone to places where I have been prevented from going and done their work. This was particularly so in Nigeria. I was due to go there once, to Kaduna, but hostilities broke out between Muslims and Christians and stopped me from doing so. Recently in Nairobi I was doing a diocesan workshop when a *mzee* (revered elder) got up and waxed eloquent on how much the books had helped him and his associates. I also wrote numerous articles for prestigious magazines on small communities and justice awareness.

Finally, I did quite a few radio and television programmes on these same subjects.

WORK ELSEWHERE

Though the emphasis in my work since 1981 has been on Africa, I really have been involved as much elsewhere: England, Ireland, Scotland, Malta, the United States, Canada and Ecuador. This work I regarded as complementary to the African endeavours. The First World needs input on small Christian communities and justice awareness even more than Africa does, because the roots of much of the injustice that we find in the Third World are to be found in the first. Work elsewhere also enlarged my vision, so that I had much more to contribute to Africa when I went there. Not, indeed, that I was a novice to the third-world scene when I went to Africa in 1981. I had already worked for ten years in South American barrios and four as headmaster in Swaziland in Southern Africa.

PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION

At this point I shall try and assess my own contribution to the foregoing project. In physical terms it is relatively simple to measure the effort. We are talking about approximately 360 workshops averaging 30-40 participants (lay, religious and clerical) given in all parts of Anglo-phone Africa over the past twelve years. To this must be added numberless and equally important sessions with individual leaders and animating teams, countless lectures, interviews and homilies and, last but not least, frequent attendance at ordinary small Christian community meetings. There was also, of course, the back-up writings consisting of seven books and several magazine articles. Finally, there was the radio and television work.

My influence on what has transpired in countries and dioceses where I have worked is harder to gauge. Here are some of the points that were commented upon positively in wide consultation:

- * effective communication of, and engendering of enthusiasm for, the subject matter,
- * the rapport established with all participants in the project,
- * the active participation of all in workshops, which were not simply workshops but places where community was experienced and related skills exercised,
- * a universal perspective of small Christian communities,
- * the many practical guidelines,
- * the theological and biblical backing,
- * the integral vision of development and justice,
- * the integral world vision: social, political, economic, religious,
- * the spiritual, human, creative, intellectual, and practical content,
- * the concern for youth,
- * the insistence that workshops were meant to be a springboard for action,
- * the avoidance of tediousness.

Criticism usually focused in two main areas:

- * folk at times wanted something much more structural and detailed than I felt necessary and desirable (not wishing to smother initiative or self-reliance),
- * there were those who felt threatened by a Vatican II vision of the Church with its emphasis on community, justice and the option for the poor.

On a critical note also:

- * in the early days I was too easily hurt by criticism,
- * in the early days I could also have involved the people more: there was too much input,
- * participants sometimes expressed the wish that there were more time (I rarely had control over this: it was decided locally).

One of the principal aims of the project was the enablement of local people. My travelling alone rather than in a team, while a disadvantage from one angle, was an advantage from another, because I was obliged to create on-the-spot teams wherever I went. These, of course, remained when I departed.

Having averted to the statements made about the project by others, I may be permitted a few personal observations. I have no doubt that everywhere I went, whether groups existed or not, I brought an authentic vision of small Christian communities that was all too often missing and a consciousness of the justice issue that was none too common either. I encouraged the ACTION/REFLECTION process within the communities in the knowledge that with time it would bring the members experientially to a keen awareness of justice. And not just an awareness of justice for awareness sake but with a view to doing something to alter the world for the better. There was the insistence that *action*, and not just pronouncements, for justice is an essential part of preaching the gospel. The universal grasp that I had of the situation of the small Christian communities, thanks to working worldwide, was also deeply appreciated.

Perhaps the main gift I have where small Christian communities and the promotion of justice awareness are concerned is an ability to give them a kick-start. In a review of *Signs of Hope*, Dr Ian Fraser, who has himself

been in 80 countries to record the experiences of small Christian communities, has written: "*O'Halloran has a rare gift for encouraging people to find resources in themselves to build the Church from below.*" It is a fact that there are quite a number of dioceses where small Christian communities did not exist when I first went and they do have them now: Mogadishu, Nairobi, Solwezi, Mutare, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Freetown and Bo, Makeni, Kenema, Monrovia, the Gambia, Sunyani, Tamale, Bata ... In short, where they existed I gave them an enthusiastic push, a clear vision of the Church model involved, and a shake-up on the justice issue. Where they did not exist, I tried to give them a kick-start and shared an authentic vision of the Church and a concern for justice with them from the beginning.

STATISTICS

As I have always said, statistics for small Christian communities are always hard to come by in Africa. By this time I would have thought that East Africa may have as many as 20,000. In South Africa 70% of the parishes are moving in this direction. In Sierra Leone there are 350-400 groups. Yet these statistics are sporadic and come from parts of Anglophone Africa. My information is that small communities thrive even more in Francophone Africa. The reality, therefore, is that there are thousands and thousands of small Christian communities in Africa. Making an educated guess I would say that there could be as many as 100,000. It is still early days in the history of the small communities, but I feel the potential for the future in terms of growth and impact is tremendous.

Needless to say most credit for all the positive features of this report must go to committed people on the spot. Yet my own contribution was perhaps not inconsiderable.

THE FUTURE

My belief is that small Christian communities and a growing awareness of justice are in Africa to stay. Indeed, I feel that these factors will go from strength to strength, helped by the *Zeitgeist* which is favouring dem-

ocracy. So the main task as I originally conceived it, that is to establish a presence of small Christian communities and a sense of justice over strategic areas of Africa has now been accomplished by a lot of dedicated people. Competent persons on the African scene have suggested that it would be most helpful were I to share the considerable experience I have gained with *really* key people there. Also, I myself have seen the importance of introducing seminarians to programmes on small Christian communities and justice awareness. Indeed, I have been advocating that they be integrated into the seminary course, and this is beginning to happen. All this because I have seen signs that if men are enthused for small Christian communities and justice in the seminary, they can become great advocates for these realities in their pastoral work later. If priests are not educated in these respects, they can clash unnecessarily with the laity in their apostolate later. I myself would be most open to helping in seminaries. I have been urged to have a video on small Christian communities made by a professional group in Ireland (Radharc) and this too I regard as an excellent idea. It would bring the good news far and wide. And then there is my preoccupation to bring the formula of the small community with all its benefits beyond the frontiers of Christianity. So broadly speaking, those would be my immediate objectives:

- * To work with key animators in Africa.
- * Help seminarians and priests there also.
- * Have a good video made on small Christian communities by a competent team such as Radharc (Ireland).
- * And write a book, theoretical and practical, that would help to extend the small community formula beyond the frontiers of Christianity.