

KEETMANSHOOP DIOCESAN PAPER

Namibian Catholic Bishops Conference (NCBC)

Ongoing Initiatives, Best Practices and Experiences in Promoting Synodality through Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

Submission to SECAM Secretariat

1. Introduction

The Diocese of Keetmanshoop has embarked on a structured pastoral journey aimed at revitalising Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a central instrument for fostering a missionary and synodal Church. This initiative is grounded in the understanding that synodality is most effectively lived at grassroots level, where the faithful gather in smaller communities to pray, discern, and participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.

In alignment with the broader vision of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), SCCs are recognised as a vital pastoral model for building a participatory, inclusive, and mission-oriented Church in the African context.

2. Phased Implementation Approach to SCC Revitalisation

The Diocese has adopted a deliberate and phased approach to SCC revitalisation across all six pastoral districts, namely Rehoboth, Mariental, Auob/Aranos, Keetmanshoop, Lüderitz, and Karasburg. Since 2024, the Diocese has prioritised awareness raising and sensitisation through structured workshops conducted throughout the Diocese. These engagements focus on deepening understanding of the identity, purpose, and mission of SCCs within a synodal Church context. Attendance registers are maintained, and participation is systematically recorded to ensure accountability and continuity.

Progress is regularly reported within diocesan governance structures, particularly at the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and has also been presented at clergy level, including during Priests' Meetings with the Bishop. This ensures alignment between leadership and grassroots implementation. A consolidated progress report from all pastoral districts is scheduled for presentation at the upcoming Diocesan Pastoral Council Meeting. This milestone will inform the transition into the next phase, namely the structured training of SCC leaders. The training phase will equip identified leaders with pastoral, organisational, and facilitation competencies necessary for the effective functioning of SCCs within parish communities. This phased progression from awareness to formation and implementation reflects a strategic and sustainable model for building a synodal and missionary Church.

"The awareness phase is supported by a standardised diocesan SCC formation manual, ensuring coherence and theological consistency across all pastoral districts."

3. SCCs within the SECAM/AMECEA Framework

Within the SECAM and AMECEA pastoral vision, SCCs are understood as a foundational expression of the Church as communion, participation, and mission. They represent a model of Church that is close to the people, rooted in daily life, and responsive to local realities.

SCCs embody:

- A lived experience of communion among the faithful
- Active participation of lay members in the life of the Church
- A missionary orientation that extends beyond parish boundaries into everyday community life

As such, SCCs serve as a concrete and practical realisation of synodality within the African Church.

4. Ongoing SCC Initiatives in the Keetmanshoop Diocese

4.1 Awareness and Sensitisation Campaigns

The Diocese continues to implement structured awareness campaigns aimed at promoting SCC participation across pastoral districts. These initiatives are ongoing and form the foundation of the revitalisation process.

4.2 Integration into Diocesan Structures

SCCs are recognised as a pastoral priority and are regularly included in diocesan planning, reporting, and leadership discussions, ensuring institutional alignment.

4.3 Pastoral Visitations

Clergy and pastoral agents engage directly with SCCs through local visitations, strengthening accompaniment and fostering closer pastoral relationships.

4.4 SCCs as Mission Platforms

SCCs are promoted as spaces where faith is lived within neighbourhood contexts, transforming local communities into centres of evangelisation and witness.

4.5 Use of a Standardised SCC Formation Manual

The awareness and sensitisation campaigns across the Diocese are conducted using a structured SCC manual/handbook developed for workshop facilitation and community engagement. This manual is implemented by a designated SCC team operating under the Bishop's Office.

The handbook provides a comprehensive and standardised framework for engagement, covering key thematic areas such as the theological and historical foundation of SCCs, their definition and purpose, practical guidelines for formation and sustainability, leadership orientation, and the missionary and pastoral dimensions of SCC life.

It further includes participatory methodologies, including group discussions, guided reflection, and practical exercises, which promote active involvement and shared learning among participants. The manual also addresses common challenges facing SCCs and provides practical guidance for maintaining spiritually vibrant, participatory, and mission-oriented communities. The use of this manual ensures consistency in messaging, doctrinal alignment, and uniformity in the understanding and implementation of SCCs across all pastoral districts.

5. Core Characteristics of SCCs in Practice

In line with the continental framework, SCCs in the Diocese reflect the following characteristics:

- **Neighbourhood-Based Communities:** Rooted within local settings, enhancing accessibility and participation
- **Participatory Leadership:** Encouraging shared responsibility among clergy and laity
- **Integration of Faith and Life:** Linking Scripture, prayer, and daily realities
- **Mission-Oriented Identity:** Serving as platforms for evangelisation and social engagement

6. Best Practices Emerging from the Keetmanshoop Diocese

6.1 Localised Expression of Church

Positioning SCCs within neighbourhood contexts brings Church life closer to the people and enhances relevance.

6.2 Continuous Mobilisation

Ongoing awareness and sensitisation efforts ensure sustained engagement and prevent stagnation.

6.3 Institutional Alignment

Integration of SCCs within diocesan structures ensures coherence, legitimacy, and coordinated implementation.

6.4 Inclusive Participation

Broad-based engagement fosters participation from all members of the faithful, strengthening the synodal character of the Church.

7. Experiences and Lessons Learned

7.1 Gradual and Phased Development

The Diocese has recognised that effective SCC implementation requires a structured progression from awareness to formation and practical application.

7.2 Strengthening Synodal Identity

SCCs are increasingly understood and embraced as practical expressions of synodality, promoting communion and shared responsibility.

7.3 Emerging Community Ownership

There is growing ownership at local level, particularly where engagement and accompaniment are consistent.

7.4 Renewed Mission Orientation

A shift towards a missionary outlook is evident, with SCCs serving as spaces for evangelisation within everyday community life.

8. Strategic Importance of SCCs

Within both the diocesan and continental context, SCCs serve as:

- A response to pastoral challenges such as large and dispersed parish communities
- A means of deepening faith formation and participation
- A platform for fostering unity, solidarity, and shared responsibility
- A vehicle for advancing the Church's mission in local contexts

9. Conclusion

The Diocese of Keetmanshoop has made significant progress in establishing a structured and contextually relevant approach to SCC revitalisation. Through a phased implementation model, supported by ongoing awareness, institutional alignment, and planned capacity building, the Diocese is laying a solid foundation for a synodal and missionary Church.

As the Diocese transitions into the training and implementation phase, SCCs are expected to play an increasingly central role in strengthening participation, fostering community ownership, and advancing the Church's mission at grassroots level. In alignment with the SECAM and AMECEA vision, the Diocese reaffirms its commitment to building a Church that is truly participatory, inclusive, and mission-oriented through the life and witness of Small Christian Communities.
