

## **Small Christian Communities**

One of the most impressive aspects of church life in Irundu is the network of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). These have been a feature of the Catholic Church in East Africa since the late 1970s and were set up initially to address the issues arising from the very rural nature of many parishes (outlying areas often only receiving a visit from their priest and Holy Communion monthly at best) and the need to involve lay people in ministry and to encourage the laity to take more responsibility for their faith.

They are similar to the housegroups in our parish but with a much broader remit.

Groups (often extended family groups) meet once a week to share the Gospel reading for the following Sunday and to tackle social and health issues in their community.

The format of the meetings is fairly fixed. They start with prayer and time is given to prayerfully look at the Gospel reading for the following Sunday. This prayerful consideration of the Gospel reading is very similar to lectio divina. The reading is read out loud several times by different people. Afterwards members of the SCC are invited to reflect on a passage from the reading that had particularly stood out for them. The catechist who leads this part of the proceedings is given training from Father Stephen.

After the Gospel reflections, there are reports from the various committee members. For example, there are members responsible for health, sanitation, education, agriculture, water and vocations. In addition, at one of the meetings that we went to lists were made of children who are to be baptised.

Each family contributes a small amount towards a central fund which is used to help members of the SCC who find themselves in severe financial hardship, perhaps through the illness or death of the main breadwinner. There is special care given to widows.

There is a marvellous mix of the spiritual and the practical and a real sense of strong community. Father Stephen, as parish priest, is still very much the leader of the parish but lay men and women are active in their communities and are praying together.

It was very moving to be able to share our faith with the members of the SCC. It made me realise how much we have in common – our faith and our hopes and fears for our future and our families.

I feel sure that we have a lot to learn from this model. I think it must have similarities to the way that the early church would have operated. Small really can be beautiful.

Christina Fitzsimons, December 2011