



ACTS 4: 32 – 34 ON COMMUNAL LIVING AMONG RELIGIOUS SISTERS AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA (CUEA), NAIROBI – KENYA

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Abstract: *This study aimed to explore Acts 4:32 – 34 on communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA. The study made use of Ludwig Bertalanffy system theory, and adopted a qualitative research paradigm. The target population were all the undergraduate and post-graduate student religious sisters in CUEA and the sample size were 15 participants. Random-sampling and convenience-sampling procedures were used to select the faculties and the participants respectively. Qualitative data were collected using interview and focus group discussion guide. Data analyses were carried out using thematic analysis, transcription, codification, which were presented into narrative form. The findings established that communal living is the act of total sharing among people, united in mind and heart. It revealed that some challenges might affect the practice of communal living among religious student sisters. Finally, the findings showed that organized programmes could take into consideration the spiritual, moral, physical, educational, and psychological needs of student sisters.*

Keywords: *Communal Living, Community, Religious Life, Religious Student Sisters*

1.1 Introduction

The book of Acts 4:32 – 34 focuses on communal life of the early Christians; it also records the witness, preaching of the apostles, and the growth of the community. The early Christians lived a communal life and shared what they had in common. In the society today, religious sisters likewise live communal life in communities and publicly profess the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. These vows unite them to God, whom their hearts seek and free them from obstacles

that hinder them from loving and serving Him more ardently. However, when religious sisters fail to live out these evangelical counsels, it brings about challenges within and among them. The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, are what differentiate the sisters from the early Christians.

Religious life according to O'Murchu (1991) is a communal life lived in community and community life is central to any authentic form of religious lifestyle. He further indicated that communal life is the "heart or key value" of religious life, because it provides the centre for interrelatedness, which calls the religious person to live his or her life. Sandra (2011) and Awogu (2006), acknowledged that religious community is model on Jesus example with the disciples; and Pope John Paul II (1981) described religious community as the fourth evangelical counsel.

Schneider (2001) noted that religious community is model on Jesus' example with the disciples. They described religious community as the fourth evangelical counsel, which is the 'heart' or 'key value' of religious life. O'Murchu (1991) advocated that religious community provide the center for interrelatedness, which calls the religious to live out his or her life through the gospel message. This interrelatedness reflects how others constitute part of self; either as voices or as positions; oftentimes God occupies an essential position in this process of inter-subjective exchange within the community. In this sense, O'Murchu (1991) emphasized that the religious community is the bedrock through which the religious develops and negotiates her sense of person. Schneider (2000) declared that when a religious lives alone because of the demands of mission, he or she connects with the congregation as the base for powerful determinant of behavior and decision. Giallanza (1998) stated that religious community is advantageous in this way because it gives the religious person a sense of belonging that flows from common commitment to Jesus, and sustained by mutual love.

Mahohoma (2018) observed that the community gathered for four interrelated aspects of common life in Acts 2:42 namely, the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. These four elements summarized the spiritual features in a religious community. Gaventa (2003) refers to these four elements as the daily life in the community. These elements are linked to one another because there is a sense of belonging in a community. Mahohoma noted that the teaching had an impact on the lives of people; it rang out authoritatively far beyond boundaries of color, creed, and tribe. In regard to fellowship Keener (2012) asserted that members of the community gathered with one mind in way that characterized a community. For Mahohoma (2018), breaking of bread has remained a central means and test of fellowship in the church. Chittister (2011) advocated that we contribute to the essence of community life through prayer, study, reflection, and solitude. It is in the quiet meditative parts of our lives where we become truly open to the other and radically hospitable in community.

1.2 Theoretical review

This study made use of system theory by Bertalanffy (1968). System theory identifies the interdependencies and inter-relations between various parts of the organization, which helps to get a holistic view while dealing with community affairs. This theory increases organization's adaptability to environmental changes in such a way that the community is seen as a whole and not through its parts. In this way, it enables the community to meet the needs of the members. The focus of this theory is to meet the wellbeing of the individual and the overall mission of the

community. There is need of equality in decision making such that no specific member gets preferential treatment. When the members of the community practicalize this, they can easily adapt to this type of system.

Further studies have attempted to focus on the establishment and maintenance of communal living. One such study was that of Olisah (2006), who observed that the root cause of psychological problems among religious sisters in Africa emerged from interpersonal relationships within the religious communities. The implication is that religious life as context for personality construction produces a mixture of experiences. On one hand, it has facilitated the sisters' human growth and sense of personal or religious identity as argued by Mangion (2007) and Stuber (2002) findings, which emphasized that the sisters' participation in community life orient the sisters to appropriately internalized as individual the community values and norms. Nevertheless, research has paid limited attention to explore how religious communities facilitate or hinder the personal growth of their members.

In a qualitative study that invited 21 participants from an international congregation in USA, Central America, and Canada, Malone (1991), a sister herself from the same congregation, addressed the issue of anger, conflict and the meaning the sisters give to these terms. All the participants were well educated, at least holding one degree. Some (number not specified) participants had entered religious life prior to Vatican II and others had become sisters after the changes had taken place. She based the research rationale on the notion that even though sisters suppressed their anger, and denied interpersonal conflict, they still experienced the effect of this suppression, which manifested later in various forms of bodily, psychological, and spiritual distress. In relation to conflict, the results showed that the participants commonly constructed conflict as an inappropriate behaviour/emotion that sisters should not experience, especially interpersonal conflict, and based on their governance structure, they emphasized that authority figures are persons whom they must obey, in order to achieve peace at any price.

Although the sisters in this study reported that they have experienced conflict in their relationships with their peers (including others in the community and those in authority), they presented themselves as suppressing their own voice, which means subjugating their own interest. The researcher interpreted this result to mean that the sisters have internalized the image of the good sister'. Some participants also acknowledged that they experience emotions such as hurt, frustration, and fear. They also reported that they resolved this dilemma by using strategies such as confrontation, avoidance, distrust, explosion, and third party mediation. The results also revealed that the young sisters in the study reported that they are constrained by the fear of being labelled troublemakers or sisters difficult to deal with by authority in their congregation in order to overcome their expressions of anger. According to Niva and Holly (2005) and Ussher (2003), the experience of anger is a source of dilemma for sisters who live religious life. Smith (2004), cited in Brock (2007) argued that this is because the expression of anger is socially unacceptable for women but also it invalidates the sisters' status as people who should not exhibit negative emotions.

Equally, Denise, Mary, Nancy, and Philippe (1998) carried out a study among 278 young Kenyan religious (a mixed group comprising of 134 Africans and 144 participants from international congregations), it was found that young African religious do not feel at home in religious

communities. In particular, they found that the young religious were concerned about hospitality. According to the researchers, the young religious' perception was that hospitality within religious life had been stressful on community resources in terms of space, time, and money. Therefore, there was always tension regarding how to treat visitors and as such, it is a source of concern for the African religious.

Another issue which was raised in connection to the feeling of 'at homeness', was concerning personal interaction with others in the community. In explaining the result, they posited that young religious felt like strangers in their own communities because sometimes no one cares about them, which is contrary to relational situations in their family of origin, where everybody at home gives time and attention to others and their concerns. They acknowledged that in religious community, most people appear to be too busy to spend time with their brothers and sisters. They argued that this lack of care influenced African religious performance of cultural and religious uniqueness, which by extension is part of his/her identity.

One more issue associated with 'homeness' of the young religious focused on the vows, particularly the vow of obedience, which they found to be a huge challenge particularly when there is no constructive dialogue or the dialogue remained discourse without change. They emphasized that superiors and/or formators under the discourse of religious obedience do not respect others but rather treat others as children, who must obey all given instructions. They pointed out that this is contrary to African culture where people expect the young ones to respect their elders or authority figures. On the other hand, the younger ones also anticipate the elders to respect and listen to them. In addition, the researchers found out that the young religious experienced religious life as too structured and authoritarian for many Africans. The participants expressed that the structure of religious communities is designed in way that make the adults to keep acting like youngsters. They stated that this occurred when community superiors want to know what is happening at all times. They emphasized that this is conforming to the strong demand of obedience, which required all religious to ask for permission for virtually everything.

As a final point, the researchers concluded that the freedom to move, and grow is lacking in community. It equates community life to boarding school for older people, crowded with rules and regulations. However, the participants in this study were young religious who were predominately male (118 males as against 34 females), working mostly in urban centres, most of whom were not engaged in full time ministry, but it nevertheless gave an insight into how young African religious view religious life. It has provided this study with some background information regarding challenges faced by African religious, which affect to some extent on personality formation. Nevertheless, this is used as a contextual to question whether African communitarian values are neglected in religious life, causing religious to experience serious challenges regarding the development and performance of personal and religious uniqueness. Thus, there is need to explore further how the religious community impacts on the issues of mental health for the sisters, which directly or indirectly link to how student religious sisters live communal life in communities in light of Acts 4:32 – 34.

However, while these articles discussed the benefits and challenges of living religious life, researchers have paid little attention in exploring how an individual sister located in a religious student sister's community understands and interprets interpersonal relationships and the impact

they have on her sense of being. Consequently, there is great need in Africa for empirical studies focusing on religious sisters' communal living in order to appreciate the meaning they give to their lives and how these experiences influence the development, performance of personal and communal living. As a result, there is lack of research work conducted among student religious sisters in Africa even in the face of the increasing number of new entrants into religious life, particularly in Kenya. This lack of research among African religious sisters makes it relevant for this research to be conducted in an endeavour to explore the challenges of communal living among student religious sisters in light of Acts 4:32 – 34.

1.3 Methodology

The study was carried out at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Langata campus, Nairobi – Kenya. This is because the main Campus is within Nairobi County where the researcher currently studies and resides; the location therefore enabled the researcher to administer and manage the study in the best way as well as minimized the cost of the research. The researcher carried out this study among religious sisters studying at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, within the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences (FASSCs), Education, and Theology because it enables her to get a 'rich' and 'thick descriptions' of the "lived experiences" on communal living in relation to Acts 4:32 – 34 from the participants. This study adopted a qualitative research design paradigm because qualitative research method is used extensively by scientists and researchers to study human behavior, opinions, themes, and motivations (Shuttleworth & Wilson 2008). The fact is that information from qualitative research design provides an in – depth understanding about the phenomena that cannot be achieved in other ways.

The target population for this study involved all undergraduate and post-graduate religious student sisters from CUEA, Langata campus. A simple random sampling procedure was used to select 3 Faculties from the 6 Faculties in CUEA, while convenience-sampling procedure was used to select 5 participants from the three selected faculties amounting to 15 participants. The researcher divided the participants into 9 undergraduates and 6 postgraduates' religious student sisters respectively. These sampling procedures and sample size provided in-depth information for the researcher, thus confirmed the transferability of the results. Bearing in mind the complexity of the study, which requires a comprehensive investigation of opinions and experiences on communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA, interview guide and focus group discussion guide were used to explore the attitude of religious student sisters towards communal living among the participants.

The semi-structured interview guide for post-graduate religious student sisters had four broad open-ended questions; while the second instrument, which was used for this study for the undergraduate participants, is the focus group discussion guide. Like the interview guide, this instrument had four broad open-ended questions designed that explored communal living among religious students' sisters in CUEA in relation to Act 4:32 – 34. Creswell (2013) criterion of dependability and pilot testing were used to ensure the interview guide and focus group discussion guide clearly defined and measured attitudes towards communal living among the respondents.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher began the data collection procedures by writing to CUEA research committee and

got an approval from them. Next, she applied to the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) and obtained a research permit, which she used to conduct this study. Thereafter, the researcher applied to the Department of Research, Innovation, and Partnerships in CUEA, for permission to carry out the study in the University. Afterward, the researcher employed the services of a student research assistant. In the process of data collection, the research assistance helped the researcher take comprehensive field notes during the interview, while the researcher interviewed and recorded the participants. The researcher met with the participants individually and collectively with the permission letter from CUEA and the research permit from NACOSTI. After a briefing on the purpose of the study, the researcher, and her assistance conducted the study.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The researcher began the data analysis procedures from 15 participants with thematic analysis of the entire data from emerging themes. The manual method of (Creswell, 2007) was used for the analysis. This involved transcribing the interviews, reading the transcripts in order to get a global sense of the whole. The researcher again read the transcripts for the second time, after which the data collected, were coded. After that, the partitioning of the coded data was categorized into ideas by tagging similar passages of text with a code in order to identify them during comparison and analysis. The categories and themes which emerged from the coding were subsequently interrelated. Then, the related themes were presented in form of words, quotes, and excerpts, which provided further understanding of the phenomenon under study.

1.4 Results

The objective of this study was to explore Acts 4:32 – 34 on communal living among religious student sisters at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) Langata campus, Nairobi, Kenya. As a result, the researcher explored the experiences of communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA in relation to Acts 4:32 – 34. The results from the interview and focus group discussions (FGDs) are presented below based on the four research objectives and research questions.

Understanding of Communal Living among Religious Student Sisters in CUEA

The first research question of this study was how does communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA relates to Act 4:32 – 34. To achieve this objective, the study used FGDs and in-depth interviews to explore participants understanding of communal living. Evidences from the FGDs and individual interviews indicated that all the participants had a good understanding of communal living in relation to the example of the early Christians in Act 4:32 – 34.

Sharing, Spending Time Together, and Having Common Interest

The participants understanding of communal living bore semblance with that described in Acts 4:32 – 34 among the Early Christians. This understanding was captured by themes such as sharing, being one in mind and heart, and by extension, sharing with the neighbors. Most of the participants emphasized the sharing dimension of communal living among religious sisters such as sharing and spending time with each other, celebrating with each other in good and bad times, contribution to common purse, communal activities and having common interest. Some of the participants captured the sharing dimension of communal life thus:

Sharing all that we have together, our good times, our bad times, and everything that we own gift, money, possessions. Therefore, our community living helps us to live our life better and we are free from not holding on to things or possessing things as individuals but living in the community. In other words, living and sharing everything that we have freely and happily with one another (FGD 1 February 12, 2020).

One more participant supported this view saying:

For me, community life is to be with each other, and feeling with the other. You shared the joy... you share the sorrow, you share everything like the meals, of course the agape meal (P3 FGD 2, March 18, 2020).

The above excerpts from the participants revealed that communal living is having one mind, one heart, and genuine love existing among religious student sisters. In Acts 4: 32 – 34, it stated that all the believers were one in heart and mind; no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. There were no needy persons among them.

Attitudes of Religious Student Sisters toward Communal Living

The second research question of this study was what are the attitudes of religious student sisters toward communal living in CUEA? The researcher probed the participants by asking them to explain their attitudes as religious student sisters toward communal living in CUEA. The researcher carried out content analysis on the responses from the FGDs and interviews by grouping them into themes, which emerged together. The emerging themes indicated positive and negative attitudes toward communal living among the participants. The results further revealed that majority of the participants had positive attitudes, while some participants had negative attitudes toward communal living.

Positive Attitudes of Religious Student Sisters toward Communal Living

Majority of the participants expressed positive attitudes toward communal living as religious student sisters in CUEA. The outcome of their responses were grouped into indicators of positive attitudes such as perception of communal living as enriching, enlightening, and enthusiasm, commitment / total dedication, welcoming spirit, and togetherness. Most of the participants were certain in their responses on positive attitudes toward communal living in general. The participants expressed these in themes such as enriching, enlightening, and enthusiastic feelings about communal life. The responses indicated that these were serious concerns for the participants. One participant briefly expressed that:

I personally see communal living as enriching, and enlightening because the sisters are from different countries (P3, Individual Interview, February 13, 2020).

Still on enriching, enlightening, and enthusiastic feelings about communal life, one more participant expressed that:

My attitude to community life is 90% positive, despite existing challenges from community life that are self-demanding. Sometimes, these challenges can consume your time as a student. She noted that there were some demands that may come in and give pressure but still community life is vital (P4, FGD2, March 18, 2020).

The findings from this study on positive attitudes toward communal living among the participants indicated that CUEA also promotes communal life among its students as part of its core values and Catholic Identity. Thus, the priests, women and men religious studying in CUEA, always and everywhere, witnesses to the joy and communion in the service of the kingdom of God as one family. For this reason, the researcher holds that, the more religious student sisters have positive attitude towards communal living in CUEA, the more they are capable to integrate the core value of the university, that is, witness of life, prayer, truthfulness, honesty, excellence, commitment, and competence into their lives as religious student sisters.

Negative Attitudes of Religious Student Sisters toward Communal Living in CUEA

Although majority of the participants expressed positive attitudes toward communal living as religious student sisters in CUEA, there were others who expressed negative attitudes toward communal living in CUEA. Their responses include lack of interest; belief in external signs, inhospitality/unfriendliness, and the need to be alone. A participant, who captured the aspect of lack of interest in communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA, indicated that many student sisters are not interested. Sometimes, you meet a sister and invite her to join a certain spiritual movement in the university, but she is not interested. Furthermore, the participant felt that:

One common thing among the sisters in CUEA is that they are either students or lecturers, who are all struggling with one thing or the other (P6, Individual Interview, February 16, 2020).

However, some student sisters were reported to lack the zeal to participate in certain activities in campus.

Sometimes, they can just be chatting but they are not interested in participating in anything. Some student sisters do not have the interest of attending Mass. What they do is to go to their classrooms and be reading there (P2, FGD1, February 12, 2020).

From lack of interest in communal living, the participants identified unfriendliness and lack of hospitality as another form of negative attitude toward communal living among student sisters. Some participants voiced out that:

Some sisters prefer to live on their own than going to the community, even though their community is just a stone throw. This is because the sisters in the community are not receptive, they are not open, and they are not straightforward. Some participants concluded that it is better for them to live on their own to avoid clashes with the community (P2, Individual Interview, February 13, 2020 and P2, FGD2, March 18, 2020).

To mitigate the negative attitudes toward communal living among religious student sisters, the researcher is of the view that communal living is a life lived in responsiveness, peacefulness, and love. It is a requirement that each student sister accept her colleagues from other parts of the world without reservation. Since all religious sisters are missionaries, there is need for them to have good relationship and work side by side with each other in love. Thus, it is the responsibility of every religious sister to strive towards aptness in ensuring that the issue of segregation and unresponsiveness are destroyed and cut off from their midst.

Challenges Encountered by Student Sisters in Communal Living

The third research question for this study was what are the challenges in communal living encountered by student religious sisters? The researcher explored the experiences of the participants in terms of the challenges they encountered as religious student sisters towards communal living in CUEA. The emerging themes from the FGDs and interviews include integrating communal programmes with academic demands, academic workload and lack of time for personal prayers, lack of support from fellow sisters, the necessity for the practice of communal living by student religious sisters, and suggestions on how African student religious sisters can integrate communal living into their studies.

Integrating Communal Activities with Academic Demands

Majority of the participants indicated that some of the things that are most challenging to religious student sisters who are in college include demands from the community, striking a balance between community activities, studies, and limited time. These themes were summarized into integrating communal activities with academic demands. One major challenge, which student religious sisters' encounter, is incorporating communal activities with their studies. Some participants lamented that the demand from the community is too high. A participant explained:

A certain community may not understand that one of their sisters is a student who needs time to focus on her study. The community always wants the student sister to participate in every activity in the community and this made the student sister not to attend some lectures (FGD1, February 12, 2020).

One more participant corroborated the issue of insufficient time to interact with colleagues saying that as a student sister, she wanted to live communal life with her colleagues but she does not have enough time to socialize with her community. She indicated:

Time is my major problem because the timetable differs. I do not have the same timetable with other student sisters and this is how individual differences come to play (P4, FGD2, March 18, 2020).

Academic Workload / Unavailable Time for Personal Prayer

Closely associated with the issue of integrating community life with academic work was the problem of lack of time for personal prayers by student religious sisters. Some participants outlined academic workload and unavailable time for prayer as challenges, which student religious sisters who are in colleges encountered. Some participant elaborated on this by voicing that:

We are always tired from academic workload. Most of the time, it is a very big challenge because at the end of the day, we do not have time to say our personal prayers. We usually sleep off while saying their personal prayers because of the academic workload from CUEA (FGD1, February 12, 2020).

The findings from the participants show that integrating communal living with academic workload constitutes a key challenge encountered by religious student sisters. It shows that academic workload sometimes encroaches into community programmes and personal prayer life of religious sisters. Moreover, the results further revealed that imbalance between communal living and academic demands put a lot of pressure on religious student sisters. Thus, there is the need for religious student sisters and superiors of their communities to work out a practical solution to promote adequate integration of religious student sister into their respective communities. Although the reviewed literature had nothing in this direction, the findings could serve as a good basis for making conclusions on the major challenges encountered by religious student sisters in institutions of higher learning.

Lack of Support from Fellow Sisters

Another form of challenge encountered by participants was lack of support from fellow sisters. The participants experienced this challenge in the form of talebearers, disunity, and uncharitable attitudes from fellow sisters. They noted that wherever there are students, there is the tendency to gossip, to have disagreement, and division among them and between them. (FGD2, March 18, 2020).

A different form of lack of support encountered by the participants was:

Inattentiveness to the needs of sisters from other countries. CUEA being a multicultural university, some student sisters are not sensitive about the needs of other students from other countries especially concerning food and giving preferential treatments to indigene and this has become a serious issue in the community (Individual Interview, February 13, 2020).

Finally, some participants identified lack of commitment to communal living by some sisters as a challenge that affects student religious sisters who are in colleges.

The above findings on the challenges encounter by religious student sisters, who are in colleges brought out a different element of concerns affecting the practice of communal living. The results of this study indicated that challenges to communal living could be serious hindrances that may perhaps affect the practice of communal living among student religious sisters especially those in colleges. Nevertheless, in contrast to these challenges, the researcher advocates that community becomes meaningful when its members have positive mindset towards each other, maintain harmony within the community, and have susceptible relationship that binds them together as they try to sort out these challenges among themselves.

Ways of Promoting Communal Living among Student Sisters in CUEA

The fourth research question of this study was what are the ways of promoting communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA? The researcher explored the view of the participants in terms of ways of promoting communal living among religious student sisters. The researcher carried out content analysis on the responses from the FGDs, interviews, and the themes, which emerged were grouped together. The emerging themes include having periodic communal spiritual

programmes and meetings, superiors should make proper plans for their sisters before sending them on studies and ensure periodic visit to religious student sisters, and other contingent support to religious sister studying in different institutions of learning. Evidences from the FGDs and interviews indicated that the participants had a good knowledge on different ways of promoting communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA.

Periodic Communal Spiritual Programmes and Meetings

The participants indicated that one way of mitigating the challenges of communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA is by organizing various communal programmes and meeting. These periodic communal programmes according to the participants include communal recollections, prayers, annual retreat, meeting, and small gathering. The participants presented their suggestions as follow:

Communal Recollections, Prayers, and Annual Retreat

Some of the suggested ways of promoting communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA was through communal recollections, prayers, and annual retreat. Explaining this point, some participant stated that

Coming together for recollections occasionally and having meeting and prayer together is one aspect of promoting communal living among student religious sisters (FGD1, February 12, 2020).

In the same vein, some participants emphasized the role of retreat in promoting communal living among student religious sisters saying that:

Having annual retreat is another remedy for lack of communal living. When sisters have annual retreat, the retreat director helps them to know or suggest some ways that could be helpful for them to keep moving. From the retreat, the sisters get some encouragement and advice; which could help them to move on and live holistically life (FGD1, February 12, 2020).

Periodic Visit, and Follow up on Religious Student Sisters

Another way to plan for and promote communal living among religious student sisters is through periodic visit from their superiors to remind and follow up their religious student sisters. Participants likewise indicated that reminding, and communicating to the student sisters about being responsible in living community life will go a long way in remedying the lack of communal living among student sisters. Similarly, there is need to follow up and visit the student sisters regularly in their different campuses. In so doing, there will be less lack of communal living among them.

Some of the participants expressed this point saying that:

Superiors should follow up their members, not just send them to school, and leave them there. They should visit their members regularly, and find out how they are faring. They should support them and give them the necessary requirements they need for school. It is also important that superiors of various congregations communicate with their members studying in other countries through circulars and

update them about the happenings in the congregation. Therefore, it is the duty of the superiors to follow up their students (FGD2, March 18, 2020).

Contingent Plans for Religious Sisters Studying in Different Institutions of Learning

Probed further on ways of promoting communal living among religious student sisters, the participants came up with different ingenious ideas on other ways to enhance community life among religious student sisters. The researcher asked the participants to mention some of the programmes they can design that could promote communal living among religious student sisters if given the opportunity to do so. Responses from the participants were grouped into two broad framework namely, drawing up a balanced community programmes to accommodate daily chores, study time, and fund for charity, while celebrations, recreations, community visitation, and spiritual activities constitute the second group.

Drawing up a Balanced Community Daily Programme

One of the suggested ways of promoting communal living among student religious sisters was to put in place balanced community programmes, which will create time for daily chores, study time, as well as allocate fund for charity. One of the participants who expressed this point stated that:

Some of the programme she can draw for the student sisters include community activities such as the daily chores, study time, and recreation, For example, cleaning, and cooking (Individual Interview, February 17, 2020).

Celebrations, Recreations, Communal Visitation, and Spiritual Activities. Some of the participants further suggested designing a programme with time for celebrations, recreations, spiritual directions, and community visitation. For example, one of the participants noted that

Another thing that could be design, which can promote communal living among student religious sisters, is by organizing celebrations such as Christmas celebration, coming together and eating together as student religious sisters (P2, Individual Interview, February 15, 2020).

Finally, one more participant suggested including apostolate into the programme saying:

Some other time, at least sometimes going for apostolate. Like CUEA, sisters do not go for apostolate. However, student sisters in CUEA could make it an obligation to go for apostolate such as going to teach children or give instruction to women, and youths (Individual Interview, February 17, 2020).

1.5 Discussion

This study explored Acts 4:32 – 34 on communal living among religious student sisters at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi – Kenya. The study showed that the participants had a good understanding about communal living in relation to Acts 4: 32 – 34. The study confirmed this in the examples given by the participants, which include sharing, spending time together, and having common interest. Some aspects of the study were in agreement with previous

studies, which clarified that communal living is the act of total sharing among people, united in mind and heart.

The findings further revealed that majority of the participants' attitude toward communal living, as religious student sisters in CUEA were positive, while some participants have negative state of mind about their attitudes towards communal living. Nonetheless, majority of the participants' attitudes toward communal living is in line with the core values of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, which include witness of Life, prayer, truthfulness, honesty, excellence, commitment, and competence. For this reason, the findings of this study hold that, the more religious student sisters have positive attitude towards communal living in CUEA as well as in their communities, the more they are able to integrate the core value of the University into their lives.

In addition, the study identified the challenges encountered by religious student sisters in communal living. Attestations from the participants indicated that maximum number of participants were aware of the challenges, which student religious sisters especially those in colleges encountered. Moreover, the findings on the challenges, which religious student sisters in colleges encountered, brought out a different element of concerns affecting the practice of communal living. However, the results of this study indicated that challenges to communal living could be serious hindrances that possibly will affect the practice of communal living among religious student sisters especially those in colleges.

Finally, the study showed that periodic spiritual direction, recollection, retreat, sabbatical programme; together with organized communal activities, meetings, and being together in small gathering arbitrate a better effect on communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA. These programmes take into consideration the basic needs, which include spiritual, moral, physical, educational, and psychological needs of religious student sisters through their interaction, integration, participation, and involvements in communal activities as religious student sisters in CUEA and in their various communities. Concerning these findings, the researcher suggests that religious student sisters should involve themselves in communal activities particularly community services and participation in various activities as well as spiritual movements in the University. Furthermore, superiors of different congregations and CUEA as a body should emphasized more on communal living among priests, and most especially religious student sisters; and organized different programmes that will empower them to practice communal living within and outside the University vicinities.

1.6 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher draws up the following conclusions in line with the research questions. Communal living is intentional communities of people living together that share common interests, often have common values and beliefs, as well as shared property, possessions, resources, talents and knowledge. The study disclosed that each religious student sister who participated in this study came from different religious community and is studying at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. In addition, these religious student sisters are in an institution that comprises of priests, young boys, and girls together with married men and women studying together with them in the University. This is very unique because the reviewed literature

showed that communal living is an intentional community of people living together and share common interests, values, and beliefs.

The study likewise concludes on one hand that majority of the religious student sisters have positive attitude towards communal living. These positive attitudes towards communal living include enriching, enlightening, and enthusiasm, commitment / total dedication, welcoming spirit, and togetherness. On the other hand, the undesired attitudes, which some student sisters religious portray towards communal living, include lack of interest; believe in external signs, inhospitality / unfriendliness, the desire to be alone and individualistic life. In a similar way, there were also some challenges, which the religious student encountered in communal living. These challenges include striking a balance between community activities with studies and demands from community. Some emphasized on limited time factor, tattletale and disunity, unkind words from fellow sisters, inattentiveness to the needs of sisters from other countries, age disparity, and lack of teamwork, among others. The findings of this study on the challenges encountered by student religious sisters brought about different elements of concerns affecting the practice of communal living among religious student sisters in institutions of higher learning.

On the possible ways of remedying the practice and lack of communal living among religious student sisters in CUEA and in different institutions of higher learning, the study concludes that the practice of communal living for religious student sisters is a necessity based on charisms of religious congregations and the benefits of practicing communal living by religious student sisters. The study concludes that communal living enables them to understand one another and tackle some issues affecting them individually and collectively in regard to communal living. It also empowers them to support one another even in the midst of academic workload. It is necessary therefore, for CUEA and other institutions of higher learning to create a forum where religious student sisters could intermingle, relate, work, and learn together as one family living in a community.

In addition, this study concludes that there is need for student religious sisters to integrate communal living into their studies. This is because it will enable them to have the interest of each other at heart and have a broad knowledge of communal living. Creating a forum where religious student sisters can commune and interact with each other will go a long way in assisting them to assimilate communal living with studies. In so doing, this will address and facilitates the challenges encountered by religious student sisters in CUEA and other institutions of learning. Moreover, the findings points out that there is need for superiors to attached student sisters to nearby communities where they can holistically practice communal living. Similarly, the findings expressed that there is need for superiors to follow up, and pay regular visit to their members who are studying in CUEA as well as in different institutions of higher learning.

The study concludes that organizing practical programmes such as having regular recollections, annual retreat, being a role model, and having periodic meetings and prayers together will go a long way in reducing undesirable attitudes as well as the challenges encountered by religious student sisters in CUEA and other institutions of learning. As a final point, this study concludes that some religious student sisters designed some programmes such as having periodic recollections, going for spiritual directions, and having some time out or study leave. These programme will support religious student sisters in living holistic life and will enable them to practice communal living effectively.

1.7 Recommendations

The findings of this current study recommended and suggested that a host of factors contribute to the challenges religious student sisters encounter in colleges in relation to communal living. Similarly, these factors make some religious student sisters to have undesirable behaviour towards communal living. Therefore, there is need for future researchers to conduct further study in finding out whether this is the case among a different population of religious sisters who are non-students in Kenya. In addition, there is need for future researchers to conduct another study among religious student sisters in higher institution of learning to find out the coping strategies they use in dealing with the challenges they encounter as religious student sisters in higher institution of learning. Finally, there is need for future researchers also to carry out another study from different countries in Africa where they can look at and analyze the experiences of communal living among religious student sisters and religious student brothers in relation to Acts 4:32 – 34.

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