

Fifth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

**ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF BEING CHURCH  
IN THE ASIA OF THE 1990s**

by  
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For centuries we thought we knew exactly what was expected in the Church, how its activities would be arranged, who should do what and when, and so forth. In other words we adopted a very fixed and even stereotyped view of the Church which made it difficult for Church members, and especially outsiders, to discover Christ behind the Church's facade. For many, the Church has become irrelevant to daily life and many pastors feel that they are running in circles.

In our workshop we will ask the question: Are there alternative ways of being Church in Asia in the 1990s?

At first we will reflect on the "Five Stage Models of a Maturing Church" which can help us to find direction and a central focus in our pastoral approaches.

Then we will practise two of the Lumko pastoral programs in order to experience the meaning of an "alternative way of being Church." These programs are compiled in such a way that they can be done by the people themselves without the necessary presence of an "expert."

**I. Five Stage Models of a Maturing Church**

Our pastoral aim is a Church which becomes mature, where all people take an active part in its interior life as brothers and sisters. We are longing for a Christian community where all feel responsible for the Church's mission in the world as a shining sign of an "alternative world"...

Many attempts have been made to achieve this vision.

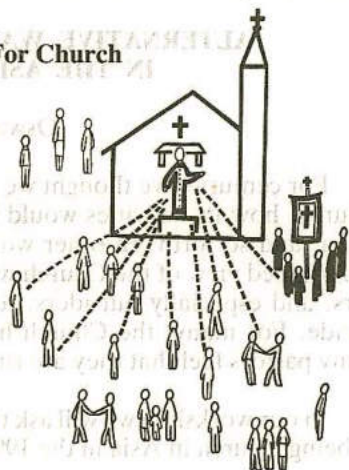
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This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshops of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC), convening in Bandung, Indonesia, July 17-27, 1990. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Emerging Challenges to the Church in Asia in the 1990's: A Call to Respond."

The following “Five Stage Models of a Maturing Church” may help us to find out where we are and what the next step may be on our pastoral journey. Of course, the five stages of development will not be necessarily the same in every parish community. They may overlap or even follow a different sequence. Also a parish can be at different stages in different areas of church life.

### 1. The Provided-For Church

In the past we experienced a totally provided-for Church which gradually disappears in this radical form. However, this model still remains basically the same, where a group of people around the priest (e.g., Legionaries) or “ward-leaders” are reporting back to the priest about the needs of the community without feeling responsible themselves to answer these needs.



- \* What is happening in this picture?
- \* What is good in the “model” and what is not so good?
- \* What role do lay associations play in this model?

### Historical Notes

It is good to remember how the above model of the Church developed in the past. This will help us to understand better the difficulties which we necessarily have to encounter in any attempt to change it.

The world “laity” comes from the Greek word *laos* (people) and was used by Pope Clement I (93-97) to distinguish the People of God from the *ta ethne*, the heathens.

In the third century the monks made their appearance and religious life was soon regarded as the “perfect” way of being a Christian. The religious class emerged as a kind of “super-Christians.” The Church lawyer Gratian declares categorically: “There are two kinds of Christians.”

In the 11th-13th century (with the development of the Roman Curia) the ecclesiastical prelate with ecclesial jurisdiction came on the scene. A lay person was anyone who had no ecclesial jurisdiction and authority. The pastor became the master over his flock. The division between clerics and



the laity became even hostile. The Papal Bull *Clericos laicos* (February 2, 1296) of Pope Boniface VIII begins with the words: "Lay people are the enemies of the clergy. This is strongly testified in the past and taught again in our present time."

The *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1917 grants the lay people the right "to receive from the clerics spiritual goods and strong help for salvation" (Can. 682). No further rights are accredited to the laity apart from allowing them to give religious instructions (Can. 1453-1455) and to administer the local Church funds (Can. 1521).

The historical burden of a "devalued" laity is our pastoral heritage and has to be remembered. Centuries of "providing" the faithful with all necessary spiritual goods, without giving them any further right than to "receive," have left their mark both on clerics and lay people of today.

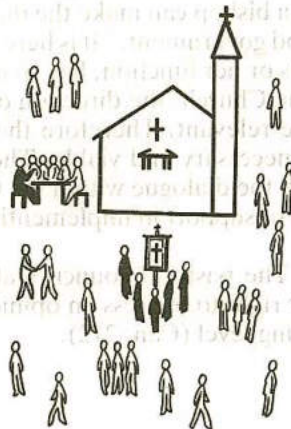
However, the Council Fathers of Vatican II have given us a new vision of the laity and stressed the common dignity which is shared by all members of the Church (LG 32).

Even before Vatican II we observe a shift in "papal theology." On October 14th, 1951, Pius XII instructed the First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate: "Catholic Action ... is a tool in the hand of the hierarchy and should, as it were, be its prolonged arm" (AAS 43, 1951 p. 789).

At the Second World Congress of the same body (October 5, 1957) Pius XII used a different language: "This apostolate (Catholic Action) always remains an apostolate of the laity and does not become a 'hierarchical apostolate,' even if it is exercised with ecclesial mandate" (AAS 49, 1957 p. 928).

## 2. The Parish Council Church

After Vatican II parish councils were introduced in many parishes around the world. They became a sign of implementation of the new vision of the Church as proclaimed by the Council.



- \* What is the advantage of a “Parish Council Church?”
- \* What are the shortcomings of a “Parish Council Church?”
- \* According to your opinion, what is the difference between a Town Council and a Parish Council?

## Some Legal Points

### a) Councils At Diocesan Level

The revised Canon Law mentions three consultative bodies at diocesan level: The Diocesan Synod (“... to offer assistance to the diocesan bishop,” Can. 460), the Presbyteral Council (“... for pastoral welfare,” (Can. 495, 1) and the Pastoral Council (“...” to propose practical conclusions,” Can. 511).

The scope of these three bodies overlaps. The canons are very flexible in regard to these three organizations.

The diocesan synod is totally optional. It can be called whenever the bishop feels that the circumstances warrant it (Can. 461, 1). There must be lay members in the synod (Can. 463, 1.5). The bishop “presides” over it (Can. 500, 1). This does not mean that he has to “chair” the meeting. It could mean that, but he still “presides” if he is present in a place of honor, taking an active part in the discussions.

The presbyteral council is mandatory. It continues to exist and it only dies with the bishop. It is composed of priests (Can. 495, 1). It is not intended to be a senate or an elite. It is intended to be an advisory body to the bishop and in some way demonstrating the unity of the clergy in the diocese around their bishop.

The pastoral council is optional. However, it is for this very reason that a bishop can make the diocesan pastoral council a key instrument of “good government.” It is here where everybody in the Church, regardless of his or her function, has an important voice to raise regarding the work of the Church, the direction of the ministry and how the Gospel can become relevant. Therefore the pastoral council is extremely important, and necessary and viable. The role of the pastoral council is crucial because the dialogue within the Church on a wider scale stimulates a wider base of support in implementing decisions.

The pastoral council makes it possible for the faithful to exercise their right to express an opinion and the right to be heard at a decision-making level (Can. 212).



The pastoral council must be convoked at least once a year (Can. 514).

#### **b) The Pastoral Council at the Parish Level**

If the bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. It is presided over by the parish priest and has a consultative vote (Can. 536).

The fact that the parish pastoral council is optional does not mean that it is unimportant. It is rather a reminder that a parish should have a pastoral council. In fact, it is the first time that Church law suggests such a council and, therefore, has to be taken seriously. It is also significant that Church law calls this council “pastoral,” which means the members share in the pastoral task of the parish, alongside the priest/pastor.

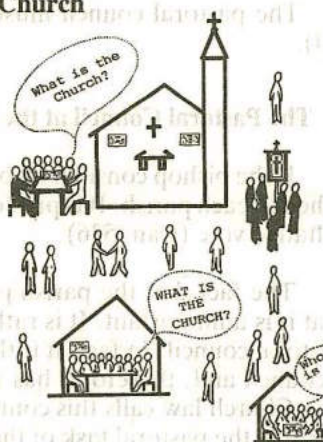
“Presiding over” (similar to the bishop’s “presiding over” the presbyteral council) does not mean that the parish priest has to chair the meetings of the pastoral council. It could mean that but he is still “presiding” (*prae-esse*) if he approves of a parish council meeting or is present among the members.

The fact that the parish council has only a consultative vote does not imply that its deliberations and decisions are unimportant. It rather opens up the possibility for “good government” of a biblical and Christian kind, of “non-dominating leadership.”

Talking about voting and decision making in the life of the Church we accept the fact that the Church is not a democracy. However, the Church is also not a dictatorship. Although “all the power” does not come “from the people,” the basic democratic rules of human behavior have to be observed in fulfilling the common mission given to the People of God as a whole. These basic rules of behavior, as they have to be observed in the Church, go much further and demand much more “democracy” than mere “democratic” rules which are guaranteed in a secular constitution. The pattern of behavior in the Church community is based on a “true equality among all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful ....” (LG 32) and governed by the Lord’s command: “... you have only one Master and you are all brothers (and sisters)” (Mt 23: 8).

### 3. The Awakening Church

There is a great longing in many Christians to be more than just individual Sunday church-goers. Christians ask the question: "What is the Church? Who is the Church?" Demands are made on the faithful often without deeper explanation. The question is asked: "Why all these changes?" The People of the Church are waking up.



\* According to your experience, what makes people in a parish feel "uneasy"? What do they question in the life of the Church?

\* In which areas of the life of the Church do you wish the people to acquire a "new outlook" or a "new awareness"?

\* The time of change is a time of suffering. Describe the "pain" which the faithful and their leaders have to experience in their search for a new outlook.

\* The time of change is also a time of joy. Describe the "gain," joy and new hope which the faithful and their leaders may experience in their search for a new understanding of the Church.

#### Summary Notes

A spirit of awakening may be created in a parish by the lack of priests, by pastoral letters of the bishop, by sermons, literature, seminars, by experiencing somewhere else a different way of being Church, and by becoming conscious of values demanded outside the Church, for instance, consultation, equal dignity, coresponsibility, etc.

If we envisage the whole parish as being on the "move," then clergy, community leaders and the faithful must accept a new outlook.

The list of possible areas of awareness or outlook which have to be influenced is, of course, endless. Each community has its own "public opinion" and "strange views" with which we are faced. Possible areas where a new outlook is required are:

— What does it mean to be THE CHURCH? .... to be baptized .... to serve others .... to cooperate with others in the Church .... to witness .... to evangelize ... to live the Gospel today?



— What has the Church to do with the problems of the world of today? With what means and methods do we face injustice and evil? What about the involvement of Christians in political parties, unions, etc.?

— The possibility of a different way of being Church, for instance in Small Christian Communities. Is it sufficient to be an individual Sunday church-goer? Why so much personal sharing in small communities? Why should they transform the world around them? Etc.

— How is leadership exercised in the Church? What about the different charisms of the faithful? How are leaders selected? Should community leaders rotate or remain forever? Etc.

A change in outlook and practice implies death and resurrection. It brings pain and gain for all involved.

Conducting awareness programs in a parish requires a different approach from “telling” the people. Awareness programs invite people to accept a new outlook and to change a value (“I like this”). Values cannot be imposed but have to be freely accepted as a matter of conscience.

In awareness programs the people themselves have to be actively involved in the process and be allowed to discover for themselves a new horizon or outlook. Arguments and facts have to be provided which may be accepted or rejected by the people.

Awareness programs have to be welcomed. Therefore, their presentation has to wait until an occasion arises in which the need for a new outlook is being felt (e.g., sickness of the priest.)

The advantages of self-designed awareness programs are evident.

Awareness programs, published by Lumko:

No. 1: Awareness program for social concern.

No. 3: Awareness program for training Parish Councillors.

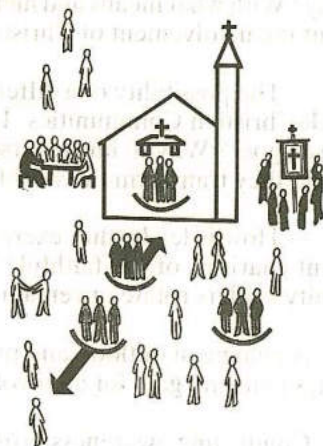
No.14: Awareness program for the Christian community to see leadership in the Church in a new way.

No.18: Awareness for introducing community ministries.

No.19: Awareness for Small Christian Communities.

#### 4. The Task Group Church

In a parish in which the faithful have become aware of their common responsibility, "task groups" or committees will evolve to fulfil the needs of the community. The priest becomes the organizer of these groups. This model remains basically the same if a parish is divided into sections or wards where similar task groups have been established on a "ward level."



- \* What is happening in this picture of a "task group Church"?
- \* What are the values of this model of the Church? What are its shortcomings?
- \* What "pains and gains" are experienced by the faithful and their leaders in this "model" of the Church?

#### Summary Notes

The "task group Church" is a mighty step forward on the journey towards a "participatory" Church. Basic functions of the Church are being fulfilled efficiently, everything is organized well and "things are happening."

However, the usual parish often is weighed down by many concerns and groups of people demanding its attention. For instance, task groups are being called for to be concerned with the youth, the aged, those in midlife, the newly-wedded as well as the divorced persons, the sick, the unemployed, workers, managers, migrants, choir, the poor, social action, catechetical programs, liturgy, associations, Marriage Encounter, and so forth.

The different task groups are likely to compete with one another for time and attention. Little training may be offered to the "functionaries," either in skill or in spiritual growth.

The role of the full-timers in such a parish will change into the one of organizers and managers. In ideal cases they will become enablers and trainers. They will feel responsible that all functions are being fulfilled efficiently by their task groups and committees.



However, “group clericalism” can develop in such a parish, which absorbs and claims “charisms” and responsibilities which belong to all in the Christian community.

Constant animation, coordination and training will become necessary. The danger is that members of task groups may be trained as mere “functionaries” — without building community or helping them to grow spiritually and mentally. Those who carry responsibility in the Church may be satisfied at having achieved an “efficient Church” where necessary functions are being performed in a well-organized way. Training may be limited to “skill training.”

However, four areas of training are required:

- a) Spiritual life (e.g., deepening of faith, prayer, etc.)
- b) Attitudes, values, awareness (e.g., service, not power, community building, team work, social responsibility).
- c) Skill training (e.g., how to read, conduct a meeting, how to solve problems, how to animate others, etc.).
- d) Information, knowledge, insights (e.g., theological knowledge, general knowledge about society, etc.).

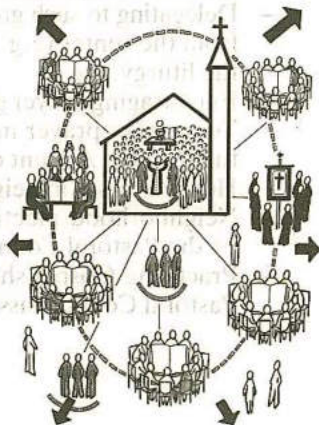
The training should mainly take place in the parish itself. Team ministry and “rotating” leadership should be exercised.

Lumko programs offer a great variety of skill-training programs, for instance, training animators for Gospel sharing, training of visiting the sick, training funeral leaders, spiritual training of community leaders, etc.

These skill-training programs follow the method of adult education which, for example, allows the trainees to discover for themselves whatever they can discover and combines practical functions with spiritual growth.

## 5. The Communion of Communities

We see the “ideal” church as a communion of communities. These “communities” may be “Christian Faith Communities,” or “Basic” or “Ecclesial” or “Small” Christian Communities. Four important “marks” belong to these small communities:



a) Neighbors meet outside the “official” church services; b) They make Gospel-sharing their spiritual basis; c) They support each other and work together; d) They are united with the other groups of the parish and the Universal Church.

\* What do you think is the difference between a Task Group Church and a Communion of Communities?

\* According to your opinion, how would you describe an “ideal” Church?

\* How is the relationship between the faithful and their leaders in such a Church?

\* What are the “gains and the pains” in such a Church?

\* What the theological reasons for such a vision of the Church?

### Summary Notes

The Church as a communion of communities is an ideal as high as Christian love and charity. We may never fully achieve it but the ideal still remains, giving direction and hope. Its deepest theological reason lies in the “interior life” of the Blessed Trinity which must be reflected in those who are called to become members of the divine household.

A communion of communities can reflect the “love pact” (covenant) of God with his people in a deeper way than a congregation of individual church-goers.

If the vision of such a Church is before our eyes, even the smallest pastoral activity receives direction and becomes a step forward without “running around in circles.” Such steps towards the ideal may be, for instance:

- encouraging all groups which foster a deeper personal-and faith-relationship (e.g., Marriage Encounter, etc.)
- Starting isolated Gospel-sharing groups, not as neighborhoods yet, but with people from the parish who are interested.
- Delegating to such groups some tasks which usually are organized from the center (e.g., preparation for the sacraments, preparing the liturgy, etc.)
- Encouraging prayer groups (even if they do not use the Bible yet)
- Temporary prayer meetings or Gospel-sharing meetings during the times of Advent or Lent
- House Masses in neighborhoods
- Neighborhood meetings to decide important issues (organized by the Pastoral Council)
- Practising Gospel-sharing in existing groups in the parish (e.g., Pastoral Council, associations, parish team, etc.)



- Adopting an animating and inspiring leadership-style, in contrast to a dominating and providing one.
- Evaluating all pastoral activities by asking such questions as:
  - “Do we call on people to ‘help us’ in achieving a certain task or do we ‘help them’ to exercise their own responsibility?”
  - “Are we providing or enabling the faithful to do themselves whatever they can or should do themselves?”

The “soul” of a Church envisaged as a communion of communities is the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ, respecting the common dignity of all (although they have different functions), and accepting the common responsibility for fulfilling Christ’s mission in the world.

The “alternative way of being Church” is basically the way of living as a loving community, which is a sign of an alternative community to the world around.

Marxism claimed to create THE alternative perfect “community.” The dismantling of Marxism worldwide, as we experience it today, should not lull us into self-complacency but remind us of our Christian task:

- To be a sign of an alternative society which is not built on brutal competition or forced sharing but on brotherly and sisterly sharing
- To be sign of an alternative community which is not ruled by power-drunk dictators but where “non-dominating” or “serving leadership” is exercised
- To be sign of sure hope that God will complete and make perfect what we have started in faith.

In this way, our dream of an “alternative way of being Church” assumes global and eschatological dimensions.

## II. GOSPEL SHARING: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF BEING CHURCH

The “alternative way of being Church” does not start by changing structures. It rather starts by doing things in an alternative way.

For example, Gospel sharing in groups is not only a different way of using the Bible but at the same time an “alternative way of being Church.” It can be done immediately with any existing group, be it the parish priest with his co-workers, the parish council, committees and, of course, small neighborhood communities where they exist.

## 1. Short Description of Gospel Sharing

The small neighborhood group in Main Street has assembled for their weekly meeting. The 7-step method of Gospel sharing is their "agenda" in which they pray the Gospel and discuss their daily needs and problems.



After having "invited" and "welcomed" the Lord into their midst they read several times the Gospel of the following Sunday.

Then each one of them picks out a word or a short phrase and repeats it several times in a prayerful way. They choose phrases like "Jesus sat down," or "Jesus looked at him," etc.

After some minutes of silence they share with each other which word has touched them personally. No one is preaching down to others or giving a clever explanation of the text. They share, however, how a certain word from the text is challenging them or giving them new hope.

Now the time has come to discuss their group activities and daily problems. For instance, some report on their visit to the sick, others mention the need to help refugees in the neighborhood who have just arrived. All this is done in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Spontaneous prayers close the meeting.

## 2. The Theological Dimension of Gospel Sharing

We are used to doing Bible studies, quoting the Bible to prove a theological point, drawing moral implications from Scripture and enjoying private Bible reading. Gospel sharing in groups, however, emphasizes or adds a certain theological dimension to the use of Scripture.

### a) A Community of Believers Welcomes the Risen Christ

The group of believers which comes together for Gospel sharing does not assemble around a dead book of many words. They "invite the Lord" and welcome him before they read the text. This indicates the theological direction of Gospel sharing from the very start.



They have come together in the name of Jesus and welcome him in their midst. They believe in the risen Christ who promised his disciples that he would stay with them until the end of the age (Mt 18: 20; 28: 20).

The same, of course, is true for the liturgy of the word and the Eucharist in church.

### **b) The Words of the Bible Become “Sacramental Signs”**

In Bible-study groups, the words of Scripture are words of information which can be “cut to pieces” (discussed) and be talked about. For others, the biblical words are messages of wisdom and spiritual insights. In Gospel-sharing groups we understand the biblical text as a “sacramental sign” of the Lord’s presence.

“The Word became a human being .... and lived among us” (Jn 1: 14). The many words of Scripture become a sign of the living Word and a concrete possibility of meeting the risen Christ. The aim of Gospel sharing, therefore, is not to “understand” a text but to touch a loving person and come in contact with him, like the woman in the crowd who touched the edge of his cloak (Mt 9: 20).

The reality of Christ’s presence in a Gospel-sharing group is as real as in the Eucharist. “The Church has always venerated the divine Scripture as she venerated the Body and Blood of the Lord” (VD 21).

The experience of the Lord’s presence through sacramental signs is not generated by magic. It depends on the loving and believing community in which these signs are being used. This, of course, creates a challenge not only for Gospel, sharing groups but also for the eucharistic assembly.

### **c) Gospel Sharing and Orthodoxy**

– The question may be asked:

What happens if one member of the group comes to an absolute heretical interpretation of the text? How can a biblical text be applied to life if the original meaning is not understood?

To start with the last objection:

Gospel sharing is an “alternative way” of using the Bible. The text becomes a sacramental sign, as mentioned above. It becomes a means of “firsthand” encounter with Christ. Even if the actual text is “wrongly” understood in the strict exegetical sense, it may be right in the context of the whole Bible, with its basic message: I am your God. I am with you. I love you.

It may also be argued that Scripture itself has sometimes “reinterpreted” biblical texts. For instance: Mk 4 (allegorical explanation of the sower); Gal 14: 24 (Sarah and Hagar); John 6 (reinterpretation of the Last Supper).

Even liturgy assumes the right to “reinterpret” biblical texts, not following the strict exegetical findings. This we observe, for instance, in the choice of the first Sunday readings which should correspond to the main theme of the Gospel.

We also know how the literal meaning of a text may falsify the message.

People in Gospel-sharing groups (or in church) can be addressed by God without understanding fully or even interpreting wrongly the original meaning of the text. Jesus himself is accepted in the text. Therefore we respond after the proclamation of the Gospel: “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”

— What happens when one member of the group comes to a real heretical explanation of the text?

In this case we trust in the ability of the community to correct and guide. A difficult problem can be presented to the “expert” later.

And, after all, Gospel sharing is not the only way of dealing with Scripture in the community. There are sermons, catechism classes, Bible-study groups, etc. All these will exercise their corrective influence.

### **3. Gospel Sharing is an Expression of an “Alternative Way of Being Church”**

— Gospel sharing involves the faithful actively in the search for God’s will and overcomes mere “spoon-feeding” through “experts.”

— Gospel sharing makes it possible for the faithful to grow together as “alternative communities” in small groups.

— Gospel sharing makes it possible to implement the expectation of Vatican II: “The people unflinchingly adhere to the faith, penetrate it more deeply with right judgement, and apply it more fully in daily life” (LG 12).

— Gospel sharing is an important step towards genuine inculturation. The people themselves are confronted “firsthand” with the Gospel and find their own response to it in daily life. Out of this genuine experience with the message of God special cultural “needs” can be answered and suitable expressions in liturgy and



art can emerge.

- In Gospel sharing an “alternative leadership style” is exercised. The “facilitator” makes it possible for the group to live. Nothing is done by the facilitator which can be done by the members of the group (e.g., reading the text, giving the first answers).

The leader of the group becomes an “enabler,” although without him there will be chaos. This type of alternative leadership, which means NON-dominating leadership, puts into practice the Lord’s command: “Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all” (Mk 9:35).

#### 4. We Practise the 7-Step Gospel Sharing

We take Mark 9:33-37 as the text for our Gospel sharing in small groups of 12-15 members.

##### THE SEVEN STEPS

##### EVALUATION OF THE 7-STEPS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1. We invite the Lord</b><br/>Will someone, please, invite Jesus in a prayer.</p>   | <p>(1) STEP 1: Was there a spirit of prayer? Was there anything which disturbed or destroyed the spirit of prayer?</p>                       |
| <p><b>2. We read the text</b><br/>Let us open ... chapter ... verses ...</p>  | <p>(b) STEP 2: Did everybody find the text before it was read?</p>   |
| <p><b>3. We pick out words and meditate on them</b><br/>We pick out words or short phrases, read them aloud prayerfully, and keep silence in between.</p> | <p>(c) STEP 3: Did we allow a time of silence in between the words which we were picking out? Did we read them aloud in a prayerful way?</p> |
| <p><b>4. We let God speak to us in silence</b><br/>We keep silence for ... minutes and allow God to speak to us.</p>                                      | <p>(d) STEP 4: Was the time of silence too short or too long?</p>  |
| <p><b>5. We share what we have heard in our hearts</b><br/>a) which word has touched you personally?<br/>b) How did we live our ‘Word of Life’?</p>       | <p>(e) STEP 5: Was there real personal sharing or ‘preaching down to others’?</p>  |

6. **We discuss any task which our group is called to do**
- a) Report on previous task.
  - b) Which new task has to be done?
- (f) STEP 6: Did we allow the Spirit of God's Word to guide our discussions on our task?
7. **We pray together spontaneously** (We end with a prayer/hymn which all know by heart).
- (g) STEP 7: Did we allow enough time for everybody to pray spontaneously?
- (h) What did our facilitator do well?  
What can he still improve?

### Note

\* Some people find it easier to share personally if they address their contribution to Jesus as a kind of a conversation with him.

\* Some groups choose a so-called "Word of Life" for a month. Such a word is taken from the actual wording of the text which was used in the meeting, for instance: "Servant of all" or "follow me." They try to remember this "Word of Life" throughout the month and apply it in certain situations to find guidance and help. They share their experience of the "Word of Life" in step 5.

\* A group can improve its 7-step Gospel sharing if the members evaluate themselves after the meeting. They may use the evaluation-sheet above.

### 5. Other Methods of Gospel Sharing

Lumko Kit no. 20: GOSPEL SHARING contains a detailed training program with posters and workbook for introducing the 7-step method and four further methods for Gospel sharing.

- The 7-step method is the basis of the other methods. It adopts a meditative approach to Scripture, helps the individual members of the group to grow in their faith and raises the mutual-trust level in the group. All this is essential for building small communities in a parish.
- The "Group Response" method does not suggest personal sharing but asks the questions:  
"Which problem of our own lives is reflected in our text?" "What



does God think of our problem?" "What advice does he give us?"

- The "Look-Listen-Love" method invites the members of the group to relate a daily life experience which the group helps to reflect on in the light of "God's view," using their Christian wisdom to throw light on the situation.
- The "Life-Bible-Notes" help a group of parish leaders to choose a social problem in the area, prepare some guiding questions and suitable Bible texts to be used in small communities.
- The "Amos Programs" offer a pattern of analysis of social problems, how to confront them with the demands of the Gospel, and how to search for root causes of these problems.

Although the 7-step method is the basis for Gospel sharing in small communities, the other methods are used from time to time in order to offer variety and open other dimensions in the "alternative use of the Bible".

### III. USING THE RCIA: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF BEING CHURCH

The Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) are an expression of an "alternative" Church where the faithful assume responsibility and are actively involved in "handing down the faith from one generation to the next."

The Lumko book *Our Journey Together* contains the illustrated edition of all the Rites, as well as 47 catechetical sessions for the different stages of the RCIA.

These catechetical sessions are written in such a way that men and women of a parish can facilitate them with a minimum of training required. This will enable the Christian community to become "self-propagating."



The book is also used by groups of Christians. It helps them to strengthen their faith and their Christian commitment.

## **1. The Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults Reflect an “Alternative Way of Being Church”**

The RCIA, well used in a parish, is a mighty step away from a mere “provided-for Church.”

- The rites make the whole Christian community responsible for accompanying catechumens on their journey of faith. In the process the Christian community realizes and practises the concept of “We are the Church.”
- The whole community takes part in welcoming the catechumens, helping them to advance on their journey of faith and finally recommending them for receiving the sacraments of initiation. Sponsors are representatives of the whole Christian community.
- Blessings and Prayers against Evil (Minor Exorcisms) are celebrated by commissioned men and women of the community.
- The major rites are celebrated during Sunday liturgy in which the whole congregation takes an active part.
- Catechumens are not just being taught in “catechumen classes” but are initiated into the faith “with the help of some of the faithful, and remain together to share their joy and spiritual experiences as brothers and sisters” (Art. 96 of the RCIA).

This is quite an “alternative” approach to the old “catechumen class” where the catechist knew all the answers to questions which never were asked.

The 47 catechetical sessions provided in *Our Journey Together* want to assist “catechumenal communities” to share together their “joy and spiritual experiences” on the great journey of life.

## **2. The 47 Catechetical Sessions in *Our Journey Together* Reflect an “Alternative Way of Being Church”**

In these catechetical sessions we find an alternative method of “teaching,” an alternative “self-understanding” of the faithful and an alternative leadership style.

- The method follows the method of adult education.
- The sessions start with a situation of life, presented in life-stories or pictures.
- The problems of life raise the questions which the Good News will answer.
- The “answers” are not being taught by an “expert” but the group searches together in the Scriptures and shares their “joy and spiritual experiences.”



- As the guiding questions do not give a fixed answer, cultural needs of different groups can be accommodated.
- “Input” is reduced to facts and summaries which the group itself cannot find in its search. 41 basic questions and answers are provided for memorizing.
- The “self-understanding” of the faithful who accompany the catechumens reflects the vision of the Second Vatican Council:
  - “... the faithful ... share in their own way the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world” (LG 31).

In other words:

The faithful accept the coresponsibility of handing down the Good News from generation to generation, making disciples for the Lord as he has commanded not only the Twelve but all his followers:

- Non-Catholics in the group can take an active part in the spiritual search and sharing because “they are indeed joined to us in some real way in the Holy Spirit” (LG 15).
- Of those who did not yet accept the Gospel, without any fault of theirs, the Council says: “Whatever good or truth is found among them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel ...” (LG 16).
- As the life of such “catechumenal communities” is embedded into the life of the whole Church, we can trust in the teaching of the Council:
  - “The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the Holy One (cf. 1Jn. 2:20, 27) cannot err in matters of belief” (LG 12).
- The leadership style in such catechumenal communities reflects a “non-dominating” but serving leadership. The facilitator leads the group to the “fountain of living waters” but does not spoon-feed its members.
- The facilitator does not do what one of the group can do. He or she does not teach what the group can discover for itself.
- The facilitator encourages all to use their gifts to “share their joy and spiritual experiences” in the same way as the theologically highly-trained St. Paul expected this from the Christian community in the Roman catacombs: “I want ... to share a spiritual blessing with you to make you strong. What I mean is that both you and I will be helped at the same time, you by my faith and I by yours” (Rom 1:11-12).
- The facilitator walks and works together with the members of the group as St. Paul did with the Corinthians: “We are not dictators over your faith, but are fellow workers with you for your happiness.” (2 Cor 1:24)

## Conclusion

We are in search of alternative ways of being Church. Gospel Sharing and following the implementation of the RCIA are practical steps towards a Church which is miles away from the “provided-for Church.”

These two pastoral programs offer also a very concrete way to “inculturate” the message in the lives of the people.

And last, but not least, they can be done by the people themselves with a minimum of training required for the facilitators.

## Reflection After Practice of Above Programs

- a) What is the “theological position” of lay people who do Gospel sharing and use sessions from *Our Journey Together*?
- b) Compare with Mark 9:33-37 the leadership style adopted in these programs.
- c) Why can we suggest that the above programs are concrete steps towards inculturation and “incarnation” of the Gospel?

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