

Sixth Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide**FORMATION AND EDUCATION
FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN ASIA**

by
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I. Introduction

The Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC is calling us to look at the quality of our discipleship and to use as a measure of our authenticity whether we serve life or not. The theme, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," must be seen in the light of vision of the "New Way of Being Church" in the Asia of the 1990s.¹ This was at the heart of the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of Bandung's FABC V.

To form and educate our lay faithful, our new priests and our children, the way ahead needs a clear vision and one that is held in common. We share below a few common elements that belong to our vision in order to ensure that we are heading in a similar direction.

The people we are forming and educating should become:

- active participants in the mission and life of the Church;
- creative builders of the Kingdom;
- centered on Christ and his word;
- leaders in the fields of peacemaking and fair play;
- a sign of the love of God in communities of love;
- builders of the new civilization of love;
- animators who build each other up.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshops of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), convening at Manila, Philippines, January 10-19, 1995. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life."

In our workshop on "Formation and Education for Christian Discipleship in Asia" we will reflect on and practise:

a) Ways to break down this "New Way of Being Church" into actual formation programs

- for adult Christians in parishes;
- for students in seminaries for the priesthood;
- for children in Catholic schools.

b) How these educational programs can form effective disciples of Christ and not only academic graduates.

c) How these formation programs can enable people to serve and improve our actual life in Asia and not remain isolated as Christians in their religious practices.

PART I

II. The Process of Our Workshop Will Be:

1. a. To experience some concrete formation programs for adult Christians in parishes.

b. To question these programs in the light of our three principles:

- How does this program help us to implement the vision of the Asian bishops?
- How does this program help form disciples of Christ?
- How is this program related to our life in Asia?

c. To ask what the consequences are of our reflections on formation programs in parishes, schools and seminaries.

III. Reflection on the Learning Process for Adults

1. Many of our programs for adults are heavily dependent on a very learned leader or "expert", with a great deal of emphasis on knowledge, which remains of academic interest. FABCV's Final Statement called for a "process of regular faith-discernment that everyone could easily use and share in... and appropriate formation processes for mission and proclamation... with emphasis on the laity's participation."² There are three commonly-used approaches:

a. **The “Talking About” Approach**

– This happens when formation is separated from religious experience. It remains a mere “talking about” God without coming into a living contact with him.

b. **The “Academic” Approach**

– This takes place where formation is disconnected from daily life. Even the language used is disconnected from daily usage. Brilliant answers are given to questions which are not asked in life situations.

c. **The “Expert” Approach**

– Formation is isolated from the living faith community in this approach. The religious teacher or lecturer knows it all.

2. We need to look for an approach that will:

a. **Make disciples** who experience the Lord in a community of disciples, in community worship, and in personal prayer. Disciples who have a desire to serve as the Lord served.

b. **Promote and transform life** for those who listen to the word and act on it, and who are liberated by the light that the Gospel gives to their life.

c. **Build community** in the process of adult Christian education and formation. For example, catechumens can be accompanied by their neighbors who are believers and have their own faith deepened in the process.

3. New ways of achieving these pastoral aims were already looked for in 1993 by the “Consultation on Integral Formation,” called by the FABC Office of Laity and the Office for Human Development. In its report we read:

a. The main purpose was to reflect together as a community, to discover and to discern more creative ways to further implement the vision of Church as formulated at the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC.

b. This vision is a participatory way of being Church. The whole community of the faithful are enabled to actively share in the integral, global vision and mission of Christ in the multidimensional context of Asia.³

c. The Consultation suggested the name ASIPA for the pastoral process that seeks to promote “The New Way of Being Church in Asia.” The acronym ASIPA stands for: the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach.

IV. A Lesson From *Our Journey Together*

(We experience now a session from *Our Journey Together*,⁴ a text for accompanying catechumens in their faith journey and for deepening the faith of Small Christian Communities.)

1. Our Life

Deep within us we feel a great longing for being together with other people. We are longing for a community where we are loved and accepted. We want friends who share with us and help us.

We are longing for a community where we can feel at home and be safe.



There are different ways in which people form communities. Let us look at the people in the picture above.

What do you think makes people come together and form communities? (Buzzing; report)

It is God who put into us a deep desire to stay together and a deep longing to be united in love. This must be so because God himself is a loving and sharing community. The ONE God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. God's Word

It was at the River Jordan that God revealed himself as a loving community: let us read Mark 1:4-13: The baptism of Jesus.

We read verses 9-11 again and look at the picture below:



– Why can we say that God revealed himself as a loving community at the River Jordan?

(Discuss with the whole group)

We can also say, God revealed himself as the “Blessed Trinity.” There is ONE God but in God are three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

– Why do you think God the Father was well pleased with Jesus, his Son?

(Buzzing; report)

- For which difficult task did the Holy Spirit strengthen Jesus? Search for many difficult things for which Jesus needed the special strength of the Holy Spirit.

(Buzzing; report)

(If possible, divide the group into small groups of 2 or 3, and give each of them one of the following texts to study and to report back:)

- Read the following texts and find out what they tell us about the "Blessed Trinity":

John 14:26

John 16:12-15

John 17:20-23

Matthew 28:16-20

3. A Step Forward On Our Way

There is a deep desire in our hearts to belong to a loving community. This desire comes from God. He wants us to be like him. Therefore, he wants us to be a sharing and loving community, especially within his Church. In the Church-community the unity and love should be reflected which we find between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Where do we see in our parish that we want to be a loving and sharing community?

(Buzzing; report)

- What can we do to become a better community?

(Buzzing; report)

Which prayers remind us of the Blessed Trinity?

4. We Remember

Make the Sign of the Cross and bless yourself with the name of the Blessed Trinity.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

In which short prayer do we praise the Blessed Trinity?

"Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

5. Questions to reflect on the approach used:

a. *How does this program help us to implement the vision our Asian bishops?*

– A participatory Church where each one is enabled to use his/her charism: in the process of sharing faith and using Scripture, each one is invited to contribute to the growth of the members and all are equal. The text provides the “input” required and can be said to be the “catechist.”

– A non-dominating style of leadership: the animator or facilitator who ‘leads’ in a session from *Our Journey Together* makes it possible for others to take part. He/she puts into practice the command of Jesus that those who want to be first should be last. The facilitating of sessions is simple and can be done with a minimum of training, as long as the person can read.

– A Christ-centered community of sisters and brothers who respect each other is built up by the word of God used as a “quasi-sacramental sign.” Scripture is used in a contemplative way in *Our Journey Together*. We listen to the Risen Lord in our midst and allow his word to guide our lives.

– Christians are called to engage in a “Dialogue of Life,”⁶ and this sharing of faith enables them to begin in their own communities.

b. *How does this program help to form disciples of Christ?*

Discipleship of Christ includes:

– Meeting Christ, trusting in him and loving him: the way Scripture is used in these sessions puts participants in touch with the Risen Lord.

– Realizing that I have a mission in common with Christ: handing on the faith is one important aspect of our mission. The laity are enabled through these simple sessions to share and “hand-on” their faith in a deep and meaningful manner.

– Desiring to align myself with the will of God and to live out his mission: There is a strong experience of community developed in the course of sharing faith. The search for God’s will is done with the community. At the conclusion of each session there is a challenge to respond and act as a Christian community.

c. *How is this program related to our life in Asia?*

- In Part One, the pictures and questions enable each one to relate an incident or issue from our own situations of life. In Part Two Scripture throws light on our situation, and in Part Three, we are asked to take a "step forward" within our own lives and circumstances.

- "What is Christ telling us about our situation?" is a regular question in sessions of *Our Journey Together*. Each one is asked to consider the words of Jesus or a particular teaching of the Church in the light of their present context as Christians living in society, in Asia.

- The bridge between faith and life⁷ is often missing or weak in our formative processes. Sharing faith in catechumen communities with sponsors who are baptized or in communities of the faithful offers adults an experience of learning which helps them grow in their love of Christ as well as in an understanding of their faith in the context of their daily lives.

The Above Session Takes into Account the Principles of Adult Education⁸ that:

- Adults have many life experiences to use in adult education.

- Adults need to be involved in their own learning process.

- Adults expect to be treated as adults and not as children.

- Adults wish to learn in a climate that respects their own dignity and their experiences.

- Adults need both to give and to receive affirmation. The atmosphere should be positive but challenging in suggesting new horizons for development.

- Language forms must correspond to the levels of education of those participating.

- Information about a program must be such that people know and understand what is involved in participation.

- Adults teach each other: Peer exchanging is an influential form of learning.

- Programs for adults must recognize a wide variety of life situations. Adults may be searching for new faith meanings and moving into a new life passage.

Generally, the most popular programs are those which deal with immediate life needs rather than those of a more theoretical nature.

- Attention should be given to the variety of motivations which may bring people to seek further education.

- Adult education programs need to be regularly evaluated by both presenters and participants.

- Since life can be very complex for adults in terms of time limits set by work and by family commitments, the programs need to be flexible and realistic, recognizing the ordinary rhythms of people's lives.

- The physical environment should be comfortable and generally informal.

6. Seminaries as Places of Adult Learning

How do these reflections on adult learning relate to seminary formation?

a. The priest who graduates from the seminary needs to be inspired by the same vision of Church as we have seen articulated in FABCV and inspired by Vatican II. It is not enough to have the vision without the tools to bring it about. The seminarian will also need:

- Awareness of the principles of adult education through an experience and practice of them.

- Experience of an approach that enables him to become an animator who encourages participation among the lay faithful as shares in divine life and in the mission of Christ. A non-dominating style of leadership should be part of his experience as a student and member of community.

- Staff or fellow students who are older to accompany him in his faith journey in a way that helps him discover his life's direction, his motivations and his mission.

b. Already five years ago the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), noted:

The deficient and inadequate formation of priests to respond to the needs of the times." In their statement they called for lay participation in the formation of seminarians in matters concerning seminary policies, evaluation of seminarians for admission into seminary and

sacrament of orders... All this will strengthen the idea that formation of priests is the common concern of the whole Church.⁹

7. The Catholic School as a Place of Encounter with Christ

How are our Catholic pupils helped to take their place as Christians in their families, among peer groups, in schools and in parishes, and in the future, in their professions and workplaces?

— The vision of a Church which is Christ-centered, a “communion” of communities, needs to be experienced to some degree in Catholic education. One of the criteria listed for a school to be Catholic is: Fidelity to the Gospel as proclaimed by the Church. “The activity of a Catholic school is, above all else, an activity that shares in the evangelizing mission of the Church; it is a part of the particular local Church of the country in which it is situated, and shares in the life and work of the local Christian community.”¹⁰

— The 30-60 minutes of catechism per week, or more, is important but is not the main channel for communicating the beliefs of the Catholic community. The whole atmosphere that pervades the disciplinary code, the relationship of teachers to pupils, and the relationship of the principal to all, make a much greater impact on the pupils than any amount of words.

— The spirit of collaboration rather than competition; forgiveness rather than revenge; the benefit of the individual pupil rather than the status and rank of the school — these are all hard choices that administrators and principals need to make. The way they choose will convey the message of the school and can be a sign of the Kingdom or a counter witness.

PART II

Small Christian Communities – an Important Place for Adult Formation

I. What are Small Christian Communities?

1. We will take ourselves through a session which is aimed at small groups who want to understand what SCCs are. Many people talk about Small Christian Communities (BECs, neighborhood communities, etc.) but mean something very different. For some, any prayer-group in the parish is a SCC. Others call a small “chapel community” which meets for Sunday services in a sub-parish a SCC. This is our question today:

What kind of groups can we call Small Christian Communities or SCCs?¹¹

2. Session – SCCs, A Home for Everyone

3. A Role Play

A stranger arrives in the neighborhood and asks two people standing in their doorways:

“Where is the Catholic church in this neighborhood?”

One of the two answers:

“I can show you the church and the Father’s house. It is in this direction.” (Points). But I can tell you now already: you will not find Father at home today. Today is Monday and that is his free day.”

Newcomer:

“This is too bad. But where can I find people who belong to this parish?”

The other one of the two answers:

“Oh, you mean our neighborhood church, the SCC. We meet every Thursday in the house just here, across the road.”

Reflection on the Role Play

– What different understanding of church did people voice in this role play?

– Why do you think a SCC is not just called a “friendly meeting of Christians” but a “neighborhood CHURCH”?

4. The Story of a SCC

Now we shall read the story of a SCC. It will help us to understand better why a SCC is not just called a “meeting of Christians” but a “neighborhood CHURCH”.

While reading the story keep in mind the following question:

– Why can we say that this SCC in Kampala is a “concrete expression of the Church,” as Pope John Paul calls these small communities?

The Story¹³

The Small Christian Community, called "St Francis," is one of 9 SCCs in a suburb of Kampala. Each of them has 15-30 active members. They all are neighbors and meet in one of their homes, which they change after 2/3 months.

All Catholics of the neighborhood are invited to their weekly SCC meeting. They include market traders, shopkeepers, laborers, wheelbarrow pushers, housewives, office workers and hotel staff. They welcome also non-Catholic spouses and guests from other churches.

They usually follow the pattern of the "Seven Step" Gospel-sharing, which encourages everyone to participate in some way. It helps them to grow together in the presence of Christ himself. Although the main language is English, an interpretation to and from other languages is necessary.

In Step Six of their Gospel-sharing they share about the task they were given the previous week, for example, visiting somebody reported sick or destitute, greeting newcomers to the parish, or helping married couples who have landed in trouble. No single person should dominate and everyone should feel involved.

One of the members (Francis Mbazira) recalls: "All first we did not realize that many of the people we were visiting had AIDS. And when we did realize it, we started to worry that we could become infected with the virus too. But then we saw Sister Miriam touching and hugging people, and sitting on their beds. So we decided it would be safe for us as well."

Each SCC in the sub-parish has a leader, elected by the members of the group for a two-year period. The emphasis is on non-dominating leadership, teamwork and the sharing of responsibilities.

The fact that the SCCs in the parish not only survived but have grown in size is due in no small measure to the weekly training sessions in which many members participate. The training covers themes such as: "We are Christians to serve others"; "The early Church compared with us"; "The relevant Church... moving to an outward-looking Church."¹⁴

On Sundays, the SCCs celebrate their unity with the Universal Church in the Eucharist. Usually one of the SCCs prepares the celebration.

The Parish Pastoral Council also creates a strong bond among the different SCCs. Many of its members are representatives of SCCs.

5. The Four Marks of SCCs

From our story and our experience of different groups we have found many “marks” or “features” which belong to SCCs. We choose 4 of them which we regard as most essential. We would like to deepen our understanding of what makes a SCC.

a. FIRST MARK

Members of SCCs are Neighbors



- They meet in their homes.
- They live in the same geographical locality where they are exposed to the same conditions of life.
- They rotate the place of their gathering.
- They gather once a week or once in 2 weeks.

Why do you think it is important that members of a SCC are neighbors?

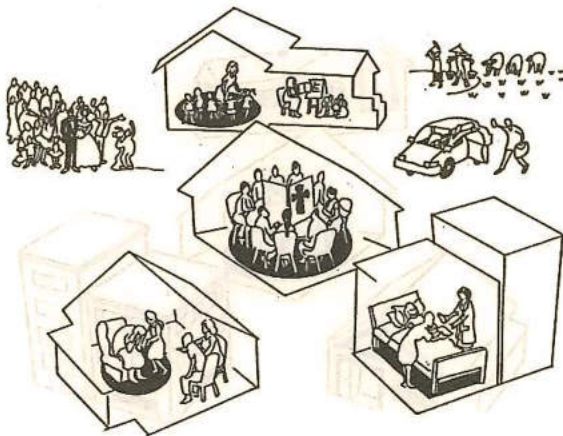
- The Church is really reflected when women and men of all races, interests, ages and backgrounds come together. We can say the Church is Universal/Catholic.
- People who have difficulty going to the church because of irregular marriage situations or behavior problems will be welcome in the neighborhood church.

– The binding together of neighbors into the Body of Christ reflects the many parts of the one Body which the Church is made up of.

– The fellowship of neighbors is based on their love of Christ and not on mutual interest or common profession, etc.

b. SECOND MARK

They Make Gospel Sharing the Basis of Their Meeting



* *Why do you think Gospel sharing is so important for a SCC?*

– Through Gospel sharing they make Christ present in their midst who truly becomes the foundation of their community.

– They begin with texts from the four Gospels and foster their personal relationship with Christ. Later they choose texts from other books of the bible as well.

– The basic Gospel-sharing method is the Seven Steps. This Gospel-sharing method gives the group spiritual nourishment, mutual encouragement in the faith, and strengthens mutual trust among the members.

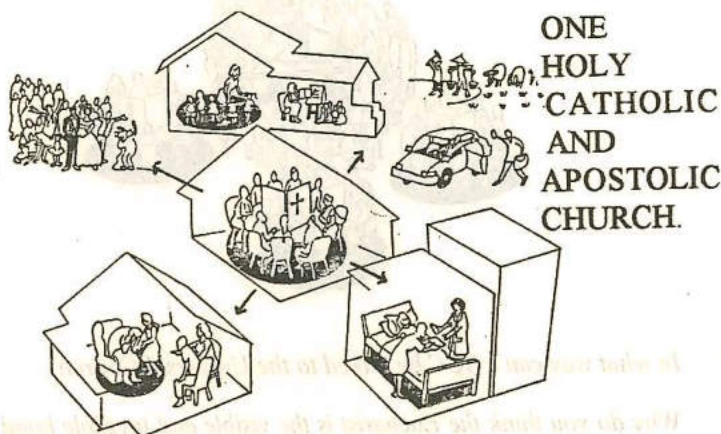
– From time to time, however, they use other methods as well, which help them to see beyond their own lives to the lives of others.

– These methods include Group Response, Look-Listen-Love, Life-Bible-Notes, Amos Programs and Christian Social Analysis.

c. THIRD MARK

The Members of A SCC Act Together Out of Faith

* What is the task and mission of a SCC?



— It is the same task as the task of the ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

— As we have heard already, Pope John Paul calls these small communities (SCCs or BECs) a “concrete expression of the Church.”

— The bishops of East Africa even call the SCCs “the most local incarnation of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church”.

That means that a SCC takes part in all activities which the Universal Church is called to do.

— In what way does the SCC in our picture (3rd mark) take part in fulfilling the mission of the UNIVERSAL CHURCH?

— Which other activities as well belong to the Universal Church and to a SCC which are not depicted in the picture? (Examples will be looked for, like praising God, handling on the faith, healing, consoling, etc.)

d. FOURTH MARK

SCCs Have to be Linked to the Universal Church



- * *In what way can a SCC be linked to the Universal Church?*
- * *Why do you think the Eucharist is the visible and invisible bond of unity with the Universal Church?*

— “The Eucharist brings about the intimate bonds of communion among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church.”¹⁶

- Every SCC is represented in the Parish Pastoral Council.
- Leaders of SCCs receive continuous skill training and spiritual formation from the priest.
- Parish animation teams visit the SCCs.

6. Reflection

— *How are the four marks of the Church reflected in the four marks of SCCs?*

- One* – Unity – fourth mark.
- Holy* – Christ-centered, worshipping — second mark.
- Catholic* – Everyone in the neighborhood is welcome, even the Catholics who are unable to go to church and receive the Sacraments — first mark.
- Apostolic* – Sent on mission — third mark.

– Apply the 4 marks of SCCs to the different groups and movements in your diocese of parish. *What kind of groups are they? Which groups can gradually develop into real SCCs?*

The session that we presented above, “SCCs – A Home for Everyone,” is an example of a methodology that can be used to form existing groups to a deeper understanding of SCCs. The methodology can also be used to form in many other topics and issues with some variations. Some other examples will be given further on. The session from *Our Journey Together* is another process or methodology that can be used. See also Part III, No. 2.

II. Reflection on Adult Formation in SCCs

1. Catholics are formed in many ways:

In the parish:

– Through the liturgical celebrations and homilies preached.

– Through the sharing of faith and life in Basic Ecclesial Communities within a parish.

– Through parish-organized courses, workshops and seminars.

In other contexts:

– Through their membership in associations and movements.

– Through spiritual direction received.

2. Formation in Small Christian Communities (BECs)

We would like to focus our attention on formation in Small Christian Communities (BECs) for two main reasons:

– *first*, it is the place where the greatest number of adults can eventually be reached who do not belong to any organizations and who never attend any courses.

– *second*, it is the place where adults can truly become the agents of their own learning and learn the participatory way of being Church by experiencing it.

“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and

with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 Jn 1:3)

From St. John’s Gospel and his letters we see that the teaching of John was personal and its aim was to build fellowship in Christ and fellowship with each other. In the document on the laity the Church teaches us that the lay faithful should draw strength for their mission from being united to Christ and each other. Mission includes building up this unity.¹⁷

A rapidly growing phenomenon in young churches — one sometimes fostered by the bishops and their conferences as a pastoral priority — is that of “ecclesial basic communities” (also known by other names), which are proving to be good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach. These are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization and a solid starting point for a new society based on a “civilization of love.”¹⁸

We see that Pope John Paul II calls these SCCs or Basic Ecclesial Communities “good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach.” Also in the document from the International Council for Catechesis there is reinforcement of the value of SCCs as the place where adults can be helped to bridge the gap which often exists between faith and life:

In various places, small communities of adults (basic Christian communities) have emerged. Here the members carry out catechesis through praying and reflecting together on the Word of God. They strive to discover the relevance of the Word for their everyday life and particularly for their society, to whose service they have lovingly and generously dedicated themselves.¹⁹

We would like to examine in the course of the workshop how this is possible and the means needed to help SCCs develop as centers of formation. We would also like to see how SCCs are a step towards the vision of a Church where:

- adults feel they belong to Christ in the Church;
- Christians in communities reach out and serve society and become agents of transformation;
- Adults share in the task of their own formation towards greater participation in our common mission to proclaim the Good News.

Questions for reflection

1. In what ways can we form adults in SCCs, and what are our areas of priority for formation?²⁰

2. What significant problem is being faced by my people, and what can the Church tell them about this problem?

How will we help them, or teach them, to look at their problem as Christians in community?

III. Seminaries and Adult Formation

– Seminarians and SCCs. A young priest who wants to convince his people of the benefits of SCCs will need to experience something of its reality. The young priest will need to become a trainer, animator and inspirer in order to lead the parish community. Can our seminary training give him the conviction that the Lord has called us not as individuals but as a people?²¹

Therefore, Christian communities need to be built in seminaries that are “universal” in the sense of including students and staff (both teaching and non-teaching).

– **A Participatory Church.** Seminarians who have been subjected to a mainly lecture-based system are often expected suddenly to develop a taste and skill for participatory learning. Although the emphasis placed on the intellectual development of seminarians is important, the struggle that many seminaries are facing is to get formation that is foundational as well as practical, pastoral and relevant. Perhaps the viewing of ordination as the end to formal formation is one cause for this difficulty. If seminary formation could prepare men to be pastors rather than professors, then a mandatory month-long period of study and spiritual reflection each year after ordination for at least five years could be one way of giving an on-going deepening in theology, Scriptures, philosophy, etc. For people in professions, four years is a basic honors degree where the intellectual foundations are laid. With seven years in hand for seminarians the pastoral, community, participatory methods and experiences should be manageable.

– **Sharing Responsibility for Mission.** The need for personal responsibility in decision making needs to be part of the conscious curriculum of seminary training. The change from seminary life to life as a priest in a parish needs to be gradual. Training should take account of the high degree of self-discipline required of a diocesan priest with regard to personal prayer,

use of money, using time, etc. A high degree of maturity is presumed. How can a newly-ordained priest feel secure and deal with other men and women in his community, if he has had little training in ordering his life without external pressures? In some seminaries, every detail of life for the seminarian is time-tabled and predetermined. This is poor training for the independent existence of a diocesan priest.

Question for Reflection

3. *What creative ways can we think of to give the seminarian practical pastoral skills, self-reliance, a sense of community and continued formation after ordination?*

IV. Schools and SCCs

— A Catholic school can be seen as a “community” where Christ is encountered in the Catholic personnel, the activities and atmosphere.

— Choices made by administrators with regard to admissions and staff recruitment will determine the aim of the school.

— The approach used in teaching the various subjects can foster communion/collaboration or competition. It can invite greater participation in the learning process or consider the children as empty vessels that need to be filled.

— The teachers can build up a sense of belonging and responsibility in the children by sharing tasks, outings, camps, and the like.

— How community-minded are our Catholic school graduates? Catholic education can prepare our children to become active participants in Church and society or passive recipients of learning, whose main aim is securing good jobs eventually.

— Attitudes of staff and pupils to learning, often seen in instructional strategies; attitudes to examinations and results and pupil welfare programs speak volumes on the aims of education adopted by the school.

— Learning for children in Catholic schools should be seen as part of a lifetime’s process of searching and growing in faith, and discovering and appreciating their families, their work and their world.

Questions for Reflection

4. Do Catholic children in our Catholic schools emerge as adults who desire to serve society; desire to keep on learning; desire to have a deep relationship with God? Do they find their place in our parishes, communities and movements as well as in society and the world?

5. Where are most of our past pupils from Catholic schools? Are they involved in the areas of priority listed earlier in question 1.

PART III

I. Gospel Sharing — “The One Thing Needed”²²

1. Communion and participation have been the call in our Asian Churches for so many years. In 1982, FABC III in Bangkok described the local ecclesial community as follows:

a. ... must be a community of graced communion rooted in the life of the Trinity,

b. ... a community of prayer and contemplation, and of sacramental celebration and life centered around the Eucharist.”

c. It must be defined by its life of faithful discipleship in the Gospel, patterned on the paschal mystery of Jesus, “a community for others.”

d. It must strive to live and act under the constant guidance and by the power of his Spirit.

e. ... genuine participation and co-responsibility must be essential elements of its existence, and theological reflection and discernment integral components of its life.

f. It is a community which strives to remain in unfeigned unity with its pastors, within the bonds of local and universal communion in the one Church.

g. It is called to give witness to the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people...

h. ... expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all spheres of its activity as Church in history; within its own real world.

i. It constantly moves forward in mission, as it accompanies all hu-

mankind in its pilgrimage to the Kingdom of the Father.

2. The call to genuine participation and co-responsibility remains a theoretical one unless there are ways by which the whole people of God are enabled to play their part in serving the life of society and the Church.

We would like to say that Gospel sharing is one important means of formation by which communities of lay faithful become co-responsible.

3. We will make Gospel sharing the basis of our prayerful reflection during these days of the workshop and experience the 7-step method and sessions to introduce Gospel Sharing to Small Christian Communities.

II. The 7-Step Method

1. We invite the Lord
Will someone please invite Jesus in a prayer?
2. We read the text
Let us open... Chapter...
Will someone please read verses...?
3. We pick out words and meditate on them,
We pick out words or short phrases, read them aloud prayerfully, and keep silence in between.
(We read the text again.)
4. We let God speak to us in silence.
We keep silence for... minutes and allow God to speak to us.
5. We share what we have heard in our hearts:
Which word has touched us personally?
(We may share also on any "spiritual experience", e.g., how some have lived the "Word of Life." We do not discuss any contribution, even if some do not "share" but "comment" on the text.)
6. We discuss any task which our group is called to do:
 - Report on previous task
 - Which new task has to be done?WHO is doing WHAT and WHEN?
7. We pray spontaneously
(We end with a prayer/hymn which we all know by heart).

III. Reflection on Our Experience of Gospel Sharing

Why can we say that Gospel sharing promotes a New Way of Being Church? (Numbers refer to the FABC III quotation given above.)

– Gospel sharing involves the faithful in actively searching for God’s will and overcomes mere “spoon-feeding” by “experts”. (5)

– Gospel sharing makes it possible for the faithful to grow together as communities. (1)

– Gospel sharing makes it possible to implement the expectation of Vatican II: “The people unfailingly adhere to the faith, penetrate it more deeply with right judgement, and apply it more fully to daily life.” LG12 (3)

– “Access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful,” DV22. (2)

– Gospel sharing is an important step towards genuine inculturation. The people themselves are confronted “first-hand” 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. (7)

– 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). (9)

The leader of the group becomes an enabler, although without him or her there will be chaos.

This type of leadership, which means a non-dominating leadership, puts into practice the Lord’s command: “Whoever wants to be first must place him/herself last of all and be the servant of all” (Mk 9:35).²⁴

IV. Using the 7-Step Gospel Sharing Method in Other Contexts

For many groups in the Church, the different Gospel sharing methods, like the 7-step method, have become the spiritual basis for their meetings. In Small Christian Communities, church committees, pastoral councils, etc., the regular reflection on Scripture in relation to their lives and work is a life-giving process of formation for the members of these groups.

The skills involved in doing Gospel sharing are few but crucial, to keep the spirit of prayerful contemplation and sharing. Martha and Mary will help us reflect on "the one thing needed."

V. Question for Reflection

6. What are we doing at present to make the Scriptures available to the majority of our adult Christians?

2. Other ASIPA Programs for Small Christian Communities

In the Asian Integral Pastoral approach, materials are being developed that enable Small Christian Communities to go through a session with facilitators coming from among themselves. They deepen their understanding of certain aspects of our faith and life. The ASIPA approach draws from numerous experiences in the area of formation, especially those related to Lumko, South Africa, the BILA and BISA series and other experiences made in Asian local Churches.

Some areas where sessions are already developed:

Introducing Gospel sharing; family; human work; Eucharist, and interreligious dialogue.

CONCLUSION

We will experience the learning process, using a few of these sessions during our workshop.

In the Spirit of our common mission and participation in the life and work of Christ, we pray that all leaders may search together for ways of building up the whole people of God through processes of systematic and creative formation and education to serve LIFE and serve it abundantly.

IV. Using the 7-step Gospel Sharing Method in Other Contexts

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FOOTNOTES:

1. FABC V, Plenary Assembly, "Final Statement," Bandung, 1990.
2. *Ibid.*, No. 7.3.1.
3. "Report of the Consultation on Integral Formation," October 30 – November 3, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia) ASIPA.
4. RCIA text written 1987 by Oswald Hirmer, Lumko Institute, and adapted for Singapore in 1993.
5. FABC V Plenary Assembly, "Final Statement," 1990, No. 8.1.
6. *Ibid.*, "Efforts to have a dialogue of life at the grassroots level be facilitated so that people of different Churches, religious traditions and persuasions, becoming aware of shared human and spiritual values, may act together for the common good."
7. *Christifideles Laici*, No. 2.9, cites the two temptations that we have not always known how to avoid... legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life.
8. Kevin Treston, *Seed on the Land Planning*, ideas and strategies for parishes, (Australia, Parish Ministry Publications, 1985), p. 67.
9. Extract from *Laity Newsletter*, quoting the *Herald*, Nov. 24, 1989.
10. "The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School. Guidelines for Renewal and Reflection," (Rome 1988) no. 101.
11. "Exposure to BCCs in the Philippines," a report in *Laity Newsletter* of 1989 gives three types of BCCs – liturgical, developmental and transformative/liberational — the prophetic stance. We would like to see a greater integration of all these dimensions.
12. "The Christian Family in the Modern World," (FC), No. 85.
13. *The Caring Community*, Coping with AIDS in Urban Uganda, published by ACTIONAID, (London, Hamlin House N19 5PG, UK).
14. *Lumko Series* "Training for Community Ministry," (Lumko, P.O. Box 5058, Delmenville, 1304, R. South Africa).
15. *AFER*, Vol. 21, No. 5, Oct., 1979, pp. 265-266.
16. "The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful," (CFL), No. 19.
17. *Ibid.*, No. 32.
18. *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 52.
19. "Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community, Some Principles and Guidelines," by the International Council for Catechesis (1990, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1990), No. 62.
20. FABC III Syllabus of Concerns: "1. That the communitarian aspects of Christian spirituality, catechesis and sacramental ministry be given greater emphasis to counter-balance the strong individualistic stress of our present approach to evangelization and Church life...; evangelization, social service, dialogue, ecumenical and interreligious cooperation..." Taken from "*For All the Peoples of Asia*," p. 63.
21. *Lumen Gentium*, No. 9.
22. Luke 10:42.
23. FABC III, Nos. 14-15, quoted from "*For All The Peoples of Asia*." Documents from 1970-1991, ed. Rosales and Arevalo, p. 52.
24. Extracts from *The Pastoral Use of the Bible – Gospel Sharing Methods* – No. 20 of Training for Community Ministries Series, third and revised edition, by Oswald Hirmer, Lumko.

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