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Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

GOSPEL-BASED COMMUNITIES BECOMING AGENTS OF CHANGE

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I. HOW TO MAINTAIN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES, OR BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

BY
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INTRODUCTION

The Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC is calling us to have a closer look at traces of a renewed Church in Asia and to search, as disciples of Jesus called to a Mission of Love and Service, for relevant responses for the new century.

The past three decades saw the emergence in Asia of a grassroots movement called "Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities." BECs/SCCs have been hailed as a new hope for renewal in church and society — "the most fundamental ecclesial realities," as stated by the Asian bishops.[1] Pope John Paul II has called them "signs 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,"[2] since they give

[1] Asian Colloquium on Ministries, 1977.

[2] *Redemptoris Missio*, N. 51.

[3] FABC V, Plenary Assembly, "Final Statement," Bandung, 1990.

This discussion guide has been prepared for the workshops of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), convening, January 3-12, 2000, at "Baan Phu Waan," the pastoral formation center of the Archdiocese of Bangkok, Sampran, Thailand, on the theme : "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service."

possibility for all the baptized to participate in church life and mission in their own areas.

A survey about BECs/SCCs in different parts of Asia conducted by the AsIPA Desk of the FABC Office of Laity bears witness to the vision of the "New Way of Being Church" that was at the heart of the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Assembly in Bandung.[3]

Asked about the changes in the life of the parish because of efforts to have BECs/Sccs, a lot of positive remarks were made. Let us listen to some voices:

"People have started to use the Bible" (Sri Lanka).
"They listen to the Word of God more carefully" (Myanmar).
"The Word of God has become dear and meaningful to them; they have started to pray spontaneously" (India).

"Participation of the people in liturgy and in other church matters have increased" (Bangladesh).
"They take more responsibility as members of the parish" (Indonesia).
"There is more concern for each other as members of the same community, especially in times of sorrow, e.g. death" (Malaysia).
"There is unity, cooperation and concern for others" (Philippines).

"The SCCs have common tasks in the neighborhood, e.g., repair houses, clean roads, buildings" (Sri Lanka).
"Some BECs are involved in interreligious and interracial movements. Their members are more approachable and willing to share and to open their houses" (Malaysia).

A. BECs/SCCs — Living Cells of a Church Dedicated to "Service to Life"

FABC VI's Final Statement called for a "disciple-community," that "is living by the Spirit of the Risen Lord and by the demands of the Kingdom of Life[4] ...," and is a "liberating and recreating communion among neighbors."[5]

Many of the BECs/SCCs in Asia show the characteristics of a true "disciple-community" in as far as:

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[4] FABC VI, Plenary Assembly, "Final Statement," Manila, 1995, No. 14.1.
[5] Ibid, No. 14.2.
[6] AsIPA TEXTS, B/3

a. They come together as a group of neighbors who have the same concerns for daily life and look for solutions in the light of faith.
b. They make Gospel Sharing the basis of their regular meetings.
c. They act together out of faith, and are therefore a concrete expression of the Church
d. They are linked to a parish and take part in the worship and ministries.[6]

In the survey all of the group felt called "**to share their faith, build up community and take actions towards local needs**" the basic purpose of their BECs/SCCs.

A sense of sharing and solidarity is almost an immediate product, not only among the members of one particular community, but also with other needy communities.

BECs/SCCs, with their regular gathering and sharing, discussion and action, provide a prophetic space for societal critique and transformation of society.

BECs/SCCs, aside from strengthening one another's faith and relationships, reach out to neighbors of other faiths in common endeavors. They are natural grounds to pursue interreligious dialogue and collaboration since they share the same life-context.

They are also the locus for inculturation to take place. As neighbors gather, they share daily life and celebrate it in ways that are meaningful for them.

Their call to inculturation is a call to the "Service to Life," which bears the power of overcoming the death-dealing forces of the present time.

For the vision of the "New Way of Being Church in Asia," that is a participatory church, being promoted by the Asian bishops, the process in building up the community is crucial. Participatory aspects should be employed in all aspects.

BECs/SCCs offer the most developed possibility of lay participation and co-responsibility. In the past, active lay participation was restricted to associations, movements, or mandated organizations, which brought about only a few groups being involved in special tasks. The new vision of participation comprises all members of the community for the total mission of the Church.

The AsIPA (AsIPA = Asian, Integral, Pastoral, Approach) training pro-

grams offer contextualized methods to foster a participatory process in the building and maintaining of BECs/SCCs. "The Asian Integral Pastoral Approach is the means to renewal," It was stated in the preparation for the Asian Synod.[7] It is **ASIAN**, to help Asian Christians face Asian life in the light of the Gospel. It is a response to the vision of being Church articulated by the Asian bishops (FABC V, 1990). It is **INTEGRAL**, because it aims to achieve a balance between, the "spiritual" and the "social," between the individual and the community, and between hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity. It is **PASTORAL**, to train the laity in the pastoral mission within the Church and in the world. And to train priests how to awaken the co-responsibilities of lay people, and how to work as teams. It is an **APPROACH**, which is a process that is Christ and community-centered. It involves the participants in workshops to search for themselves, and it allows them to experience a "New Way of Being Church," In this approach "everybody is somebody," contributing to the learning of one another. The very participative process is the message that reflects the vision.

B. Major Difficulties of BECs/SCCs — Some Solutions

Although there is a variety of BECs/SCCs throughout Asia, there are common areas of concern. Here are some statements of people involved in BECs/SCCs:

> "After a first period of enthusiasm more and more members of our BEC are losing their interest — participation has become poor."
>
> "When the animator moved to a different parish the community stopped gathering."
>
> "A lot of people stay away from leadership or any involvement. — They are not used to assuming responsibilities in the church."
>
> "There is very poor cooperation with the priest and the religious in our neighborhood parish — There is no big enthusiasm in our diocese."
>
> "Some of the SCCs in our parish are more like prayer groups. They show no interest in social issues or social involvement."

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[7] Statement of Bishop Joseph Kingsley Swampillai of Sri Lanka, in ASIA FOCUS, January 16, 1998, p.8.

[8] FABC VII, Plenary Assembly, Bangkok, 2000

[9] AsIPA TEXTS, D/6

These and other voices throughout Asia show that most of the concerns are related to the basic question of how to maintain BECs/SCCs as living cells of a Church who are called to a Mission of Love and Service.[8]

1. Different Ways of Starting BECs/SCCs

The question of how to maintain BECs/SCCs is closely related to the question how BECs/SCCs came into being.[9] There are many ways of starting SCCs, e.g., developing existing prayer groups, or action commitees. But experience has shown, however, that certain ways will necessarily lead to failure. Two main approaches have to be distinguished:

i) "Expert" Start:
ii) "Community" Start:

Positive aspects of the "expert" start are the quick start and short time needed to train leaders. The negative aspects are linked to the impression that the SCCs are "Father's business." Inner conviction and lasting commitment will hardly be developed, leaders may not be accepted by the community, and some of them may not be suitable for the task of promoting SCCs.

On the other hand, the "community" start is a slow, time-consuming approach but one positive aspect is the participatory process, which makes people feel that they are respected and taken seriously. There is the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of SCCs first, and then to be invited to join the Parish Team or SCCs. There is an ongoing support of the SCCs by the parish priest and his team. Ongoing formation of the leaders, assisting them in taking up tasks in the neighborhood, offers them new approaches and skills, allows the emergence of new leaders, which helps to overcome signs of fatigue in the SCC. In the long run the "community approach" has a solid foundation that assures continuity.

2. How to Involve the Whole Community: The Importance of Awareness Programs

If a three-legged chair is to be made lower or higher, one cannot just alter one or two legs but has to change all three. If a congregation wants to become a sharing and caring community, then the three parts have to undergo a change:

- The full-time leaders (priests, deacons, catechists, etc.)
- The many emergent leaders, and
- The whole congregation

If one of the three parts remains unchanged, the others will not succeed in moving towards a living Christian community. Therefore, the process of formation should not be limited to the groups of voluntary workers. The congregation, too, needs formation.

That is why awareness programs are so important. They offer one way through which all members of the community can acquire a new consciousness regarding their relationship with their local leaders and the need for joint effort.

Our consciousness changes only if we are involved. If the whole community is to change its collective consciousness, all its members must be involved in some way in the change. It is, of course, difficult to involve a large number of people who meet only for the Sunday service. Suitable ways must be devised to achieve at least a minimal involvement that goes beyond passive listening.[10]

Awareness changes only if full information is given. Therefore, the whole congregation must know as much as possible about the basic ideas of ministry in the Church. These basic ideas are not just dry knowledge, but are central parts of our message.

3. Developing Shared Ministry

A difficulty for many parishes and BECs/SCCs is how to get the right leaders for SCCs, or how to replace them. This question is closely related to the awareness of a shared ministry in the Church. The awareness that all members of the Christian community are called to share with others in prayer, service and community building cannot be forced on them. It has to emerge from within the community as the result of a participatory process.

There are different ways of getting leaders, some of them foster this process, some of them don't.

1) "Appointed leaders" start SCCs.
2) "Volunteer leaders" start SCCs.
3) "Elected leaders" start SCCs.

All three ways of getting leaders involve some risks for the continuance of the SCCs:

Whereas by "appointment" some outstanding leaders may be found, they may on the other hand not be accepted by the community; or may

[10] Awareness Programs for the Sunday Liturgy: AsIPA TEXTs, D/3, D/4, D/5.

remain the "prolonged arm" of the priest, and vanish when the priest is transferred. Some may regard their SCCs as their "property," and develop a dominating style of leadership. The responsibility for the life and actions of the group may rest with the leader, and does not emerge from the community.

"Volunteer leaders" may be committed and motivated leaders, but they may have not any experience in leading a small community. Some may not be accepted by the community. The wrong people may volunteer; their reasons may be wrong reasons, e.g., looking for status in the church. Like the appointed leaders, they may lose interest when the priest is transferred. The responsibility for the life and the actions of the group may rest with the leader, and does not emerge from the community.

The way of "electing leaders" involves the community in getting leaders, and establishes a leadership-structure. But starting with an elaborate leadership-structure may make a SCC too formal and hinder the spirit of warm fellowship. The wrong persons may be elected, e.g., those who have already a number of other commitments in the parish.

The AsIPA process proposes a fourth way of getting leaders for SCCs: "The emerging, rotating team leadership."[11]

Explanation: How Leaders Emerged in the SCC "St. Gabriel."

The whole community is aware of their responsibility to do Gospel-sharing and visit newcomers. Out of this common awareness of shared leadership, new leaders emerge and act on behalf of the small community. Although these leaders are elected, they "emerge" from an atmosphere in which all feel: "It is our common business!"

The small community knows exactly for what task particular leaders are needed. This makes it easier to let the right people emerge. There are at least two leaders chosen for each task in the community, to avoid overburdening one person, and to make mutual correction easier. Other advantages of teamwork are: it's easier to replace somebody; young people can join more easily; shy characters will find it easier to come forward; and the burden of training will be shared.

A rotating leadership animates all the members of the SCC to take an active part in the tasks of the community. It helps to develop the gifts and talents of every member. "Old" leaders can share their wisdom with the new leaders. People undertake more willingly a certain responsibility if the

[11] AsIPA TEXTS, B/4, p.6-12.

time of their commitment is limited. The SCC coordinator (or facilitator), for example, will usually change after two years. Concrete tasks, like greeting newcomers in the neighborhood, could even rotate after six months.

To have an "emerging, rotating team leadership" calls for a constant ongoing training in the BECs/SCCs. A participatory process is suggested to find out what kind of formation is needed for various leaders of BECs/SCCs.

The AsIPA Desk of the FABC Office of Laity and the Lumko Institute offer a whole series of skills-training and formation programs for leaders of BECs/SCCs. Most of them are based on the principle of "learning by doing."

Pastoral planning in every parish should include in its parish calendar terms for skills-training and the spiritual formation of leaders during a particular period every year. It is the task of the parish priest and his parish team to invite the leaders to weekend retreats and formation programs.

An annual "Blessing of Community Leaders" will keep the interest in BECs/SCCs alive, and give public recognition to their contribution to the life of the parish.

The annual celebration for the parish leaders should be celebrated on a special Sunday of the year where all leaders of the parish can be thanked, introduced to their responsibilities, or released from them.

The AsIPA process considers helping the SCCs sustain and maintain themselves to be a very important principle for "maintaining SCCs."[12] To strengthen the self-confidence and conviction of all the members of a SCC, an ongoing formation of all members is indispensable. The AsIPA texts have been written for this purpose. A facilitator of SCCs, without the traditional theological schooling, can use the AsIPA texts in their respective groups after a minimum of training. The texts focus not only on some "skills," but try to share with the lay-faithful deeper theological insights about the "New Way of Being Church." This might be the major challenge not only for the members of the SCCs and their leaders, but also for the full-time leaders (bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, etc.), and for the whole congregation, as they are called to a change their attitudes and to evaluate their specific role in the Church.

In the "New Way of Being Church" the clergy and laity continue to

[12] AsIPA TEXTS, D/7

[13] Vatican II: LG 32.

have different roles, but there is "true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is in common to all the faithful."[13] There are no classes of the "learned" and the "ignorant." All have some knowledge and experience to share.

"Maintaining SCCs" depends greatly on whether the parish priest and the parish leaders accept and appreciate this equality, and how they understand the nature and mission of the SCCs. This will influence the way in which the priest and his team will inspire and accompany the SCCs in the parish.

SCCs are more than prayer and/or action groups. They are the "concrete expression of Church."[14] SCCs, therefore, share in the basic mission of the parish in their particular neighborhood and make it possible to "decentralize" the tasks of the parish. The members of the SCCs share in the consultative and decision-making process of their parish. Pastoral tasks will no longer be limited to members of existing organizations and committees. Associations and other traditional groups in the parish are challenged by the SCCs to re-think their role within the Christian community.

4. Towards a Guiding Leadership

In a paper written for a training session for new bishops, Archbishop Joseph Ti Kang writes.[15]

> If we see this vision of (a participatory) church, our bishop–laity relationship has to undergo a dramatic change with regard to our personal dealing with the laity and in pastoral planning. It will affect our assignment of personnel, finances and pastoral priorities. It will demand a continuous training of the laity and of the priests. The most difficult challenge is the change of leadership style which one Indian bishop at the Pune General Assembly in 1991 summarized: "It means a continuous dying to ourselves."
>
> Here is a brief exercise to reflect on our own leadership style:
>
> *Read silently the features of leadership as presented in the these two columns, and try to see the difference of leadership style when the pastor says: "I am the Church," and when he is convinced and says: "WE are the Church:"*

[14] AsIPA TEXTS, B/2.

[15] Joseph, Ti Kang, "*The Bishops and the Laity*," Vatican, October 2, 1995.

I am the Church	*WE are the Church*
"I must provide for them!"	"I want to build up people!"
"I must tell them!"	"I want to inspire and animate people!"
"I must initiate things!"	"I like to discover the talents of people!"
"I do everything for my people!"	"I trust the people, in spite of some disappointments!"
"I have studied theology!"	"One of my main tasks is to train and enable people!"
"This is good for you!"	"I have to learn how to listen!"
"Discussions are a waste of time!"	"I share my responsibility!"
"I choose the leader because I know my people!"	"We pray, discuss and decide together"
"No criticism, please!"	"I accept criticism even if it is not so pleasant!"
"I need helpers for my task!"	"I work with the people!"
"How can you make such a suggestion!"	
"I am the parish priest!"	"I respect the people!"

Some of the difficulties found in SCCs are tensions between the parish priest and the SCCs, or between members of SCCs and their coordinators. Many of them are caused by a dominating leadership style.

Let us have a look at a parish with this problem:[16]

The congregation of St. Simon with about one thousand Catholics had already gone through the different stages of building up a community of communities, when the problem arose that some leaders wished to do things alone. Again and again, the community had to counter these attempts. Many people emphasized that they wanted everybody to have a say, and everybody to use their charisms. But others said that they found it good if leaders had special rights and were different from the others.

One day, somebody stood up in one of these meetings, and said: "Do you not see that this is the main problem of our whole society, not only of the Church? We have officials in the town-offices who want to become our bosses instead of serving us. We have leaders who compete among themselves for power and status instead of working for the common good of the country. And, at the same time, we have the masses of people who just accept the evil and have given up their right to say what they feel. They

[16] Lobinger, Fritz, Towards Non-Dominating Leadership, No. 10 of Lumko-Series, p.9.

leave everything to the few at the top. They deplore the domination but they assist it through their passivity. They suffer under the exploitation, but they perpetuate it forever, because they are competing in the very same way among themselves. It is a vicious circle of domination and submission and it will carry on forever, unless somebody finds something that counteracts it.

Do you not see that it is God himself who is most strongly against this kind of life? Do you not see that it must therefore be the family of God, the Church, who has to make a path towards a new kind of society where there is communal responsibility? What we need is a combination of real community and non-dominating leadership. We want this kind of leadership everywhere: in the town-offices, in the factories, in the political parties, and in the governments of our countries.

But if we want it in the whole society, we must make a start in the Church. If we cannot manage it in the Church, we cannot make big statements saying that it is God's will in the world. In the Church we are a large group of people. We have to demonstrate in the Church, that it is possible for such a large group to feel belonging to each other, to voice their opinion, and to be jointly responsible. At the same time we must demonstrate that such a large group can have leaders who exercise authority without destroying communal responsibility. If we believe that society needs non-dominating leadership, we must prove in the Church that this is possible. This is our service to the world.

A Christian community needs leaders who resemble Jesus Christ: Jesus led and served at the same time. He rejected Satan's temptation to power and made himself equal to his disciples.

One Gospel passage[17] gives us an excellent summary of a good leader according to the ways of Christ:

Jesus walked with the disciples to Emmaus; listened to their reasons for being sad; helped them discover the message, while retelling the Scriptures and inflaming their hearts; accepted their invitation to stay and share at table; be recognized in the breaking of the bread; and disappeared when not needed.

According to the Gospel the features of a guiding leadership are:

- a good leader helps others how to find out what is wrong with themselves

[17] Mk 16,12; Lk 24,13

- a good leader offers a vision
- a good leader is a non-dominating leader, who is patient and gives the members of the group the feeling, that everyone can contribute to the solution
- a good leader is with the people; his role is guiding, facilitating the group response
- a good leader builds up people, gives confidence to them
- a good leader encourages others to do the same
- a good leader is an inspiring leader.

In a Participatory Church there is always a team of leaders working with the parish priest.

They continually animate all the members of the community to fulfill their responsibilities. Together with the priest, and in his name, they are concerned about the unity of the congregation.

In most of our present-day communities none of these leaders are ordained. They are men and women, lay-faithful and religious, working together as a team.

The parish priest should frequently meet with the leaders, train them, and be a team member with them in order to inspire them. Together with the leaders, he conducts the liturgical services, and is concerned about the unity of the congregation. He forms a bridge between the life of the various communities within the parish, between his parish and parishes in the neighborhood, between the people of his parish and the bishop.

5. Ongoing Formation for Facilitators

A difficulty of BECs/SCCs, sometimes mentioned, is that they are rather a nice prayer group, and show no or very little interest in social actions. This is quite often related to the fact that there was no, or poor, basic formation of new leaders. In most of the cases there was very little ongoing formation.

The AsIPA modules are prepared in such a way that they lead to action. The basic steps of this awareness program are:

- Look at the life-situation
- Seek inspiration from the word of God and from Church teachings, and,
- Plan a common action to move towards the vision.

[18] AsIPA TEXTS, A/1- A/6

It is crucial for every BEC/SCC to know the basic structure of a SCC-meeting, which follows the 7 Step-Gospel-Sharing Method:

- Step 1-5: Growing personally and together as a community in the presence of Christ.
- Step 6-7: Continuing Christ's mission in this particular neighborhood.[18]

When BECs/SCCs have been using the 7-Steps Method for some years, one way to maintain them is to help them grow in their social awareness and concern. There are other group-sharing methods that concretely aim at this:

We will give you two examples of a Gospel-Sharing Method, which can lead the SCC towards more involvement into social actions:

Group Response Method[19]: facing Sunday Gospel's social aspects.

Aims:

- To see how daily situations and problems are reflected in the biblical text.
- To help the group look beyond their immediate personal spiritual needs.
- To make the Gospel a driving force for "self-help" in tackling life issues.

Look–Listen–Love

Aims:

- To start from a life-issue.
- To share life-experiences in which members of the group are emotionally involved, feeling happy or unhappy about them.
- To listen to God's call regarding this experience or event, even if no biblical text can be quoted.
- To arrive at common action.

C. BECs/SCCs as Agents of Change: from Gospel Sharing to Social Involvement

BECs/SCCs do not live for themselves alone but to become communities that carry out the Kingdom mission of justice and peace in the world. It is not right for Christians to leave "social analysis" to experts only, or to some militant political groups. It was for this reason that different pro-

[19] AsIPA TEXTS, A/7

grams have been compiled to empower BECs/SCCs and other groups to get involved in social issues.

An outstanding tool to move from Gospel sharing to social involvement is the Amos Program.

1. Amos Program : Its Aim and Features

The Aim of the Amos Program:

Amos was a prophet of Israel. He was one of the people who herded the cattle and ploughed the field. Inspired by God's Spirit he stood up against the king and the priests of his time. He told them that God wants laws that are just, and religious services which come from pure hearts.

In the same way, the Amos programs aim at waking up Christian communities, and helping them to do something about the problems that are tormenting them. Too often Christian communities say: "We are powerless; we cannot do anything; we just sit down and wait." The Amos programs help to overcome this mentality. They offer a way of facing social or economic problems, analyzing them in the light of the Gospel and doing something about them.

The main features of the Amos Program:

- The starting point is a "typical" social, economic or political problem, e.g., "When the poor are pushed aside."
- There are two "rounds" of analysis in the Amos Program:
  First, a somewhat "superficial" analysis, asking the question "WHY?"
  Secondly, a deeper analysis, searching for the root causes of a problem.
- A problem-solving scheme helps the group to arrive at a concrete action.
- "God's point of view" is included through Gospel Sharing and asking the Church documents what they have to say about a certain problem.

The Amos Programs are used from time to time, to widen the dimension of a group's Christian vision and enable them to take part in changing the world around them.

By using the Amos Programs, our Christian communities can become prophetic communities.

2. Example of an Amos Program: "We Need More than Money."[20]

1. Look at Life: The Story of Florence, the Bride

There was great excitement in the home of Florence. Mr. Lola was dating Florence and there was hope that he wanted to marry her. The girl, however, was not in a hurry to decide.

Her father was furious. He could not understand his daughter's hesitation. "Look," he said. "Mr Lola is one of the richest businessmen in town. He knows how to make money and he is not lazy. Even on Sunday morning he works in his office. On Sunday afternoon he looks after the local soccer team. He is a respected man. Do not miss the greatest chance in your life. Who else in town drives such a car as he does? Who else could build such a beautiful house for himself? If you want to be happy, marry him. He will be able to fulfil all your wishes and buy you all you want. What else are you looking for in life?"

Florence just replied: "Dad, I need more than money." Her father shook his head and left in anger.

(Read the story twice. Dramatize the conversation between Florence and her father.)

2. Ask the question ***Why***?

(Buzz sessions in groups of two, 2 to 4 minutes: report back to the whole group after each question.)

- How can you describe the feelings of Florence?
- What kind of happiness did her father have in mind?
- What did Florence say: "I need more than money?"
- What else did she want?"
- Find examples from your own life where you judged and behaved in the way that Florence's father did.

3. We listen to God

God is interested in Florence's happiness and in our own happiness. His word can throw light on her situation.

a) We read the text:

Luke 4, 1-4 (Man does not live on bread alone.)

[20] Hirmer, Oswald, *The Pastoral Use of the Bible, Gospel Sharing Methods*, No. 20, of Lumko Series, p.72.

b) We listen in silence:

Read the text again, slowly. Keep silence.
Or: Pick out a word or a short phrase. Keep silence after each individual contribution.

c) We can share together:

What word or phrase has touched you personally? (No discussion yet.)

d) We search together:

- What has this text to do with Florence?
- How does this text challenge our own life?

4. Search for Root-Causes

Let us find deeper reasons why many of us think that the only thing which can make us happy is money.

a) We look for root-causes for our attitude:

What influences us and forces us quietly to think that money can make us really happy?

(Think of things which form public opinion.)
- Make a list of things which you need in order to be happy.
- Underline the three most important things which you need in order to he happy.
- Which of these things can you buy with money; which ones can you not buy in any shop.

b) What do Church documents say about our question?

- "People cannot live without love. They remain beings that are incomprehensible to themselves; their life is senseless if love is not revealed to them; if they do not encounter love; if they do not experience it and make it their own; if they do not take part intimately in it" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 1979, No.10).

- Pope John Paul II praises modern progress which has brought so much good to many people. However, he continues: "But the question keeps on coming back... Are people in themselves becoming truly better, that is to say, more spiritually mature, more aware of

the dignity of their humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all?" (*Redemptor Hominis*, No. 15)

5. Plan with Firmness and Love: adapt — do not give up.

The world, people around us, our youth... are confused about real happiness. We Christians have the prophetic task to proclaim the Good News, news which can make people happy.

How can you, as a community, bring to others a happiness that cannot be bought with money? What can you do to help the youth find the way to those real values which alone can bring happiness?

Make a plan, even if you can do very little yet. Make use of the following steps to agree on a concrete plan of action:

CONCLUSION

The lay faithful of the Church have demonstrated their desire to participate fully in the life of the Church and its mission in the world. In several occasions and in previous statements, the Asian Bishops have recognized the importance of enabling the whole People of God to become a sign of communion and to live out their faith in daily circumstances.

The formation of Small Christian Communities and the BECs and their growth will bring to realization the communion and mission so longed for by all. The need for continuous support, training, evaluation and trust cannot be under-estimated. The work has just begun.

D. Reflection Questions

1. What is your diocesan vision that gives light and direction to all the efforts to build BECs/SCCs? How is the vision implemented in all diocesan and parish programs and activities?

2. What is the present situation of BECs/SCCs in your diocese? What are some of the difficulties they encounter? What are some of the approaches they have employed to expand and maintain the communities?

3. What are the difficulties you have experienced?

4. List the advantages and disadvantages of both ways of starting SCCs.—

1. 'Expert' Start

① Parish leaders decide:
"We should have SCCs!

② Parish priest appoints or asks for volunteers too join the "Parish Team."
-He trains the team to conduct SCC meetings.

③ Parish Team divides the parish into zones and SCC groupings.

④ Members of the parish Team start and lead SCCs in all the zones.

2. "Community' Start

① Retreat weekends on "New Way of

② Being Church" by a small (diocesan) team.

③ Parish Team emerges and is trained to start SCCs.

④ Parish Team and members of committees visit all homes.

⑤ Parish team conducts AP in parish hall and/or during the Sunday liturgy

⑥ Parish Team conducts 5 to 8 initial meetings in SCCs, on request.

① Emerging leaders in SCCs are trained regularly.

II. THE BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY AS A CHURCH MODEL FOR ASIA

BY

ARCHBISHOP ORLANDO QUEVEDO

INTRODUCTION

My topic has been the main concern of my pastoral experience, and is close to my heart: The Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) as a Church Model.

Strangely, the BEC is mentioned explicitly in only two instances in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of bishops for Asia (as "Basic Christian Community"). Still, in both instances the *Instrumentum Laboris* cites BEC as a positive element, and an Asian aspiration for a genuine sharing and serving disciple-community.

My task now is relatively simple. It is to treat of the BEC as a Model of the Church for Asia. I wish to develop the topic in three general steps: (a) the Pastoral Situation and Vision in Asia; (b) the Vision of a New Way of Being Church; and (c) Basic Ecclesial Communities.

THE PASTORAL SITUATION AND VISION IN ASIA

From the very beginning of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), three key insights into the pastoral situation have guided pastoral reflection among FABC bishops. The first is the tragic reality that Asia is the vast continent of the poor. Almost three-fourths of the world's poor are in Asia (73% in 1993; South Asia alone has the biggest share of the world's poor at 39%). While Asia's poor may not be the poorest of the poor (for it would seem that these live in Sub-Saharan Africa), still rural poverty is the principal aspect of Asian poverty. On the other hand, mass media would seem to dwell more on the mass migration of rural poor to urban areas, and on the dehumanizing situation in which millions of poor Asians live in hundreds of crowded and crime-ridden city slums.

Faced with this situation of abysmal poverty the Asian Church envisioned a Church that is on the side of the poor, exercizing a preferential love for the poor, and proclaiming a Gospel of integral salvation and liberation from every form of dehumanization, most especially sin. It is a vision of a Church of the Poor.

A second key insight into the pastoral situation is the fact that Asia is the cradle of the world's ancient religions, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and scores of ancient religious and philosophical

traditions. For centuries, even before Christ, some of these religious and philosophical beliefs have shaped and enriched Asian civilizations, and through them Asian peoples have believed in salvation.

In light of this pastoral reality, the Church in Asia envisions itself as a Church in dialogue with peoples of other faiths and religions, journeying to the common hope of all humankind, which is to satisfy the deepest aspirations, especially spiritual, of the human heart and soul. The Church in Asia has to be a Church of Dialogue.

The third key insight into the pastoral situation is the fact that Asia is also the home of the greatest variety of rich and ancient cultures, the matrix of great and enduring civilizations. The thought patterns, ways of valuing and relating, ways of living, and all other elements, that make up the cultures of Asia are vastly different from those which brought Christianity into many Asian countries. Although Christianity was born in Asia, in many parts of this continent Christianity is regarded as a "foreign religion." In a few countries, becoming Christian may even raise questions of cultural identity.

From this insight Asian bishops envisioned the Church to be thoroughly inculturated, so that Christ, his life and message, the Gospel and the Kingdom of God, the Church and its teachings, etc., may be fully understood in terms of the cultures. Through such inculturation, Christ and the Church would truly have an Asian Face.

The pastoral situation then calls for a triple dialogue: with the poor, with peoples' faiths, and with their cultures.

The corresponding vision is formidable, but daily it is guiding Asian local churches in their pastoral thrusts and programs.

THE VISION OF A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

In the dynamic interplay of pastoral situation and pastoral reflection, there has emerged in Asia a vision of a "new way of being Church."

One will find such a vision described in FABC plenary assemblies, in various FABC institutes and pastoral programs, such as BIRA (Bishops' Institute for Religious Affairs), BILA (Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate), BIMA (Bishops' Institute for Missionary Animation), and BISA (Bishops' Institute for Social Action).

How would the Asian vision of a new way of being Church be concisely described? To describe it comprehensively within the time available

is not possible. But allow me to give a rather rough synthesis of some fundamental components of the vision for the purposes of this symposium:

> In the light of the massive poverty of Asian peoples, of the plurality of their faiths and the rich variety of their cultures, the Church in Asia has to be a Church of the Poor, a Church of Dialogue, and a Church that is truly inculturated, a Church then that is thoroughly Asian.
>
> It has to be a Church that is Communion, a people of communion with the triune God, with the universal Church, and with the peoples and cultures of Asia. It is a communion of participatory faith-communities.
>
> It is a Church of Solidarity, in active solidarity with the poor in their struggles for the fullness of life, in solidarity with God's creation, defending and promoting its integrity.
>
> As people of God, this Church humbly accompanies, walks humbly with, the peoples of Asia in the common journey to the Kingdom of God, a Reign of justice and peace, truth and love. It is a sign of this divine reigning, and bears, as a herald and servant-community, the Gospel of Jesus, Lord and Savior, who is the Good News of Salvation and Integral Liberation.
>
> For this reason, the Church in Asia must speak, act, and live — out of profound communion with the Spirit of the Lord in an integral spirituality that is truly contemplative, and therefore truly apostolic.
>
> Such is "the new way of being Church in Asia," and this is genuinely reflected in the life of Basic Ecclesial Communities now sprouting like seeds that are harbingers of full life in the Reign of God." (An excerpt, with minor changes, from Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., "An Overview of the Colloquium on the Church in Asia in the 21st Century," Pattaya, Thailand, August 25-31, 1997.)

The major components of the vision are the following:

— a Church of Communion;
— a Church of Dialogue–with the poor, the cultures and faiths of Asia;
— a Servant-Community, serving and bearing humbly the saving and liberating Good News of Jesus;
— a co-pilgrim with peoples of other faiths to the Kingdom of God;

— a communion of participatory faith-communities;
— led by the Spirit of God in an integral spirituality;
— to live out by word and witness their faith in Jesus;
— such a vision is exemplified and concretized in Basic Ecclesial Communities.

BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

The FABC Thrust toward BEC

In the thinking of FABC bishops the Basic Ecclesial Community (or in some countries, the Basic Human Community) clearly holds a privileged place in their vision of new way of being Church.

The Third Plenary Assembly of FABC, at Sampran, Bangkok, Thailand, in 1982, reinforced what the First International Mission Congress in Manila (1979) had already indicated. The Plenary Assembly issued a "Syllabus of Concerns" which included the following:

> That small ecclesial communities at all levels of Church life be more widely and intensely fostered, characterized by their openness and outreach to society through evangelization, social service, dialogue, ecumenical and interreligious cooperation with peoples of all faiths, and by their close union with their priests and bishops. (Gaudencio Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, S.J., eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia*, FABC Documents from 1970, 1991, [FAPA], p. 63).

In their own Syllabus of "Mission Concerns" the participants of BIMA III, Trivandrum, Kerala, India, (30 November 1980), expressed the following:

> 10. Basic Christian Communities. The formation of Christian communities at all levels is an important element of the efforts of the churches in Asia to carry forward their task of evangelization. The participants of BIMA III strongly endorse and encourage such efforts (FAPA, p. 108).

In a more pointed manner, referring explicitly to the vision of a new way of being Church, BISA VI (Levalle, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 4-8 February 1983), emphasized the following:

> BISA V, when addressing itself to the problem, "What does it mean to be the Church of the poor? saw Basic Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities (communities with non-

Christians) as an important response of the Church. The proliferation of Basic Christian Communities and Basic Human Communities is a sign of hope that the Church will become the Church of the poor (FAPA, p. 225).

Finally, the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly at Bandung, Indonesia, 27 July 1990, on the theme "Journeying Together toward the Third Millennium," spoke explicitly on "a new way of being church " as a response "at the level of being" to the challenge of the third millennium:

> 8.1.1 1) The Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, Religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities, and "covenant communities"). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and heart" (FAPA, p. 287).

The Plenary Assembly went on to say that such a communion of communities must *witness* to the Risen Lord, reach out "to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life towards the integral liberation of all," be a "leaven of transformation in this world," and "serve as a *prophetic sign*, daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come" (see FAPA, pp. 288-89).

Understanding the BEC

Why is the Asian Church so keen on building Basic Ecclesial Communities? The reason lies in the very nature of the BEC. At this point we can then ask: "What is the Basic Ecclesial Community?" It is known by different names such as Basic Christian Community, Neighborhood Church, Small Christian Community, Covenant Faith Community. Where Christians live together with peoples of other faiths, they try to build a "Basic Human Community."

For our purposes, allow me to take the description of my own colleague, Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., as a working description:

> The BEC is:
>
> (a) any community of believers
> (b) who meet regularly

(c) usually under lay leadership
(d) to express their faith in common worship;
(e) to discern in faith on their life problems and opportunities; and
(f) to act in faith on those same problems and opportunities
(g) in community, as community ("A New Heart and a New Spirit," First Northern Luzon Pastoral Forum — Papers, September 23-27, 1996, p. 24).

An elaboration of the description above would include the fact that the BEC is a small community of believers (believers in communion with God, with one another, with their leaders, etc.), usually at the grassroots. Community members are thus able to interact regularly with one another, know one another on a personal basis, care for one another and share with one another. They take seriously the idea that the Church is "the People of God."

Their community is centered on the Word of God, with the Eucharist as the summit of the community's celebration. A participatory ethic governs the regular meetings of the community. There is a sharing of gifts through dialogue and co-responsibility. Activities are facilitated and led by their own lay leaders. A common discernment regarding their faith life in relation to social, economic and political issues is a regular feature of their reflection on the Word of God. Such discernment leads into action by the community, as community, involving collaborative witnessing and action. The perspective of the BEC is the Kingdom of God, "now and not yet." Its basic evangelical motivation is that of love, especially a Christian love that expresses itself in "option for the poor." Its mission is integral evangelization. Its spirituality is Gospel-based and apostolic. Thus, it is an evangelized and evangelizing community, a renewed and renewing community, a leaven of the Gospel transforming the wider society.

The Basic Ecclesial Community as described above is a contemporary image of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles. This Christian community gathered together in prayer and worship, heeded the instructions of the Apostles, broke bread with one another, loved one another and shared with one another. It was a community where no one was poor, all being in solidarity with one another.

Process and Stages of Development

In Asia, BECs usually develop because of a pastoral vision and plan, either on a parish or diocesan level. The first step is a process of communal discernment regarding the pastoral (social, economic, political, cultural and religious) situation. Social analysis, cultural analysis, faith analysis are used in the process of discernment.

A process of envisioning follows. In the light of the pastoral situation, what kind of community should the people of God be in this particular geographical area? How do they envision themselves as church? What kind of mission does the Holy Spirit call them to fulfill? The formulation of a vision-mission statement takes place.

The vision then guides a process of decision-making and planning on how the vision can be realized and on how the envisioned community can respond to the pastoral situation in the light of the faith and of the resources of the community.

The general process will call for the following components required for the establishment and growth of BEC:

— catechesis, formation and conscientization of members of the community;
— the organization of the community;
— the selection, formation, and training of lay leaders in various aspects such as community organizing and leadership, catechesis, liturgy, and social action;
— action or community mobilization.

In the growth of the BEC, several stages are observable: liturgical, development, and liberational or prophetic. In general, BECs first go through a liturgical stage, where gathering together for prayer and worship is the main, and sometimes the only, activity. There is also a developmental stage, where the Basic Ecclesial Community goes beyond the prayer stage into social action, in order to meet some social and economic needs, such as livelihood projects. Finally, the BEC might reach a prophetic stage, where it grapples with the root causes of its social and economic problems, or with issues of justice and peace, such as ecological concerns or the imbalances of the economic and political structures. All these issues and concerns are discerned in a participatory manner, dealt with collaboratively in the light of co-responsibility and subsidiarity. And at all stages, prayerful reflection on the Word of God is a necessary component.

A method of discernment is generally adopted by the BEC. This is the method of the *Pastoral Spiral*. It begins with an analysis of the situation, moves on to a reflection in faith, followed by decision-making and planning the implementation of the decision. The Pastoral Spiral ends with action (implementation of the decision) and evaluation. A new situation emerges from the process, and a new pastoral spiral begins. In many BECs, this method of community discernment is done regularly by the members and their leaders. It ensures that their faith response is rooted both in prayer and in the actual situation.

The "Newness" of the BEC

If the BEC is considered by FABC bishops as a concrete realization at the grassroots level of a "a new way of being Church," what does this "newness" consist of?

In my own experience with BECs I have found the following transformations taking place in people and in communities:

a) From individualism to community — members of BECs gradually shed off individualistic attitudes regarding their faith and religion (God and I), and begin to understand that these have basic relationships with their neighbors (I-Thou-We-and-God).

b) From sacramentalism and ritualism to integral faith—members of BECs consider and practice their faith beyond the mere celebration of rituals and sacraments, and are deeply aware of the social implications of their faith on Christian mission and day to day living.

c) From non-involvement to co-responsibility and participation—in the BECs, church people are impelled by their faith to participate not only in their own intra-BEC activities but also in the outward reach of Church mission into the socio-political community, as an imperative of co-responsibility in mission.

d) From corporal works of mercy to justice — BECs are very much aware of the importance of traditional works of charity, but their faith impels them to do more and, therefore, to act on behalf of justice and social transformation.

e) From clericalism to lay-centeredness — in the BECs a paradigm shift takes place regarding the role of clergy and religious and the role of lay people. The principles of co-responsibility and subsidiarity determine both the process and the level of decision-making. A process of "de-clericalization," and a corresponding "lay empowerment," takes place in BECs.

These five transformational movements are evident where BECs are strong. Active lay leadership and an evocative clergy servant-leadership are characteristic marks. Also evident are signs of a changed mentality in terms of option for the poor, a Kingdom perspective, the primacy of witness and orthopraxis, and salvation history as on-going. The figure of the Gospel-Jesus is familiar to members of the BECs as prophet, healer, liberator, hearer of the Good News to the poor, as "God-made-poor."

There are many more of the "newness" of Church in the BECs but what I have presented are, I hope, sufficient for the purposes of this seminar.

Conclusion

May I simply conclude my presentation with two official recognitions of the Basic Ecclesial Community:

> [Basic Ecclesial 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'...
>
> They take root in less privileged and rural areas, and become a leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transforation of society. Within them, the individual Christian experiences community, and therefore senses that he or she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task. Thus, these communities become a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel, and a source of new ministries. At the same time, by being imbued with Christ's love, they also show how divisions, tribalism and racism can be overcome. (*Redemptoris Mssio*, 1990, no. 51)

The Synod of Bishops in 1985 had earlier testified:

> Because the Church is communion, the new "basic communities, " if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church (Extraordinary Assembly of 1985, Final *Report*, II, C, 6; cited in *RM*, no. 51).

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