Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide

LAY MINISTRIES IN THE RENEWED CHURCH OF ASIA
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INTRODUCTION

To bring about a renewed church in Asia it will be:

> necessary to look more closely at the communion and participation of the layfaithful in parish life. In this regard all lay men and women are called to give greater attention to aparticularly meaningful, stirring and incisive passage from the Council: "Their activity within Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness."

> This is indeed a particularly important, which evidently must be interpreted in light of the "ecclesiology of communion." Ministries and charisms, being diverse and complementary, are all necessary for the Church to grow, each in its own way."[1]

While the Church teaches officially that lay ministries are essential for the full effectiveness of the apostolate of the Church, the reality in the Asian Church is far removed from such a possibility.

The 2nd Plenary Council of Philippines in 1991 stated that only 15-20% of the Catholics go to Church, and that only 1-2% of them are actively involved in the life of the Church. In Malaysia about 15% of the faithful gather for the Sunday Eucharist and in South Korea the number is about

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[1] C.L. 27.

30%. In India the vast majority of the Catholics goes to Church, but are passive in the pastoral life of the Church. In most Asian countries it is obeserved that the clergy and the rich people control the decision-making process of the Pastoral Councils and Committees in the dioceses and in the parishes. The charisms and talents of the poor and marginalised, who make up the majority of the Asian Church, are not recognised. It is often felt that women remain largely a type of unrecognised labour class in the Church, where their feelings and sense of respect are not recognised in the domestic church, parish, and at the level of the diocese.

In almost all the Asian countries intelligent and talented Catholic lay women and men occupy influential posts and are involved in the policy-making bodies of the State government, industries, political parties, media network, financial institutions, etc. Yet they do not feel that they are sent by the Church to proclaim the Gospel. These Catholics are trained and employed by structures, which work for their own objectives. They help in decision-making which are often against the Gospel imperatives of justice, love and truth, because the Church has not chosen, trained and commissioned them for their mission in the world. It is in this context that one is reminded of the answer the workers gave to the master in the parable of "the workers in the vineyard": "No one hired us" (Mt. 20:7).

In a situation like this we need to ask ourselves: Why is it that thousands of these qualified and resourceful women and men are not at the service of the Gospel in the intersections of life they are placed? Could be that the Christian community hias not asked for their service, while public institutions hire, train and commission, them for their own ends? The quotation given above reminds us that the apostolate of the pastors is ineffective without the active involvement of the laity. Why is it that most pastors are content with a passive majority? Why is that the church leadership generally do not feel a sense of urgency in activating the charisms and talents of the laity in ministries for the spreading the Gospel and working towards the coming of the Reign of God?

"Ministries and charisms, which are diverse and complementary, are all necessary for the Church to grow?" At this juncture of time we can hope and plan for the growth of the renewed Asian Church in the third millennium only through serious efforts to develp and sustain ministries and charism of all the members of the Church. While it would not be proper to ignore the rich and influentail members of our communities, we cannot, in a spirit of Christian charity and brotherhood, allow them to dominate and influence the Church councils and committees. The poor, who make up the majority of the Asian people, are yet to find their rightful place in the Church. In the spirit of the Gospel, just as Jesus upheld the contributions of the poor widow (Lk. 21:14), the Church in Asian in the third millennium must en-

rich herself by valuing "the cooper coins" the poor will have to offer.

A broader historical, theological, pastoral overview of the development of ministries in the Church will help us to understand lay ministries in today's historical context.

1. Our Vision — The Church: Communion in Mission

1.1 The Biblical Image of the Church as "A Single People"

In the Old Testament we see that Yahweh constantly invited Israel to become a "Single People" commiitted to him by following his commandments. That was the only way Israel could ensure her prosperity and happiness (Ex. 6:7; 19:4-8). Yahweh sent Moses and, later, prophets to guide Israel to walk, as a people, in his ways with single-hearted devotion to him and his Word. In spite of his constant call to unity and fidelity, Israel chose to be stubborn and ignore Yahweh's call and became a broken and divided people. (Jer. 7:21-26). This led to their oppression and captivity, and they were scattered over the earth.

Jesus renewed this call from God. The passionate dream that engulfed Jesus was "gathering all humanity into one fold under his tutelage" (Jn. 10:16). Her prayed to the Father that his followers might be completely one, like the Father and the Son, so that the world wil believe in his origin and mission from the Father (Jn. 17:23). The Church, modeled on the Trinitarian communion, is "One Body" (1 Cor. 12:12-27) united in love and action. The Church can be said to be complete only when all its members are joined to the Body and functioning together effectively for the growth of the Body, so that each member grows to the full stature in Christ (Eph. 4: 11-16). Vatican II confirms this biblical vision as the source of the Church's life and mission. The Church is "a sign of intimate union with God and of unity of all mankind."[2] It has been God's will to make us holy and save us, not as individuals without any mutual bond, but through forming us into a "Single People."[3] This reality of Church as communion is the "integrating aspect" and "the central content" of the mystery of Church.[4]

This new social order that Jesus came to establish is the content of his proclamation of "the Reign of God" (Mt. 4:17). In this new social order God is the Father, Christ is the Teacher, and all of us are Sisters and Brothers (Mt. 23:8). 'There is no longer a distinction between the Jews and the

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[2] L.G. 1.
[3] L.G. 9.
[4] C.L. 19.

Gentiles, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, barbarians, savages and free man, but Christ is "all and in all' (Col. 3:11-12). Establishing his Father's Reign in this world was Jesus' mission. He began to prepare a core group of his followers, so that they would continue this divine mission in human history: to mak love authentically human and at the same time divine, the factor which would unite and gather all peoples and nations, and bring our human history to its fulfillment.[5] We may appropriate this mission only in a limited or distorted way. Human as Christ's followers are and remain, no community of church can ever say that it is perfect, that it has accomplished its task.6 Yet God's constant and loving concern (Jer. 31:3) is ther to help us see and accept the wisdom of his plan to form us into a single people committed to follow his teaching in word and deed. (Jn. 8:31).

God's Reign cannot be limited to Church activities, nor can it be fully in the grasp of human agents. It is God's Reign on God's terms and through whom he choose (Jn. 15:16). The Spirit is not in anyone's control (Jn. 3:6-8); he freely gives his gifts to those whom he chooses (1 Cor. 12:11). It is through following the teachings of Christ faithfully that the community grows in an intimate sense of belonging to each other as children of God (Jn. 15:9-11). This sense of belonging brings about a communion (living in perfect union of heart and soul) which becomes a way of life capable of sanctification and mission.[7] The early Christian community understood this and tried to live this spirit of communion. They shared in the mission of proclamation of the Gospel and spreading the Reign of God in their own way (Acts 4:32-37; 8:4). Inspired by the Spirit, they discerned God's will for them in the context of their community situations, and responded to it together (Acts 6:1-6; 15:1-35). They realised too that the same infilling of the Spirit which was given to the Apostles, was also given to the Gentiles. Peter witnessed to this, making it very clear to the first community that the Spirit considers all human persons as equals and pours out his charisms on people of his choice, thus breaking down all human barriers (Acts. 10:44-48).

1.2 Communion in Mission

The ecclesial communion is an "organic" communion analogous to that of a living human body. It is "characterized by diversity and complementarity of vocations and states of life of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities ... because of this diversity and complementarity, every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a

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[5] "Who is a Minister in the Church?", Fr. Gerwin Van Leeuwen, OFM, *Ministries in the Church of India* (Research Seminar and Pastoral Consultation), CBCI, New Delhi 1976.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] L.G. 9.

totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body."[8]

Lay vocations, charisms, ministries and contributions are complementary, and strengthen the unity and enrich the resourcefulness of the Church, because the "one and same Spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity in the Church."[9] To be in communion in the Church demands both an acknowledgement of the legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of laity, and a willingness to cooperate and work with them.[10]

This communion is the source of Church's fruitfulness — holiness, salvation and mission because communion with Jesus gives rise to communion among God's people, and is the indispensable condition for bearing fruits (Jn. 15:5). "Communion begets communion" essentially, it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion."[11] Vatican II affirms this, and says that God willed to make people holy and save them, not as individuals without any mutual bond, but by making them into a single people.[12] The Church documents remind us that "communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other. They interpenetrate and mutuall imply each other to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion."[13] All the missionary activities of the Church are signs and instrument of unity.[14]

"Hence, it is not possible to think of communion and mission separately, nor of running our parishes with the support of a few. However, the general tendency to multiply missionary activities or to concentrate on efficient istitutions with the help of so-called experts will defeat the missionary objective of the Church, because mission can only be accomplished in communion, and necessarily leads to deeper communion. The Church in Asia needs to focus on how all our apostolic and missionary activities can be done in a way fostering a sense of communion at each level, be it the parish, diocese, the region or nation, leading to an experience of mission in communion." To do this effectively:

i) The Asian Church in the 21st century needs to think about making every parish community both the subject and agent of evangelization.

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[8] C.L. 20.
[9] C.L. 20.
[10] C.L. 30.
[11] C.L. 32.
[12] L.G. 9.
[13] C.L. 32.
[14] L.G. 1.

ii) She needs a well-defined plan to activate the "unchurced" faithful and the passive "church-goers."

iii) She needs to understand clearly her mission in the secular spheres of the Asian society, and plan how she will train, confirm and support those choosing a vocation to serve in such areas of life.

iv) She needs a program to foster, affirm and support the community way of evangelizing,m making the communities of believers both its subject and agent in a very conrete and meaningful way, and enabling them to implant the values of the Gospel in the society in which they are placed.

2. HISTORY OF MINISTRY

Let us review the history of the development of ministry in the Church objectively and impartially. It will give us a panoramic view of all the issues involved and will facilitate our efforts to arrive at more effective, relevant and concrete ways of minstering to the Gospel in the 21st century.

2.1 Jesus and Ministry

Jesus did not understand his ministry in the sacredotal or ritual line. He did not belong to the Aaronic or Levitical line. Nor did he join the temple service with the priests.[15] He did not take interest in reforming the Old Testament priesthood. On the contrary, he accused them of hypocrisy and malice, and provoked the whole priestly class to plot his death. Jesus' ministry was one of an eschatological prophet,[16] announcing the Reign of God, inviting all humanity without any distinction, to be completely transformed by his teaching so as to enjoy the fruits of the Reign. Since Jesus in his humanness is the primordial basis for Christian mission and ministry, one can conclude that Jesus himself is neither cleric nor lay, and his mission and ministry is neither cleric nor lay. If Jesus himself was a cleric nor lay, and his mission and ministry is neither cleric nor lay. If Jesus himself was a cleric, Vatican II would not have based the mission and ministry of the laity on Jesus, and vice versa.[17]

We can say that ministry is service to the Reign.[18] Jesus himself presented God's Reign in and through his ministries of healing, teaching, re-

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[15] *Lay Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, its History and Theology*; Keenan B. Osborne, OFM; Paulist Press, New York-Mahwah, 1993, p. 28

[16] *Lay Ministry, A Theological, Spiritual and Pastoral Handbook*, by William J. Rademacher; the Crossroad Publishing Co., New York, 1993, p. 13.

[17] Ministry, by Osborne, p. 32.

[18] Rademacher, p. 11, 46-47.

conciling, liberating, exorcising, showing compassion and bringing God's peace.[19] Setting limits to ministry which blocks or hinders people's involvement in the service of the Reign does not seem to be the mind of Jesus. He empowered people to get involved in ministry (Lk. 10:1-9, Jn. 4:28-30).

The ministry of Jesus, as understood and explained by him, had a strong liberative content. "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives... to set free the oppressed" (Lk. 4:18-19). Jesus preached that liberty to people, and indeed set them free from a variety of bondages — of sin (Jn. 8:1-11), of evil spirits (Lk. 8:26-33), of sickness (Lk. 8:24-44), of narrow and rigid interpretations of the Law (Lk. 11:37-52), of social oppression. (Lk. 19:1-10).

2.2 Ministry in the Early Community

The central ideal of ministry in the early Church seemed to have emerged from the communities' needs, based on their experience of Christ and the apostolic tradition.[20] This flowed from their desire of being faithful to the mind of the founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, the exemplar of all *diakonia*, and to the development of the ministries introduced by the apostles and their disciples.[21] As a consequence the Church used its freedom to introduce those forms ans structures that were necessary, and seemed best to do the job of building up the body, the Church, and to proclaim the Good News.[22]

The Spirit led the first Christians into a self-understanding that they are a communion in Jesus. So they felt called to live like sisters and brothers (Acts 2:43-47), and take decisions together. For example, we often think that in Acts 6:1-6 seven deacons were ordained. The Greek taxt does not speak of deacons, but of seven men who were called to *diskonein*, which means service.[23] When the problem about prejudices in daily distribution was brought to the notice of the apostles, they helped the community to find a solution through consensus. It is a very clear example of the apostles' understanding of mission in communion. The community and its leaders together arrived at a decision to established a ministry. This ministry had nothing to do with sacraments, though we find that the seven engaged them-

[19] *Ibid.*, 12.

[20] *Ministry —Traditions —Tension —Transitions*, by William J. Bausch; Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Connecticut, 1984, p. 16.

[21] "Ministry in the Early Church, a Short Survey," by Fr. E.R. Hambye; *Ministries in the Church of India* (Research Seminar and Pastoral Consultation), CBCI, New Delhi, 1976; IV/23 P. 352.

[22] Ministry — Traditions — Tension — Transions; Bausch, op. cit., p. 16.

[23] Lay Ministry; Rademacher; op. cit., p. 35-37.

selves in preaching and sacramental ministry. This shared sense of doing ministry led to the upbuilding of the community and the speaking of the Gospel.

The apostles realised that the Spirit of God freely invited people to the service of the Reign through the infilling of the Spirit. This filled the apostles with joy, who then confirmed the people chosen in ministry through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17; 11:17-24). The empowering of the Gentiles and Greeks was an explosive issue, and went against the thinking of the Jewish converts. Peter helped the apostles and elders in the community to understand that the Spirit freely bestows his grace on all and that they should not act against the working of the Spirit (Acts 11:17). Their task was not to control the working of the Holy Spirit, but rather together with the community learn to discern, facilitate and confirm the activity of the Spirit in the community. Once again we see the apostles helping the community to look at the mission in communion, even with the Gentiles. Once the community opened itself to exercise the missionary mandate in wider circles, it led to greater joy among the believers, and the mission was accomplished more effectively. St. Paul exhorted the first Christians to use all the charisms and gifts given by the Spirit for the good of all, as inspired by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

We also find that, though the seven men were appointed for the sevice of daily distribution, they were involved in preaching the Gospel (Acts 6:8) and baptizing (Acts 8:38). They did not make the kind of distinction we make between the spiritual and material. The leaders never acted without consulting the community, and no ministry came into existence unless the leaders approved and instituted them. We also see that there is only mention of the community at Jerusalem, who had commissioned seven men for the ministry of daily distribution. Other communities must have instituted other ministries according to the needs they had, like the collection made in Antioch (Acts 11:27-30). We hear about a wide variety of charismatic ministries in the Pauline Churches, such as apostles, healers, miracle worker, pastors, contributors, etc. (1 Cor. 12:8-10; Rom. 12:7-8; Eph. 4:11).[24]

Reflecting on the development of ministries in the early Church, we can see that:

1. Baptism is the foundation of ministry. All the baptized are called and sent by the Spirit to usher in the Reign of God.
2. Ministries emerge in communities according to the felt needs and call of the Spirit.

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[24] *Lay Ministry*; Rademacher; p. 32-33.

3. Nothing becomes a ministry unless it is approved by the community and instituted by the apostles.
4. Ministry is for the building up of the community as servant of the Reign.
5. Ministry is functional in nature; it does not constitute a separate class. It does not require the vow of celibacy, or life commitment.
6. Ministry is fluid, in transition, constantly in a process of redefinition. The change in needs or the existing situation, or the growth of the minister through life experiences affected changed the style of ministry. Change can also be a way of being faithful to the Spirit who guides the minister.
7. Since ministry emerges in community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, its ministers who are commissioned by the community are accountable to God, the giver of all charisms and to the community whose servants they are.[25]

William Rademacher gives a fitting conclusion to the New Testament understanding of ministries.

> Ministries flow from the call, the gifts, the needs, the faith, the discipleship and the Holy Spirit. Ordering or structuring the ministries is as after-effect done by the repsonsible ministers themselves, and perhaps, by whomever has the gift of administration. Such "ordering" structures for ministry may be hierarchic, participative, etc. As an effective sign of the Body of Christ such structures need to witness to the mutuality, reciprocity and interdependence of all the members of the Body.[26]

2.3 Ministry: Clericalized and Sacralized.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (50-110), who had to face several heresies in a city prone to civic unrest, took on a strong leadership role in order to give proper guidance to the people and to deal with the heresies. He appealed to the faithful "to give heed to the bishop... do nothing without the bishop."[27] This appeal implied that the bishops did not have a strong leadership role as of then, and that he would like that the faithful give the bishops such power. He said that obedience to the bishops, presbyters and deacons was the means necessary to achieve unity in the Church. Many historians find the seeds of monarchic pattern of episcopacy in Ignatius. The Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II has quoted him 13 times in support of the teaching on episcopacy.[28]

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[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[28] L.G., Chap. 3.

In 215 Hippolytus of Rome made a collection of documents pertaining to various Church orders. From those documents we have clear indications about the Apostolic Traditions concerning liturgy and ministries in the early Church. The faithful still had a voice in the appointment of the bishops. The document states:

> Let the bishop be ordained after he has been chosen by all the people. When someone pleasing to all has been named, let the people assemble on the Lord's Day with the presbyters and with such bishops as may be present. All giving assent, the bishops shall impose hands on him.[29]

There was a very clear understanding of ordained and non-ordained ministry by then. Bishops, presbyters and deacons were ordained ministers; and widows, lectors and subdeacons were non-ordained. Nevertheless all ministries were designated by the bishops. Ordination was not a sign of empowerment to function, but a recognition of the activity of the Holy Spirit in this person, just as a confessor could function as a presbyter without the laying on of hands. His heroic confession of faith is considered a sure sign of the working of the Holy Spirit.[30]

St. Cyprian of Carthage (220-258) known as the Pope of Africa, modeled his episcopacy on the secular officialdom of Carthage city, on Roman law and the priesthood of the OT. He opposed Stephen, the bishop of Rome, on the issue of rebaptism of heretics. The 7th Council of Carthage, presided over by St. Cyprian, proclaimed that every bishop has his own free will and unrestrained exercise of his liberty and power. Each bishop is accountable to God alone, while staying in concord with the universal Church. For him there could be no Church without a bishop, and no salvation without the Church. This stand of St. Cyprian on the authority and independence of the bishops has come to stay up to our time and found its way into the new Code of Canon Law.[31,32] Following his mentor Tertullian, he taught that women should not teach, preach, baptize or claim any function reserved to the masculine. In this he was strongly influenced by the Roman imperial practices in Cathage. Gradually, modeled on the civil order of rulers of the city of Carthage, the bishops and presbyters became the ruling class. This was the starting of the clericalizaion of ministry.

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[29]Quotations from *Didache* come from the translations of Williams Jurgens in *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, Minn, Liturgical Press, 1970), 166.

[30]*Lay Ministry*; Rademacher; p. 54.

[31]CCC 391.

[32]*Lay Ministry*; Rademacher; p. 56.

St. Cyprian believed in the universal priesthood of the baptized, though they were not included in the ruling class. The royal priesthood of the laity was "an inheritance from the life of faith and a succession to the Levitical priesthood."[33] Baptism and Eucharist were so important to the life of faith that the laity was to celebrate it where the ordained ministers were absent. However, the distinction he made about the order of bishops reduced the status of the laity, and compared the priesthood to the sacrificial priesthood of the OT, paving way for its sacralization.34

Emperor Constantine changed the concept of ministry radically. He appointed bishops as both civil and ecclesiastical rulers of civil districts. For hundreds of years to come, ministry then would mean both civil and ecclesiastical service. Emperors began to appoint bishops and presbyters. Bishops became the sole legislators and administrators of Church property. Eventually, in 1864 Pope Pius IX would in his syllabus of errors condermn the teaching that "the Church is to be separated from the state and the state from the Church."[35]

From the 4th century celibacy became the sign of purity in the Western Church. It began to be seen as the sign of ritual purity. The initial preoccupation was about married clergy abstaining from sexual intercourse (Council of Elvira in Spain in 309). The Eastern Church on one hand upheld the dignity of marriage and sexuality, while the West increasingly began to look down on marriage and, sex and exalt celibacy as the ideal Christian response. The 8-centuries-old debate on celibacy ended in the Second Council of Lateran, which imposed celibacy on the clergy.[36] Pope Gregory VII promulgated the theology that Christian society had spiritual and material ends. The king ought to deal with the material and temporal and the pope with the spiritual. The spiritual realm is divine and superior, and so the spiritual authority could command obedience of the material authority. This put an end to the practice of lay investiture — the power of emperors to appoint bishops and clergy, and gave the pope supreme power and control. The very same teaching led to shrinking of the concept of ministry, and made it purely spiritual.[37] This led to the exclusion of laity and what they could do from the purview of ministry.

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[33]Benson, *Cyprian: His Life, His Time, His Work*, p. 39.

[34]*Lay Ministry*, Rademacher, p. 58-59.

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 60.

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 64-67.

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 70.

2.4 Dualism in Ministry

Human history has plenty of instances of picturing life in dualistic language. Zoroastrianism taught that there was a cosmic war between good and evil. The Gnostics considered matter so evil that they felt Jesus could not have been human. The dualistic tendency continued, dividing the world into spiritual and material, between that which is holy and that which is unholy. Soul is spiritual, body is material; priest is holy, the lay person is unholy. Sunday is holy, Monday is not. The one who distributes Holy Eucharist is a minister, and the teacher in the school is not. All that is holy is around the Church, and all ministries happen inside it only.[38] In short, many came to look at ministry in an "over-spiritualised" manner that it almost got emptied of any human or material content, as though the Incarnation of Jesus is affecting only those portions of human existence which are considered spiritual.[39] Though much change has taken place in the understanding of spirituality, ministry still needs to embrace a much broader outlook to include the so-called secular, material and human realm of life, where God's reign must be preached more urgently than ever.

3. THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

Baptism and Confirmation make every believer a servant to Christ and his mission. We can say that every believer is ordained and consecrated to service through Baptism and Confirmation. Both these sacraments have "laying on of hands" and "anointing with oil," the two most important rites in the ordination ceremony. It implies that these two sacraments by nature amount to an "ordination" — i.e., being set apart as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,' not for itself, but as servant of Yahweh to establish the Reign.[40] One does not neeed another mandate for ministries since the Spirit commissions each member of the Church according to his free will (1 Cor. 12:4-11) to help in the building up of the Body of Christ. The community is bound to acknowledge this working of the Spirit in each, and facilitate the involvement of all for maximum fruitfulness and effectiveness in the service of the Reign of God.

The missionary mandate given by Christ is the patrimony and duty of the community. Individuals are called to discern their vocation; but a ministry must be ratified and commissioned by the community. "Being sent" is part of the understanding of mission. As the Father sent his Son, Jesus sent the twelve (Mt. 10:5) and the seventy-two (Lk. 10:1-7). The community of

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[40] *Being as communion,* by John B. Zizioulas; Crestwood, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985 p. 215-216.

Jerusalem commissioned the seven men (Acts 6:1-6), and the community at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-4). Ministry cannot and must not be one's private choice. Ministry is to be discerned as the Holy Spirit speaks through the community and its leaders in particular situations and needs. St. Paul says:

> We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given to us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve, if it is to teach..." (Rom. 12:4-8).

In the epistle, Paul reminds the church that as the body has many members and each member has a function, so too, each member in the community through the gift of the Holy Spirit has a function to work for the good of all. This exhortation of Paul implies the spirit in which each believer is to relate to others and serve the community through everything he/she does. Since each member of the church has an indispensable role in the building up of the Body of Christ through ministry, there is a need for a spirit of shared ministry, each supporting and collaborating with the another,[41] so that the whole church is built up into a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5). Ministry needs to be seen in this broad perspective. Nothing one does can be excluded from the Reign, which is the loving active plan of God in and through history.[42] Everything done by every believer must add to furthering of this loving plan of God at that moment of history.

After Vatican II there has been a definite shift for the better, and much has changed. We accept today that the material and spiritual are from the same God, and are finite reflections of the infinite Holy One.[43] His holiness then, pervades every exisiting reality. This holistic understanding of spirituality has helped broaden the concept of ministry from merely sacramental service to service of God's Reign in all life situations, as led by the Spirit. Jesus ministered mostly in the streets and market places, and not in the sanctuary. His ministry was feeding the poor, healing the sick, proclaiming the Gospel in the streets, etc.; so too there is a growing awareness today of the need of various ministries to answer to the needs that the church is

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[41] *Church, Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament,* by C.K. Barrett; The Paternoster Press, Exeter, Devon, Britain 1985, pp. 31-38.

[42] Lay Ministry; Rademacher, p. 11.

[43] Lay Ministry; Rademacher, p. 128-129.

confronted with.

We use ordinary material things as sacramental symbols — water, wine, bread, wooden cross, candle, pictures, oil, etc. We seek graces by blessing a car, house, our bodies, animals, etc. All these show that in our faith these and other material things are sources of God's blessings for us, and that the original creation is holy. In the light of the Incarnation we realise that nothing here on earth is exclusively profane.[44] We cannot divide earthly realities into dualistic categories of spiritual and unspiritual, holy and unholy, natural and supernatural. We cannot categorize people into holy and unholy. Since Christ has sanctified all and constituted them into a community with common dignity,[45] a division of the community into clergy and laity based on ministry, which affects adversely the status and positiion of the laity, is not healthy. It would be more appropriate and in line with the Gospel to think of "the community of believers and different ministries." This minimises, if not removes altogether, the chance of one section dominating over others or claiming superiority, which is ruled out by Jesus in the Church (Mt. 20:25-28). One will have to agree then with William Rademacher that:

> All Christian ministry is a living sign of the enfleshment of the sacred and the secular, of the spiritual and material.
> Through the power of Christ, ministers cleanse or exorcise the world/Church of the trauma and contamination it has suffered from evil and restore it to its original wholeness. Ministy happens not only in the Church, but also especially along the wayside, in the world, where the human condition lies beaten and wounded by sin, rape, drugs, alcoholism and terrorism.[46]

Therefore, ministry is a call to all the believers at all the intersections of life. Everyone in the church is responsible for protecting, nurturing, deepening and witnessing to the Christian faith.[47] "Ministry, to be authentic, must flow from our inner ontology, a state of communion with the transcendent God."[48] The triune God in order to communicate his loving plan in human history, is vitally involved in calling people to ministry through the concrete church community, which commissions its ministers to serve concrete human needs in different historical moments and places.[49] The leaders in the Church ought to help in the communal discernment of the mind of the

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[44] Dermot Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*; Paulist Press, New York, 1975; p. 137.
[45] L.G. 32.
[46] Lay Ministry; Rademacher; p. 130.
[47] Fr. Geerwin van Leeuwen, OFM I/5; p. 92.
[48] Lay Ministry; Rademacher; p. 94.
[49] Fr. Geerwin van Leeuwen, OFM I/5; p. 94.

Spirit in the particular life contexts, confirm and empower those called by the Spirit to ministry,[50] and ensure sanctification of the whole creation. St. Paul tells us that the whole creation is groaning for the final liberation (Rom. 8:18-22), and it can happen only through the committed ministry of all God's elect, in the manner Jesus exemplified in his earthly ministry, and followed by the first Christians.

The God of Christians is now victoriously present in the human creation, making it holy and calling it to greater holiness. The effects of sin are still upon humanity and tend to contaminate it further. Yet the power of resurrection will restore humanity to its wholeness.[51] But if that must happen, the Christian community must search with a sense of urgency and diligence for those areas of human existence where the power of the gospel must be proclaimed and respond to the need. So the Christian community must see its ministry beyond the confines of the altar and send its ministers to today's politics, industry, media network, public offices, market places, the narrow lanes of towns and villages where life is tread, and anywhere else the Reign of God must be established. Failing in this means these areas become the Reign of the evil power.

4. MINISTRIES IN RENEWED CHURCH IN ASIA

4.1 Progress since Vatican II

The Vatican II has opened the windows of the Church wide for participation of the lay faithful. The organization of continental and national bishops' conferences decentralized Church organizations and gave room for developments in lay ministries in different spheres of life. Several of the commissions and committees set up at international, national and diocesan levels provided room for lay participation. The establishment of the formation centers and the variety of formation programs they conduct are healthy signs of growth in the right direction. Establishing commissions/desks for laity, women, youth, social and developmental areas at diocesan, national and Asian levels help shaping of the Church in the post-Vatican II vision of the Church as the People of God. The growth of lay associations and lay missionaries are signs of the increasing awareness of the lay faithful about their co-responsibility in the mission of the Church. The opportunites for the laity in faith formation and active ministry are increasing. The efforts to introduce and promote SCCs in many dioceses, some countries, and even national conferences, giving it pastoral priority, makes the Church struc-

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[50] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[51] *Lay Ministry*; Rademacher; p. 130-131.

tures more participatory. The increasing number of Church organizations and people getting involved in social issues is making the Church a servant of humanity.[52]

Ever since Vatican II the Church has realized the importance of cultures of people, and the Church has been taking shape in the local cultures. Many developments have taken place in inculturation, like using local language, music, art, customs, etc., in the Church services and activities. But more still needs to be done on a war footing.

4.2 The Other Side of the Asian Reality

It is true that much has happened in the Asian Church since Vatican II. Yet when we look at the broader picture, we see that a lot needs to be done, as there seem to be some very dangerous growing trends.

4.2.1 While there are innumerable lay movements, it is alarming to see the growing number of people — to the tune of 70-80% — being unchurched in countries like Philippines, South Korea, Malaysia." And in other countries where the large majority go to Church, 90-98% remain a passive majority. Re-evangelizing the unchurched and activating the passive people in the Asian Church have become such a gigantic task. And yet the Church appears unable to do anything significant, and is not equipped enough to meet these growing challenges. The Christian sects are making a good harvest out of our ill-formed and passive community. The number leaving the Church is growing daily. The problem is so acute that in 1996 the Bishops' Conference of India made a study of the problem. The Church has yet to find urgent and concrete solutions to ease problems and equip itself to confront the other challenges posed by the modern media and the changing socio-economic situations, which are destroying Christian values systematically.

4.2.2 Though there are scattered efforts to promote lay involvement in the Church, the Asian Church, by and large, is too clericalized, institutionalized, and its leadership quite dominating. The parish life and activities depend very much on the interests and priorities of each parish priest, leaving the parish life very unstable and the people helpless. Though the Church teaches that pastors ought to promote and encourage lay efforts in the life of the Church,[53] not only are such efforts often not promoted, but in many cases even are shut down. In other situations very little or no effort is made to involve the people in the decision-making process, and often decisions

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[52]G.S.I.
[53]C.L. 31.

are made for the people. It is a common trend in the Church to avoid, perhaps in very gentle and subtle ways, people who raise unpleasant, yet valid questions about the way Church is organized or run, and work only with those who are pliable to the ways of the priest.

4.2.3 The Asian culture lends to men's domination, leaving women in a secondary state. This is noticed even in Church. Women are generally treated as second-class citizens, be it in the home, Church or society. The Church too does not give women their due dignity as children of God in discussions, decision-making, leadership roles, etc. Even, though the women were downgraded in Israel, the Gospels especially the Gospel of Luke highlight the way Jesus brought out the best in women, and showed how important their tasks were in the social and ecclesiastical field.[54] The Church of Asia, showed in the light of the Gospel, should give the lead in giving women respect and dignity so that the cultures of Asia are influenced by the Word.

4.2.4 The early Church had a broad understanding of mission and ministry. As pointed out earlier, communities under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit set up ministries that responded to people's needs and the demands of the Gospel. As long as the community and its leaders worked together and discerned the activity of the Spirit in and through them, they were able to overcome cultural barriers and did not experience a clergy and laity divided. (Acts 10:1-14). With the spiritualization of ministries in the Middle Ages, ministries became the monopoly of the clergy and were limited to liturgical sevices. The world outside was considered evil and to be shunned by Christians. In this way we turned over the world and all its goods to the Evil One who has taken away the vast majority of the faithful. The Church still does not consider it important to train and send its own ministries into professional life in the world—politics, industry, media, the marketplaces, etc., and into areas that involve people's day-to-day life.

4.2.5 The Bandung Statement of the FABC in 1990 spoke of the future Church of Asia as "a communion of communities," where people live as brothers and sisters.[55] Many dioceses and countries have introduced SCCs as a *New Way of Being Church* to make the Church participatory and collaborative. Yet in many cases, SCCs have not been given the importance and support needed to truly make it the *New Way of Being Church*. It has been noticed that wherever clergy showed enthusiam and interest, SCCs

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[54] "The Participation of Women in the Life of the Christian Community", by Sr. Angela Nijssen; *Ministries in the Church of India* (Research Seminar and Pastoral Consultation), *CBCI, New Delhi,* 1976; I/8, p. 127.

[55] Bandung Statement, 1990, no.8.

flourished and people grew in apostolic consciousness. Often the change of priest or cooling of his enthusiasm, has led to the collapse of the SCCs. Could SCCs be the thrust and focus of a renewed Church in Asia in the spirit of Church as communion in mission?

4.3 Call of the Spirit to Respond

In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12) we have a very clear account of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given for the common good and of the mutuality and co-responsibility of all the members of the Body of Christ in carrying our the mission of Christ effectively. Though the body has many parts, and each part has different functions, they still make up one body. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church uses this image for the Church.[56] Pope John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* reconfirms this image when he says: "One and the same Spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity."[57] The Spirit bestows various gifts on different people for the purpose of the building up of the Body of Christ until it attains unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and grows to the full stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). This understanding of ministry shows that all ministries have divine origin and authority and are not amenable to human organization.[58] Each is a free gift and does not carry with it any distinguishing characteristic of belonging exclusively to either the hierarchy or laity. Each gift is for the building up of the other members and of the body, the Church as a whole, and at the service of the Church and its mission. The clergy and aity would in their own way respond to the call of the Spirit in communion with others to fulfill the mission of the Church in Asia.

4.3.1 Role of the Lay Faithful

Through Baptism all the faithful are called to participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ.[59] Whether the gifts given by the Spirit are ordinary or exceptional, they are from the same Spirit and for the good of all.[60]

A great part of the responsibility of the mission of the Church is entrusted to the lay faithful.[61] The whole of chapter 3 of *Christifideles Laici* deals with the co-responsibility of the lay faithful in the mission of the

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[56] L.G. 7.
[57] C.L. 20.
[58] *Church, Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament,* by C.K. Barrett, p. 35.
[59] C.L. 23, 33.
[60] 1 Cor. 12:7; C.L. 24.
[61] C.L. 32*

Church. It spells out very clearly the different fields, which fall under the purview of lay ministries. The document states that the lay faithful too share the responsibility of founding new Churches,[62] and it is their unique responsibility to present the Gospel in the secular spheres of life.[63] The unique way the laity become founders of the Church is by defending the dignity of the human person and the right to life,[64] and by making family the foundation, the inner core, of Church and Church experience.[65]

> The laity are called to participate actively in the whole life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the very heart of the community of mankind."[66]

If the lay faithful are to be actively involved in the mission of the Church, they are to be made aware that they have a right to be involved in the apostolate, and organize apostolic groups in communion with the Universal Church. This right of theirs is guaranteed by the teachings of the Church.[67]

4.3.2 Role of the Clergy

The understanding of the role of the clergy in the mission of the Church has changed in the course of history. The early Church understood that decision-making is a way of being and becoming a community in the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that Jesus advised his disciples not to dominate over people but rather to become servants of the community (Mt. 20:25-28). The apostles in their ministry facilitated and inspired the community to make Spirit-filled decisions respecting the views of all (Acts 6:1-6; 15:1-). In the course of history, all decision-making powers came to be concentrated in the hierarchy. The Vatican II documents and the post-Vatican II documents have brought a balance to the decision-making process, going back to biblical spirit. The ministerial priesthood is a grace for the entire Church, and is at the service of the priesthood of the People of God,[68] and is not for any personal power.[69] This means that the role of the clergy is to facilitate, strengthen and animate the effective functioning of the priest-

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[62]C.L. 35.
[63]E.N. 70; C.L. 36, 42, 43, 44.
[64]C.L. 37, 38.
[65]C.L. 40.
[66]G.S. 43.
[67]C.L. 17, 28, 29
[68]L.G. 10; C.L. 22.
[69]C.L. 22.

hood of the People of God.[70] This is what St. Paul meant when he said that the various ministries of the Church are to build up and equip the faithful to the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). Since different ministries are complementary, and they exist in communion and on behalf of the communion[71] "the pastors ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices, the roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation, indeed, for good of many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony."[72] Since the lay faithful spend a greater portion of their potential and life in the secular sphere, this is precisely the area where they will be able to serve the Church in ministry. Pastors thus ought to acknowledge the vast potential available for the service of the Church, and foster those ministries that would make the Church a sign and sacrament of salvation. To do so the pastors need to discern with the community the ways to train and empower the lay faithful to minister to the Gospel in the various secular fields. As the quotation from *Christifideles Laici* states above, the pastors are morally and legally bound to foster those ministries. A tendency often found among the clergy is that one often promotes a few lay ministries and charisms of his liking or interest, or encourages those he likes. No interest is shown to others, especially to those who hold different views, or are critical of the pastor. This is not according to the teaching of the Church which states:

> The various ministries, offices and roles that the lay faithful can legitimately fulfill in the liturgy, in the transmission of faith, and in the pastoral structure of the Church, ought to be exercized in conformity to their specific lay vocation...[73]

Sometimes one wonders if the leaders in the Asian Church are really and deeply convinced about the indispensability of lay ministries derived from Baptism, Confirmation and matrimony for the effective fulfillment of the mission of the Church. There seems to be an in-built distrust of the lay talents and charisms, flowing from a strong feeling of insecurity in the clergy, which frustrates and blocks, often in a very gentle and subtle way, the flowering of the charisms and energies of the millions of the lay faithful. One hears about if from the lay faithful everywhere. It is also a fact that wherever there is a pastor deeply convinced about the importance of lay participation, ministries flourish and the parish church there becomes vibrant and energetic. It is tragic to see that in many such emerging parishes, the change of the pastor with another who does not see the value of the lay ministries,

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[70] P.O. 9.4.
[71] C.L. 20.
[72] C.L. 23.
[73] A.A. 1.2.

leads to total frustration of the entire process of building a participatory Church. In the whole process, the lay faithful are taken for granted, and it is no wonder that the laity are so skeptical of any change in the existing church structures, even if it is for their good.

The Church's teachings spell out clearly that the clergy's role is to acknowledge, foster, coordinate and order all ministries to the building up of the Body of Christ, to the service of the communion. The unhealthy tendency to take over lay charisms or to continue with the passive majority is rooted in the lack of clarity about the role of the clergy and the lack of conviction about the importance of the role of the lay faithful in fulfilling the mission of the Church locally. It may be even an indication of the clergy's understanding that the mission of the Church as activities in and around the parish church. The less the efforts put in by the clergy to activate the lay charisms, the more the chance of the laity being used by counter-Christian cultures for their end. The more the clergy delay the promotion of active and full use of the lay potential, the greater the chance and number of the lay faithful losing their faith. Such seems to be the experience of the Catholic countries. The passivity of a single lay person even for a minute is an irretrievable loss for the building of the Body of Christ. Each member of the faithful needs to realize fully that he/she has to respond to the gospel mandate in his/her life situations in a responsible way.[74] The positive role of the Church leadership is urgently required to make this possible.

5. CHALLENGES AHEAD

5.1 Building Evangelizing Communities

Vatican II teaches that God makes us holy and saves us by making us a single people.[75] The mission of the Church is to be manifested in the united witness and action of the all the baptized.[76] So building up a community of brothers and sisters of Jesus, and activating the charisms of all the believers, ought to be targeted as the goal of the Church at all levels. The project of a group of clergy, religious and laity running the Church for a passive majority can be likened to the survival efforts of a paralysed body. If the vision of the Church of Asia is to be implemented, the statement of the Asian bishops at Bandung that the Church of Asia would be a communion of communities,[77] must become a pastoral priority. A pastoral priority implies making resources (finance and trained personnel) available at all lev-

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[74]A.A. 1.2.
[75]L.G. 9.
[76]A.G. 6.
[77]Bandung Statement, no. 8.

els, be it the parish, diocese, region or nation. It is envisioned that the Church of Asia would be a community of brothers and sisters who address together the call of God to witness to the Gospel in the midst of challenges posed by the Asian context—massive poverty, corruption, illiteracy, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, fundamentalism, increasing violence, economic domination of the multi-nationals, ecological issues, equal dignity of women, etc. It is impossible for the Church in Asia to address these challenges without fully activating the potential and charisms of the lay faithful through proper ministries. The bishops of Asia have given the right direction in giving us a community dream and a community action program through the Bandung Statement. The real challenge for the Church leadership today would be to implement the statement without dilly-dallying. The bishops, with their clergy, can work out a way of implementing this vision in a systematic way.

Since the whole Church is missionary,[78] the mission mandate must be seen as a community task. Evangelization is the grace and vocation proper to the Church.[79] She exists to evangelize.[80] Parish communities must see themselves as evangelizers, and identify their missionary mandate in their local context and respond to it in a mature way as the Body of Christ there. The assemblies of the faithful, as living communities of faith, must be characterized by their civic and apostolic endeavours which are rooted in justice and love.[81] The challenge before us now is whether the pastor in a parish has the formation and skill to help the parishioners see their mission in the local context and commit themselves to fulfill it in communion.

To respond to this urgent need is the call of the hour, and it can be addressed by developing, instituting and commissioning suitable ministries through which the local Church can carry out the missionary mandate. Karl Rahner says that parish is 'the local representative actualization of the Church."[82] Any group of people can be considered a "local Church" only when it is capable of fulfilling the essential, basic functions of the Church, such as, organized proclamation of the gospel, celebrations of the sacraments, practicing Christian charity, etc.[83]

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[78] A.G. 6.

[79] "Being Church in Asia" (Theological Advisory Commission Documents, 1986-1992), vol. 1, ed. John Gnanapiragasam and Felix Wilfred, Claretian Publications, 1994, p. 45.
[80] EN., 14.
[81] A.G., 19.

[82] Karl Rahner, "Theology of the Parish," *The Parish from Theology to Practice,* ed. Hugo Rahner, trans. Robert Cress, Westminster, NB., Newman Press, 1968.
[83] Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come,* New York, Seabury Press, 1978, p. 109.

"Various ministries are necessary for the implanting and growth of the Christian community, and once these forms of service have been called forth from the body of the faithful, by the divine call, they are to be carefully fostered and nurtured by all."[84] Rosemary Houghton says that there can be no church apart from its mission, which it evolves in a concrete, localized way.[85] The apostolic ministry, which can take a variety of institutional structures, is a constituent of the local Church.[86] The local Church really takes shape only when the Word is experienced through her apostolic ministry, the Eucharist, the fellowship of love, ...[87]

The same is confirmed by the Synod of Bishops.

If indeed, the parish is the Church placed in the neighbourhoods of humanity, it lives and is at work through being deeply inserted in human society and intimately bound up with its aspirations and its dramatic events. Oftentimes the social context, especially in certain countries and environments, is violently shaken by elements of disintegration and de-humanization. The individual is lost and disoriented, but there always remains in the human heart the desire to experience and cultivate caring and personal relationships. The response to such desire can come from the parish, when, with the lay faithful's participation, it adheres to its fundamental vocation and mission, that is, to be a "place" in the world for the community of believers to gather together as a "sign" and "instrument" of the vocation of all to communion, in a word, to be a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all, or, as Pope John XXIII was fond of saying, to be the "village fountain" to which all would have recourse in their thirst."[88]

The missionary activities of the Church are intimately bound up with human nature and its aspirations.[89] "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially the poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing which is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts."[90] It is the task of each parish to discern the will of God from within the aspirations and experiences of the people in a given place and time and

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[84] A.G. 15.
[85] Rosemary Houghton, "The Emerging Church," *The Way*, Jan. 1982, P. 32 & 33.
[86] Being Church in Asia, p. 46, 47.
[87] Being Church in Asia, p. 46.
[88] C.L. 27.
[89] A.G., 8.
[90] G.S., 1.

respond to it. In this sense maintaining huge passive crowds in our parishes is a disservice to the growth of the Church and can only lead to the dechristianization of the faithful over a period of time.

5.2 Importance of Formation of Clergy, Religious and Laity for Ministries

It is in the above context that formation of clergy, religious and laity for ministries becomes so important. Formation is more than mere indoctrination, or learning formulas or rituals. Formation must be suited to the condition of those engaged in ministry,[91] and lead to empowerment to effective ministry. It must be geared to age, time and diverse situations of life, so as to enable people to explain their faith and respond to it reasonably.[92] Formation is not to be merely a classroom exercise, but "a continual process in the individual of maturation in faith and likening to Christ, according to the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."[93] In actual practice we find that there is hardly any adult formation of the type described above and it is not a continuous process. We need to examine how far our faith formation is greared to help individuals to mature in faith so that he/she can be equipped to live his/her faith in varying life conditions and be a committed witness. The huge percentage of dropouts and passive members in the Church is an indication of a lack of maturing in faith and the inability to grow in the likeness to Christ.

Vatican II states that the missionaries should raise up communities capable of fulfilling the priestly, prophetic and royal functions entrusted to them.[94] This brings to the fore the importance of formation of the laity, who have to be prepared for their vocational commitment in the middle of the trials of this complex world. Their formation "ought to be so placed within the plan of pastoral action that the efforts of the whole community (clergy, lay faithful and religious) converge on this goal."[95] The clergy and the religious have formation plans and programs for themselves; but they as yet do not seem to grasp the importance of the lay formation, as mentioned above, for there seems to be very little initiative and collaboration effort towards it.

The clergy—laity and Church—secular sphere are divisions which appear to be a hindrance to the development of ministries needed to make the Church fully alive and witnessing. If the clergy are in-charge of the

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[91] A.G., 26.
[92] C.L., 60.
[93] C.L., 57.
[94] A.G., 15.
[95] C.L., 57.

Church affairs, and the laity of the secular affairs, how can the clergy lead the laity in their field? How will the clergy who are trained to organize the church affairs form the laity in secular affairs? Following such compartmentalized interpretation of ministry tends to reduce or prevent experiences of the Church as a "communion in mission." Rather, she appears to accomplish her mission in different compartments. This has resulted in wide experiences of arguments and fights between clergy and laity about each other's limits and powers, and in unending misunderstanding, frustration, loss of good will and mutual distrust. In such a compartmentalized approach to mission, it is difficult for the whole community (clergy, laity and religious) to plan their pastoral action in a convergent manner as put down in *Christifideles Laici*. It is a challenge for the Asian Church in the 21st century to think of a collaborative formation which will lead to a primary experience of the clergy and laity being brothers and sisters in the Church. They collaborate together in the upbuilding of the body of Christ in different roles and serve the Church in varying ministries. The early Church experienced this, as we saw earlier.

There is a need to evaluate the formation given to all in the Church in terms of its power to conscientize and activate the whole community in her mission in the local context. Are we forming builders of community? Are we preparing formators for people's ministry? Does the formation program make the parish an evangelizing community? What are the goals of the various formation programs? Have the formation objectives been met or has the method and content been defective in some way? These questions need to be answered from the point of view of results seen in activating the potential of the whole community for the missionary enterprise.

5.3 Building Participative Structures

Our considerations so far have elucidated very much that the Church and her mission by its very nature is participatory. The Bandung Statement of the FABC states the future Church of Asia will have to be a participatory Church where gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all the faithful — lay, religious and cleric alike — are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realised.[96] What is commonly experienced in the Church is that there are a very large number of passive laity, and there are not enough support and opportunities for all those who come forward to take part in the life of the Church. There is no provision to absorb all the talents and charisms of all the members of the community. Very often involving in the life of the parish means doing what the priest wants him to do

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[96] FABC; Bandung Statement 1990, no. 8.

or being a member of a pious association. It is still very much an extra voluntary act, not a missionary mandate coming from the baptismal call. Though the Church teaches that the pastors ought to uphold the rights of the lay faithful to organize, individually and in groups, activities in conformity with the apostolic goals of the Church,[97] in actual practice not enough provisions are made structurally. These rights have been guaranteed in the new Code of Canon Law.[98] It is necessary that Church structures at all levels make provisions for the development of various ministries that are found necessary for the growth of the Christian community.[99] Consultation, collaboration, consensus making, etc., must become the renewed way the Church would function with a view to awaken and enkindle a missionary zeal in the hearts of all. Much greater and pronounced efforts are needed to make parish Pastoral Councils, diocesan Pastoral Councils, diocesan Synods, and various other commissions and committies, lead to fruitful actions beyond the meeting halls and documentation files. It must be ensured that these bodies act as effective tools to broaden the community organizational base to usher in greater lay involvement, for making continuous formation available to people, and to bring the gifts and charisms of all to the service of the Gospel.

It has been observed that generally the rich and influential people dominate in the existing Church commissions and committees. The poor and marginalised find no place, and their contributions are unwelcome. The Asian Church in the 21st century must use the talents and charisms of the rich and the influential to activate and empower the talents of the poor (Rom. 15:1). The "Anawin of Yahweh" must take their rightful place in the Church. The local Church must dialogue with the poor, listening to their genuine experiences of deprivation and dehumanization, and respond to their aspirations and hopes for a more just human and social order.[100] Asian cultures in general, except in matriarchal societies, degrade women. The Church too tends to follow this, though she teaches that all discriminiations against women must be opposed, and there is a need to restore to women their full dignity a full human person.[101] In many cases, if women express their feelings of being discriminated against, it is ignored, denied or they are sidelined. The Church must in all its structures reflect the common dignity and equality of men and women, and be an example and model to the others discriminating in Asian cultures.

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[97] C.L., 29.
[98] CCC 215.
[99] A.G., 15.
[100] Being Church in Asia, p. 58, 59.
[101] CL. 49, F.C. 24, 46.

5.4 Neighborhood Communities (NCs)

In recent time in many Asian countries, NCs (also known as BECs, SCCs, BCCs) have been proliferating in response to the needs of Christian life and mission, helping the faithful to experience Church in a concrete way, and making communion and participation a lived reality.[102] Gathering in small groups, around the Word of God, they are able to foster a true sense of community and apostolate. They are ' "living" communities, and "true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization."[103] As they grapple with life issues in the light of the Word of God, they are evangelized (appropriate the Word for themselves), and are motivated to face its challenges in real life.[104] NCs take root among the less privileged and in rural areas, and become a source of new ministries, of commitment to social transformation. Being imbued with Christ's love, they are able to show how racism, tribalism and other sources of division can be removed.[105] They are potent places and agents for inculturation of the Gospel. They provide opportunities for authentic Christian witness and evangelization as they interact with people of other faiths in mutually addressing problems of life.[106] Beginning with the FABC statement at Bandung in 1990, a few national conferences and several dioceses in Asia have made the formation of SCCs a priority. NCs have proved in the Asian context to be an effective tool for promoting lay ministries and activation of the lay charisms. More than 17 countries in Asia have initiated NCs. Yet in a majority of dioceses it is looked on as one more lay association and poorly followed up. NCs need to be understood and introduced in the same sense as the Church has officially acknowledged them to be, and given much more attention and care. One important way in which they are kept alive in faith and united to the larger Church is through ongoing formation, especially of its leaders.[107] The challenge before us is this: Can the dioceses and national conferences give sustained attention and organizational support to make NCs what it is stated to be in official statements?

5.5 Family as Nurseries of Evangelization and Lay Ministries

Family is the foundation of human society and the domestic sanctuary of Church.[108] It is the first form of communion between persons, the pri-

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[102] Being Church in Asia, p. 63.
[103] EN 70, RM. 51.
[104] Being Church Asia, p. 63.
[105] R.M. 51.
[106] Being Church in Asia, p. 63.
[107] EN 58.
[108] A.A. 11; L.G. 11.

mary agent of humanization of the person,[109] the natural and fundamental school for faith formation where children get the first and primary experiences of love of God and a sense of Church;[110] and families are seminaries for lay apostles.[111] It is the couple who has to witness to the indissolubility and holiness of the marriage bond, and guarantee the Christian upbringing of children.[112]

It is the failure of couples to act and become the primary evangelizers and apostles, which is destroying the roots of family as a divine institution. The modern society has made sex an object of self-seeking pleasure, and has systematically destroyed the sanctity of marriage as a sacrament. The Church appears to be a helpless bystander, as marriages break down in increasing numbers. Efforts need to be made to protect our families from this scourge. These efforts have to become a mass movement of the laity, and a major ministry in the Church. For it is they who will be able to address this situation with a response that is appropriate. It is unfortunate that in many dioceses in Asia, even in these times, clergy or religious are entrusted with this ministry, indicating a lack of trust in laity even in this ministry, and a disinterest in lay family ministers.

The couples are the sacramental ministers of marriage. Hence, the forming and nurturing of families and the couple bond is properly couple ministry. The clergy or religious do have a role to play, though in a limited capacity. Yet it is the priest who will go for a post-graduate degree or intensive training in the family ministry, and not the couple. The challenge before us is to adequately prepare enough couple ministers to protect all the families, to help them to become effective ministers of the Church, and to refrain from taking over this ministry from the laity under one guise or the other. All the good marriages must become a resource at the service of the Church; such couples must be trained properly and supported by incorporating them into the pastoral organization of the diocese. The existing family organization like, the Couples for Christ, must be welcomed, in order to make their service fully and effectively available to the building up of the domestic Churches, making them indeed sacred signs of God's covenanted love and seminaries for lay apostles.

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[109] C.L. 40.
[110] C.L. 62.
[111] A.G. 19; A.A. 11.
[112] A.A. 11.

6. COMMISSIONING THE LAY APOSTLE

The Church teaches that the whole Church is missionary. The parish offers an outstanding example for community apostolate as it gathers into unity all human diversities and inserts them into the universality of the Church.[113] The laity should develop the habit of working in close collaboration with their priests in bringing before the ecclesial community various life issues, both local and universal, and the problems of salvation, and in seeking community discernment and action.[114] In practice, the concept of mission is pejorative; it is only what the clergy and religious do. They are still the missionaries. In attitudes, convictions and responses, all the sections of the faithful remain pretty much the old type. The mission of the Church is still fthe work of the clergy and religious; the laity are by and large, passive or unchurched. Even where there is full Church attendance, the vast majority remains passive and uninvolved in the mission of the Church. Their active involvement is limited to the Sunday obligation; what happens during the week rarely matters. The man in trouble in the neighbourhood, the injustice done in the workplace, the unhealthy surroundings, etc., are not considered part of the missionary mandate of the community. So it is left to the private initiatives of those interested. In this case, contrary to what is taught, communion of this community does not give rise to mission. It does not seem to be the nature of the Church here to be missionary. By its nature it is silent, passive and uninvolved. A community which is aware of its missionary mandate will discuss such situations, and enlightened by the Spirit, especially through the Word, will respond. The Spirit will "commission" them to act. Commissioning implies confirmation of the presence/activity of the Spirit of God. It is that action by which the community expresses its commitment and communion (its union in love and action). Commissioning highlights the community dimension of all ministries. That is why and how it will lead to greater communion. The community may be sending one or two individuals to do something in a particular situation; but what is important is that it is the whole community, which responds, and these two individuals are only servants, carrying out the missionary mandate on behalf of the community. Hence they remain accountable to the community.[115]

Commissioning was part of Church's life from the beginning. Jesus not only chose the twelve, but also commissioned them. (Mt. 10:1-15). "I chose you and commissioned you... (Jn. 15:16). Acts 6:1-6 reveals the im-

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[113] A.A. 10.
[114] *Ibid.*
[115] Rademacher, p. 97.

portance of commissioning. A few individuals did the daily distribution; it created a situation calling for the attention of the community. The apostles helped the community to take up the issue and arrive at a consensus decision to select seven men of Spirit and commission them for this task. What is important is, not the issues involved, nor the position or status of the people, but the community which listens to both the situation and to the Spirit. The whole process makes the community take up the responsibility for the mission proper to it — i.e., its own upbuilding and witnessing to faith in its life situations.

Some think that commissioning is "clericalization of lay ministry." It is a type of clericalization, if it is seen as one who has power giving power to one who has no power. This is not what commissioning is about, as we discussed above.

A community, which feels responsible for its missionary mandate within the life situations in which it is placed, identifies its ministries, trains and commissions its ministers. That community reveals a strong sense of maturity in faith and Christian commitment. It will help every member to understand his/her role in the community, on behalf of the community, and fulfill it. So the clerk in the office, the politician in making policy decisions, the businessman in doing business, are all missionaries of the community and are accountable to the community. This is the accountablility about which Jesus speaks in the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants (Lk. 12:41-48). A community which has not understood its missionary mandate will be passive and will leave mission to those interested. Its members do not know their Baptism as a call to belong to the community and to participate in its missionary task wholeheartedly. When a community attains the maturity to commission its ministries and ministers, it reveals a certain spiritual maturity. The Whiteheads connect this spiritual maturity of the community to the "sensible" state of the five virgins in Mt. 25:1-13.[116] Through lived experiences of faith in concrete life situations the community "seasons" its faith and learns to be open to the ways of the Spirit in real life situations.

The Whiteheads give a fitting conclusion to our consideration on the community way of doing (commissioning) ministry. The community of faith which inherits the dream of Jesus through the Church is aware that she is not on neutral zone. It is aware that the Spirit is alive and active in its members and excites them to life ambitions which contribute to the Reign of God on earth. Therefore, the community invites her members to pursue

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[116] *Community of Faith, Crafting of Christian Communities Today,* Evelyn E. Whitehead & James D. Whitehead, Twenty-third Publications, Mystic Connecticut, 1992, p. 93.

their vocations as part of the community's large dream and purpose, and offers them many specific examples and avenues to realize their dreams.

> The collective dream of a community must support and challenge the growth of individual vocations, just as these individual dreams contribute to and, at times, challenge the community's dream. And both dreams, individual and corporate, must remain open to the enlivening critique and purification provided by God's continuing revelation of us to ourselves.

> A community may abandon its dream, just as individual believers may allow their own religious hopes to die. When this happens in a parish, Sunday worship and special colletions may continue, but the vision is gone. Members are exhorted rhetorically to follow the Gospel, but there is no longer any excitement or ambition to transform the world in the direction of the values of Christ.

> As a faith community loses its vision, personal vocations wither. In the absence of a strong sense of corporate calling, without attractive examples of the Christian dream being lived out, Christian values of love and justice penetrate less powerfully the fabric of their daily lives.

> If a community can lose its dream, it can also allow it to narrow into a rigid and compulsive vision. This happens when a community seizes one aspect of Christian life (for example, personal piety or liturgical renewal or political action) and gives it exclusive and obsessive attention. In one group, then, "born again" becomes the only acceptable credential of Christian holiness. Another, in its enthusiasm for protecting unborn children, neglects other concerns of Christian justice and mercy. ... This partial vision is identified with God's will for everyone. .... Antagonistic defense of "our vision" replaces the broader and more open pursuit of the elusive kingdom of God.

> The shared dream of a parish or school or religious congregation is, thus, very much like a personal vocation. Fragile and in need of purification, the group's dream is continually being revealed to it. And like an individual vocation, a Christian community's dream is imbedded in a larger vision and hope, the dream of the Kingdom of God.[117]

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[117] *Community of Faith, Crafting Christian Communities Today*, pp. 85-87.

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Topics For Discussion

1. Ways and means to help the whole parish community to share their mission of becoming and evangelizing community.
2. Women as collaborators and partners in ministry.
3. Dealing with the unchurched and the passive majority.
4. Ongoing formation of laity, geared to make them agents of the Gospel, wherever they are: family, professional life, politics, industry, media, etc.
5. Family as the foundation for Church, and a seminary for building lay apostles.
6. Giving greater importance and support for SCCs as a tool for a promoting lay involvement.
7. Commissioning as a way to make the community responsible for its mission.
8. Role of the clergy and religious in mission in communion.
9. Broadening pastoral structures so as to emphasize the equal importance of the vocation and dignity of all believers in building the Body of Christ as a witnessing community.

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