

Towards a New Way of Being Church

Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA)

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Asian, Integral, Pastoral, Approach.

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1. What does AsIPA stand for?

A sian, Integral, Pastoral, Approach.

- Asian because we would like to be very much a part of the local culture and the gospel should take on the expression of the local people and be a part of their own way of living. Sometimes we are thought of as a foreign church. This will be proved untrue if we are rooted in the daily lives of very ordinary people.
- Integral because it is about bringing together all the various aspects of our parish life into community & mission in and with Christ. It is about weaving together our faith with our daily choices and actions. It is about trying to bring together the different generations and various families into our small Christian communities.
- Pastoral because it is about caring for all who live with and around us, regardless of their race or religion. The approach is about making it possible for everyone to participate according to their gifts in the work of bringing about the reign of God. Pastoral because the work of all God's people is the same as that of their shepherd.
- Approach. The tools used to build up the community must be such that they enable participation, build up confidence, skills in the various ministries as well as always addressing the question: "Why are we doing this?" The theological background to all we do is made available through simple texts and scripture.
 - Scripture is the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst and that is the main way scripture is used in the programmes of AsIPA.
 - There are no 'experts' and receivers in this approach. All have something to offer and all have access to the same information and search together.

- Discovering our common mission that arises out of our common vision is the work of the people in our small communities. Just telling and expecting results is the opposite of this approach.

2. What are some of the programmes offered by the AsIPA desk?

The AsIPA programmes are supplemented by the Pastoral training programmes coming from South Africa and the Philippines. There are many types of programmes for different contexts and needs. Some examples are:

- General awareness programmes which wake up the Sunday congregation to the demands of the Church after Vatican II. About leadership; sharing responsibility for mission; our social responsibilities for the poor, creation etc.; about what SCCs are and why we need them; about the rites of Christian initiation and why the church asks us to change our way of catechizing adults, youth and children.
- Programmes for small communities to: learn how to do Gospel sharing using different methods for different occasions. Learn how to start and maintain small Christian communities; learn how to choose the right leaders for the various ministries and services.
- Programmes for parish teams to learn how to develop a mission statement and make their own awareness programmes.
- Programmes for parish pastoral councils to learn what it means to be a councilor and how to work with parishioners and the parish priest.
- Programmes for SCC members to train for ministry to the sick, for home visiting; for infant baptism preparation; for liturgical ministries like lectors, etc.
- Programmes for social awareness and analysis of problems in society and church.
- Leadership training programmes

- Programmes for the spiritual growth of leaders and to assist in the resolution of difficulties.
- Adult catechetical sessions for use in the journey of Faith of catechumens.

3. Who is behind the AsIPA programme? Who is promoting it?

- Basically it is the Office of Laity and Family of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). There is an 'AsIPA desk' that is part of the OLF which is now based in Singapore.
- This was set up in 1993 to coordinate the needs of many dioceses for training. The executive secretary of the AsIPA desk receives requests for training in different dioceses and asks members of the Asian team to oblige if they are available.
- The AsIPA Resource Team (ART) is made up of various individuals who have been or are working on the AsIPA programme at national or diocesan level in their own countries. At the request of dioceses or bishops' conferences the team is formed for a training programme or consultation. Different dioceses give the programme very different receptions. It is only possible to implement the programme where the invitation is forthcoming.

4. Is the New Way of Being Church only about starting Small Christian Communities?

- Short answer to that is NO.
- The New Way of Being Church is a phrase used by the Asian Bishops in the final statement of their fifth plenary assembly in Bandung, Indonesia in 1990. However, it must be realized that the statement also contained lengthy paragraphs about our call to Evangelize in a new way in Asia, a way of reaching out to our Asian brothers and sisters in the way we pray as individuals and a community. The statement gives a very clear indication that giving visible and concrete witness to social responsibility;

caring for the poor - the millions of starving poor, the discriminated sectors of society including women and the girl-child is our only claim to credibility as a church that claims to love and care for others.

- The 'New Way' is a movement away from some of the old ways that were undermining our witness and threatening our health as a Catholic Community based on a Gospel life-style. If you look closely, you will realize that this New Way is actually the way we have been called to change by the Second Vatican Council II and the documents written during and after the Council.
- The 'New Way' is also the original way of being Church as we read in the Acts of the Apostles. It's not really new but we moved away from it for a long time and would now like to return to the Gospel way.
- Also the Small Christian Community is the focus of energies for AsIPA. The vision of a communion of communities is the New Way of Being Church. At every level from the Universal Church, Regional Conferences, Dioceses, Parishes, Neighbourhoods we want to encourage communion in order to witness to unity and participate in the mission of Christ which was very much centred on building community and unity.
- The Small Christian Community at the base is also the most basic unit of the local Church. The way to become a Church where laity are more Christ-centred, more conscious of their mission, can experience communion and can use their gifts and talents is through these SCCs.
- AsIPA therefore has as its focus the SCCs. Having SCCs in our parishes will impact very significantly the way we structure our Parish Pastoral Councils, the way we organize our Ministries, our Liturgy, Catechesis and Evangelization.

5. So what is the NEW way and what was wrong with the OLD way?

- There is no intention to say that the OLD way was wrong. The OLD way was the best way for the time but times have changed and new things are needed. In this case the NEW is actually taking us back to the days of the early church to the ‘original’ way.
- The impetus for growth came with the renewed vision of the laity at the Second Vatican Council. We are called to move towards greater care and concern for those who are not among the Sunday church goers – the people of other faiths and those who have fallen away from any kind of belief and church attendance. In the past we were afraid to be influenced by people with different views from ours. We avoided places of worship of other faiths. Now we are called to actively approach all people and search together for the truth about God and ourselves.
- We are called to move towards our neighbour and show a more special love for the poor and not only by the occasional handout but by a solidarity in life-style and self-restraint. The Irish Lenten campaign slogan one year ran like this “Live simply so others might simply life”.
- We are called to move away from the performing of ritual towards a greater awareness of how our lives are penetrated by the meaning of our worship and the struggles and joys of our lives profoundly affect our worship. The emphasis in the past was on doing the right thing in the right way. The call today is to relationship, with God as Father Son and Holy Spirit and in God, with our neighbour.
- We are reminded of the original spirit of unity and communion in the early Church. A communion based on the Trinity. In the New Way we are called back to being more community minded and to leave aside the individualism that has crept into our hearts and into the Church from society.

6. Are we supposed to use only the AsIPA texts to promote a participatory Church?

- The AsIPA texts are considered a bag of tools. Sometimes you may need a different type of tool for your context. There are no hard and fast rules about using or not using AsIPA texts.
- What is important is that the way a ministry or community is nurtured enables the members to grow in their relationship with God; experience being part of a community of equals with no dominating teacher or leader but rather a facilitator who is also a learner.
- The AsIPA texts were developed with a small group in mind. It is easy to facilitate and lay people with minimum training can study together what it means to be a Small Christian Community, How to do various methods of Gospel Sharing and problem solving and how to choose leaders, etc.

7. Small Christian Communities – must they be NEIGHBOURS?

- The SCC is the church on mission in the local area – “the most local incarnation of the one, holy, catholic & apostolic church” as described by some African bishops. The SCC is a *microcosm* of the church.
- The larger parish community is reflected in the neighbourhoods of the parish. We witness to the love and unity that transcends racial, economic and gender barriers being united only by baptism.
- When we are born into our families we do not have a choice regarding the members of our family. They are given to us, we are simply born into THIS family and no other. The same is true of being baptized into the church family.
- Where we live is where we belong to the other members of the body of Christ. It is in this place and with these people that we are to carry out the service and witness to Christ and his people in this area.
- The meeting in a home establishes a Christian presence, which is firmly rooted in the neighbourhood. If the members are from the

immediate locality they are aware of what is happening around them so that the group can identify with the real needs and reach out effectively. It is the eyes and ears, hands and feet, of the church.

- A number of close neighbours meeting weekly or monthly would also have the potential to influence the everyday life of the members who meet and talk frequently. Also, by meeting this way, the invitation to take part is a personal one and not an anonymous request printed in a parish bulletin, which reaches only the Mass-going population.
- The SCC is not only about the weekly or fortnightly meeting. It is about acting together and witnessing together during the week and supporting each other and building up bonds as we meet in the supermarket or post office or at the bus stop etc.

8. What is the relationship between Parish Pastoral Councils and Small Christian Communities?

- The Church today is working hard to animate the lay faithful to take up their baptismal calling to serve Christ in the world and in the Church. The parish pastoral councils (PPCs) are at the head of such an effort.
- In order to give as many lay faithful as possible the opportunity to participate in the pastoral plan of the church, the PPCs are set up to include as many people from the various apostolates, minorities, movements and organizations.
- Given our parish set ups, the best way to activate the laity who are not involved in the long standing organizations is to encourage them to belong to the SCCs which are the basic grouping in the parish.
- Members of SCCs who are actively involved in serving their neighbours will be able to bring to the PPC the real needs of the people in the parish and their own needs too. In this way, the many voices of the varied peoples in the parish can be heard

rather than only the few already active and articulate people in the organizations and ministries. The pastoral role of the council and church as a whole will be much strengthened as a result.

9. Why not Ministry groups, Organisations or Movements? Why so much emphasis on SCCs?

- In the past, those lay people who wanted to be active in the church had to join one of the movements like Young Christian Students, or Young Christian Workers or the Catholic Women's League or St Vincent de Paul Society in order to exercise their desire to participate in the church's mission. The best, most active laity were involved in these organizations.
- These groups are all specialized in who can join or whom they serve. The members have to be students or workers or women etc. The work of these groups like the St Vincent de Paul was very much limited to caring for the poor. Those in the St Vincent de Paul Society for example would not think it their task to teach catechism or to organize a liturgy. The movements and organizations have a very particular spirit or charism which attracts only a select number of people. The movements belong to international bodies who dictate their action plans etc.
- All of us who are baptized are called to be Christ to our fellow workers in the factory or hospital or school, wherever it is we work. All of us are called to help the poor. In some places, the parishes have left the poor to the SVDP only or the care of workers to the YCW. SCCs which are rooted in the local area and part of the local church help to spread awareness of the responsibility of all the baptized to carry out the whole mission of Christ and the church which includes caring for the poor.
- There is a need to form the people and give them a place in the small communities where they can also take up their responsibilities. In the past most formation and accompaniment was focused on the movements and organisations.

- After the Second Vatican Council and the development of the understanding of the role and mission of the laity, the interest in liturgy and parish life exploded onto the scene and lay people often felt that the best way to participate in the church's mission was to join one of the ministries - the lectors, extraordinary ministers of Communion, the music ministry, wardens, artists and so on.
- Many lay people became very interested in growing in their faith so bible study groups, prayer groups and formation programmes have become very popular.
- When you consider the nature and function of a SCC you begin to realize that there are no qualifications required for membership other than baptism.
 - The concern of the group is to serve the people living around and beyond.
 - The SCC is 'catholic' in the sense of welcoming everyone to the meetings.
 - Those people who are unable to receive communion at the Eucharist can attend the meetings and hear the word of God and receive care from the group.
 - SCCs are a 'home and a family' for all kinds of people of all ages. The whole family can attend the meetings.
- In SCCs ALL are enabled to participate in the Church's varied mission – to care for the poor, to catechize children, to worship, to welcome strangers and so on. The work of the specialized groups is to handle the cases and situations that the SCCs are not capable of tackling.
- All groups have their place and function. The SCC is a primary reality coming as an intermediate community between the 'domestic' church (the family) and the parish community. The call to be a Christ-centred Community on Mission can happen for many more people if they can understand and realize themselves as being church in the neighbourhood.

10. What are some other names for Small Christian Communities? (SCCs)

Catholic Neighbourhood Group

Neighbourhood Christian Community

Basic Ecclesial Community

Basic Church Groups

All these names refer to the same reality. The four marks of the church apply to the SCC:

1. Christ-Centred – prayer, bible, liturgy, Eucharist
2. Community based – neighbours without any discrimination by age or talent or profession
3. Mission Oriented – Existing to serve & evangelize those around them and beyond.
4. United – through the PPC, the leaders training programmes & parish events SCCs are united to one another within the parish. Parishes should experience and realize this unity within the diocese and so on to the Universal Church.