

BILA I ON SCCs
Oct. 18-23 2010, Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand
(Organized by AsIPA Desk, Office of Laity & Family of FABC)

FINAL STATEMENT

Introduction

“The Church in Asia will have to be a Communion of Communities” in the third millennium. This was the Spirit-inspired dream the FABC Plenary Assembly in Bandung in 1990 set for the Asian Church. The bishops, clergy, religious and laity, 90 in all, gathered here in the Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya in Thailand for the first BILA (Bishops Institute on Lay Apostolate) on SCCs (Small Christian Communities) from Oct. 18 to 23 2010, feel grateful to God for inspiring our Bishops of Asia with such a vision. It has guided the Asian church to move in this direction of a New Way of Being Church through building SCCs, ensuring participation of all the faithful in the life and mission of the Church.

Strengthened by Word and Sacrament

Through Gospel Sharing in SCCs the Word of God has gained due importance, as taught by Vatican II. Indeed, we can see the hand of Jesus in shaping these communities through His calling of thousands of ordinary people as animators at the service of SCCs building in 17 Asian countries. The Lord Himself strengthens them constantly through His Word and Sacrament (FABC Bandung Statement, No. 8.1.1). The Spirit has actively guided the Asian Church by providing inspiration, resources and organizational networks to plan consistently to make that vision a reality in the lives of the people of Asia. It has resulted in building up of AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) animation team and development of formation materials. We organized 5 AsIPA General Assemblies and several national assemblies. All these have contributed to the emergence of thousands of SCCs all over Asia.

Guided by Church Leadership

The Holy Spirit initiated this vision of a New Way of Being Church through the Bishops of Asia and Her/His guiding action can be seen in several National Bishops Conferences and many individual bishops in their own dioceses, giving SCCs pastoral priority. Many countries set up national animation teams and SCC offices for promotion of SCCs. The Spirit continues to inspire increasing numbers of priests and religious to dedicate themselves to the promotion of a New Way of Being Church. They testify that their involvement in SCCs has helped them to re-discover their vocation as facilitators, enablers and unifiers of communities. Several bishops too are on the teams of animators. This is a welcome sign.

Renewed Church as Communion of Communities

SCCs have indeed taken the Church back to its origin of being a people's Church in their own home environment. It has helped in unfolding the mystery of God's Word hidden for ages (Col. 1:25-27), and to live the good news of the Gospel in a spirit of love and fraternal/sisterly service (EA. No. 25). Truly the Gospel is ever new and fresh, allowing people to befriend neighbours without prejudices, build new bridges in their broken relationships and discover new hopes in the midst of disillusionment of life. The emergence of SCCs has directly facilitated a new awakening in thousands of laity who are inspired and motivated to serve communities. Seeing the renewal SCCs brought to the Church the Asian Synod Fathers affirmed "SCCs as an effective way to promote communion and participation in parishes and dioceses" (EA. No. 25). SCCs make the Asian face of Jesus visible and through their loving services become the seed for a new society based on love (RM. No. 51).

Challenged To Move Forward

Even as we rejoice and celebrate the blooming of thousands of SCCs all over Asia, they raise new challenges and problems affecting their growth. If SCCs must grow strong as churches in the neighbourhood, Church leaders must have the skills to accompany these communities and enable them systematically to face the tensions and challenges of daily life. Passivity in members of our church and lack of Catholic understanding of the Sacred Scriptures make them easy prey to proselytizers, attuning themselves to teachers which turn them away from the truth of the Gospel (2 Tim. 4:4). It is only authentic living which can make our witnessing genuine. Only when we are "God-realized persons", our Asian brothers and sisters can be touched and drawn to Jesus (FABC Bandung Statement, No.9.2). SCCs, for want of trained animators, still see themselves as prayer groups and need to be enlightened to see themselves as "disciples who follow-Jesus-in-his-mission", (FABC Bandung Statement, No. 9.1). They must respond diligently to their missionary

responsibilities in their neighbourhood to make the Kingdom plan of God come true in their daily lives as they continue to pray in the great prayer “Our Father”. Let us take to heart the encouraging exhortation of our beloved Holy Father Pope John Paul II of fond memory to the Asian Church, “*With the Synod, I encourage the Church in Asia, where possible, to consider these basic communities as a positive feature of the Church's evangelizing activity*” (EA. No. 25). With humility and deep trust, we turn to God for new light and strength to address these difficulties.

Recommended Actions

The onward journey of guiding the growth of the New Way of Being Church in our parishes demands systematic and well-planned pastoral strategies, with the courage and commitment to follow them up faithfully.

- a) We request the Bishops Conferences and individual bishops to reiterate formation, sustenance and promotion of SCCs as pastoral priorities and follow it up with appropriate action plans.
- b) In the next 20 years we need well trained animators at every level who can guide the existing communities into active evangelizing communities.
- c) Church authorities be seen as solidly behind this new pastoral vision and facilitate structural changes which will facilitate the process of SCCs building in parishes.
- d) We need many clergy and religious who are full-time enablers and motivators of communities.
- e) Dioceses need to ensure that communities which are formed are sustained and nurtured.
- f) It is not enough to appoint someone as SCCs coordinator, but that person should be appropriately trained and enabled to function with sufficient resources.
- g) Take special care to introduce seminarians and candidates of religious communities systematically into SCCs building and animation.

Filled with Renewed Hope

We are experiencing now the new hope SCCs are bringing into the Church as prophesied by Pope Paul VI (EN No. 58) and servant of God, Pope John Paul II (RM No. 51). Let us accept these renewing experiences in our parishes given by the Spirit, as a beacon for new light and energy to keep animating communities. We recall and repeat with the Bishops who gathered at Bandung in 1990, “With a prayer on our lips and a hope in our hearts, we entrust ourselves to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is our Guide for the Way. She will help the Church in Asia to keep on the right path even if this proves to be the Way of the Cross” (FABC Bandung Statement, No.10).