A: GOSPEL SHARING

A\8

THE PROBLEM SOLVING SCHEME

TOPICS OF AsIPA TEXTS:

A : GOSPEL SHARING

B : SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

C : A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH

D : TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS

A\8

THE PROBLEM SOLVING SCHEME

INTRODUCTION

In this session we would like to introduce and practice a 'Problem Solving Scheme'. This scheme can be useful for any group, be it a Small Christian Community, Pastoral Council or an Executive Committee. It will help them to avoid 'planning failure' in the process of making a concrete plan for action and implementing the plan.

A. WHY "ACTION PLANS" OFTEN FAIL

Read in the whole group
The Small Christian Community in a city parish had the situation of many families with one or more members suffering from AIDs. At one of their meetings they decided that they should do something t help these families. At their regular weekly meeting they started discussing how they could help. They talked about how AIDs is a worldwide problem and about all the millions of people who are suffering from AIDs. Then

Mr. Bigmouth suggested that they should write to the local government and request for cheaper medicine for the AIDs patients. Everyone agreed and they all asked him to write the letter. They talked a lot about the problem and then prayed and left. Three meetings later they were still talking about the problem.

Discuss in small groups of 2/3.
Report after 4 minutes.
After discussing the two questions below, read the summary.

Questions for discussion:
1. **What is the response of these people to the problem of AIDs?**
2. **What may be the reasons why 'the action plan' of this SCC or other groups in the parish often fail?**

Summary:
- The problem tackled may have been too big.

- Nothing can happen if a group wants to "change the whole world" immediately.

- There were vague and clever discussions about the 'huge problem' as such. Little effort was put into breaking down the problem into more specific parts to be tackled.

- The first and only solution, expressed by an articulate person, was discussed at length without listening to other suggestions as well. All may have agreed with this solution but nobody felt 'involved' and it remained the solution suggested by this one person.

- Details of the action-plan were left in the air, eg. We did not ask who is doing what, how and when! What difficulties can we foresee?

- The motivation was missing. The question, perhaps, was hardly asked, 'What does Christ expect from us?' 'What plan of action may be nearer to the mind of Christ?'

- The action was not supported by the group and was abandoned soon after difficulties were encountered. Once the action is not successful the group gives up the project.

B. THE PROBLEM SOLVING SCHEME

Our "Problem Solving Scheme" tries to help a group avoid obvious traps in the process of planning.

- The problem we are using as an example is: *'There are many people suffering from AIDs in our country.'*

- Read all the steps of the scheme in the whole group without any comment at this stage:

THE PROBLEM SOLVING SCHEME

1	**Understand the problem or situation better** Who knows more about our problem? Why do we have such a problem? Who gains and who loses if the situation remains as it is? What difficulties can we foresee? **From a problem to a concrete objective for action** *After some discussion formulate a manageable objective* Write it on newsprint. It should be something that the group can do immediately. Include a time frame.
2	**Suggest many solutions.** Brainstorming – everyone can suggest many solutions. No discussion yet!
3	**Discuss a few solutions.** Find advantages and disadvantages of a few solutions. Ask: which solution is nearest to the mind of Christ?
4	**Decide on ONE solution.** The whole group decides unanimously on *one* solution.
5	**Appoint!** Plan how to implement the solution. WHO does WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? (Tomorrow? Next week?...)
6	**Check again later!** Fix a date when to report back. Change the method if necessary. Adapt - do not give up.

C. WE PRACTISE THE PROBLEM SOLVING SCHEME

We will now take the problem solving scheme one step at a time and practice each step.
Our 'Problem' is for example: *'There are many people suffering from AIDs in our country.'*

1. Practicing Step One

1	**Understand the problem or situation better** Who knows more about our problem? Why do we have such a problem? Who gains and who loses if the situation remains as it is? What difficulties can we foresee? **From a problem to a concrete objective for action** *After some discussion formulate a manageable objective.* Write it on newsprint. It should be something that the group can do immediately. Include a time frame.

Before we can find an appropriate solution for our problem we need to understand our situation and problem well. It may be necessary to postpone looking for solutions or objectives until we have studied the situation and reported to the group. The questions in step one may be a help for the study.

In step one we must break the problem down and look at one small part of it. 'We have to formulate a small concrete objective for action which we can really manage!'
An example of going from a problem to a concrete objective for action is:

Problem: There are many people suffering from AIDs in our country. They are neglected and after some discussion we have discovered that there are 2 people suffering from AIDs in our own area.

Concrete Objective: To begin showing more compassion towards the two persons suffering from AIDs in our neighbourhood within the next two months.

Exercise:
Practice formulating a 'concrete objective'
Form small groups of 2/3.
Each small group is given ONE 'huge' problem from the table below.
*Formulate a small concrete objective' in the boxes provided. (Make sure it is really manageable and has a time frame.)
*Report after 7 minutes.

Problem	Objective
eg. There are many people suffering from AIDs in our country.	*To begin showing more compassion towards the two persons suffering from AIDs in our neighbourhood within the next two months.*
Young people out of work	To ...
The migrant labourers in our parish are neglected.	To ...
Many people are leaving the Church and joining the sects	To ...

Supplement:
- To find employment for three youth from our parish/ village within the next twelve months.
- To provide some recreational facilities for the migrant workers in our parish within one year.
- To conduct a survey to find out why people are leaving our parish and joining the sects.

2. Practicing Step Two

2	**Suggest many solutions.** Brainstorming - every member may suggest solutions. No discussion yet!

Example:

Our SCC has formulated their 'concrete objective': *To begin showing more compassion towards the two persons suffering from AIDs in our neighbourhood within the next two months.*

The facilitator of the group invites every member to make suggestions. There are many ideas. The suggestions are written on a board. No suggestions are discussed at this point:
- Write about the AIDs patients in the parish bulletin and ask for prayers for them.
- Invite some suffering from AIDs to share with us in our SCC on their life.
- Write a Christmas card to the two AIDs patients and bring them a small present.
- Put them in a hospice in the city.
- Accompany them to the hospital for treatment.

Exercise:
Suggest Many Solutions
- *As a whole group brainstorm and add suggestions and solutions on how to show compassion to the AIDs sufferers in our neighbourhood as given above. Invite suggestions from everyone.*
- *List these on newsprint or a whiteboard.*
- *Remember not to discuss them at this point.*

3. Practicing Step Three

3	**Discuss a few solutions** Find advantages and disadvantages of a few suggestions. Ask: which solution is nearest to the mind of Christ?

Example:
Some in our SCC favoured the suggestion to write something in the parish bulletin and ask for prayers for the AIDs patients. It is easy, they said, and prayer is always effective. Others favoured writing a Christmas card and bringing a small gift to all AIDs patients.

The group asked itself; 'Which solution is nearer to the mind of Christ?' It was felt that Christ does not only want prayers or cards but personal involvement as well.

The group short-listed a few manageable solutions.

Exercise:
Discuss a few solutions
Discuss a few of the suggestions from your list of solutions. Ask which solutions are nearer the mind of Christ. Follow the same process as in the example. Narrow down to two or three solutions.

4. Practicing Step Four

4	Decide on ONE solution.
	The whole group decides unanimously on *one* solution.

Example:
The group decided on writing a Christmas card to all AIDs patients and bringing them a small gift. (A small activity like this can be good to begin with.) Some of the group were not altogether happy with this choice of solution but they agreed to work with this solution. They felt that other solutions could be taken up later.

Exercise:
Choose one solution for action
As a whole group, decide on one solution from your list of two or three solutions which can be done by the group immediately.

5. Practicing Step Five

5	**Appoint!** Plan how to implement the solution. WHO does WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? (Tomorrow? Next week?...)

Example:

Taking up the solution chosen the group will decide on the following: how will we collect the money; who will buy the cards; who will write the messge; what type of presents should be bought; who will buy them; who will pack them; how shall we divide ourselves up for the visit; when shall we visit?

It was decided that small groups of two from the SCC will visit the AIDs patients before Christmas. They should let them know that they are not forgotten.

Exercise:
Make a plan
As a whole group agree on who will do what, when and how with regard to the solution you have selected in step four.

6. Practicing Step Six

6	**Check again later!**
	Fix a date when to report back. Change the method - if necessary. Adapt-do not give up.

Example:
Two months later, reporting on this action plan the group stated: How much money they had collected; The selection of gifts; How the cards and gifts were presented.
(In case something has gone wrong, they will try other solutions and will not give up.)

Exercise:
Implement the scheme
In the coming weeks practice this Problem Solving Scheme in your Parish Pastoral Council, organization or SCC and use it in the context of Gospel Sharing so that you can remain close to the mind of Christ.

CONCLUSION
Some points for groups using the Problem Solving Scheme

- **Finding root causes**
  You will find help to study root causes of a problem in the Lumko series No. 20 'Pastoral Use of the Bible' from which this text is adapted.

- The problem solving scheme can be used with the Seven Stop Gospel Sharing Method in step Six or the Bible-Mirror Method (Group Response) in step 5 'We plan the Kingdom way'. (See AsIPA text A\7).

- We hope this exercise has helped you realize that solving a problem is a long-term and step-by-step process of planning, implementation and evaluation. If we plan and act as a community close to Christ our actions will be much more effective.

METHOD OF ASIPA TEXTS

ASIPA TEXTS are compiled for Christian men and women at grass root level of the parish. They can be conducted most fruitfully in Small Christian Communities, Neighbourhood Communities, Parish Pastoral Councils or any other small groups in the parish.

ASIPA TEXTS can also be used with larger groups, e.g. in the parish hall - provided the "participatory method" is maintained in smaller working groups.

Features of the "ASIPA approach"

1. ASIPA TEXTS adopt a **"participatory approach"** in which all participants of a group search and discover for themselves as far as they are able to.

2. The texts are compiled in such a way that the facilitator can use them with a **minimum of preparation.**

3. The facilitator is requested to **follow the text** as closely as possible and allow the participants to contribute when indicated in the text.

4. The facilitator is not content with one answer to a question but he/she encourages as many participants as possible to search for an answer. **"Buzz groups"** of 2/3 are helpful to achieve maximum participation.

5. The **SUPPLEMENT** can help add to the findings of the participants and summarize them.

6. The **SUMMARY** is meant to be used as 'input'.

ASIPA:

As-ian -**I**-ntegral -**P**-astoral -**A**-pproach

The Asian Bishops declared in the Final Statement of their Fifth Plenary Session in Bandung: The Church of 1990s has to be a "Participatory Church", a "Communion of Communities", a Church that "witnesses to the Risen Lord" *(FABC5,#8).*

The question was, how to promote this "new way of being Church".Therefore, late in 1993, jointly sponsored by the FABC Offices of Human Development and of Laity, a consultation meeting was held in Malaysia. It was during this consultation that the pastoral process for promoting a "Participatory Church" in Asia was termed ASIPA: Asian Integral Pastoral Approach.

ASIPA TEXTS (training programmes) follow this directive:

ASIAN

They want to implement the vision of the Asian Bishops and help Asian Christians face Asian life in the light of the gospel.

INTEGRAL

They aim at achieving a balance between the "spiritual" and the "social", between the individual and the community, between hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity.

PASTORAL

They train the laity in their pastoral mission in Church and world.

APPROACH

The process of ASIPA TEXTS can be described as a pastoral approach which is "Christ- and Community centred". It involves the participants of workshops to search for themselves and allows them to experience a "New Way of Being Church."