

B: Small Christian Communities

B\1

SCCs ARE “A HOME FOR EVERYONE”

TOPICS OF ASIPA TEXTS:

A : GOSPEL SHARING (7 steps)

B : SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

C : A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH

D : TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS

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ASIPA B: SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES:
Programmes for Training the Christian Community

B\1

**SCCs ARE
“A HOME FOR EVERYONE”**

Prepare beforehand:

- Strips of paper for writing/marker pens.
- Quotations of scripture texts for group work in # C,1.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world we hear of “Small Christian Communities”. They are called by other names too, e.g. “Basic Ecclesial Communities”. The Asian bishops call them “A new way of being Church” and Pope John Paul II calls them “Ecclesial Basic Communities” and refers to them as a “home and family for everyone” ¹.

In our session today we ask ourselves, “What are Small Christian Communities” (SCCs)?

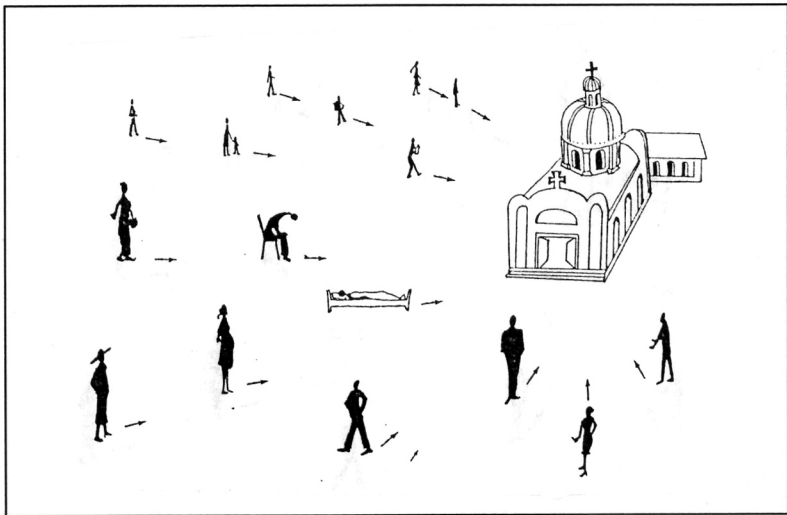
A. THIS PARISH HAS A PROBLEM!

In the drawing below we see a parish somewhere in the world. Look at it for a while in silence and detect all the details.

1. Discuss in the whole group:

Question:

What is happening in the drawing? —



Questions:

- *What do the ARROWS mean? —*
- *Why do some of the people WALK AWAY from the Church? —*
- *How do the different people FEEL in this parish?—*
- *What is the PROBLEM in this parish ? —*

Supplement:

- All the people in the drawing are baptized and belong to the Church. On Sundays they go to Church.
- They are Christians individually, that means they feel alone, without any bonds with other Christians.
- They remain alone in times of sickness and distress. None of the other Christians take notice of their needs.
- Many feel disappointed and look for other communities where they find human togetherness and mutual help.

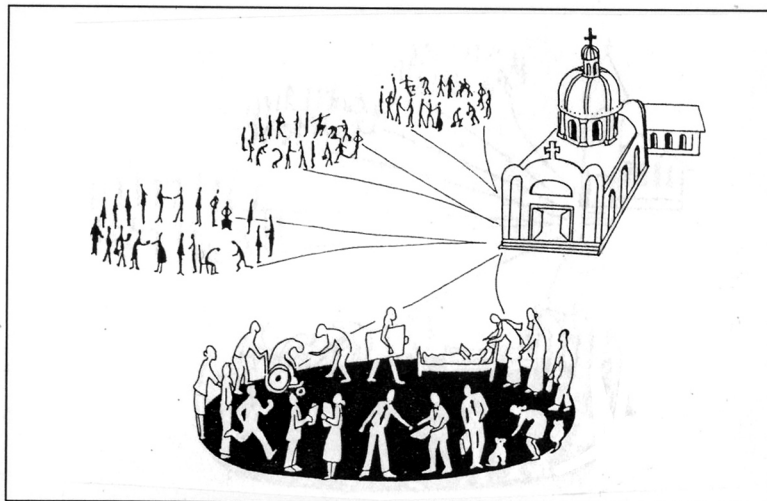
B. A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

Here is another parish which looks quite different.

1. Discuss in whole group:

Question:

What is different about this parish? —



2. A community Church or a Church of individuals?

In 1964 all the bishops of the world came together for discussions in the Vatican City of Rome. They held a Council meeting called “Vatican Council II”. In their document about the Church we read the following words:

“It has pleased God to make people holy and save them, not as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people”².

Discuss in whole group:

Questions:

- *What do the terms “individuals” and “single people” mean? —*
- *Try to re-phrase this text in your own words. —*
- *Apply this text to the two drawings above and decide which one it fits and explain why.—*

C. WHAT PICTURE OF CHURCH DO WE FIND IN THE BIBLE?

1. Group work for 15 minutes

- Form small groups of 3/4 people.
- Each group takes a different text.
- Discuss the question below.
- On a strip of paper write a word or sentence which may be relevant to one of the two drawings above.

Question:

What verse of each text is most relevant to either of our drawings? To which one? —

- (1) Acts 2,42-47
[The Early Church met in the houses for the breaking of bread]
- (2) Acts 4,32-37
[The Early Church community: united, heart and soul]
- (3) Rom 12,3-13
[The Church as a community]
- (4) 1 Cor 12,12-30
[The Church as a body]
- (5) Eph 4,1-16
[The different gifts in a community]

2. Report

- Summarize the text which have been given.
- Display the strip of paper with the short quotation.
- Explain the word or sentence you have chosen.

D. HOW DO SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES LIVE?

We have discovered that God wants us to grow together as a community of brothers and sisters. Therefore many Christians form Small Christian Communities.

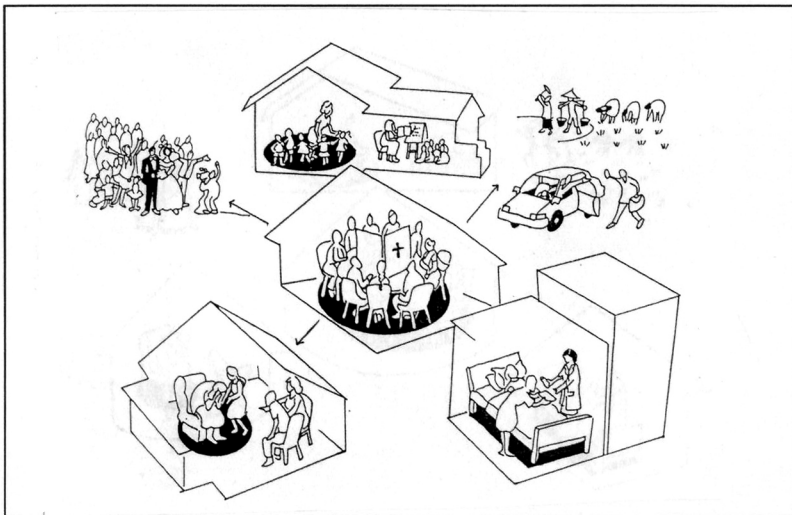
But how does it work? How do Small Christian Communities live in practice?

1. Small groups of 2/3

- Look at the drawing below.
- Discuss the questions in your small groups.
- Report after 3 minutes.

Question:

What belongs to the life of Small Christian Communities as we see it in this drawing below?—



Supplement:

- In SCCs, neighbours meet in one of their homes.
- SCCs make the gospel the basis of their gatherings.
- SCCs do what the Church is supposed to do in this neighbourhood: sharing the faith, teaching catechism, helping the poor, assisting the destitute, celebrating together, improving living conditions....

2. What Pope John Paul II says about Small Christian Communities.

- Small groups of 2/3
- Each group is assigned ONE of the texts below which Pope John Paul II has written to all Christians.
- Read the text and discuss the question.
- Report after 4 minutes.

a) Question:

How can the Church be a 'home and family' for everyone?—

“No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and a family for everyone, especially those who ‘labour and are heavy laden’”³.

b) Question:

What could 'concrete expression of Church' mean?—

“The Church finds concrete expression in... the parish family, in Ecclesial Basic Communities...”⁴

c) *Question:*

What experience of community does the Pope want us to have?—

“Within the Ecclesial Basic Communities, the individual Christian experiences community and therefore senses that he or she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task”⁵.

d) *Question:*

How can SCCs be a starting point for a new society?—

“Ecclesial Basic Communities are a solid starting point of a new society based on a ‘civilization of love’.

They become the leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected...

They show how division, tribalism and racism can be overcome.”⁶

PRAYER

We pray spontaneously that the Lord may show us the way in which he wants us to be Church in Asia today.

Footnotes:

- 1 FABCS, BANDUNG 1990, art. 8; See also: “The Christian Family in the Modern World”, (FC) art. 85
- 2 Church (LG), art. 9
- 3 FC, art. 85
- 4 FC, art. 85
- 5 Church’s Missionary Mandate (RM), art. 51
- 6 RM, art 51

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."
