

B: Small Christian Communities

B\3 WHY SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES?

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\3

WHY SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES?

INTRODUCTION

Members of a Parish Pastoral Council had an exciting discussion about Small Christian Communities. There were different opinions about them. Some argued, “Why should we promote SCCs? I do not see any reason for having them in the parish!”

Others supported them and said, “Our Sunday services are well attended, we have a good number of Church organizations and movements. What more do we want?”

This is our question today, too: “Why should we have SCCs in the parish? What are the reasons for having them at all?”

A. WHAT IS STILL MISSING IN OUR PARISH?

1. Small groups of 2/3:

- Discuss the questions below.
- Report after 3 minutes.

Questions:

What can still be improved in our parish?

- *For instance, how well do we cooperate with each other in the parish?—*
- *Do we feel we belong in our parish community?—*
- *How do we experience the presence of God in our church activities and services?—*

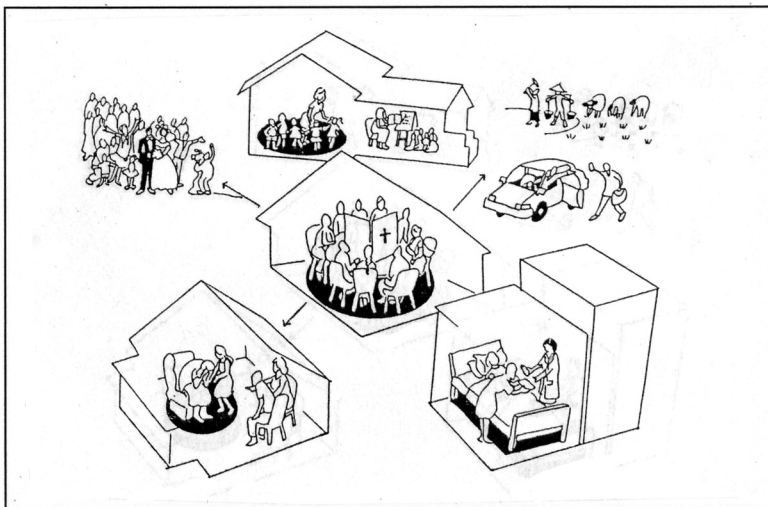
Supplement:

(All read the supplement silently. Then they share on the question, “What other points do we find in the supplement which are additional to our own findings?”)

- Some may miss the personal experience of God’s presence.
- *Some people may miss a warm, supportive human community.*
- The Church may not address their personal human needs.
- *The majority of parishioners may remain passive.*
- Some may feel they are treated like immature children.
- *Some may feel used by the priest and the community by being pushed to “help THEM in THEIR business.”*
- Some may feel we are still a foreign Church.

B. SCCs CAN OFFER WHAT MAY STILL BE MISSING IN OUR PARISHES

Look at the picture to remind you of the life of an SCC.



- Discuss in the whole group the question below.
(List the answers on the chalk board or newspaper.)

Question:

In what way can SCCs improve cooperation in the parish; make us feel we belong and give us a deeper experience of God's presence?—

Supplement:

(All read the supplement silently. Then they share on the question, "What other points do we find in the supplement which are additional to our own findings?")

- They offer human closeness and support.
- They offer a "home for everyone".

- Gospel sharing allows a personal experience of Christ.
- *Life issues are dealt with in the light of the gospel.*
- Equality in dignity among Church members can be experienced.
- *Participation of all can be put into practice.*
- Co-responsibility can be experienced: actions flow from a new conviction, “It is our common business and our common responsibility here in our neighbourhood.”
- *Leadership in a SCC can be experienced as “up-building” and “serving” not as “dominating” and “bulldozing”.*
- Parish life is rooted in the life of the local people.

C. WHY SCCs? WE CONSULT THE BIBLE AND CHURCH DOCUMENTS

1. THE BIBLE AND SCCS

- Groups of 2/3 take one of the following texts
- Discuss for 10 minutes
- Report

Question:

What reasons for SCCs do we find in this text?—

(Present one of these reasons through drama, poster, etc)

- (1) Mark 3,13-19
[Jesus founded the small community of the Twelve]
- (2) John 17,18-23
[The community in God should be reflected in his disciples]
- (3) Luke 8,1-3 and John 12,6
[The members of the small community around Jesus share with each other their material belongings.]
- (4) Cor 16,19-20/ Col 4,15-18 / Philemon 1-3
[House Churches in the Early Church. Warm personal relationships.]
- (5) Acts 2,43-47
[The Christian community in Jerusalem]
- (6) Acts 11,19-26
[The Christian community in Antioch]

2. CHURCH DOCUMENTS AND SCCs

- Groups of 2/3 take one of the texts below
- Discuss for 10 minutes
- Report

Question:

What reasons for SCCs do we find in this text? —

(a) Vatican II, on the Church's "Missionary Activity", art 15

"Therefore, missionaries, the fellow workers of God, should raise up communities of the faithful, so that... they might carry out the priestly, prophetic and royal offices entrusted to them by God. In this way the community will become a sign of God's presence in the world."

(b) John Paul II in "Mission" (RM), art. 51

"The Basic Ecclesial Communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a 'civilization of love'.

These communities decentralize and organize the parish community, to which they always remain united.... Within them, 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....

At the same time, by being imbued with Christ's love, they also show how divisions, tribalism and racism can be overcome." (Encyclical Letter on the "Church's Missionary Mandate", 51)

(c) John Paul II in "Christian Family" (FC), art 85

"For those who have no natural family the doors of the great family which is the Church - the Church which finds concrete expression in the diocese and the parish family, in ecclesial basic communities and in movements of the apostolate - must be opened even wider.

No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone especially those who 'labour and are heavy laden'".

(d) Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Bandung, 1990

“The Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities, where laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (e.g. neighbourhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and “Covenant” communities). There they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are ‘in one mind and heart’”.

(e) AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) STUDY CONFERENCE, 1979:

“The Christian communities we are trying to build are simply the most local incarnation of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. ‘Small Christian Communities’ are the means by which the Church is brought down to the daily life and concerns of people where they actually live. In them the Church takes on flesh and blood in the life situations of people.” (AFER, Vol 21, pp 265-266)

PRAYER

We ask anyone to pray spontaneously asking the Lord to guide us to live as Church in the way he is showing us.

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."
