

D: TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS

D\7

How to Maintain Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

TOPICS OF AsIPA TEXTS:

A : GOSPEL SHARING

B : SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

C : A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH

D : TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS

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AsIPA D: TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS
(Pastoral Leaders)

D\7

HOW TO MAINTAIN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (SCCs)

Introduction:

The most important principle for 'maintaining' SCCs is to help SCCs to sustain and maintain themselves. There is the danger that 'SCC Promotion Teams' in a parish over-provide assistance to SCCs by constantly offering written materials and elaborate formation for leaders only.

Therefore, we would like to reflect on two basic questions on how to maintain SCCs:

- A. How can the priest and his 'SCC Promotion Team' strengthen the self-confidence and conviction of all the members of SCCs?
- B. How can the priest and his 'SCC Promotion Team' 'accompany' the members of a SCC.

A. FORMATION FOR ALL MEMBERS OF SCCs

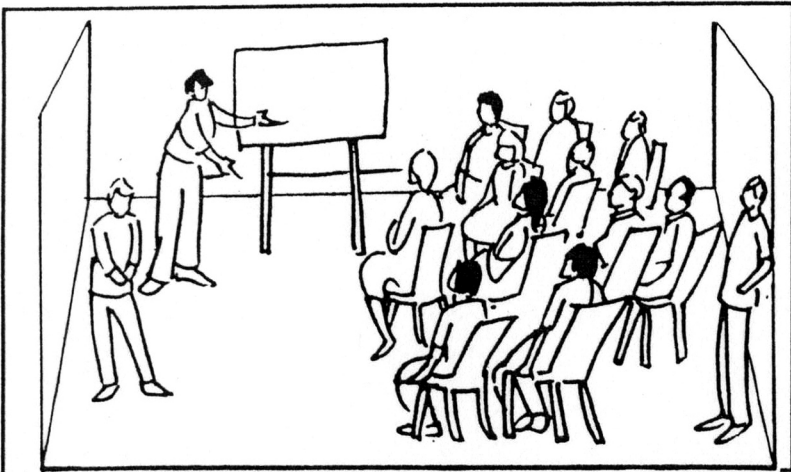
- ☞ *Read the suggestions in part A and part B in the whole group and discuss them one by one using the questions below as a guideline for your discussion:*

Question:

- *What result can we foresee if we succeed in implementing this suggestion in our parish?--*
- *What difficulties can we foresee?*
- *How could we start on a small scale?*

SUGGESTION:

- 1. Help the leaders of SCCs to share with all the members of their SCC**



- Two leaders of each SCCs are asked to attend formation evenings or retreat weekends.
- Use one AsIPA topic for the evenings or weekends, according to your local need.
- Practise with the leaders to help them use this particular AsIPA text in their SCC at home, thus sharing with all the members the deeper understanding and insights gained.

AsIPA texts are written for the formation of all members of SCCs.

AsIPA texts (Series A,B,C) are written for the formation of all members of SCCs. Facilitators of SCCs, without special theological schooling, can use the AsIPA texts in their respective groups after a minimum of training.

The texts do not only focus on some 'skills' but try to share with the lay-faithful deeper theological insights.

There are a variety of excellent formation programmes available, e.g. from Lumko Institute. The AsIPA texts, however, have the additional advantage that leaders can share their formation with all members of their SCC using the same text.

Three areas of formation are offered by AsIPA texts

AsIPA texts offer formation in the following areas which are essential for maintaining SCCs:

1. How to make Christ the Centre in SCCs.
Gospel Sharing: (AsIPA A\1-7)
2. What are SCCs? (AsIPA B\1-4)
3. What is our vision of a 'participatory Church'?
(AsIPA C\1-6)

Formation is more than teaching 'skills'

'Formation' in the parish or 'forming Christians' is more than teaching pastoral skills or giving some lectures.

'Formation' aims at deeper insights and helps committed Christians to discover the reasons behind any parish activity. Formation will not only transmit 'knowledge' but will lead to deeper commitment and perseverance in times of difficulties. AsIPA texts aim at this deeper formation of leaders and the SCCs themselves.

Make a plan for formation

Mark in your parish calendar regular times for forming and training your community leaders, be it leaders of SCCs or parish organisations. Enable them to share their new insights with their respective groups.

SUGGESTION

2. Help SCCs to accept their call to mission and service.

‘Maintaining SCCs’ greatly depends on how the parish priest and the parish leaders understand the nature and mission of SCCs. This will influence the way in which the priest and his team will inspire and accompany the SCCs in the parish.

Therefore it may be helpful to discuss first the following question:

☛ *Discuss in the whole group:*

Question:

- *Do we regard SCCs as*
 - *prayer groups?*
 - *social or action groups which meet occasionally?*
 - *‘concrete expression of Church in the neighbourhood’?*

Supplement:

SCCs are more than prayer-/ or action groups.

They are for us the “concrete expression of Church” in the neighbourhood. (‘Family’ FC, 85).

SCCs, therefore, share in the basic mission of the parish in their particular neighbourhood. They are called to mission and service.

Therefore, a parish which has opted for SCCs will not rely any longer on parish organisations and committees as the **main agents** for certain pastoral tasks. SCCs make it possible to 'decentralize' the tasks of a parish. ('Mission' RM,51)

The mission of SCCs 'decentralizes' the task of the parish, for instance:

Welcoming strangers to the parish;

Accompanying catechumens (at least partly);

Caring for the sick;

Helping the poor;

Accompanying young people who prepare for the sacraments;

Preparing the Sunday Eucharist or the community liturgy; (See AsIPA text A\7)

Tackling social issues in the neighbourhood.

SCCs are not an "ever-ready pool" for staffing parish committees

It is the neighbourhood which is the first and most important area of service for a SCC. A parish priest should NOT regard them as an "ever-ready" pool for staffing his parish committees. If he does so, the danger is that he will not maintain but destroy SCCs.

Therefore, 'maintaining SCCs' means:

- Sharing with all members of SCCs the deeper understanding of their call to mission and service.
- Making it possible for SCCs to take part in basic tasks of the Church in a neighbourhood.
- Training members of SCCs to fulfil these tasks.

SUGGESTION**3. Help SCCs to evaluate themselves**

Self-evaluation is one of the best means of helping a SCC to grow and to maintain itself.

Help them to use AsIPA text B\5.

B. HOW THE PRIEST AND HIS TEAM CAN ACCOMPANY AND ENCOURAGE SCCs.

SUGGESTION

1. Regular skills training and spiritual formation

Regular training of emerging leaders is the way in which a 'SCC Promotion Team' can accompany, encourage and inspire SCCs in a parish.

Pastoral planning should include in the parish calendar, skills training and spiritual formation of leaders during a particular period every year.

A whole series of skills training and formation programmes is available from Lumko Institute:

Visiting the sick: Lumko no. 9;

Serving the neighbourhood, Lumko, 17;

Funeral leaders: Lumko no.8;

Communion-givers: Lumko no.2;

Leading the community service: Lumko, no 7;

Accompanying catechumens: Our Journey Together;

(There is also a Singapore edition of 'Our Journey Together'.

Spiritual Formation for leaders of all groups : Lumko no.15

Address of Lumko Institute:

PO Box 5058, 1403 Delmenville, South Africa.

Fax: [27] 11-827 5774

SUGGESTION

2. An annual 'Blessing of Community Leaders' will give SCCs a place in the parish.

An annual celebration for parish leaders, including leaders from SCCs and parish committees, will keep the interest in SCCs alive and give public recognition to their contribution to the life of the parish.

The "Blessing of Community Leaders" should be celebrated on a special Sunday of the year where all leaders of the parish (of SCCs and committees) can be thanked, introduced to their responsibilities, or released from them.

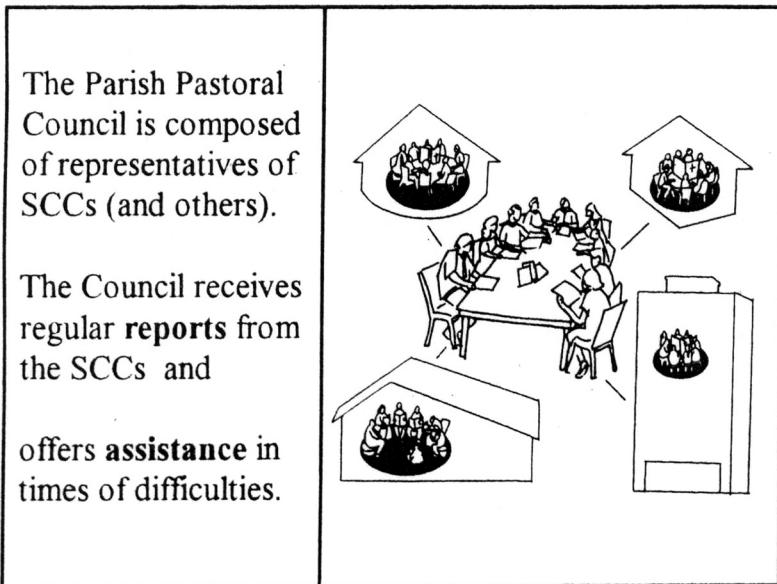


SUGGESTION

3. Linking SCCs through the Parish Pastoral Council, joint meetings and other means.

SCCs must be linked to the parish and the whole Church and experience support. Bonds of unity, therefore, should be established between the SCCs themselves and the parish community. The Parish Pastoral Council provides the 'structural' link to the parish.

PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL



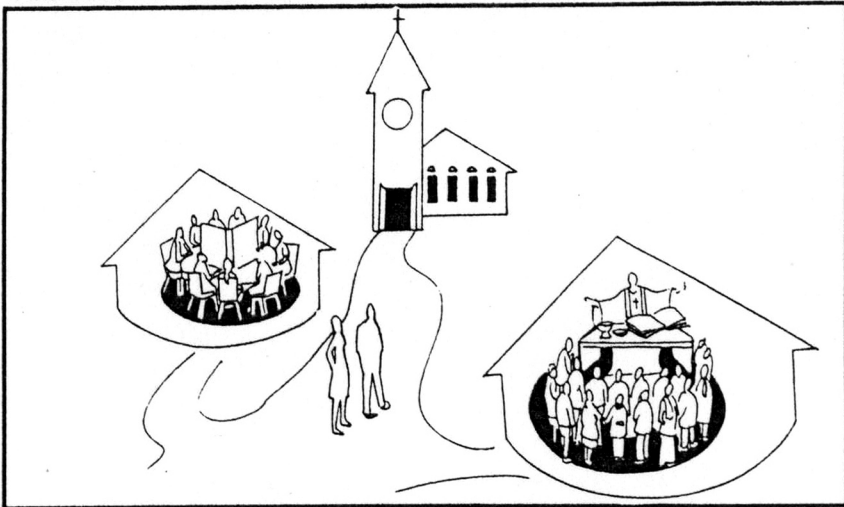
SCC FESTIVALS AND PICNICS

① SCCs exchange experiences and receive encouragement in ‘**SCC Festivals**’ on a regional or diocesan level.

② SCCs organise a “**SCC Picnic**” in the parish or in the region.



VISITING TEAMS AND HOUSE MASSES



Small groups of 2/3, composed of members of different SCCs visit all existing SCCs in a certain period of time. They bring

the greetings of their own SCC and offer some deepening: e.g. vision of Church, gospel sharing, diocesan Advent or Lenten programmes, Lumko no.19, AsIPA C1-6 etc.

The priest occasionally celebrates the Eucharist with an SCC. E.g. some priests reserve one day in the week for such SCC house masses with different SCCs.

PARISH AND DIOCESAN NEWSLETTERS

SCCs are linked and encouraged through reports on the lives of SCCs in parish or diocesan newsletters.

DIOCESAN SCC PROMOTION OFFICE

A Diocesan Office for promoting SCCs provides a 'network' for SCCs in the diocese. This is particularly valuable when a parish priest changes.

SCC NOTES

Very helpful are regular 'SCC NOTES', supplied by the diocesan Pastoral Institute or the Diocesan Office for Promoting SCCs. These can be used by the SCCs to reflect on topics that are crucial in the life of the church or to help them discuss issues that have arisen in the diocese.

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."
