

**SALIENT FEATURES OF THE FABC V VISION OF
THE NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH ON THE PROMOTION OF SCCs**

Rev. Sr. Martina L. Thabah, Co-opted Member, NST for SCCs

This paper has three sections. First we shall see a short summary of the final statement of Bandung Conference of FABC #5, followed by highlighting the salient features relevant to SCC and finally a comparison between Vatican II vision and salient features of the statement on the New Way of being Church.

SECTION ONE

**The Summary of Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation of Asian
Bishops' Conference.**

I. Introduction

Gathered together at Bandung, Indonesia, for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, from the 17th to 27th July 1990, the bishops, priests, Religious and laity, experienced a communion which resembled the Asian Church in miniature. They were united in prayer, asking for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all the Church, in an atmosphere of mutual sharing and dialogue. They considered the theme: "The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond", reflected on the contemporary time in Asia, and tried to see the way on which the people of God must walk as the Church in this vast continent.¹ Anyone who has been associated with the promotion and nurturing of SCCs will surely agree that like the Second Vatican Council this conference has given a new image and understanding to the Church of Asia in particular. This without doubt is being hailed as the Magna Carta for SCCs in our times.

The time, the way and the place are deeply related to the mission of Christ which we as his Church must continue.² Hence they sought to understand and appreciate the critical importance of the present time and to hear what God is calling the Church to do as the third millennium dawns. Together they searched for a way along which the Asian Church must walk.

¹ The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops' Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (1.1) page 3.

² cf. FABC 5, Bandung, final document, PAC publication 1990.

³They then tried to see the new way of being and becoming Church in Asia and also the spirituality which must adhere to.⁴

In their opening remark the conference observed that there are many situations and structures, groups and persons in Asia where justice and peace, love and compassion, equality and brotherhood, and religious freedom do not always find a sufficient place for existence and the challenge of the Church is to proclaim the Good News in these Asian realities.

II. CHALLENGES AND HOPES

A. The Challenge of Ferment and Change in Asia

The conference states a striking change in many of Asian societies in the breakdown of the nation-state resulting in tragic, widespread ethnic and communal conflict and violence. There is also a growth of “statism”, religious fundamentalism, modernization often leading to social and cultural dislocation and loss of traditional values and attitudes. This has led to the creation of a class of consumeristic and competitive mentality, insensitive and indifferent to the overwhelming majority of poor and marginalized people.⁵

B. The Challenge of Continuing Injustice

There is an unchanging reality of injustice, violations of human rights, exploitation of every type, and discrimination against women migration leading to destruction of families. The unemployment is leading to consequent frustration in youth. The participants also found that all of these instances of injustice are interconnected.

C. Hope at the Crossroads

In the face of the massive problems engendered by social change and in the face of massive injustice, they could discern, however, many signs of hope. There is a new consciousness on the part of the marginalized and likeminded people to fight together against injustice. They could find the promise of movements for democracy, participation and human rights, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, of the women’s movement, of ecological

³ Ibid (1.4).

⁴ Ibid (1.6).

⁵ The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops’ Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (2.1.4) page 5.

movements, of the search of spirituality and spiritual values. There is a genuine desire for spirituality, for the contemplation and a possible convergence of the sacramental tradition, of the contemplative tradition in other faiths, of concern for the environment, of respect for the feminine, and readiness of the rich to share with the poor and marginalized. These are great signs of hope. A further sign of hope is the desire for communion in community. It is seen in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities and other neighbourhood groups.

These signs of hope that they had discerned offer the potential for humanized and humanizing change. The challenge for the Church is to work for justice and peace along with everyone to make the Kingdom of God visibly present in Asia.

III. THE EVANGELIZING MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY ASIA

The vastness of the Asian continent, the number, complexity and tenacity of its problem could cause in Christians a paralyzing discouragement. But seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties, together with the signs of hope that accompany them, are challenges to mission. God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission. The document further states various reasons for evangelization. It clarifies the mode of Mission in Asia by explicitly stating that “the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the centre and primary element of evangelization”.⁶ Witnesses of Christians and of Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christ-like deeds, are ways of evangelization in the midst of neighbours of other faiths. Proclamation through dialogue and deeds-this is the first call to the Churches in Asia and our minority status should not deter us from patiently working in collaboration with others.

The future stress has to be on the role of the lay faithful who should take upon themselves this specific responsibility to bring renewal to the Asian society according to the values and cultures, and the whole fabric of life in society. This calls for a thorough education of Catholic in the social doctrine of the Church, as well as the formation of their hearts towards just and compassionate living in present-day Asian society. Christians formed in this manner will be evangelizers of their own-the young evangelizing the young, workers evangelizing workers, professionals evangelizing professionals, government officials evangelizing government

⁶ cf. FABC 5, Bandung, final document, PAC publication 1990 (cf. 3.2.1).

officials, families evangelizing families and will be leaven for the transformation of Asian society.

After having emphasized the deeds, it goes to say that mission is more than deeds. It involves the very being of the Church. Therefore, the members of the Assembly asked themselves: “what should the Church be in and to this changing Asian world? This Church, witnessing by its very being and deeds to the values of the Kingdom of God, will be credible when it proclaims with its lips that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and give answer to all its longings.

IV. LIVING IN THE SPIRIT: PASTORAL RESPONSE

Our reflection on the Asian situation in the light of our mission of evangelization has led us to realize the enduring validity of a process of: (a) dialoguing with the realities of Asia from within; (b) discerning the movement of God’s Spirit in Asia; and (c) translating in to deeds what the Spirit bids us to accomplish. This process has to be the general approach for our total response as Church in Asia.⁷

A. Pervading Pastoral Imperatives: At the Level of Discernment

From the sharing of experiences and reflections they found six pervading pastoral imperatives which had constantly emerged. They are: centrality of Christ in our proclamation, the relationship between the mission and pastoral thrust, empowering people for mission, encouraging grassroots level initiative, credible witness of the Church and re-envisioning and re-planning formation process.

B. Specific Pastoral Directions: At the Level of Doing

Having discerned the way the Holy Spirit is leading the Church to respond to the challenges emerging in Asia, for specific pastoral initiatives and processes the bishops urged:

1. Proclaiming the Faith through various means like promoting lay participation, faith formation programmes, building Word-Eucharist centred communities etc.
2. Serve Asian Societies which are mediated by the Social Doctrine of the Church.

⁷The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops’ Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (7.1) page 17.

3. Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation through our institutions and programmes.
4. Develop a formation process toward the formation of “persons of dialogue,” necessary for a pluralistic Asian society.
5. Promote deepening of faith through various means like promotion and development of centres of prayer, possibilities of pilgrimages, spirituality that would be relevant to children and youth etc.

SECTION TWO

The Salient Features of the New Vision given at the FABC Bandung Conference Relevant To SCCs

A. A New Way of being Church in the 1990s: Response at the Level of Being (Section C)

The New way of being Church has some major dimensions and they are discussed here:

1. Brotherhood and Sisterhood of all the children of God

The Church in Asia will have to be communion of Communities where clergy, laity and religious consider each other as sisters and brothers.

2. The Centrality of the Word.

They are gathered and united around the Word of God as they share, pray, discuss and discern God’s will for them in their neighborhood.⁸

3. A Participatory Church.

It is a participatory Church where the gifts and charisms given by the Holy Spirit to all – laity, clergy and religious – are recognized and activated to build the Body of Christ, the Church in the neighborhood, to fulfill her mission in that place and time.⁹

4. A Witnessing and Evangelizing Community

They witness together to the Risen Lord lovingly and reach out to all the needy. They discuss and cooperate with all the people around in order to make the Kingdom of God present.¹⁰

⁸ The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops’ Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (8.1.1.) page 22.

⁹ Ibid (8.1.2).

¹⁰ Ibid (8.1.3).

5. *A Prophetic Sign of God's Kingdom in the Neighbourhood*

They become a prophetic sign daring to point beyond the world to the Kingdom of God through their efforts to transform the society in which they live.¹¹

6. *Non-dominating Leadership*

In this, leadership at all levels is non-dominating and put on the servant like and self-emptying image of Christ. Leader never seeks to be served but gives his/her life to build the people.

B. A Spirituality for our Times- Response At the Focal Point of the Spirit (Section D)

Spirituality of the New Way has certain important aspects which are summarized as follows:

1. This is a community that does not depend on human wisdom for its life, but trusts completely in the Lord to lead the community at all levels, times and places to that “authentic spirituality” which is “nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia”.¹²
2. It emphasizes witnessing as more important than teaching and living the Gospel. It embraces the Spirit of deep contemplation, renunciation, humility and simplicity which are also Asian religious values.
3. It is a spirituality which integrates every aspect of Christian life – liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with the poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment, etc.
4. It is a spirituality which returns to the Sacred Scriptures and Church Traditions for inspiration and to a dynamic interaction with the aspirations of our people.
5. The community embraces the spirit of Yahweh’s “anawim” the powerless – deep union with God, renunciation, simplicity, compassion and solidarity with all, especially the powerless and marginalized. They work for justice through active but non-violent ways.
6. The community moves away from focusing on exterior organization, power and mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble surrender to God and loving service.

¹¹ Ibid (8.1.4).

¹² Ibid (9.1) page 23.

7. A community working for inter-religious and human harmony. It is firmly convinced that communities in Asia are called to engage in a dialogue of life with the people of other faiths and build a harmonious society.

C. Essential Aspects of the Bandung Statement relevant to SCCs

Following are some of the important aspects of the Bandung statement which are relevant to SCCs.

1. Communion of Small Communities

We share the Asian Bishops' vision of the Church as a Communion of many Small Communities.¹³ The Church is a Communion, i.e., all people in union with Christ¹⁴ and all people are called to belong to this Union in Christ.¹⁵ God willed that all people be made holy and saved not as isolated individuals without any mutual bond, but by forming them into a single people.¹⁶ We dream of small communities since, unlike large anonymous groupings. We can foster through them genuine and deep human bonding and plan ways to involve everyone in witnessing to the love of Jesus.

This spirit of mutual fellowship implies the breaking down of man-made barriers based on caste, culture, creed, status, gender and human prejudices so that all may be one as Jesus and the Father are one in love (*cf. Jn17:20-23*). Indeed, it is a continuation of the dream of Jesus to arrive at the fundamental equality and fraternity of all the children of God in the one, unique Fatherhood of God (*cf. Mt-23:8*).¹⁷ The Christians, though as clergy, laity and religious have varying roles, live this fraternity and witness to it in their lives and in their neighbourhood.

The CBCI says: in order to make Jesus' vision a reality, we recommend very strongly that the basic structure of the Church in India is to be a communion of communities and for this Small/ Basic Christian Communities must be formed in every Parish...Given the great potential which they have to build up authentic local churches with a sense of mission, let the Episcopal bodies in India make it as a priority in their pastoral animation of the Church to build up these

¹³ The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops' Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (8.1.1.) page 22.

¹⁴ *Vatican II Lumen Gentium 3.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.no. 13.*

¹⁶ *Ibid. no. 9.*

¹⁷ *Ibid. no. 32.*

Small Christian Communities. Thus our parishes will function as bodies in which all the living cells will be fully alive and operative.¹⁸

Through the guidance and commitment of the archdiocesan and regional team the SCCs / BECs has an important role to implement the vision of new way of being Church and empower the laity to take part in the mission of the church through SCCs in the archdiocese. The 9 years of efforts has convinced many diocesan priests that SCCs are the based for parish life and the hope of the Church that is Communion and Participation.¹⁹

2. Evangelized by the Word of God

The teaching of Jesus is the rock on which communities build their life and actions (cf. Mt.7:24-27). Jesus himself is the truth, life and the way (cf. Jn 14:6). Hence the communities are trained to do Gospel Sharing to pray, reflect, share and in this way root their lives in the Words of Jesus and the teachings of the Church. Gospel Sharing helps them to listen to the voice of the Spirit and to discern together the will of God for them in the concrete life situations. In this way the “Word becomes flesh” (cf. Jn 1:14) and they are evangelized and become an agent of evangelization. Gathering of the community made up of clergy, laity and religious, around the Word is also symbolic of their common dignity, fundamental equality and a sign of collective fidelity and surrender to the Word of God.

To be truly the sacrament of salvation, the Church as God’s people has to be sustained in its mission through the Word and its living tradition and the Eucharist and the Sacraments. When these divine treasure of the Church- the Word and the Eucharist become the sustaining force of BECs, then our shared mission will find full realization around the table of the Divine Master Himself.²⁰

3. Renewing the Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood is the focus of life and activity. The early Church had followed the model of little house Churches (Rom.16). The Universal Church is concretely present and active

¹⁸ The Catholic Bishop’s Conference of India, the Church in India- *Yesu Khrist* (YKJ 2000).

¹⁹ AsIPA BEC Desk FABC July 2015, **SCC** in the Archdiocese of *Thare – Nongseng* Thailand.

²⁰ The Catholic Bishop’s Conference, Philippines National Assembly September 2005 (6.4).

in the neighbourhood. A group of Christians are present 24 hours a day and 7 days a week in a certain neighbourhood and interact with people of different creeds and cultures there in a stable way. It is there that they need to be Church in a concrete way and become responsible for their Christian mission. Only they can fulfill that mission there on behalf of the Universal Church. The Sunday Liturgy will hopefully enable them to grow stronger in faith and witness to Jesus in the neighbourhood. When they fail in that, the Universal Church fails there. Hence it is important that we pay great attention to the Church in the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood is a real arena of life filled with activities, tensions and interactions. It is where life is made or broken. It is where people make, break or restore relationships. It is where we face poverty and affluence, injustice and human rights issues. It is where people compete with each other for sheer profit or help one another to face up to life. It is the place where the fury and destructiveness of modern warfare is experienced and people need to work together for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. It is where the Word must be planted like a leaven, like a mustard seed and nurtured. The Small Christian Communities in the neighbourhood thus become source of new life in Jesus and a prophetic sign of the Kingdom,²¹ if only they are enthused by the Word and empowered to respond to these challenges. The neighbourhood stands between the individual and the larger society as an agent of transformation, for it is not easy for the individual to act alone against social evils. A community empowered by the Word of God can effect conversion in the individual and support him/her in acting in a prophetic way for the transformation of the society.

Small Christian Communities as proposed for Eastern Africa are “simply the most local incarnation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” The AMECEA bishops wish to say that those who want to become members of the Church must first of all become members of small Christian communities through baptism in the neighbourhood. Again, they must maintain ecclesial communion with these communities after baptism.²²

4. Holistic Transformation

The Kingdom Plan of God includes the individual, the neighbourhood, the society at large and all of creation. Use of the created goods mindless of the plan of the creator for survival

²¹ The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops' Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (8.1.1.) page 22.

²² Association of Member Episcopal Conference of East Africa (AMECEA) Plenary 1976.

of all, is pushing us and the future generation to a death trap. The whole creation awaits the liberating grace of Jesus to embrace lovingly the Plan God and its fulfillment (cf. *Romans 8: 19-23*). Hence true and complete transformation is achieved only when whole of creation is freed from the powers of evil to follow the path set by God. The ocean of humanity is the medium for the total transformation of creation. This is only possible if they understand the Kingdom Plan of God for themselves and for the whole creation. The Christians have the awesome responsibility to conscientize the people about that plan of God. The SCCs once again become in a forceful way the focal point of prophetic witness and the effective agent of transformation.

The BECs become leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. Within them, the individual Christian experiences community and therefore senses that he/she is playing an active role and is encouraged to share in the common task. Thus, these communities become a source of new ministries.²³

5. Non Dominating Leadership.

In the future Church, as the Asian Bishops said, the experts and **leaders are not dominating leaders**. They are not the focal point; Jesus and the community are. It is the community which will work together and evangelize the neighbourhood to make the Kingdom of God present there. The leaders and pastoral experts are servants and animators of the community.

The CBCI states that, “the ideal parish or diocese is a community of believers where all sections of the people of God, gathered in small groups, are involved in the planning, decision-making and execution of the various activities of the Church. The leadership in such a church must be a non-dominating one, following the example of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. Each diocese and region has planned such a participatory Church.”²⁴

6. Holistic Spirituality

Christian vocation is a call to perfection. Everybody is called to holiness though the ways are different. The bishops urge us to live an authentic spirituality which is “nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission”, an authentic discipleship in our own local

²³ National Seminar NBCLC 1996.

²⁴ Catholic Bishop Conference of India Pune 1992.

context. It emphasizes witnessing as more important than teaching, integrates every aspect of Christian life, a spirituality which returns to the Sacred Scriptures and Church Traditions and embraces the spirit of Yahweh's "anawim". It moves away from focusing on exterior organization, a community working for inter-religious and human harmony, engaging in a dialogue of life with the people of another faith to build a harmonious society. Small Christian community helps people grow together in their spiritual life praying together regularly, following the liturgical calendar of the Universal Church. In small Christian communities the members are deeply influenced in their spiritual life by others in the community through the sharing of experiences lived in daily life. The small communities present the environment for communitarian spirituality.

The Church has to foster the "Spirituality of Communion" among the priests and the laity, among various sectors of the laity, among the clergy and religious themselves and with the bishop. As family where equal in dignity and diversity of functions are promoted and respected, where co-responsibility for the one mission of the Church is recognised, the BECs can be guided to develop new paradigm and contexts of relating to each other and to the bigger, more diverse community of believers. BECs have to be really a community where diverse gifts and functions fully participate in the building up the family of God.²⁵

CONCLUSION:

The Asian Bishops began by emphasizing deeds as a response of the Church to the challenges of Asia and they ended by pointing out that responding with the very being and heart of the Church has primacy over doing. This must be so, for effective doing can only result from the very depths of the Church's being and authentic living. *The Church has to become what it really is for the doing to begin, for the Church in Asia "to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God" (cf. Micah 6:8) (no.10).*²⁶

²⁵ Catholic Bishop's Conference Philippines BEC National Assembly September 2005

²⁶ The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops' Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (10.0) page 24.

SECTION THREE

A Comparison between the Vision of Second Vatican Council and Salient Features of the Bandung Statement.

SCCs are the concrete expression to live the new way of being Church propounded by the Bandung conference. The ecclesiology of Vatican II, in fact, promoted the emergence of SCCs. The church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, in so far as they are united to their pastors.²⁷ The Council document *Ad Gentes* states that building communities of faith is not a clever ingenious invention of the church. It is God who called the people from various origins to form them into a human family. It pleased God to share his life with men and women not as isolated individuals but as a community in Jesus Christ.²⁸ It has “focused on the mystery of Christ and his church and at the same time open to the world.”²⁹ In this way, the Council assumed and legitimated different tendencies that were coming up in the first half of the 20th century. “The biblical and liturgical movements, the renewal of the church’s ecclesiology and social doctrine, the growing participation of lay people, and sensitivity to the modern world are decisive elements”³⁰ which paved way for the emergence and establishment of SCCs. Hence the emergence of SCCs promoted by the Bandung Conference as New Way of Being Church has roots in Vatican II.

The 5th Plenary Assembly of FABC at Bandung in Indonesia, in 1990, was the turning point for SCCs in Asia. Fr. Oswald Hirmer from the Lumko Institute, South Africa was invited to facilitate the sessions whose theme was “A New Way of Being Church in Asia in the 1990s”. These Lumko sessions made the bishops of Asia to declare SCCs a pastoral priority for Asia and to open a desk within the FABC office of Laity for the promotion of SCCs.³¹

In *Tertio Millennio adveniente*, the Holy Father wrote that the best way to prepare for the Jubilee of the Third Millennium was through the study and implementation of Vatican II. In the same document, he called the Church to examine its conscience regarding this implementation. The Bandung Conference already in 1990 took a serious note of the exhortation by Holy Father asking the faithful to walk the New Way of Being Church. It gave a further impetus to this by re-

²⁷Vatican II *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26.

²⁸Vatican II *Ad Gentes*, no. 2.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio adveniente*, no. 18.

³⁰ M. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 642.

³¹ Developing Indian Integral Pastoral Approach (DIIPA) Introductory Workshop, pg.14.

emphasizing the new image and vision of the Church, and SCC as its instrument of new evangelization in the coming millennium.

In the call of the Asian Bishops to follow the new way, the tone is much the same as that of Second Vatican Council Fathers. The new way is very much the way Jesus set for us. Christianity is a way of life – a way of seeing, accepting and relating to fellow human beings as children of the same God. Following are some of the common points arising in the Bandung statement which finds its source also in the magisterial teachings of the Second Vatican Council regarding the New Way of Being Church.

1. Church as the new people of God

In concretizing this vision, the Council chose the following images from the ninety-five images and symbols, which in Scripture refer to the entity, called Church, and regarded them as basic for our time: Church as THE NEW PEOPLE OF God, Church as BODY OF CHRIST and Church as TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. In the Bandung Conference we too find the bishops stressing profoundly on the first two images when it advocates the new way by forming small communities which are a home and family for everyone. According to them the Church as the people of God and the body of Christ with all its implications can be very well lived and experienced in SCCs. "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." (8.1.1)³²

2. Ecclesiology of Communion

All of the Second Vatican documents are concerned, in one way or another, with the mystery of the Church: The whole People of God- laity, religious, and clergy alike- is called to participate in the mission of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. This principle, presented in the fourth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* (especially nn. 30,33) and reaffirmed in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, corrects the pre-Vatican II notion of Catholic Action, wherein the lay apostolate is essentially a participation in the mission of the hierarchy. This is expressed as a

³² The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Federation Asian Bishops' Conference Bandung, Indonesia July 27, 1990 (8.1.1) page 22.

vision of 'Participatory Church' in Bandung (cf. 8.1.1). Both have strongly emphasized on communion ecclesiology as the way of being Church.

3. Local Church

Vatican council vision also gave theological basis and encouragement to SCCs by recognizing local churches. From *Lumen Gentium* Chapter one and two we can derive Universal Church as the communion of Local Churches. (LG.Ch 1), every local Church is fully the Church. (LG.Ch 2) and wherever the people of God are there is the Church. In the NT, then, *ekklesia* primarily means the local community though at times it also denotes the universal Church. It is significant that Paul does not think of the local Church merely as a part or sub-division of the universal Church. For him the entire mystery of the Church is present in the local community. Hence he makes such formulations as "the Church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2).

In *Lumen Gentium* No.26 we read, "This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the NT.... In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, "that by the flesh and blood of the Lord's body the whole brotherhood may be joined together". The Bandung Conference emphasizes on meeting in the neighbourhood as people of God since Church's new definition the Church is present where the people of God are present. (cf. 8.1.1)

New way of being Church means being a domestic Church, not losing the capacity to remain close to the people in their daily life... to be present in the midst of homes of the sons and daughters of the Church.

4. Participatory Church

Regarding recognizing the different charisms and gifts of the people of God and call to service we find the echo in many council documents. As is clear from the New Testament the early Church was a community of believers who had a variety of charisms which blossomed into a diversity of services. Gradually leaders emerged who had a special charism. Their function was to be ministers of Christ in the service of the people (cf. 2 Cor 4:5; 1 Cor 9:19). There was no question of their dominating over the community (cf. 2 Cor 1:24; 1 Pet 5:1-5). Jesus the servant was model for all Christian ministers. Such an understanding of leadership as ministry

prevailed in the Church. That is why *Lumen Gentium* has a whole chapter on the People of God before it deals with the various categories of people in the Church. While there are functional differences in the Church, and the pastors have their rightful place, “all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ” (LG 32). In the Bandung statement we find: “It is a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful - lay, religious and cleric alike - are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized” (8.1.2).

5. Microcosm Church as Seedbed for Ministries

The ministries in the Church are to be understood as functions within the community of the People of God. They are meant to foster the growth of the entire body of the faithful; while respecting and safeguarding the dignity and freedom of each one (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 18 & Bandung 8.1.2). Pope John Paul II spoke about SCCs as becoming a leaven of Christian life, of care of the poor and neglected, and of commitment to the transformation of society. He also stated that 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. Hence these communities become a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel and a source of new ministries. (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*.51)

6. Evangelized and Evangelizing Communities

While describing SCCs as the new way Bandung says: It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a prophetic sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come (no. 8.1.4). The mission of the whole Church includes: (a) the proclamation of the Word of God, both internally and externally; (b) the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; (c) the witnessing to the Gospel through a life of discipleship; and (d) the rendering of service to those in need, both inside and outside the Church. This multiple principle is grounded (a) in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation and the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity; (b) in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; (c) in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the fifth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church ("The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness"), the Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, the Decree on the Ministry

and Life of Priests, the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, and the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life; and (d) for the service aspect of mission, in the same documents. This multiple missionary principle expands the missionary responsibility of corporate witnessing to the Gospel. Because the Church itself is a sacrament, it is an essential part of its mission to practice what it preaches.

7. Dialoguing Church

Pope John's positive attitude to the modern world had a great impact on *Gaudium et Spes*. That is probably why it has turned out to be one of the most inspiring documents of the Council. Bandung states: Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all (8.1.3). This new attitudes to the world calls for a new way of dealing with it. The Second Vatican Council speaks of "dialogue" which is a sign of the Church's love for and solidarity with the world. Since the world is the object of God's love, the Church, as the servant of God, should be at the service of the world in order to liberate it from its sinful alienation and lead it to its true destiny. This does not mean that she can neglect her duty to work for a better world here and now, since, as the Council itself points out, "the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one". And our efforts to build an earthly city where all human beings can live together in freedom, equality, love, justice and peace are of vital concern to the Kingdom of God.

8. Servant Church

The Church by its very nature is missionary (AG-2). The mission of the People of God includes service (*diakonia*) to human needs in the social, political, and economic orders as well as the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. This principle is especially set forth in *Gaudium et Spes* and is reiterated in more abbreviated form in such documents as the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Decree on Ecumenism, the Decree on Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church, the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, and the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity. (Cf. Bandung. Section D. A Spirituality for our Times-Response at the Focal Point of the Spirit)

9. Vision Concretized through SCCs

The teachings of the Council Fathers, subsequent Popes and the Asian Bishops have been the guiding principles of the FABC desk for laity and all AsIPA assemblies which have been effectively promoting SCCs to foster this vision of the new way (*AsIPA assembly 1, Ban Phu Wan, Thailand*). Till today the whole Church in Asia continues to be both inspired and energized by the Vision of a “New Way of Being Church” in Asia expounded by the Asian Bishops. In this statement the Bishops articulated their Vision: “The Church in Asia will have to be a Participatory “Church”, 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... leads them to form Small Christian Communities...!” (FABC 5 # 8). Such participation in the Church was emphasized by all the Bishops of the World in the Second Vatican Council: “The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under One Head. Whoever they are, they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification” (*Lumen Gentium* 33). Our Holy Father has also reinforced this Vision in the “Church's Missionary Mandate”: “The Basic Ecclesial Communities are a sign of vitality within the church, and instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilization of love”. (*Redemptoris Missio* art. 51).

Conclusion:

The history of the SCCs shows that it was developed as a result of putting ecclesiology of the Vatican Council II into practice. It originated in the late 1960's/early 70's. They sprang up spontaneously throughout the world, without influencing much one on the other, at roughly the same historical period by the power of the Holy Spirit. SCCs are *communities*, not groups. In this post-modern world, the urbanized individual suffers from a great deal of isolation and anonymity. The influence of mass media and capitalism severely causes a congenial atmosphere. The parish as it exists today appears to have become top heavy with structure and rigid with administration, exclusively territorial and occasionally a mere cog in the wheel of the diocesan administration. In this prevailing situation, in these communities people feel more immediate and fraternal relationships and thus “communion and participation” are manifested. By emphasizing communion it seeks to live the faith as a shared experience, mutually nourished and supported by

their members. The covenantal relationship between God and humanity is the inspiration for this dimension. This communion in faith leads its members to a growing improvement in interpersonal relations within the community. Ultimately the communion enables one for participation, shared responsibility for making and carrying out decisions. In this way, these communities overcome the passive attitude of the laity and authority of the clergy, religious and lay leaders in the community.³³ Communitarian spirit is a part of modern life. SCCs are the expression of this desire.

Both the documents have changed the lives of the faithful both quantitatively and qualitatively. The enormous number of communities all over the world has created small evangelizing churches in thousands of neighbourhoods. That is why they are like an Oasis; for it is where the faithful drink together from the water of the Spirit and then take that water to refresh their families and communities.

³³ M. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 638. Cfr. J. Marins and Team, *Church From the Roots*, 19, 20. Marins makes a distinction between community and group and highlights the concept of community in BCCs.