

IMPACT OF THE FABC VISION OF THE NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH IN IMPLEMENTING VATICAN II VISION IN THE CHURCH IN INDIA

Dr. Joseph Dias, SVD

Introduction

A special moment of grace has come into the Church with the holding of Vatican II, which humbly asked us to go back to our roots and, at the same time, it makes us reflect on the signs of the times. And that is how the Church has discovered once again the rich heritage of the Church, as being participatory by nature. The Second Vatican Council brought about a paradigm shift because of the new ecclesiology. Pope John XXIII was a dynamic person, and so he sought to bring in a new ecclesiological thinking. He also wanted the Council Fathers to articulate a new vision for the Church. Keeping in mind the fundamental mystery the Church is, he wanted to reformulate the traditional ecclesiological truths and doctrines in a new way. The Second Vatican Council, has been referred to as the Council for ecclesiology.¹ A presentation of the major ecclesiological themes from Vatican II up to the present day will bring to light the ecclesiology of the New Way of Being Church .

1.Theological Imperatives: Vision of the New Way of Being Church the Magisterial documents.

First, we shall discuss it from the perspective of the **universal Church**, secondly, from the standpoint of the **Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conference**; and thirdly, from the position of the **Catholic Bishops' Conference of India**.

New Way of Being Church and the Magisterium

We see here the thought and practice of the New Way of Being Church , especially, the way the Magisterium has dealt with the issue, by giving the relevant Vatican II, post Vatican II, Papal and Synodal statements. These documents will be of support to the NWBC especially in knowing about the pastoral and ecclesiological implications.

1.1.Sacrosanctum Concilium encourages an active and full participation in all the liturgical celebrations. It says that the

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (1Pet 2:9,4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism. (SC 14)

The document also makes a certain demand on the faithful, for a renewed and total dedication while they are celebrating the liturgical service

¹ Daniel Donovan, *The Church as Idea and Fact*, Michael Glazier, Wilmington, 1988, p.31.

1.2 *Apostolicam Actuositatem* came into existence to involve the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. Lay people, having a sincere apostolic zeal and enthusiasm, help out in the pastoral needs, and also become a source of support to the pastors (cf. 1Cor. 16:17-18). *Apostolicam Actuositatem* speaks of the action of laity in the Church so that their participation will be a communion in the Church.

Participants in the function of Christ, priest, prophet, and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and action of the Church. Their action within the Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect. (AA 10)

Very often, the active participation of the laity is of great help in the liturgical celebration of the community. Many a time, even other lay people, especially those who rarely go to Church, are drawn towards the Church, seeing the zeal of the active life of the laity. The laity fervently cooperate in a number of ways like teaching catechism to the children, keeping the books of accounts of the parish, giving of financial advice or raising funds for the poor of the parish. The laity also takes a lot of initiative to organize the singing and to conduct the choir. All these activities make the parish active and vibrant, thus forming a participatory Church in communion (cf. AA 10).

Apostolicam Actuositatem also says:

Laymen have countless opportunities for exercising the apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very witness of a Christian life, and good works done in a supernatural spirit, are effective in drawing men to the faith and to God; and that is what the Lord has said: "Your light must shine so brightly before men that they can see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mt.5: 16) (AA 6).

The document on the laity is evocative in saying that Vatican II has given the laity a number of prospects for making the members involved in the work of evangelization. One of the most powerful ways, yet the subtlest way, is by the very witness of living a dedicated Christian life. This type of a simple life and the values of humility, love and justice attract other lay people. Although, on the surface, this type of simple life may come across to some simple people and look very ordinary and common, the irony of it is that it is very difficult (cf. AA 6).

Apostolicam Actuositatem also speaks of the vital role the family plays in the life and mission of a Christian community. One could say that compared to all the groups, the family is the most crucial and important unit. A sound family will make a sound community and a sound parish. The document says:

The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God himself. This mission will be accomplished if the family, by the mutual affection of its members and by family prayer, presents itself as a domestic sanctuary of the Church (AA 11).

Vatican II shows how the families or the domestic Church should organize themselves into core groups and work for the betterment of their own community. The family apostolate can be a vibrant force in the whole parish, for in it all the members of the community can be involved in their respective fields like adopting abandoned children,

welcoming the strangers, supporting adolescents with advice and help, assisting engaged couples in a better preparation for marriage, etc. (cf. AA 11).

1.3 .*Lumen Gentium*

One of the central and fundamental ideas of the Second Vatican Council is the ecclesiology of communion.² *Lumen Gentium* goes on to say that it is a communion with God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This communion is mainly strengthened through the sacraments. Just as baptism is the door and the foundation of unity, similarly the Eucharist is the source and the culmination of the life of a Christian (cf. LG11).

He has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people, who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. He therefore chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it (LG 9).

All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This people have to spread to the whole world so that the design of God's will may be fulfilled (LG 13). Communities have to be built, so that God's plan of salvation may be realized. When we remain united as a community, we are also doing God's will. The NWBC is seen as contributing to the communion and renewal of the Church. As the Church is communion, and if the new basic communities truly live this communion with the Church, they will be a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. This gives a great hope for the life of the Church.³

1.4 *Gaudium et Spes* aims that the people of God may be happy with the experience of the joys and the hopes, and be prepared for the challenge of grief and anguish of everyday life from the pastoral point of view. This document asks the people to listen to the Spirit so that they could be in harmony with the Church. *Gaudium et Spes* says:

For theirs is a community composed of men, of men who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (GS 1).

The realization the New Way of Being Church came into existence only after the Vatican II ended, and it was seen as an unanticipated development. Hence, there are no explicit references to the NWBC in any of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. However, both these aspects are often described as "causally connected."⁴ In fact, the new ecclesiology acted as a catalyst for the development of NWBC. Although there is no direct reference, there is always an indirect reference.

² ND No. 893.

³ Final "Relation" of the Synod, "The Church in the Word of God Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the Word", in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), December 16, 50 (1985), p.8.

⁴ The Final Statement, International Consultation on Basic Christian Community, Notre Dame University, 1991, p.3.

1.5 *Christifideles Laici* promotes lay participation, especially in the aspect of building the NWBC Communion ecclesiology is the basis for a participatory Church. This ecclesiology provides the foundation for collegiality, participation and co-responsibility at all the levels of the Church's life.⁵ The role of the laity too is of paramount importance and they are asked to collaborate in the church. *Christifideles Laici* mainly deals with the participation of the lay faithful in the life of the Church as communion (CL 27). From this communion, which the faithful experience in Christ, there is an overflow of ministries and charisms, all for the growth of the Church and to bring about a greater communion and participation in the Church (CL 27). This communion is a wonderful reflection of participation, just as we see it in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Such communion is the very mystery of the Church.⁶

Through their specific vocation, the laity contributes to the 'organic communion'. For *Christifideles Laici* says:

Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a *diversity* and *complementarity* of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity, every member of the lay faithful is seen *in relation to the whole body* and offers a *totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body (CL 20).

Christifideles Laici gives a lot of encouragement and freedom for the laity to come out with their innate gifts and use them for the good of the community and to build up communion. The only caution is that these initiatives of the laity must be supervised and monitored by the parish or the Magisterium. This is not to have a control on the initiatives of the laity, but to see that these groups of laity are in communion with the Church.

1.6 *Evangelii Nuntiandi* also says that as the Church does not find herself better equipped to announce the gospel message and to implant the conviction effectively and in the freedom of the Spirit in the hearts of people (cf. EN 4), it is better to have SCCs as the starting point in the work of evangelization. The SCC animators could be living examples of evangelization; first and foremost this can be done by their very life, which is a model to the new people who come to be evangelized. In No.58, we read:

That a great deal of attention was devoted to small groups or basic communities and that there is a lot of attention in the church and a talk going on in the church. They are themselves evangelizers and are objects of evangelization. They participate in the life of the church are nourished by the Church's teaching and are loyal to their pastors. The exhortation also called SCCs as nurseries of evangelization and it will be a source of hope for the universal Church (EN 58).

This document clearly says that if SCCs live in communion with the Church they will make the Church flourish; they also need to remain faithful to the local Church and the Magisterium. Pope Paul VI brings out certain criteria in order to make the basic

⁵ A. Dulles, "A Half Century of Ecclesiology", in *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989) 3, p.441.

⁶ *Towards Lay Ministries, A Summary of "Christifideles Laici,"* F.I.L.M.C, Our Lady of Salvation Church, Mumbai, 2003, p.8.

communities truly ecclesial communities. Firstly, they must be fed with the power of the Word of God. Secondly, they need to have a wonderful spirit of the Church. Thirdly, they need to avoid the danger of becoming isolated. Fourthly, the SCCs need to have collaboration with their pastor. Fifthly, they must be attached to the Local Church. And lastly, the communities have to be aware of and to grow in missionary consciousness and enthusiasm. The SCCs must possess an open attitude to all peoples, and in no way favour any particular type of people. Further, the SCCs are not the only means by which the Church evangelizes people, and in all things the SCCs must never be sectarian but always universal. This clearly gives us in detail the criteria for an effective and successful SCC.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 58, Pope Paul VI termed the true basic communities a hope for the Church universal, for the communion ecclesiology means that there cannot be active members on the one side, and passive ones on the other.⁷ Thus, with this communion ecclesiology, the involvement and participation of all in the Church will grow to greater heights, and the Church will be more vibrant as there will be no passive or dormant people of God; consequently, we will have a Church which is a full communion. The bishops also see the SCCs to be a means of a deeper communion in the Church.⁸ Bringing about communion is not the work of the hierarchy only, but it is the co-responsibility of each and every person in the community.

1.7 Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* says the Small Christian Communities are a **force for the mission and evangelization in the Church**. There is a rapidly growing phenomenon in the young churches and the bishops and their Conferences mainly foster this as a **pastoral priority** and it is to build on Small Christian Communities. These communities come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis and to discuss human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. These communities will be able to be a sign of vitality within the Church, by enabling them to evangelize and catechize themselves and others to overcome economic and social problems. The Holy Father also asks them to live always in line with the obligations of the Church and their pastors (cf. *RM* 51). This is one of the ways that a parish could be divided or decentralized, and the laity could be given the responsibility to take an active role in the mission and life of the Church, and especially a couple of new ministries could be introduced. This could be one of the effective ways in which the Good News could be preached.

1.8 *Ecclesia in Asia* exhorts all to build up communities and to be in communion with one another (*EA* 13). In *Ecclesia in Asia* we find a very good development of communion ecclesiology. In this connection, with the background of *EA* 24, J. H. Kroeger says:

The Church is a "privileged place of encounter" between God and people. Her first purpose is "to be the sacrament of the inner union of the human person with God." She is also "the sacrament of the unity of human race." This means that "communion and mission are inseparably connected [and] they interpenetrate and mutually imply each

⁷ W. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, p. 162.

⁸ *Ibid.*

other." Communion is "both the source and fruit of mission." In short, "Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion" (24).⁹

Thus, the ecclesiology of communion is self-explanatory. We have to be the sacrament of unity and, by doing that, we ourselves become instruments of communion. Once we are in communion with the Lord, it will help us to be in communion with our fellow beings. Being in communion, we are to bear fruit. So in this way, communion and mission are inseparably connected. Communion signifies both: it is the source and fruit of mission. So, in this way, as *Ecclesia in Asia* says, we can emphasize that communion gives rise to mission, and mission is fulfilled in communion (EA 24).

In our Asian realities, we find that women are not given their rightful place, and it will be only appropriate if committed people, by working in communion with women, can bring about a greater communion in the life and mission of the Asian Church. The New Way of Being Church is seen as contributing to the communion and the renewal of the Church. (cf. EA 45).

The best way to build up communion is to begin with the family, for the family is the domestic Church. As *Ecclesia in Asia* says,

The family is "the domestic Church" (*ecclesia domestica*). The Christian family, like the church as a whole, should be a place where the truth of the Gospel is the rule of life and the gift which the family members bring to the wider community. [...] The family is [...] the Church's most effective agents of evangelization. [...] The Christian family needs to be genuinely "the domestic Church" (EA 46).

If the family is truly in communion, it would be the best form of a participatory Church. If a family is in communion, then the possibility of the neighbourhood families being in communion is greater. Thus, the Christian family can bring about a wider communion in the Church.

Ecclesia in Asia says, "Basic ecclesial communities are effective ways of promoting communion and participation in parishes and dioceses, and as a genuine force for evangelization" (EA 25).

Again, in *Ecclesia in Asia* 25 Pope John Paul II says:

Drawing on their pastoral experience, the Synod Fathers underlined the value of basic ecclesial communities as an effective way of promoting communion and participation in parishes and Dioceses, and as a genuine force for evangelization. These small groups help the faithful to live as believing, praying and loving communities like the early Christians (Acts 2:44-47; 32-35, EA 25)

The Holy Father wants that these communities live the gospel values in fraternal love and service. He goes on to say that with the help of these communities the Church should go ahead to do the work of evangelization. He states that these communities must always be in line with the teachings of the local and the universal church, and always in communion with the pastors and the Magisterium (EA 25).

⁹ J. H. Kroeger, "Exploring Mission in Ecclesia in Asia", *Mission Today*, Vol II, 2002, p.158.

Reflecting on communion ecclesiology Walter Kasper says that we need to understand properly the aspect of co-responsibility in the post-Conciliar period. The challenge today is to work out a common communion ecclesiology which will make the laity get involved in the life of the Church, and which will also bring about a sort of openness and accountability in the Church.¹⁰

Ecclesia in Asia gives ample scope to build up a Church that is truly participatory and which will, ultimately, make it a communion of communities. The document says:

The Synod Fathers chose to describe the diocese as a communion of communities gathered around the Shepherd, where clergy, consecrated persons and the laity are engaged in a “dialogue of life and heart” sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is primarily in the diocese that the vision of a communion of communities can be actualized in the midst of the complex social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia. Ecclesial communities imply that each local Church should become what the Synod Fathers called a “participatory Church” (EA 25)

This is a very good development to proceed from Small Christian Communities to Small Human Communities. The theology of communion describes the Church as the pilgrim people of God to whom all peoples are in some way related. So on this basis the Synod Fathers stress this mysterious link between the Church and the followers of other Asian religions as they are “related to the Church in varying degrees and ways. ” This gives us a very good insight for fostering Basic Human Communities (cf. EA 24).

The document says that we have to build a dialogue of life and of heart. This can be built and made possible, only if we respect each other and have deep concern mainly for one another’s religion and culture. In a country, which is multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic, the big challenge that lies ahead is to proceed to become Small Human Communities.

2. FABC DOCUMENTS AND THE NWBC

This year we are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Vatican Second and the Silver Jubilee of the Bandung Conference . The Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishop’s Conference held at Bandung, Indonesia, said that 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. It is *a participatory Church* where everybody’s gifts are recognized and activated, so that the Church and its mission may be fulfilled.¹¹

The FABC has repeatedly recommended the New Way of Being Church through the creation of basic Christian communities. There is a lot of hope given to these communities that they will be able to foster the daily practice of the Gospel, the manifestation of the various charisms of believers in the community and the exercise of

¹⁰ W. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, p.163.

¹¹ G B. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo, (eds) *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents*, Claretian Publications, Quezon City, Phillippines, Vol 1, 1992, pp.287-288.

participatory leadership. In other words, it means that the laity will be recognized with their charisms.¹²

This is seen in a concrete way when the Gospel sharing groups share their lives with joy and enthusiasm; thus, people experience *belonging* to the *Christian Family* in a more genuine way.¹³

The **AsIPA General Assemblies** too works towards building up communion through SCCs. They observed that more and more countries, dioceses and parishes today are making committed efforts to live the new way of being Church where all Christ's faithful learn to live in communion and work as sisters and brothers. To reach this goal of making the Church participatory, an increasing number of laity, religious, priests and bishops are beginning to see the SCCs as one of the best means available at present. Moreover, Vatican II has reminded us that the family is the domestic Church. So the collaboration among families is becoming very important so that if there is a communion among the families, there can be an easy communion in the parish, the diocese and the Church. By the inspiration of the Asian bishops who have walked on this journey of community building, we hope that all bishops of Asia will lead in a participatory way to buildup a true communion of communities.¹⁴ The Small Christian Communities hold immense potential for being catalyst for change in our Church and our society on the whole.¹⁵ The participants of the assembly powerfully felt that 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 Divine Word to form Small Christian Communities like 'neighbourhood communities', 'covenant communities,' etc. It is in communities that they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus.¹⁶ In communities like this they live their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and heart." The statement of the assembly says that it is the desire of the community. At the global level it could be said to be the desire of solidarity. However, "more locally, it is seen in the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities, of neighbourhood groups, of groups that come together to defend human rights, or that come together for prayer or Bible-sharing."¹⁷ Many a time these groups are interconnected. These groups are also motivated by a healthy reaction so that the traditional structures of community are broken down. Moreover, they rise from a concern with human persons rather than impersonal structures, and they also do have a concern for those who are small, despised or

¹² G. B. Rosales and C. G. Arevalo, (eds.) *For All the Peoples of Asia*, p. xxvii.

¹³ F. J. Eilers, (ed.) *For All the Peoples of Asia, FABC Documents from 1992 to 1996*, p.138.

¹⁴ Final Statement of AsIPA General Assembly II in *A New Way of Being Church in the New Millennium*, AsIPA Desk, FABC Office of Laity, Taiwan, 2002, p.7.

¹⁵ "SCCs/BECs Towards a Church of Communion", is the welcome address of His Grace Archbishop Soosa Pakiam M., Archdiocese of Trivandrum, India, at the AsIPA General Assembly IV at Maria Rani Centre, Trivandrum, India, from Nov. 8-15, 2006, quoted from AsIPA General Assembly IV, pp. 23-26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.287.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

neglected.¹⁸ **AsIPA General Assembly II** reaffirmed the mission of helping to build the local church as a 'Communion of Communities' gathered around the Shepherd, where clergy, consecrated persons and the laity are engaged in a 'dialogue of life and heart' sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit" (EA 25).¹⁹ As a community of small communities, the AsIPA methodology, is declared by the FABC as "proving a very good help to the growth and development of BECs' become the central tool in bringing about this communion marked by authentic participation and co-responsibility (cf. Final Statement of FABC 7,III.7)."²⁰ The Final Statement of the AsIPA General Assembly II says that the SCCs are a leaven for the social and the spiritual transformation, and that it also acts as an agent of change. Even though the SCCs are small in size, they are like the Church in the neighbourhood, for they become a leaven of transformation. All the activities of the SCCs like solidarity, compassion, service and involvement at a local level serve as a leaven that makes life a little better in our world. It is intermingled with the lifestyle of prayer and reflection.²¹ The networking and action of SCCs in a parish setting, therefore, expresses solidarity with the poor, the weak and the suffering. The exposure or immersion program further adds to get a first hand experience of learning.²² The SCCs is the positive, hope filled protest of the poor against oppression and injustice of all sorts."²³ The Final Statement of the General assembly says that the Church in Asia is entering a new phase where we need to be disciples of Christ. The ecclesial community has to be a leaven in the midst of a sea of people. Only when every person is enlightened by the Gospel and the sacraments we will be able to proclaim the good news and bring in harmony through inter-religious understanding and ecumenism. If we make conscious efforts to integrate men, children and youth into the mainstream of SCCs and if we ensure emerging and rotating leadership in SCCs and other structures we will be able to bring a qualitative growth.²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ AsIPA General Assembly II, *A New Way of Being Church in the New Millennium*, FABC Office of Laity, AsIPA Desk, Taipei, Taiwan, 2002, pp. 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid. p.7.

²¹ Ibid. pp.8-9.

²² J.G.Healey & J Hinton, (eds), *Small Christian Communities Today –Capturing the New Moment*, p.127.

²³ AsIPA General Assembly IV, *SCCs/BECs towards a Church of Communion*, FABC Office of Laity and Family, AsIPA Desk, Taipei, Taiwan, 2006, I pp. 25-26

²⁴ Final Statement of AsIPA General Assembly IV, Trivandrum, November 8-15,2006,p.4

AsIPA General Assembly V says SCCs has initiated interest in the Word of God. Many members share the living Word and there is a growing sense of belonging in these communities. The Participants pointed out that they are growing in their commitment to reach out to those in need in the neighbourhood and are enabled to read the 'signs of the times' and respond in the light of the Gospel. The assembly further says, "The breaking of the Word and Bread challenges the SCCs to share all the diverse charisms and gifts given by the Spirit and use them to build up the body of Christ (Eph.4:11-12) and carry out their mission to the world."²⁵

All the programs and documentation of the FABC aim at discovering the 'New Way of Being Church.' While referring to the 5th FABC Plenary Assembly of 1990, the FABC is trying its best to realize the dream of the Asian bishops, namely to face the challenges of the evangelizing presence in all matters, be they multi-cultural, multi-religious or multi-linguistic. It is the continent chosen by God to realize the plan of salvation; this was articulated by Pope John Paul II in *EA*: "He sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour, who took flesh as an Asian" (*EA* 1).

3. CBCI AND THE NWBC

The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) has played a very important role in making the Church in India co-responsible and participatory. Now let us look at the various documents of the Indian Church.

In the CBCI Meeting held at **Pune** in **1992** the Bishops questioned themselves about the different ways in which the Church community could best tackle the needs of Christians. They discussed an ideal parish where all sections of the people of God, gathered in small groups, 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.²⁶ They concluded by stating that the formation of Small Christian Communities would be the best alternative to meet the needs of the people.

During the evaluation of the CBCI in 1995, the Small Christian Communities movement was thoroughly evaluated and the Indian Hierarchy felt that a new trend in the formation and growth of Basic Christian Communities has gained popularity in certain parts of the country and there are strong appeals from respondents that these communities should be formed all over the country. The meeting emphasized that this trend of development towards SCCs needs to be encouraged.²⁷ The commission had a proposal to organize more inter-religious dialogue and they felt that this should be done with the involvement of the laity, and during such a discussion at the grassroots level they recommended the formation of Small Christian Communities.²⁸ The Commission also proposed a concrete

²⁵ Final Statement of AsIPA General Assembly V, Davao City, Philippines, No. 3.2.

²⁶ Statement of the CBCI, Western Region council of Bishops, in "Church Documents on Small Christian Communities," FILMC, Mumbai, 2001, p.8.

²⁷ CBCI Evaluation Report, New Delhi: CBCI Evaluation Committee, 1995, p.204.

²⁸ Ibid. p.102.

national plan for the formation of SCCs in India.²⁹ They also suggested grassroots level of participation through schools, hospitals and other institutions.³⁰

The Bishops strongly felt the need of reorganizing the structure of the parish and they went a step ahead, when the bishops said that these faith communities should be open to people of other faiths, in other words, to build 'Small Human Communities' (SHCs) so that the concerns of those of other faiths could be welcomed by taking up social, cultural and environmental activities.³¹

When the Church in India was undergoing a lot of problems because of neo-Pentecostalism, the CBCI conducted a Survey to provide pastoral care and one part of the report says:³²

We have seen that the vast majority have left the Church and have joined the neo-Pentecostals in time of crisis or need. This seems to indicate that in the Catholic Church they did not receive adequate pastoral care. Given the size of our parishes and the paucity of priests, it is unlikely that we will succeed in providing adequate pastoral care for the faithful so long as pastoral ministry remains the exclusive responsibility of the priest. Time has come, it seems to me, to induct sisters and lay people in a big way as pastoral agents so that the church can provide care with a personal touch.³³

This report very obviously hints at the promotion of the NWBC through Small Christian Communities and asks the pastors to give enough pastoral care to the faithful. It also asks us to take the help of other pastoral agents like the religious sisters or the laity who will be able to share the aspect of pastoral work of a non-clerical nature. This will naturally make the faithful more dynamic and vibrant.

The **1996 National Seminar** on Small Christian Communities was a very important stage for the Church in India. The participants came out with very clear-cut perception on Small Christian Communities. They said:

The emergence of Small Christian Communities (SCC)/Basic Christian Communities (BCC) in many parts of the world and in our country too is to be recognized as a special grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. We need to recognize them as a special time of grace for our times. In India, where the sense of family belonging is so strong, the BCC's are a providential development. There is a great potential in these communities to be channels of God-experience, of encounter with the Word, of deep fellowship and of 'pastoral care with a personal touch'. These communities remove the fear of anonymity and promote personal relationships and a sense of belonging. Liturgical celebrations become alive, meaningful and participative, leading to a deep God-experience. Members of such Basic Communities become agents of personalized pastoral care and

²⁹ Ibid. p.72.

³⁰ Ibid. p.102.

³¹ Ibid. p. 4.

³² Paul Parathazam, "Neo-Pentecostalism in India, Preliminary Report of a National Survey," presented to the General Body Meeting of CBCI, Trivandrum, 1996, pp.15-16.

³³ Paul Parathazam, "A Survey on Neo-Pentecostalism in India", (ed.) George Pereira, Deputy Secretary General for the CBCI, in *Catholic India Special, CBCI General Body Meeting, 13-21st February 1996, Trivandrum, Kerala*, CBCI Centre, New Delhi, 1996, p.78.

evangelization. They can be powerful catalysts in fostering the faith of individuals and the unity of parish.³⁴

Thus, the report of the National Seminar is clear on its stand of fostering and promoting of SCCs all over the country. After the National Seminar, Small Christian Communities have picked up very much in most parts of the dioceses of India. Many who have left the Church have returned because of the dynamism of the SCCs. The SCCs have given people to share their God experience and it has also made them to grow in fellowship thus removing the fear of anonymity.

The CBCI meeting of **1998** held at **Varanasi 2000 at Chennai** also emphasized the New Way of Being Church and the continuous reminders from the CBCI itself are an encouragement.³⁵

The National Assembly of **Yesu Khrist Jayanti** talked about the promotion of Small Christian Communities. All the members of the Yesu Khrist Jayanti were enthusiastic about SCCs, especially with a view to making the Church in India a communion of Communities. To realize Jesus' vision the participants said, "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."³⁶

The National Assembly and the Yesu Khrist Jayanti has given a motivating force to promote Small Christian Communities. Many dioceses have taken the suggestion of starting the SCCs very earnestly. A lot of hard work and energy is going in making the Indian Church a communion of communities, but the promotion of SCCs has been very successful and encouraging.

The **CCBI** met at Kolkota in January **2001** and in their Concluding Statement said that SCCs must be the pastoral priority for the entire Indian Church, and secondly, as our Indian realities are multicultural, multi-religious, etc., the people should nurture Basic Human Communities, of course, keeping in mind the ecclesial identity. A networking like this will help us to discern and deepen the gospel values of love, peace, justice and harmony.³⁷

After going through all the Magisterial documents on SCC from the viewpoint of the universal Church, FABC and the CBCI, one can easily come to the conclusion that a lot of empowerment is given for the fostering and promotion of Small Christian Communities.

Small Christian Communities are a new way of being Church. In a way there is nothing radically new in the SCCs. They existed right from the time of the early church.

³⁴ "The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism", Final Statement of the All-India Consultation, 5-7 December, 1996 at NBCLC, Bangalore, in *VJTR* 61,1997, p.117.

³⁵ CBCI,"Pastoral Letter on the Occasion of Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000," in *Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000. Towards a New Society. National Assembly and Public Function: CBCI, Bangalore, 2001,p.2.*

³⁶ Yesu Khrist Jayanti, Final Statement of National Assembly, Bangalore, 2000, No.44-46.

³⁷ CCBI, Concluding Statement of CCBI No. 3 & 4, Kolkota January, 2001.

But what is new about is that we have revitalized the spirit of the past and there is a certain newness given to it. Once again the magisterial documents have brought back the character of the early Church. The institutional Church has taken a back seat and the Church as 'the people of God' has been placed in the forefront. The concept of Church is no more pyramidal, but the paradigm is seen in the circular form, where all, the laity, clergy and the religious work hand in hand to make the Church a participatory one. The future of the SCCs will be bright to the extent that they are ready to dialogue with others. The Church is no more seen as a passive Church where the clergy prescribe and the laity just follow the instructions without any knowledge. The laity of today is knowledgeable, and the clergy will have to dialogue with the laity in a non-dominating way. The laity has to be given the respect due to them.

SCC makes the pastoral life very enthusiastic and full of passion. The parish is seen as one big community which is made up of a web of many SCCs. The picture of the pastors is no more mere dispensers of sacraments but animators and builders of community. Today, everything is done as a team. The SCCs are trying to bring the people together to form communities and to motivate them to work in communities and eventually build the church into a communion of communities.

2. Let us look at the Impact of the FABC Vision of the New Way of being Church in Implementing Vatican II Vision

Vatican Second had paved the way for a participatory Church, there were no direct references in its documents. However, in the Post-Conciliar period, there are documents which speak of the SCCs or BECs as concrete manifestations of a participatory Church.

Vatican II did not only envisage the Church as communion; it also suggested that there should be "structures of expressing communion and participation."³⁸ Two of these clear-cut structures could be the Diocesan Pastoral Council at the level of the diocese and the Parish Pastoral Council at the level of the parish. Both these structures help to bring about a wider participation and greater communion in the Church.

From a pastoral point of view the post-Vatican II magisterial documents call for a decentralization of the parish so that the Church may become truly participatory. The documents will also recognize the SCCs to be a tool for deepening the communion that already exists in the Church. By participating in the very sacramentality of the Church, the mystery of the Christian communion can be expressed in a more concrete and visible way.

NWBC as an Expression of Ecclesial Communion

2.1. A Sign of Vitality: The NWBC has given us a sign of vitality because of good training and formation. In *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II tells us that:

"Ecclesial basic communities")... are proving to be good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach....These 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" (RM 51).

³⁸ A.Raggio (ed.), *The Parish Community: A Path to Communion*, Translated from the original Italian edition *Comunita Parrocchiale, un cammino di comunione*, New City Press, New York, 2000, p.52

SCCs are communities which are full of vigor and vitality. These communities are vibrant and full of power. They are like communities which have a Christian leaven in them and, as a consequence, can make the whole community or groups of communities vibrant and powerful. These communities are a force in themselves that can impart simple formation to live a genuine Christian life. Communities like these become meaningful because they reach out to people who are in need or in difficulties. These communities are missionary minded and so they go out of themselves to reach out to the poor and the neglected.

2.2 Effective Ways and true Expression of Communion: In order to express himself clearly and distinctly on the aspect of communion, the Holy Father says:

Because the Church is communion, the new 'basic communities,' if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a *true expression of communion* and a *means* for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church (RM 51).

The Holy Father reminds the people that the Church is communion, and he encourages the basic communities to be always united to the Church and to all its activities and programs. There is a lot of dynamism present in the basic communities. The Church wants to make use of the dynamism of the SCCs. The Church expects the SCCs to be of help for its growth and development, and to bring in greater communion and unity in the Church.

The SCC spirituality is rooted in the Acts and it is further developed when people love their fellow human beings by giving of their time and energy, and serves those in various needs. When the people show their love in a concrete way they also bring about communion. In *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25, we read:

The Synod Fathers underlined the value of *basic ecclesial communities as an effective way of promoting communion* and participation in parishes and dioceses and as a genuine force for evangelization. These small groups help the faithful to live as believing, praying and loving communities like the early Christians (cf. Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35). They aim to help their members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service, and are therefore a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love.

The SCCs bring about unity at all the levels of proclamation. The SCCs are, in a very concrete way, the expression of this reality of communion and participation when they primarily care for one another by their sincere love for one another. Secondly, this love is shown in action by their loving service. Just like in the early Church, the members of the SCCs have a deep concern for each other, and their prayers and actions go together like that of the apostolic community. Many a time, they are of 'one heart and mind.' All these features are sincere expressions of the new dynamism of the participatory Church.

2.3 Large Cities propels us to a NWBC

Ecclesia in America helps us to reflect on our large cities which resist to form SCCs in our parishes. *Ecclesia in America* encourages us when it tells about our big towns and cities. The document says:

One way of renewing parishes, especially urgent for parishes in large cities, might be to consider the parish as a community of communities and movements. It seems timely therefore to form ecclesial communities and groups of a size that allows for true human relationships. This will make it possible to live communion more intensely, ensuring that it is fostered not only “ad intra”, but also with the parish communities to which such groups belong, and with the entire diocesan and universal Church. In such a human context, it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word, and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ.³⁹

2.4 Genuine Christian Fellowship

The FABC at Sampran stated that there is a genuine Christian fellowship in our Communities in Asia’ The ensuing document says:

There is, in some countries, the rapid multiplication of “grassroots ecclesial communities,” so often alive with the freshness and enthusiasm of early Christian times. In these communities an experience of *genuine Christian fellowship* and love is often found as well as the emergence of diverse charisms and ministries.⁴⁰

The fast growth of these communities shows that there is an ever-growing eagerness and zeal to spread the movement. Secondly, the whole world is longing and craving for sincere love and friendship and these communities are doing just that. Hence, many people are eager to join these communities, which give them genuine Christian joy, peace and fellowship.

2.5 A New Dynamism in the Asian Church

The presence of the SCCs in Asia is slowly being recognized in the Asian Church. The clergy, the religious and the laity are co-operating in this New Way of Being Church. The Bandung Statement says that the Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*.⁴¹ The statement of 1990 is re-echoed by Bishop Thomas Dabre when he says:

There is a *new dynamism* in the Asian Church because of Small Christian Communities. Pastors are more people-oriented, and the laity is becoming increasingly aware of their Christian calling. The results are that charisms are being released, problems addressed, and a spirit of joy and fellowship prevails in the church. The model of communion or communities is also taking shape, a communion that cherishes a vision of a better life for all people regardless of race or creed, a communion in which all are missionaries.⁴²

At present, it can be said that in many parts of Asia, especially where SCCs are functioning, there is a communion of the religious, the laity and the clergy. There are so

³⁹ *Ecclesia in America* No. 41

⁴⁰ Rosales Gaudencio & Arevalo C.G., (eds.), “For all the Peoples of Asia”, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991, p.59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

⁴² Bishop Thomas Dabre, “Small Christian Communities -Vision and Practicalities”, J. O’Halloran (ed.), pp. 209-210.

many common programs not only for the clergy and the religious, but for the laity as well. It is seen that in areas where there are common programs, the participation is vibrant and active. The laity also shines out with their various charisms and talents, and thus, they feel encouraged to be more committed and dedicated. They feel respected that they too are involved in the responsibility of being Church, and in being 'lay missionaries'.

2.6 Effective Means for Mission

The VII FABC Plenary Assembly concluded by stating that the Church in Asia has to be a communion of communities, of authentic participation and co-responsibility. It emphasized that "an *effective means* for our mission of love and service will continue to be the Basic Ecclesial Communities, small gospel-based communities and ecclesial movements."⁴³ The emphasis given by the FABC gives a clear indication that the NWBC is becoming more useful and valuable, by becoming a means or a way of promoting communion. For instance, when the SCC members visit the sick and the lonely, they do manifest love and also spread loving communion. That is why the Asian bishops say that the SCCs are promoting a vision for the New Way of Being Church in different ways. One of the ways it encourages is by building up the creative contributions of the SCCs as a Church, which is participatory in nature.

2.7 A New Trend of the Church

The CBCI Evaluation Report of 1995 speaks of a new trend in the Church that is gaining ever greater admiration of the people. The Report says:

A new trend which seems to have gained a fair amount of popularity in certain parts of the country is the formation and growth of basic Christian communities. There are strong appeals from respondents that these communities should be formed all over the country. Perhaps this trend needs to be encouraged.⁴⁴

When one looks at the SCCs and its increasingly accepted style of functioning, one is compelled to accept the SCCs as one of the new ways of being Church. As this approach is down to earth, it touches the hearts of the people. The fact that many are inclined to this way of being Church reveals that the SCCs are a concrete expression of a participatory Church.

2.8 Agents of Pastoral Care

One of the most important milestone which brought about a renewal of the Church in India was the National Seminar held at NBCLC⁴⁵, Bangalore, in 1996. The seminar "The challenge of neo-Pentecostalism" became a blessing for the growth of the SCCs. It was met by the emergence of these basic communities. This seminar also helped to clarify many doubts and fears about the SCCs. It also explained the theology and development of the SCCs, and gave a clear vision and boost for its future growth.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., p. 200.

⁴⁴ *CBCI Evaluation Report*, CBCI Evaluation Committee, New Delhi, 1995, p. 204

⁴⁵ NBCLC means National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Center.

⁴⁶ "The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism", *Final Statement of the All-India Consultation*, VJTR 61, 1997, p.117.

The findings of the seminar spoke of the SCCs as a concrete expression of a New Way of Being Church. The document says:

There is a great potential in these communities to be channels of God-experience, of encounter with the Word, of deep fellowship and of 'pastoral care with a personal touch'. These communities remove the fear of anonymity and promote personal relationships and a sense of belonging. Liturgical celebrations become alive, meaningful and participative, leading to a deep God-experience. Members of such Basic Communities become *agents of personalized pastoral care* and evangelization. They can be powerful catalysts in fostering the faith of individuals and the unity of parish.⁴⁷

This report speaks at length of the many prospects and possibilities of the New Way of Being Church to bring about an experience of God through its various ecclesial programs and outreach activities. It makes the faithful pulsating and energetic. The SCC animators and leaders become channels in the promotion of a participatory Church, and also enable the members to be means of transmitting the same experience to others.

2.9 Communities to become Concrete Realities

In the Pastoral Letter of the CBCI on the occasion of Yesu Krist Jayanti January 2000, the bishops of India encouraged the people to become witnesses once they accept the dynamism and vitality of the SCCs. The bishops go on to state:

The Spirit of the risen Lord, who gave Himself to others, is communicated to the disciple in the Eucharist. This results in building up communities of love and sharing. The Acts of the Apostles describes this community as united in listening to the Word, in the breaking of the bread, prayer, sharing and one in which 'there was not a needy person among them' (Acts 4:34). The Christians translate the love of God, which they experience into a love with which they love one another. This is a special contribution that we can make to this land of age-old religiosity. [...] Our dioceses and parish communities should strive to become *inspiring models* for a new society in India where the human dignity of every person is fully respected and where faith in God is expressed in mutual sharing.⁴⁸

Although do not explicitly mentions of SCCs but we finds the spirit of the New Way of Being Church implicitly. The bottom line of the pastoral letter of the CBCI is that all the faithful have to grow in communion and the best and the most effective way is to be a witness to the faith experience. The bishops also encourage us to be generous by sharing our resources like time, money and energy with the faithful, and especially the needy and the poor. In this way, one can be an example or a model that would inspire people.

The Indian hierarchy is very keen that the New Way of Being Church be promoted in every parish and wherever there is a Christian presence. Since the SCCs are one of the ways in which the love of God becomes real in a very tangible way, the bishops feel that, for the present, this way of being Church can bring about a real communion in the Church.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

⁴⁸ CBCI, "Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India on the Occasion of Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000", in *Catholic India*, 2000, p.109

2.10 SCCs as Pastoral Priority

The Indian ecclesiastical hierarchy has taken up the promotion of the SCCs as its topmost priority in the CBCI meeting in their Final Statement, It says:

As the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) ensure a participatory, active, vibrant and evangelizing Church, they should become a *pastoral priority* for the entire *Church* of India, as mentioned time and again, especially by the recent National Assembly of Yesu Krist Jayanti- 2000 at Bangalore. While recognizing the important place that ecclesial movements and associations have in the Church, these are called to the fuller understanding of their collaborative role in relation to SCCs.⁴⁹

The CBCI has thus acknowledged the importance of promoting SCCs in the country. The bishops are on such a promotion drive because the hierarchy feels that one of the best ways to bring about communion in the given circumstances of the present milieu is by fostering SCCs. Further, SCCs are not just working at the theoretical level, but have got concrete plans to bring about the formation of a participatory Church.

2.11 SCCs provide a regular platform for its members to discuss and plan activities:⁵⁰ The whole church in the neighbourhood is involved. The Liturgy has become participatory; PPC members are elected from SCC unit. Decisions are taken at the SCC level.⁵¹ The animators are well trained and quite capable of conducting meetings on their own. They prepare an agenda, write minutes, plan their activities, evaluate, visit families, and reach out in times of need, etc. they do all this on their own. The presence of a priest acts as a motivating factor of people's action.⁵²

2.12 The impact of the Word leads the people to conviction. The people are able to reach out to others.⁵³ It is interesting to know that the people are willing to hear the Word and to live that Word. They feel it is a better way of relating to Jesus and to reach others.⁵⁴ Fr. I.P. Sarto says that in his area about 70 % of the people are involved in SCC as they want to read the Word of God as a community, to reflect together and to plan for their well being. These people are convinced that the Word of God strengthens, moulds, heals and transforms them, their families and the neighbourhood.⁵⁵ The people feel called by God himself to participate actively in these communities because they live by the Word of God and make gospel living possible.⁵⁶

Whenever one is open to the Word of God there is bound to be a change in the person.⁵⁷ The Word of God has the power to inspire, to heal and to transform.⁵⁸The

⁴⁹ CBCI, *Final Statement of CBCI*, Kolkota, 2001, No 3

⁵⁰ Interview with Thomas Vijay, SAC

⁵¹ Interview with Sr. Emilia Monteiro, SMI

⁵² Interview with Mr. Elvin S. Colaco

⁵³ Interview with Mr. Sachin Fernandes

⁵⁴ Interview with Fr. Faustine John Pinto

⁵⁵ Interview with Fr. Fr I.P.Sarto

⁵⁶ Interview with Fr. Francis Scaria

⁵⁷ EA, 46

Christian community has to be made aware that the Church is based and nourished on the Word of God. Emeritus Bishop Alphonse Bilung says that “Once the power of God’s Word permeates the lives of the people the SCC will become the fruit of God’s work.”⁵⁹

Those who practice Gospel sharing has a taste to read the Word of God,⁶⁰ they take the initiative to read the Bible, meditate over it and share their personal reflections.⁶¹ When they become familiar with Gospel spirituality and try to be sincere in their Christian life.⁶² They grow in self confidence to go through any tough situation as they believe that God is with them⁶³ and they are more open and committed to serve the wider community.⁶⁴

2.13 Involvement in Social Problems: SCCs promote social development like improving the civic amenities, helping the poor and bringing harmony in the neighbourhood.⁶⁵ As Catholics our involvement into social problems constitutes an important element of our Christian faith. Faith without action is useless. It is when we reach out in love and charity to those in real need and when we empower the marginalized and downtrodden of our society then our faith comes to fruition. Hence it is a very important component of Christian living and SCC’s have to encourage the members to deal with social problems in their plan of action.⁶⁶ Sr. Alda Paes says that SCC’s are 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 fully yet to come.⁶⁷

2.14 Impact on Families and Neighbors: One of the first tangible sign of the SCCs growth is the interaction between families and the influence of the SCC on the family.⁶⁸ The SCCs have the capacity to make a positive impact on relationships. If people are open to Gospel sharing and try to live in accordance to its spirituality there is bound to be a change in their attitude and in their relationships. There are many instances of testimonies of people and families that have been reconciled after attending SCC meetings.⁶⁹ SCCs have promoted better family life and good neighborly relations. In particular, the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness is growing,⁷⁰ many family disputes and quarrels over property, money etc. are resolved in the SCCs,⁷¹ but in order to make

⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. Elvin S. Colaco

⁵⁹ Interview with Emeritus Bishop Alphonse Bilung

⁶⁰ Interview with Sr. Emilia Monteiro, SMI

⁶¹ Interview with Sr. M. Lancine Parampi SRA

⁶² Interview with Bishop Thomas Dabre

⁶³ Interview with Dr. Poonam Anupama Ekka

⁶⁴ Interview with Bishop Ignatius L. Mascarenhas

⁶⁵ Interview with Ms. Jayasheeli

⁶⁶ Journeying together the third millennium – The Final Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference 1990 Bandung, Indonesia, pt: 8.1.4 Pg. 22

⁶⁷ Interview with Sr. Alda Paes, SAC

⁶⁸ Interview with Mr. Gordon E. Morris

⁶⁹ Interview with Bishop Gerald John Mathias, Mrs. Janice D’Mello

⁷⁰ Interview with Bishop Thomas Dabre

⁷¹ Interview with Most Rev Dr. S. Singaroyan

a real impact, the SCCs must be strong.⁷² The neighbors, who were not on talking terms, have been brought together and reconciled by SCCs. It is seen that from time to time the families do come together and have a sense of belonging, and support one another. This is seen especially during the time of funerals, and when families are in crisis, or in sickness.⁷³ Thus, the SCCs have become a very good pedestal to unite families.

2.15 SCCs with ministries. If SCCs are with family ministry then they will help the SCC members to deepen their relationship. Community starts from the family. So the activities that are carried out by the SCCs have made definite impact on relationship within family.⁷⁴ After gospel sharing members go home and discuss this in their own family. This connection to the gospel and life situations improves the bonding in the family. They become more caring and tolerant. God begins to live in that home and His presence makes the members to be good and loving. This ensures to increase love and bonding both within the family and with others.⁷⁵ Families that are God centered live in total trust in God. This love and unity which is seen in families is spilled over to the neighbourhood and is eventually seen spreading all through the Parish, Diocese, State and the Country too.⁷⁶

3. Challenges to A Way Forward.

Let us reflect on some of the challenges that we need to face to make the NWBC fruitful and passionate.

3.1 Servant Leadership: In the NWBC people need to exercise a serving style of leadership, which is encouraging, enabling, training, inspiring and empowering. In this style of leadership people are not “dominating and bossing leaders”.⁷⁷ Bishop Lucas Kerketta says: “In SCCs all of Christ’s faithful build up each other while forming their SCCs, contributing to the building up of the Body of Christ, the communion of communities.”⁷⁸ **Rotating leadership**⁷⁹ is another way of making the Church more participatory. People are happy that many get the opportunity to participate, and that the rotational leadership especially is very welcoming. In the SCCs, leadership roles are normally shared by different people for specific periods of time. We need to teach people to accept rotating leadership so that the community will take the responsibility to invite many people to share leadership roles.⁸⁰ It is also sad to note that for some

⁷² Interview with Emeritus Bishop Alphonse Bilung

⁷³ Interview with Fr. Patrick D’Mello

⁷⁴ Interview with Dr. Bipin Kishore Kullu

⁷⁵ Interview with Dr. Poonam Anupama Ekka

⁷⁶ Interview with Sr. Alda Paes, SAC

⁷⁷ Interview with Bishop Lucas Kerketta

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ In Rotational leadership the leaders are change from time to time or from period to period.

⁸⁰ Interview with Fr. Thomas Vijay, SAC

animators to be in the background for long is a painful process.⁸¹ However, there is a growing awareness regarding the rotating leadership.⁸²

3.2 Non-dominating Leadership: One of the main principles of the SCCs is the presence of a non-dominating leadership. Jesus advocated a simple, servant style which is lost and needs to be revived. A non-dominating, animating, collaborative style of pastoral leadership at all levels of hierarchy⁸³ is to be fostered. Priests and religious should allow the lay people to take up leadership roles, share their views, give suggestions and actively help in the planning and implementation of the pastoral programs in the parish. The clergy should always encourage members of the SCCs to participate in the meetings as well as Church activities so that the parish becomes a more vibrant community.⁸⁴ Transparency, openness and consultation/ consensus should be the operating style in decision making. We ought to embrace not only a consultative element but also one of arriving at a '**consensus**'.⁸⁵

3.3 The participation of the Laity: Lay participation is the cornerstone of the NWBC. The small neighbourhood communities are like *mini churches* that are animated by the lay people who take responsibility for their proper functioning. The people themselves plan their activities and meet their felt needs. We need to have programs that respond to people's needs and we are bound to evoke participation and involvement in large numbers.⁸⁶ The idea of the laity as 'people of God' is more visibly manifested at the SCC level. The participation at the SCC level invariably leads to participation at the parish level too since the laity begin to accept they are the church.⁸⁷

3.4 Training of Laity: A suitable number of the laity needs to be trained and appropriate skills for community building.⁸⁸ Those SCCs who are trained properly will find a stronger sense of God and church.⁸⁹ Mr. Elvin S. Colaco says that whenever the SCC formation was accompanied by creating proper awareness among people there is a degree of understanding and appreciation of God's call, the role of the laity and the need for participation. The Laity try to live and witness the early Christian spirit and work as leaven among others.⁹⁰ The realization of the Kingdom of God makes them aware to come together and get involved in SCCs.⁹¹

3.5 Co-responsibility of the Laity: We need to make a pastoral implementation body by helping people to be co-responsible in the missionary mandate of the church locally.⁹² Thus, there is a greater participation and co-responsibility on the part of the

⁸¹ Interview with Mr. Gordon E. Morris

⁸² Interview with Fr. Harold Pereira

⁸³ Interview with Mr. Elvin S. Colaco

⁸⁴ Interview with Bishop Gerald John Mathias

⁸⁵ Interview with Mr. Elvin S. Colaco

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interview with Archbishop Filipe Neri Ferrao

⁸⁹ Interview with Fr. Thomas Vijay

⁹⁰ Interview with Sr. M. Lancine Parampi

⁹¹ Interview with Ms. Jayasheeli

⁹² Interview with Mrs. Janice D'Mello

laity and is practiced in SCCs and this is a sign that the Church is becoming more participatory.⁹³

3.6 Participatory Structures: We need to create adequate infrastructure along with animation teams to spread awareness and understanding of SCCs.⁹⁴ The Bishops Conference of the region has to own the vision and give priority to the SCC ministry.⁹⁵ All dioceses need to make **SCCs a pastoral priority**.⁹⁶ We could make SCCs a pastoral implementation body by helping people to be co responsible in the missionary mandate of the church locally. Time has come for every diocese to set apart personnel and finances for building awareness in the people.⁹⁷ Each diocese could have a Diocesan SCC team⁹⁸ with a full time director for SCCs⁹⁹ and they could also have SCC materials and modules made available in vernacular language.¹⁰⁰ It would be appreciable to make a strategy, that when a priest who is promoting SCC is transferred, another priest who promotes SCC replaces him for the continuation of the SCC work¹⁰¹ or else all the hard work of the previous person goes in vain.

The various structures of the Church such as Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC), deanery council, Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), diocesan and finance committees should be made active and effective. The laity and the religious should be adequately represented in these structures. The clergy, especially the pastors, should be willing to share responsibility and to delegate. We could have the PPC members from the SCCs. When all these structures are in place we will have committed faithful in the church, thus a participatory church. Every parish needs to have a parish animation team¹⁰² and we could build and strengthen the effectiveness of pastoral animation teams to promote SCCs.¹⁰³ Parish structure needs to adopt new changes for new ministries and need to encourage people as far as possible.¹⁰⁴

3.7 SCC is a process : SCCs must spread gradually.¹⁰⁵ The SCC movement must be seen as a process. Bishop Thomas Dabre says that priests and religious should act as regular animators/ guides and should cultivate the art of getting things done by the people.¹⁰⁶ SCC is a process, it brings people together and it still has to go a long way¹⁰⁷ but we have no patience and want to see full results immediately and in the bargain give up the process in the mid-way.

⁹³ Interview with Bishop Lucas Kerketta, SVD

⁹⁴ Interview with Mr. Elvin S. Colaco

⁹⁵ Interview with Sr. Mabel D'Souza UFS

⁹⁶ Interview with Mr. Elvin S. Colaco

⁹⁷ Interview with Mr. Gordon E. Morris

⁹⁸ Interview with Fr. Harold Pereira

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Sr. Mabel D' Souza UFS

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Interview with Mr. Joseph D'souza

¹⁰³ Interview with Mrs. Jancie D'Mello

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Mr. Joseph D'souza

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Fr. Francis Scaria

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Bishop Thomas Dabre

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Bishop Selvister Ponnuthan

3.8 New Ministries. A New Way of Being Church will surely go in for the **creation of various ministries** at the SCCs level. It is essential that various ministries like a ministry of education. A ministry of social action, of health services, a family apostolate, of liturgical animation. In addition it is good to give community recognition at SCC or SHC level.¹⁰⁸ There is a great need to **coordinate the various service activities** rendered by the SCCs. Care should be taken that the various ministries are not monopolized by all the services of the community. Every Christian Community is and must always remain a community of service.¹⁰⁹

Michel Navant Identified lay ministries like evangelical ministry, catechetical ministry, animation for prayer ministry, liturgical animation ministry, family ministry, healing ministry, mass communication ministry, youth and education ministry.¹¹⁰ Arulsamy adds to say that various other ministries like religious harmony and Inter religious dialogue, Family counselling and marriage preparation ministry¹¹¹ will activate the latent talents of the laity and bring a new outlook to the laity. Joseph G. Healey says that lay ministries like AIDS outreach, ecology and environment, peacemaking, healing and evangelization have emerged out of the pastoral priority of building SCCs as a New Way of Church from the grassroots upwards.¹¹²

3.9 Small Grassroots Communities: Our parishes are so large and so In the set up of the parishes, it is not possible for Christian to be active and participatory. So Small grassroots communities may be a way out at the present situation. These communities provide the right atmosphere for the gradual initiation of the young into the Christian life of the community. They present many opportunities for a fast changing world. It is here that the liturgy can be meaningfully celebrated and sacraments fully administered. In communities like these Bible can be read and reflected upon the context of the needs, problems and challenges of our people. This all make the life of a Christian a living and vibrant reality.¹¹³ Being aware of the rich heritage of Indian religions These grassroots communities will enter into dialogue with the followers of these religions and will collaborate with them in tackling the problems and meeting the challenges of contemporary India. In this way these grassroots communities will progressively incarnate themselves into the life and reality of our country and thus become fully inculturated.¹¹⁴

3.10 National Integration: Inter Religious harmony is in the interest of National Integration. Unless people are bound together in peace and Justice there cannot be

¹⁰⁸ K. Kunnumpuram, "Laity and Creative Ministries," *Indian Missiological Review*, ATC, Bombay, Vol.8, No. 3, 1986, p.178

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ M. Navant, "Ministries Musing on a Seminar" *Indian Theological Studies*, St Peter's Pontifical Institute of Theology, Bangalore, Vol XIV, No.1, 1977, p.157.

¹¹¹ A. Arulsamy, "New Vistas of the Lay Ministries", *The Divine Shepherd's Voice*, Vol 6, No. 2 Coimbatore, 2008, p.129.

¹¹² J.G. Healey, "How New Ministries are Emerging", *Priests and People*, Vol 8, No.2, 1994, p.67.

¹¹³ K. Kunnumpuram, "Laity and Creative Ministries," p.175

¹¹⁴ K. Kunnumpuram, "Laity and Creative Ministries," p.175

national integration. ¹¹⁵ SCCs are a good starting point to built national integration. Vibrant and enthusiastic SCCs can slowly emerge into neighbourhood communities and passionate Neighbourhood Communities will surely materialize to grow into the values of the Kingdom like Justice, Peace, fellowship, freedom etc. and this in turn could dream to built national integration.

3.11 Basic Human Communities: “Basic human communities are a microcosm of an alternative society grounded on values of justice, search for the truth and harmonious co-existence.”¹¹⁶ To concretize the aspect of Small Human Communities, we find that *Ecclesia in Asia 24* brings out the aspect of Communion Ecclesiology. Christians no longer belong to themselves but to the Lord. They are united to Jesus and are bound by the Spirit and are also united to the Father. So the Church’s first purpose is “to be the sacrament of the inner union of the human person with God.” She is also “the sacrament of the unity of human race.” This means that “communion and mission are inseparably connected and they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other.” Communion is “both the source and fruit of mission.” In short, “communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion” (*EA 24*).¹¹⁷ Small Christian Communities can become Human communities when Our Inter Religious Dialogue is **involvement based** and we have to learn it through doing it. The process will be learning in the context. We learn by doing it and this will also generate lasting motivation and commitment. I feel that this approach is not only legitimate but also desirable. Our SCCs are involvement- based and doing communities so SCCs could give us an impetus.

3.12 Civic and political involvement: We have to motivate the present SCCs and train them to be involved in **civic and politics** and finally making them effective instruments in promoting SHCs.

Conclusion

In short, we could say that the various expressions of the New Way of Being Church are just pathways and indicators for the faithful, to come closer for a deeper commitment to the Lord and to lead a life of greater dedication, zeal and enthusiasm. Today, witness plays a very crucial role in all the spheres of life. The people of today are looking for concrete expressions of the faith.

The SCC is becoming a New Way of Being Church because the Christian communities are experiencing a certain sense of satisfaction while being in these communities. Since the SCC methodology is action-oriented, one can easily evaluate for oneself the veracity and authenticity of the movement.

¹¹⁵V. Sekhar, *Religions in Public Life – A Practical Guide to Religious Harmony*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2004, p. 66

¹¹⁶ M. Lobo, “ Dialogue :A Celebration of Diversity,” *Mission Today*, Vendrame Institute Publications, Shillong, Vo1, No.1,2 & 3, 1999,p.101

¹¹⁷ J. H. Kroeger, “Exploring Mission in Ecclesia in Asia”, *Mission Today*, p.158.