

# New wine, new wineskins

## Emergence of New Pastoral Structures in the light of a New Vision of FABC V Assembly in living out of Vatican II vision

### Introduction:

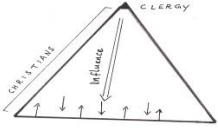
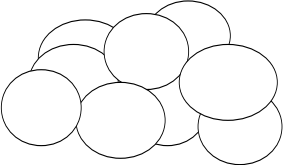
Structure is far more important than we usually realize. Every building in the world, including our church building, has to have the right structure to stand up and not to collapse. This applies not only to buildings and edifices, but also to living beings. An animal can grow to no more than nine inches without the structure of an internal skeletal system.

Our social and community life also follow some structured norms and practices. Some of these structures promote growth while there are other structures that promote exploitation and oppression.

When we come to the Christian Church, we have the refreshing model of the early Church with a minimum of structures. Over the centuries, however, the Church accumulated an oppressive array of structures, until the time of the decongestion initiatives set in motion by the Vatican II Council. The model of the Church that has become dominant since Vatican II is that of a communion of communities. The model and source of ecclesial communion is the Holy Trinity – the perfect and eternal communion of the three Divine Persons. To envision the Church as communion is to emphasize the inter-personal and communitarian dimension of the Church. “It is in the concept of communion that theology in our own day has found the key for approaching the mystery of the Church... a Sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”<sup>1</sup> With new understanding of Church as Mystical Communion, Church as Sacrament, Church as Herald, Church as Servant, Church as the People of God, there came about a shift in the way of being and doing Church.

Moving away from an Old Way of Being Church

Moving Towards a New Way of Being Church

1	<p>That is massive, highly institutionalized and impersonal. A church where members live in anonymity and do not feel a sense of belonging.</p> 	<p>That is Communion, a community whose members are in communion with God and with one another.</p> 
2	<p>That is identified exclusively with the hierarchy and that ignores the laity.</p>	<p>That is People of God participating in the mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet &amp; King (Hierarchical Leadership at the service of the People of God)</p>
3	<p>That is exclusively ritualistic and</p>	<p>With a holistic perspective which encourages</p>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI (*Dec. 12, 2007 General Audience*)

	sacramental, a Church that is not concerned about the situation of poverty, injustice, violence and the destruction of the environment.	involvement in the temporal/social order
4	That is associated with the rich and powerful, where the poor are marginalized.	That is also a prophetic and servant community.
5	That is only concerned about heaven	That is not only concerned about heaven, it is also concerned about the earth and all its problems.

This great contribution of Vatican II for renewal is the realization of Church as a community of love and the ministry of the Church as ministry of the Word. It has given the Church a new way of being, namely, to be a communion of Communities (SCCs). This dream of the Vatican II is realized through the promotion of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). The Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC (1990), in its Final Statement, stated, "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"<sup>2</sup> This Fifth FABC Assembly has also made a significant contribution to the development and growth of the spiritual and theological life of SCCs in India.

The CBCI has taken SCCs as the main thrust of its work since 1989. SCC was adopted as a model for the Church in India by the CBCI in January 1992. The Statement of the General Body Meeting held in Trivandrum in 1996 on 'Lay Participation in the Church' notes: "Thus the building of Basic (Small) Christian (and Human) Communities flowing from our celebration of the Eucharist (Acts 4:32-37) is pastorally desirable. The model of the Church is 'communion of communities'. Parish councilors are best chosen from among the animators of SCCs. We affirm our resolution, made at the Conference in Pune 1992, to develop this form of Church life all over the country"<sup>3</sup>

### 1. SCCs as decentralization of parishes enabling people's involvement

In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II affirmed that "BECs are centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach. They are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, a solid starting point for a new society based on a "civilization of love." BECs decentralize and organize the parish community to which they remain united. They take root among the less privileged. They become a leaven of Christian life, care for the poor, and commitment to the transformation of society... They are a means of evangelization and of initial proclamation of the Gospel - a source of new ministries. They are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are a cause for great hope for the life of the Church."<sup>4</sup> (RM 51).

#### Small Christian Communities and New Structures:

If we try to put the new life of a grassroot movement into the rigid and hierarchical structures of the traditional way of being and doing Church, we will destroy it. Frustration and conflict will either lead to

<sup>2</sup> FABC V,#8.1.1.1.

<sup>3</sup> CBCI Final Statement, 1996, no 66.

<sup>4</sup> RM 51.

split or withdrawal. New wine in new wineskins is a brilliant Gospel image, one too often overlooked in various "renewal" programs in our church. In other words, the new wine will be lost if we try to preserve it in old wineskins. "To new wine, new wineskins". This is why "the Church asks us, all of us, for a few changes. She asks us to leave aside fleeting structures; they aren't necessary! And get new wineskins, those of the Gospel".<sup>5</sup>

The Church, however, follows the wisdom of Jesus, which is less confrontational. Luke 5:39 affirms the value of the mature wine contained within the old wineskins. If the Church were to attempt to accommodate itself to the SCC way of being church we would probably lose a large degree of the existing support: the old wineskins would break rather than bend. Some might argue that this is necessary, that the traditional Churches are full of things that hinder the growth of real, biblical Christianity. However Jesus doesn't want to destroy and lose the old: he wants the Church to have the wisdom to allow new structures to exist in parallel with the old structures.

### 1.1: The Church as a people of God

Vatican II views **the Church as a people of God** that is prophetic, priestly & kingly by nature and mission. This image of the Church asserts that all the baptized share in the life and mission of the Church. Thus, the laity have the right and responsibility to actively participate in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of the Church.

Lay people, "by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which they enjoy, are able and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on things which concern the good of the church"<sup>6</sup>. They can do this either individually or through appropriate bodies<sup>7</sup>. It is therefore the duty of the Church's Pastors to be attentive to the suggestions and proposals of the lay faithful, while at the same time exercising the freedom and authority which is theirs by divine right to shepherd that part of God's people entrusted to them.

SCCs at the grass root level are mostly led and run by laypeople, thus giving them a chance to exercise directly and actively their kingly-prophetic-priestly role. Since SCCs are in grassroots communities in far-away villages which see their parish priest sometimes only once a week or month, or worse, once a year for a feast day, the lay people take the leadership role of facilitating the Gospel sharing sessions. Not only the lay leader, but the rest of the community also share their experiences and reflections on the Word of God. Decisions as to a common stand and action to be taken on a particular social issue are deliberated upon and made by the entire community, not by one person alone. In this way, the SCC is truly participatory in accordance with Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion, and the vision of the Fifth FABC Assembly in Bandung in the year 1990. The co-responsibility which must characterize the Vatican II Church is nowhere more palpable than in the SCC where members are no mere passive spectators in the liturgy, followers of ready-made decisions, or recipients of the Church's charitable works. In the SCC the lay people are actively engaged in all aspects of their Christian community life, including the process of policy and decision making.

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<sup>5</sup> *Pope Francis Mass at Santa Marta, Sept. 5, 2014, L'OSSERVATOREROMANO.*

<sup>6</sup> *Lumen gentium, n. 37*

<sup>7</sup> cf. *Congregation for the Clergy, Omnes Christifideles, 25 January 1973)*

## 1.2 A New Direction is in process:

Moving away from

Moving Towards

1	<b>Emphasis on Institutional Church</b>	<b>Church as people</b> the reign of God
2	Administration	Mission and Animation
3	Centralization in the person of leader	Centrality of the participation of people
4	Building	community
5	Saved	In need of change and conversion

From a clergy-centered Church and the parochial structures to people’s participation. (<Is this a title? It is not a full sentence) It is an effort of inculturation, dialogue, empowerment and liberation. The relationship between interreligious harmony, mission, and dialogue was elaborated by the Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly as follows: Mission in Asia will also seek through dialogue to serve the cause of unity of the peoples of Asia marked by such a diversity of beliefs, cultures and socio-political structures. In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament — a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony<sup>8</sup> The Fifth FABC Plenary Assembly also equated the triple dialogue with the Christian mission imperative and concluded: Mission includes: being with the people, responding to their needs with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing and word. Mission will mean to dialogue with Asia’s poor, with its local cultures, and with other religious traditions<sup>9</sup>

The same inspiration was received by the Bishops of India. And they greatly emphasized the importance of SCCs in their 30th General Body Meeting held in Bangalore, from February 1-8, 2012, and they write in their Final Statement: “The Church will seize opportunities to be an instrument of reconciliation, seeking to be a bridge-building community among peoples. We will encourage our lay faithful especially our Small Christian Communities, to engage in a dialogue of life whereby they interact with people of other religious traditions, being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows. We will encourage our faithful to enter into a dialogue of action whereby people of different persuasions work harmoniously with a common concern for the good of society”(no 8.9). It is an invitation and challenge to the Church in the neighbourhood where it needs to become leaven. **Can you add a few sentences showing how SCCs is the best place for dialogue of life – people get a sense of it and work for harmony, unity, etc. End it by saying that SCCs is a place dialogue must be encouraged since it helps in facing up to real life issues in living out the gospel in a multi-cultural and religious context.**

## 1.3 SCCs represent a new presence of the Church.

The findings of the National Survey conducted in 2010 by NST show that in India 36 dioceses show a mature sense of “being Church” by making the mission of the Church their collective responsibility in their neighborhoods and 60 dioceses (nearly 51%) are gradually enabling their SCCs to take up the services the Gospel demands from them in being Church locally. The concept of the New Way of Being Church demands a new way of understanding and practicing leadership. The survey shows that 38 dioceses are already moving strong in the direction of promoting a participatory leadership while 63 dioceses do it in a moderate way.

<sup>8</sup> FABC V, art. 4.2,

<sup>9</sup> FABC V, art. 3.1.2,

In 76 dioceses SCCs understand leadership as facilitating and enabling the community involvement in planning, decision making, etc. 34 dioceses practice rotating leadership always at all levels. This will help the community to become mature and responsible for their mission. It will help many people to take up leadership roles in the Church and society. "We meet in different houses and whoever is the host, she is the one who will choose the readings and coordinate. That means all of us are leaders," Says Kumdini SCC parish Coordinator; a nurse from Bokaro City parish. "I think in most places... the host becomes the facilitator" adds Mr. David. This fluid pattern of rotating and revolving responsibility may be a sign of a desire for participative or democratic structures, reflecting cultural character of SCCs in India.

There is still a need in the institutional and hierarchical Church to decentralize activities, ministries, locations and materials. Decentralizing and delegating responsibilities need to be part of a permanent process in the SCCs. They give opportunities for new people to take up responsibilities and avoid having the same person to do everything in the SCCs. We do not want one person to do 12 people's work but create conditions and opportunities for 12 people to work.

## **2.1 New DPC/PPC Structures Emerging**

As part of a renewal of the Church, Vatican II called for a number of new structures to promote active involvement and collaboration in the mission of the Church. After the Council a new structure was proposed by the Church to call forth the insights and cooperation of persons at the level of the local community. That structure is the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). In "Novo Millennio Inuente," Pope John Paul II stressed the need to foster greater involvement of the laity through participatory structures such as pastoral councils and parish assemblies. "Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church's life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be clearly characterized by communion. To this end, the structures of participation envisaged by Canon Law, such as *the Council of Priests and the Pastoral Council*, must be ever more highly valued. These of course are not governed by the rules of parliamentary democracy, because they are consultative rather than deliberative;<sup>29</sup> yet this does not mean that they are less meaningful and relevant. The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful: on the one hand uniting them *a priori* in all that is essential, and on the other leading them to pondered agreement in matters open to discussion. To this end, we need to make our own the ancient pastoral wisdom which, without prejudice to their authority, encouraged Pastors to listen more widely to the entire People of God."(45)

### ***Ecclesia in Asia*, "The Church in Asia."**

Pope John Paul II presented in New Delhi, India, on November 6, 1999, the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* to more than 100 Asian Bishops. It is based on the work of the April 19 - May 14, 1998 Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, one of the regional synods called for by the Pope as part of preparations for the Jubilee Year 2000. (*Published in Origins 29:23 (November 18, 1999): 357, 359-384.*)

"Every particular church must be grounded in the witness of ecclesial communion that constitutes its very nature as church. 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 communion implies that each local church should become what the synod fathers called a 'participatory church,' a church, that is, in which all live their proper vocation and perform their proper role. In order to build up the 'communion for mission' and the 'mission of communion,' every member's unique charism needs to be acknowledged, developed and effectively utilized. In particular there is a need to foster greater involvement of the laity and consecrated men and women in pastoral planning and decision making through such participatory structures as pastoral councils and parish assemblies.

"In every diocese, the parish remains the ordinary place where the faithful gather to grow in faith, to live the mystery of ecclesial communion and to take part in the church's mission. Therefore, the synod fathers urged pastors to devise new and effective ways of shepherding the faithful, so that everyone, especially the poor, will feel truly a part of the parish and of God's people as a whole. Pastoral planning with the lay faithful should be a normal feature of all parishes." (*Paragraph 25, p. 372*)

## **2.2. ESTABLISHMENT OF A PPC**

**The Code of Canon Law.** To reflect the exciting, ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church, Pope John XXIII called for a revision of the 1917 Code of Canon Law. The revised code was promulgated in 1983 by Pope John Paul II. Echoing the spirit of Vatican II, the new code emphasized the communal nature of the Church. This is particularly evident in the code's definition of parish: A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church (diocese); the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. <sup>10</sup>(*Canon 515. 1*)

### **The role of the laity defined in the canons:**

The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated into Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God; for this reason, since they have become sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner, they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one. <sup>11</sup>(*Canon 204*)

### **The call for the establishment of parish pastoral councils:**

After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyteral council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish; the pastor presides over it, and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office give their help in fostering pastoral activity. <sup>12</sup>(*Canon 536 1*)

By virtue of their baptism, then, the laity are empowered to participate in the mission of the Church and in the "pastoral activity" of the parish, a community of believers striving to experience more fully the

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<sup>10</sup> . *Canon 515. 1*

<sup>11</sup> . *Canon 204*

<sup>12</sup> . *Canon 536 1*

Kingdom of God in a particular time and place. One of the ways in which the laity exercise this call is through service on the Parish Pastoral Council.

Parishioners who serve on a PPC must be those who have received a call to the service of leadership. Together with the pastor, these are individuals who are capable of reflection, discernment, visioning, reaching consensus, and pastoral planning. The clergy and parish staff, too, must possess and demonstrate this same disposition toward the ministry of shared leadership if the process is to be effective. For this reason, the pastor and the council members ought to engage in initial and ongoing formation in the ministry of leadership.

In India, 61 dioceses elect their PPC members through SCCs . More and more dioceses are getting their PPC members through SCCs. This makes sure that the whole parish has their representatives elected and rotated after a period of time. They are formed and trained in co responsibility and shared leadership and team work. Through the pastoral planning process, the pastor and pastoral council leads the parish in the discernment and expression of its mission. In communication and cooperation with the associate pastor, parish staff, finance council, parish organizations and committees, and all parishioners, the parish pastoral council focuses the vision of the parish on the essential elements of parish life. A service of leadership that is rooted in the Spirit has the potential to continually pour the new wine of God's Word into the wineskin that is the renewed parish. By re-visioning the parish through the ministry of the Parish Pastoral Council, the entire parish joins together in fulfilling its unique role within the local and universal church. **Can you also talk about some difficulties or objections pastoral workers and people put against this like, it will make those not participating in SCCs not eligible for PPC and answer it by stating it the other way; it is not preventing them, but inviting them to fully be active in the community building process.**

### **3.NST/NRT/NCSCC and parallel regional/diocesan structures making participation and consensus making as the way**

The Small Christian Communities do recognize the essentiality and importance of the hierarchy and its functions. But the present hierarchical structure does not begin with the grass roots who need leadership and coordination and proceeds to the leaders. The Small Christian Communities are an attempt to call the church to its original status, the small neighbourhood community. The characteristic nature of these communities of the grass roots started on the day of Pentecost. It is continued by the presence of the Holy Spirit to represent Christ in the church and the world. The SCCs point to a church institution where the clergy and the laity share responsibility in the building up of the church; the body of Christ.

The restructuring of the church suggested by the SCCs is an attempt to help the church to re-discover itself. The suggestion is to have bishops, priests and laity establishes a network of relationships with one another, involving one another. The shape of this structure will not be a triangular one but a **circularity one**. This will enable the laity to participate in the decision-making process which would imply a decentralization of power.

SCCs form teams at various levels. There are teams of animation and coordination in all levels; Neighborhood SCCs, parish, diocese, Region, National. These are based on the communion ecclesiology and establish minimal structure of the Church. They help coordination that facilitates reciprocally efficient contact and joint action.

**In the SCC level:**



It is necessary to form teams for each SCC which allow integration. In the SCC level leadership is shared and the desirable rotating leadership is introduced. Planning and decision making is done in collaboration with the SCC members. The mission is carried out in teams.

**In the Parish level:**

In the parish level, together with the parish priest, there is a parish animation team for coordination and animation of SCCs. This team is trained. Parish is organized and coordinated by creating neighborhood communities and committing them to people who live in there. They unite themselves with others and form animators' teams and service teams which can help promote SCCs in the parish. This team accompanies and helps for joint visits and tour of the parish. They create opportunities for exchange of experiences and resources, and share stories of success and struggles. They do constant evaluation of the community life in the SCCs, and help them with problem solving skills and promote celebrations of feasts and sacraments.

**In the Diocese level:** There are three layers of Teams; Diocesan Service Team (DST), Diocesan Resource Team (DRT), Diocesan SCC Council. It is very encouraging to see that the SCC structure in 69 dioceses of India, work as co-responsible teams of clergy, religious and laity. It is a sign of the great influence the SCCs have on dioceses, parishes and their leaders in putting into practice the Vatican II model of ecclesiology. 61 dioceses elect their PPC members through SCCs. In 62 dioceses PPC promotes SCCs and involve them in decision making process in the parish.

**In the Regional level:** There are three layers of Teams; Regional Service Team (RST), Regional Resource Team (RRT), Regional SCC Council.

**In the National level:** National Service Team (NST), National Resource Team (NRT), National SCC Council (NCSCC) for providing a stable organizational network from national level to the last SCC.

- They make SCC building and animation a truly communion ecclesiology model
- Truly participatory in nature (at all levels)
- Collectively plan for stage by stage development of all SCCs in a systematic way.

The NCSCCs consists of NST members, Regional SCC Chairman bishops, Regional Secretaries and one lay person from each region.

The NRT and RRT make sure that

- formation is systematic, continuous and contextual (at all levels)
- formation programs are reviewed and proper formation materials are provided
- Translation, adaptation of formation materials are done

**NST:** The Coordinating Team has sub teams for: Finance, organizing programs, editorial team, Media desk.

SCCs offer a form of participation not normally available in traditional church structures. In SCCs women have a place of leadership. More women than men attend church and SCC meetings regularly. SCCs are led in prayer and theological reflection by both men and women.



The growth of SCCs in India necessitates a minimal structure which will assure of its continuity. SCCs are both dynamic and structured. We must seek out structures that are fertile to promote growth and life within the community.

SCCs are truly *churches at the grass roots level*. Since they are ways of decentralization of the parish<sup>13</sup> (RM 51) to foster deeper fellowship and witnessing within the local context, SCCs are referred to as a *communion of communities*. They are called *the New Way of Being Church* since they bring the church to the neighbourhood to where people live and interact daily. Small Christian communities are the Church in the Neighbourhood. They live in the present day; in the style of the Trinitarian community. Therefore they value equality of persons which does not over look differences. They try to put into practice love lived in mutual respect, confidence, humility and gentleness. SCCs are missionary as they try to reach out to one in need in the neighborhood and try to evangelize themselves and engage themselves daily in dialogue. Working in teams, community based; participative. The FABC pointed out that the ultimate goal of mission in Asia is "to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote the values of the Kingdom such as justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in the Asian reality. In short, it is to make the Kingdom of God a reality"<sup>14</sup>

**Decision making is done through Consensus.** Consensus is making unity beyond our differences.

It refers to everybody knowing what must be done because it is discerned to be the will of God rather than everyone necessarily agreeing with the decision. When the aim is that everybody knows what must be done rather than agreement, the political framework is less operative and the open mindedness required to begin discernment is made possible. Mission is always outwardly oriented rather than oriented toward the self. Self-will and imposing self-will on others cannot be the center of consensus in the Catholic Church. This implies that members of SCCs are mature enough to move beyond self-centeredness into focus on mission, and have the capacity to keep that mission in mind as they discern more tangible “practical conclusions.

Let us look at the differences between decision making through voting and consensus.

Through Voting	Through consensus
majority overpowering minority	body that acts together or not at all
forces people to choose one of two sides	no decision is made until everyone is willing to go along with it
defend own position	scrutinize my own view
defeat others	listen with care to others

<sup>13</sup> RM 51

<sup>14</sup> . FABC V, art. 1.7.

“efficient”	
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### 3. Being in partnership with different agencies in serving as people of India

"With the Christians of other churches, together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths and with all people of goodwill, to make the Kingdom of God more visibly present in Asia" (FABC V, art. 2.3.9). In an Asia marked by diversity and torn by conflicts, the Church must in a special way be a sacrament — a visible sign and instrument of unity and harmony<sup>15</sup>).

The call of SCCs as neighbourhood church is to be a net work with other communities, just as members of one body. This call is especially prophetic and touching today, in view of the occurrence of religious strife in many parts of India, e.g., the Hindu-Christian conflict (attacks on Christians from right wing Hindutva militant groups, e.g., the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Sangh Parivar, and Bajrang Dal.) This net work includes also working with different ecclesial groups with their special charism, and relates to groups in wider society like ecology, human rights, justice and peace, self help groups, non formal education, gender equality, care of the poor and rejected, exploited, marginalized, orphans, youth groups etc. with which SCCs have something in common. The parish will be a body that motivates, facilitates, animates, forms, coordinates and accompanies SCCs and other groups.

Why is net working important?

- To give new energy to the mission of the Church.
- To be deeply rooted and **grounded in communion spirituality**
- To welcome, meet, accept, share, connect, and generate new possibilities.
- To promote a sense of union and community; encouraging communal discernment;
- To be not self--centered but focused on the common mission, ultimately seeking the building of the Kingdom of God;
- To provide for a way of sharing ideas, expertise, resources, and creativity;
- To complement, strengthen and tap on local initiative rather than replacing it.
- To have the cheapest and the quickest way for solving problems and achieving goals.
- To share information and find solutions together,
- To create constructive synergy by the pooling together of many minds for the same purpose.

### 4. The overall picture of new structure emerging and the difference it will make to the Church in India

5.1. A wide variety of ways of net working among SCC bodies all over the country is taking place. Different net-working activities undertaken by the dioceses are attending national and regional level seminars and programmes, say 59 dioceses in the recent survey done by NST. They keep regular contact with NST, Regional Offices, reporting regularly in the diocese about national/regional SCC activities, subscribing to newsletters, organizing inter diocesan exchanges, facilitating inter parish SCC exchanges, exposure programs, picnics, celebration and systematic planning, implementation and regular evaluation

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<sup>15</sup> FABC V, art. 4.2

of their diocesan activities. This is the result of close connection maintained among all SCC bodies -- national, regional, and diocesan -- and focusing on the spirit of the New Way of Being Church in all our efforts.

5.2. A big contribution of SCCs to Church leadership is a great change of mind-set in priests and religious who, as 65 dioceses reported, exercise their role as facilitators.

5.3. The image of Church as communion emphasizes the communitarian and interpersonal dimension of the Church. With this type of structure Ecclesial communion can be lived out in various levels:

- a. National Level: Communion of Regions
- b. Regional Level: Communion of local Churches(Dioceses)
- c. Diocese Level: Communion of dioceses/parishes
- d. At the Parish level: Communion of SCCs
- e. SCC level: Communion of individual members, and families

5.4. The Communion and net work made strong, we can be mobilize people to participate in nationwide prayer rallies and vigils for various causes taken up by the CBCI, NST, Diocese or any other Commissions of CBCI and the diocese

5.5. To ensure just and honest elections, the SCCs can be mobilized to bring awareness to all sections of people in the Nation.

5.6. SCCs can help in protecting the environment.

**Please check the numbering for consistency. Nos. 4, 5, 6 – are they there? Is sub-numbering same everywhere?**

5.7. In response to communal violence, they can join hands with other likeminded people and be part of the peace movement that pressures the government and revolutionary forces to pursue the peace process.

5.8. Through the SCCs lay people can actively participate in the process of social transformation.

5.9. To alleviate the problem of poverty, they can set up socio-economic projects (livelihood projects, cooperatives, self-help groups, sustainable agriculture, etc.)

5.10. By involving themselves in the participatory structures within the Church, laity are receiving a continuing theological and spiritual formation, including formation in the Church's social doctrine, of a sufficiently high level to enable them to fulfill their role in the Church and in society through SCCs in various level as expressed by the Holy Father: "A constant concern of the Church's Pastors must be the question of whether Catholic laity are receiving a continuing theological and spiritual formation, including formation in the Church's social doctrine, of a sufficiently high level to enable them to fulfill their role in the Church and in society. This formation should be arranged in such a way as to meet practical difficulties at the parish level where so many secular interests compete for people's attention"<sup>16</sup>

5.11. The SCC way brings alive the local culture as SCCs are like the traditional community structure in villages, family units, township compounds and neighborhood (like Santals and other tribal communities of North India) where life is received, shared and nurtured in common.

5.12. "the local Churches and communities can discern and work together (in dialogue with each other and with other people of goodwill) to find the best way to proclaim the Gospel, set up the Church, and promote the values of God's Kingdom in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to, and serving, the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local

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<sup>16</sup> . *Holy Father to United States Bishops ad limina visits on Saturday, 2 October, L'Osservatore Romano October 13, 1993*

Churches" (FABC V, art. 3.3.1). SCCs can be a powerful instrument in promoting inter-religious dialogue in various level and be promoters of BHC (Basic Human Communities) in the neighbourhood.

Include in this section that SCCs brought a huge section ordinary people to the forefront of the local church. Eg. Even if we take 2 persons per SCC involved in leading, it amounts to 164788 persons (82394 SCCs x 2) There are more than 2 people active in every SCC which means lakhs of ordinary people have been motivated to become active agents of the gospel ...

### **Conclusion:**

In order to fulfill the dream of Vatican II and the new vision of FABC V for the Church **together with personal, communitarian, mission renewal**, we desperately **need to change the way we're organized** so that leaders are free to dream, to make decisions, to exercise faith, and to empower other leaders and volunteers without an over-abundance of red tape, policies, and procedures. The church must absolutely function with a high commitment to ethical and legal integrity, but we also can't forget that the church is a living organism that must move fast and remain fluid and flexible.

Like the first disciples of Jesus, the institutional churches in India need to consider Christ's call to a sacrificial self giving: the willingness to spend everything, even at the risk of death. Jesus had challenged his disciples by saying, "whoever wants to save his life must be willing to lose it" (Mark 8:35). If the traditional Churches gave sacrificially for the sake of the SCCs it would be a tremendous witness, a painful experience, possibly even the death of the old way of being Church. It could also be the beginning of something far more fruitful: Jesus also said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24).

As I conclude these reflections, I like to recall the words of Pope Francis, "In the Christian life, even in the life of the Church, there are old structures, passing structures: it is necessary to renew them! And the Church has always been attentive to this, with dialogue with cultures ... It always allows itself to be renewed according to places, times, and persons. The Church has always done this! From the very first moment, we remember the first theological battle: was it necessary to carry out all of the Jewish practices in order to be Christian? No! They said no! The gentiles could enter as they are: gentiles ... Entering into the Church and receiving Baptism. A first renewal of the structures. ... And so the Church always goes forward, giving space to the Holy Spirit that renews these structures, structures of the churches. Don't be afraid of that! Don't be afraid of the newness of the Gospel! Don't be afraid of the newness that the Holy Spirit works in us! Don't be afraid of the renewal of structures!"<sup>17</sup>

Can the conclusion put down some suggestions/recommendations for the future?

1. Let every diocese adapt PPC and DPC to be structured through SCCs.
2. Involve SCCs in the pastoral life of the parishes through setting up ministries.
3. Let every parish set up pastoral committees and take care of the needs of people.
4. Involve SCCs in dialogue of life
5. Train priests and sisters to be more open to people's participation
6. Other suggestions

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<sup>17</sup> ibid