

**GOLDEN JUBILEE OF VATICAN II & SILVER JUBILEE OF THE FABC 5TH PLENARY
ASSEMBLY STATEMENT 1990**

**REVIEW SEMINAR ON THE NEW WAY
OF BEING CHURCH IN INDIA**

AUGUST 25TH TO 28TH 2015, AT THE M.Th. BLOCK, JDV PUNE

**SITUATING THE SEMINAR ON THE IMPACT OF THE VISIONS OF
VATICAN II AND THE NWBC ON SCCs DEVELOPMENT IN THE CHURCH IN INDIA**

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There is no doubt to anyone's mind about the significant changes and transformation the FABC Vision of the New Way of Being Church brought to the Church in India since its inception in our country in 1990. No one heard about this vision and Lumko programmes until then. In October 1990 Fr. Dr. Oswald Hirmer, who became the bishop of Umtata in South Africa in 1997, came to India and conducted two Lumko workshops – one in Ranchi and the other in Guntur, each for a period of two weeks. Both these workshops were well-received by the participants who numbered about 250. The 5th Plenary Assembly of the FABC at Bandung, Indonesia in 1990 articulated and documented the vision of the New Way of Being Church for the whole Church in Asia. This vision would not have spread as it did in India if Fr. Hirmer had not done what he did in the following years. He invited a team of three from India to the Lumko Institute in South Africa for the one month's International course on Lumko methodology which used to be held there annually and another 5 went to Hua Hin in Thailand for the one month's Lumko international course held there in October 1991. Besides, under the office of the CBCI Laity Commission Chaired by Most Rev. Bosco Penha and assisted by Fr. Thomas Vijay its Secretary, Fr. Hirmer spent one month yearly in India from 1990 – 1996 offering Lumko workshops all over India. Already in 1990 he gave us both the permission and funds needed to print Lumko materials and later AsIPA Materials in India. He took Fr. Vijay personally to MISSIO Munich in 1991 and introduced him to its President. These were his words to him, "This is Fr. Thomas Vijay, a man full of Spirit and responsible for the SCC animation in India. Please support him with funds as much as you can." Since then to this date, we got partial support to our SCC projects from MISSIO Munich. These gestures speak volumes about Bp. Hirmer's love for the Indian Church and his generosity. During those years many more people went to Lumko

Institute, South Africa and the Lumko/AsIPA courses held in several parts of Asia, especially Thailand and Philippines.

Till 1990 SCCs were introduced only in some parishes in few dioceses of India. Many considered SCCs dangerous and feared that it would lead to division among the people. In these initial struggling stages of SCC building we cannot forget stalwarts like Abp. Susa Pakiam of Trivandrum in South, Bp Bosco Penha & team in Mumbai, Abp. Vincent Concessao in Delhi, Bp. Jose Mukala and Bp. Vincent Kimpot of fond memories in the North-east, Bp. Joseph Pathalil of Udaipur who went on motorcycle through interior villages conducting Gospel Sharing and Bp. George Ananthil of Indore, Bps. Lucas Kerketta of Sambalpur and Alphonse Bilung of Rourkela in Orissa, Bp. Thomas Kozhimala of Bhagalpur of fond memories and Julius Marandi of Dumka and several others. The Andhra Pradesh region through the services of Rev. Fr. Raphael Etikuri the then Ex. Secretary of the Jyothirmai Society, the Regional Pastoral Coordination body under the AP Regional Bishops Conference, brought the Lumko materials and translated them into Telugu in 1984 and started promoting SCCs in the region. There are others who devoted themselves totally to work of promotion of SCCs like, Fr. Edwin of Kottar, Frs. Rufus Pius Lean and James Culas of Trivandrum, Mr. Gordon Morris, Mr. Ashley Nazareth, Mr. Elvin Colaco, Fr. Joe Dias SVD, Fr. Peter Emmanuel, Sr. Christin Joseph, Sr. Martina Thabah ... and list has only begun. The Pallottine Animation Centre was founded in Nagpur in 1991 and grew up into a nerve centre for SCC animation and publications in India and made a huge contribution in spreading the vision of the New Way of Being Church. I could name hundreds of priests and sisters and lay leaders across the country who were all zealous promoters of this vision in the course of last 25 years.

A Step Forward by the CBCI/CCBI

The 1992 CBCI Meeting in this very same place in Pune, was a turning point. Although the main topic for the Conference on the Agenda was Social Justice, the topic 'SCCs' was also given 2 days. Fr. Oswald Hirmer was invited to lead the team to present the vision of the New Way of Being Church. In fact, at the end of the Conference all the bishops of India were enthused to promote SCCs in their own dioceses and endorsed unanimously to make 'SCC building a pastoral priority for the Church in India' (CBCI Pune 1992). Most of the subsequent CBCI and CCBI Conferences reinforced the importance of SCCs for the Church in India. The 27th Plenary Assembly of the CCBI held in 2015 at Bangalore states thus : *As the Universal Church prepares herself for the Synod on the Family in October 2015, we recognize the importance of the communion of families in neighborhoods which are the Small Christian Communities (SCC) that always relate liturgy to life and vice versa. It is through the communion of families in the neighborhood, that the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church becomes Eucharistic like the early apostolic communities (Acts, chapters 2 and 4). We therefore pledge ourselves to strengthen the SCC as the true way of being the living Church.*(Message of the 27th CCBI plenary assembly held at Bengaluru from 3-9 February, 2015, no. 8)

Lumko/AsIPA/DIIPA vision

Fr. Hirmer remains the significant person in transforming the Asian Church since he re-versioned Lumko programmes for Asia. He gathered a team from different countries of Asia and began a process of re-designing the Lumko programmes and eventually he named it AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach). It is this new vision which spread to many Asian countries, enthusing their interest in promoting SCCs. His own personal interest to spend 6 months every year in Asia, organizing workshops all over Asia and his zeal to promote AsIPA materials led to SCCs taking roots in over 17 Asian countries.

From AsIPA to DIIPA

In 1996 Fr. Oswald Hirmer and Fr. Vijay animated Fr. Hirmer's last workshop in India at Palai. During that workshop he spoke about the importance of adapting the AsIPA programme for the Indian Church. He also emphasized that the process of adaptation should take the form of a community discernment witnessing the spirit of the New Way of Being Church. In the years which followed a team of animators met regularly at PAC in Nagpur for sharing, studying together and promoting SCCs in different dioceses of India. This programme shaped into '**the Mission in Communion Programme**'. This programme held annually brought together animators from all over the country to share, pray together, support learn new training materials and to plan together for the year ahead. These meetings gave us a wonderful team and community spirit which has guided our lifestyle and work to this day. It is in these meetings that we tried to adapt Lumko/AsIPA methodology for the Indian situation. In 2001 that effort took concrete shape in **DIIPA (Developing Indian Integral Pastoral Approach)** Training materials.

Yesu Khrist Jayanti 2000

The CBCI Committee set up for the Yesu Khrist Jayanti 2000 celebrations and for ushering in the 21st century with new ardour, new methods and new expressions for evangelization under the Chairmanship of Most Rev. Gali Bali, bishop of Guntur and under the secretarial assistance of the Very Rev. Fr. Paul Puthenangady SDB of fond memories, provided great support and the many seminars Fr. Paul organized at national, regional, diocesan and parish levels across the country with great emphasis on SCCs as a great means for evangelization helped in deepening and widening the spirit of the New Way of Being the Church in India. The YKJ Assembly in 2000 stated categorically thus:

We need to embrace "A New Way of Being Church" which is best expressed in "Small Christian Communities":

"In order to make Jesus' vision a reality, we recommend very strongly that the basic structure of the church in India is to be a communion of communities and for this Small/Basic Christian Communities must be formed in every parish. 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' (Ecclesia in Asia No:25). Given the great potential which they have to build up authentic local churches with a sense of mission, let the Episcopal bodies in India make it as a priority in their pastoral animation of the Church to build up these Small Christian Communities.(The Focus of this statement (Chapter VI)

Present Scenario

The single point follow-up agenda taken up by the YKJ Follow-up Committee was to promote SCCs intensely, under the new Chairmanship of Most Rev. Thomas Dabre of Poona. We had the special privilege to have him as our Chairman until this year. His presence as a senior bishop gave us inspiration, support and motivation.

In 2009 we started a process of developing national and regional vision and net-working which has helped the SCC animators from all over India to work in increased collaborative spirit. Practically all dioceses have now SCCs and promote SCCs.

The setting up of NRT (National Resource Team) helped pooling together all the resources and resource persons in the country to create a common training programme and training team.

Our SCCs survey in 2010 showed dramatic changes in the perception of all - Bishops, clergy, religious and laity - about the importance of SCCs. Gospel Sharing and Bible reading in SCCs led to the love and reverence for the Word of God among Catholics. Lay involvement in the life of parishes and dioceses improved. Parishes became more active and Sunday Eucharist became more meaningful. SCCs helped people to become more service-minded and leadership became a more enabling and empowering role. People received a grounded sense of being the People of God called to holiness, fellowship and "gathering" became a Spirit-inspired moments to grow in holiness and witnessing together in their neighbourhood. As the People of God they received a very contextualized sense of mission and community and a much more active sense of spirituality (a spirituality which leads to service). For thousands of our people church has come nearer home to their own neighbourhood and just like among the early Christians (Acts 2:44-46) fellowship, sharing of resources and care of the needy became the hallmark of many SCCs. Increasingly people connected the Eucharist with their daily life and many SCCs inspired by the Word became agents of direct evangelization. These are all not by any means small achievements. As per the survey result of March 2015, the total number of SCCs in our country is 83380. We have a well-knit network of 14 SCC regions with a Bishop as its Chairman in every region. The national Service Team under the new Chairmanship of Most Rev. Ignatius Mascarenhas and the guidance of two other eminent bishops, our previous Chairman, Most Rev. Thomas Dabre of Poona and Most Rev. Gerald Mathias of Lucknow the CCBI Laity Commission Chairman and a balanced team of 3 priests, 3 Sisters and 3 lay persons all of whom

are very committed and active animators in their own regions and nationally guide the programme for continually assisting SCC animation in regions and dioceses. Every diocese with a diocesan Coordinator and a team of animators continuously strengthen SCCs in parishes through various training and other activity programme.

The year 2013 should be written in golden letters in the records of SCC promotion work in India. On November 19-21, 2015 we held the first SCC National Convention in Goa which brought together 74 bishops, including His Excellency, Salvatore Pennacchio, the Apostolic Nuncio to India and the CBCI President, His Eminence, Oswald Cardinal Gracias and over 7000 SCC animators from all over India. The Government of Goa acknowledged the significance of this event in the presence of Goa Governor, Chief Minister, Chief Secretary and several ministers and MLAs for the inaugural event. The archdiocese of Goa under the leadership of His Grace, Philippe Neri and team, opened up about 2500 homes to welcome these animators. They were welcomed by SCC homes and came daily to the Conference sight. This live-in experience of the Convention left memorable experience for all the participants. Bishop Lobinger of South Africa who was a guest of honour thanked the organizers of the Convention and said, "I would have missed something very significant if had not come".

Certainly we have every reason to thank God for the renewal the Church in India has experienced through embracing the vision of the New Way of Being Church introduced in our country in 1990. At the same time we are obliged work hard to sustain this spirit of community and service and lead our people to attain greater transformation and empowerment to witness to the Gospel in their neighbourhoods.

Vatican II Vision

When St. John XXIII opened the windows of the Church through the Vatican II the Holy Spirit led the bishops of the Church to script a radically renewed ecclesiology which we have in *Lumen Gentium*. It took us back to the original vision of the Church about which we read in the Acts of the Apostles, especially in chapters 2 and 4 where the Apostles and the faithful worked together in close fellowship and partnership to proclaim and witness to the gospel. *The Second Vatican Council confirmed this tradition in its description of the missionary character of the entire People of God and of the apostolate of the laity in particular, emphasizing the specific contribution to missionary activity which they are called to make. The need for all the faithful to share in this responsibility is not merely a matter of making the apostolate more effective, it is a right and duty based on their baptismal dignity, whereby "the faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King."* ^(RM 71)

St. John Paul II envisioned a "New Evangelization" for the Church today. It was he himself in his IX pastoral trip to Latin America who emphasized even more the meaning of the expression

“new evangelization” : grafted on the roots of the announcement brought by the first missionaries and animated by a “renewed apostolic ardour” we can speak of a “new evangelization” if it is : “new in ardour, new in its methods, new in its expressions” (4). (*THE ACTIVITY OF COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS, Pastoral and Missionary Commission “THE HOLY SPIRIT: PROTAGONIST OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION”* (http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01111997_p-72_en.html.)

Tens of thousands of Catholics who were passive in the past, have become energized and filled with the Spirit to serve the community and witness to the Word. Now evangelization happens in their neighbourhood by spirited, may be poor or illiterate, lay people. SCCs are indeed a tool for this new way of evangelizing – new in ardour, new in its method and new in its expressions. One will be amazed about the ways and means they use to evangelize. Already in 1996 the All India Consultation on “New Pentecostalism” stated that “SCCs is a special grace from the Holy Spirit and “have the potential to become channels of God-experience, of encounter with the Word, deep fellowship and of pastoral care” (Final report, no. 28 in *Church Teachings on SCCs*). In the same manner, the synod fathers called upon Christian communities to “devise approaches to Christian initiation which, through listening to the Word, celebrating the Eucharist and the communal living of love and fellowship, will lead to a growth in faith (*Lineamenta, Synod of Bishops XIII ordinary general assembly, “The New Evangelization For The Transmission of The Christian Faith”, 2012, no. 13*). The Word has a central place in the life of the Church. Dei Verbum states that the Church has always venerated the Word as she has venerated the Eucharist. (DV . 21) and that the Sacred Scriptures is a mirror for the pilgrim people to see the face of God (DV, 7).

All Christians in any state or walk of life, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society. In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gifts, so that following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory and to the service of their neighbour. (LG. 21) The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living (RM 42). This is what SCCs do; it invites all the faithful in it to manifest an active sense of holiness by loving service of their neighbours.

The Holy Spirit sanctifies the people of God through the ministry and the Sacraments. However, for the exercise of the apostolate he gives the faithful special gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), besides “allotting them to each one as He wills” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11), so that each and all, putting at the service of others the grace received may be “as good as the stewards of God’s varied gifts,” (cf. 1 Pr. 4:10), for the building up of the whole body in charity (cf. Eph. 4:16). (AA.3) It is with deep conviction that I say that it is the Holy Spirit who initiated and empowered SCCs to implement the Vatican vision of the Church.

SCCs offer the 21st century Church a great hope

There is no doubt in my mind that SCCs gives the Church in the 21st century a great hope. Dioceses like Mangalore testify that SCCs have really provided our faithful a strong bonding that they no more join other sects looking for more meaningful worship or fellowship. Thousands of passive members of our parishes have become active and joyfully witnessing to the experience of the Risen Lord in their midst through many activities rooted in faith. If all the parishes in our country is fully transformed in SCCs and if animation of SCCs become a major pastoral activity of the dioceses and parishes, I have no doubt in my mind that India would we evangelized in ways we can never imagine. It is top-to-down evangelization which may be difficult; but we have so many SCCs engaging in evangelizing their neighbourhoods. I agree with His Grace, Archbishop Abraham Viruthakulangara of Nagpur when he said:

“I am deeply convinced that SCCs is the only way to achieve full faith maturation of a parish community. SCCs, when facilitated well, have the potential to get the whole community to create a sense of belonging and be empowered to be at the service of the community and society. There needs to be no doubt that in the future, the basic structure of the Church will be SCCs. In SCCs people to people conscientization happens and they become responsible for the living out of the faith within their local context of time.”

His view is a reflection of the changes which has taken place in the theological understanding of SCCs and the pastoral significance of these communities today.

Our gathering here on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Vatican II and the Silver Jubilee of the FABC Vision of the New Way of Being Church, is of paramount importance in discerning the mind of the Holy Spirit for the Church in India and our journey into the future. I hope that this National Review Seminar will focus on some important concerns I believe necessarily must be attended to:

- a. The bishops of India, in consideration of the clear stand both CBCI and CCBI has taken to make SCCs a pastoral priority, should give SCCs a prominent place in CBCI/CCBI organizational set up.
- b. We need to think of all those people who still hesitate to be part of the SCCs and promote SCCs, and they still make the majority in every segment of the faithful.
- c. Motivate so many of those good priests and sisters out here, who think that SCCs is not their business.
- d. Within a stipulated time all the bishops of India should see that all the parishes in their dioceses are transformed into communion of SCCs.
- e. It is time we stop saying that we have no money and we collectively provide funds for sustaining the 83380 SCCs in our country. They also must become agents of evangelization locally. Only then we can say we are a mature church.

Together let us resolve that this august gathering will inspire the Church in India to commit more fully to promote SCCs in all our parishes of our country and rooted and founded on the Word and the Eucharist, every SCC in our country become a spirited agent of evangelization and a starting point for a new civilization rooted in love as St. John Paul II stated (RM.51). Let us hope and inspire that every bishop in our country will take steps to ensure that all parishes are “Communion of Communities” (FABC V, 8.1) and little churches in their neighbourhoods.

May our heavenly mother, the mother of the Church, assist us our efforts to renew the church.