

Small Christian Communities (SCC)

SCRIPTURE

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2: 42-47)

Also Cf. Acts 4: 32-37; Lk 24:13-35

OPENING PRAYER

O God the Father, our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer and Holy Spirit our Comforter, we thank and praise you for revealing to us, as a community of persons. Loving Father, you sent your Son into the world and through Him founded a community of disciples – the Church. Help us to build a community of communities in our Parishes. Send your Spirit into us to enable us to understand your word of life, to break bread together as brothers and sisters and strengthen us to reach out to one another in loving service. We ask this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

At the national celebration of “Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000” the bishops, the priests, the religious and lay representatives gathered in Bangalore to mark the occasion of the 2000th birth anniversary of Lord Jesus, they made a historic vision statement for the Church in India. **A “new way of being Church’ in the third millennium would have to be a community of communities lived through Small Christian Communities.** This realization was prompted by the experience of our Parishes, as large institutions. For they lacked a firm foundation based on the Word of God and genuine fellowship and concern for those in need.

The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) have emerged in response to the pastoral needs of the local churches and has made the Christian communities to realize a maturity of faith in day-to-day lives. The emergence of SCCs is to be considered as a gift of the present times to live our faith and to build Christian communities based on the model of the early Christian communities. These communities are considered a new way of being Church - the Church at the grassroots, i.e. neighborhood churches.

PART 1: TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

Vatican II

Right from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, proclamation of the Word of God was done in both word and deed. This led to the formation of communities of the apostles and 72 disciples. During the apostolate era, the very same drive led to the foundation of many local Christian communities across Asia Minor, especially by Sr. Peter and St. Paul (Lumen Gentium, Article No. 5).

At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. (Gaudium et Spes, GS, Article No. 4).

If Charity is to grow and fructify in the soul like a good seed, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out his will with deeds with the help of his grace... (Lumen Gentium, Article No. 42)

Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharistic mystery the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increases veneration of the Word of God, which stands forever. (Dei Verbum, Article No. 26)

All men are called to the union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed. (Lumen Gentium, Article No. 3)

Post Vatican Documents

The Basic Christian Communities can quite simply be, in their own way, an extension on the spiritual and religious level-worship, deepening of faith, fraternal charity and prayer; contact with pastors of the small sociological community such as the village. Their aim may be to bring together, for the purpose of listening to and meditating on the Word, for the sacraments and the bond of the agape, groups of people who are linked by age, culture, civil state or social situation: married couples, young people, professional people, etc.; people who already happen to be united in the struggle for justice, brotherly aid to the poor, human advancement. (Pope Paul VI Evangelium Nuntiandi)

The 'ecclesial basic 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' " (Ecclesia in Asia, John Paul II)

I encourage the Church in Asia, wherever possible, to consider these basic communities as a positive feature of the Church's evangelizing activity. (Ecclesia in Asia, John Paul II)

FABC

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences gave a new thrust to Basic Christian Community focusing it as a local Church. The localization and concretization of the Church find expression in the Basic Christian community. It is a visible community of the Disciples of Christ gathered together and embodying the spirit of their master. It is a community of persons in authentic interpersonal relationship with a mutual sense of belonging and concern, in fellowship open and extending to all, and in an outreach of humble service. It is a community of faith, hope and love in its function of effective witness and humble service. (Salient features of the Bandung Statement of the Asian Bishops in 1990)

CBCI

Ideal parish or diocese is a community of believers where all sections of the people of God, gathered in small groups, are involved in the planning, decision-making and execution of the various activities of the Church. (Pune, 1992)

The Catholic Bishop's Conference of India in Trivandrum emphasized the need of Small Christian Communities in the dioceses. "In the process, we saw that the building of Small Christian Communities flowing our celebration of the Eucharist (Acts. 4: 32-37). The model for the Church is "Communion of Communities".

SCCs are powerful witnesses to the mission of the Church and need to be fostered and encouraged. (Varanasi,1998)

The Yesu Krist Jayanti Assembly 2000 made this recommendation. "Given the great potential which they (SCCs) have to build up authentic local churches with a sense of mission, let the Episcopal bodies in India make it a priority in their pastoral animation of the church to build up these SCCs. Thus our parishes will function as bodies in which all the living cells will be fully alive and operative".

The Indian Bishops have committed themselves "to establish within two years the participatory structures (pastoral councils, finance committees, etc.) where they do not exist and promote Small Christian Communities which make the Church truly participatory.

Directives from the Regional Bishops' Council

The Bishops of the Region of Bengal-Sikkim have proclaimed SCC will be our pastoral priority in the Region. (February 2012 Jalpaiguri)

PART 2: LIGHT AND SHADOW SITUATION

2.1 Light Situation:

- ❖ Diocesan office functions with a full time personnel
- ❖ Animators are selected and trained at parish, deanery and archdiocese levels
- ❖ Regular meetings are held
- ❖ Quarterly Newsletter is published
- ❖ Two priests who attended SCC Theological course in Nagpur are assisting in the promotion of SCCs.
- ❖ Greater interest achieved in reading and understanding the scriptures, both in personal and community levels.
- ❖ Greater participation in the various apostolates
- ❖ Prayer life and sacrifice has improved
- ❖ Coherence of faith and life
- ❖ Growth in generosity and self-giving
- ❖ Faith in the strength of the Holy Spirit
- ❖ Dedication, initiative and responsibility towards community oriented action
- ❖ SCC animators are interested to get trained
- ❖ SCC animators like to train the grass-root level people
- ❖ Regular Gospel sharing are organized
- ❖ Great interest to learn more about the Bible, read the Bible daily
- ❖ Unity among the SCC families
- ❖ Witness to the Gospel
- ❖ Laity leadership has emerged
- ❖ Regular visit to those who do not come for SCC
- ❖ More committed people are available to lead SCCs
- ❖ Love and humility to work together as members of a team
- ❖ Celebration of annual SCC Day in the Parishes.

2.2 Shadow Situation

- ❖ Lack of knowledge about SCCs
- ❖ Lack of trained animators
- ❖ Lack of team spirit among the SCC animators
- ❖ Lack of interest among some Parish Priests and Religious.

- ❖ Absence of rapport with the Parish Priests and animators
- ❖ Men's participation is less in comparison to women and children
- ❖ Lack of understanding between the Parish Priests and people
- ❖ Families are far away
- ❖ Illiteracy of the people
- ❖ Ineffective animation of parish priests
- ❖ Prevalent sense of individualism hampers the promotion of SCCs, especially in the city parishes.
- ❖ Lack of time and lack of interest are major obstacles in the growth of SCCs.

PART 3: SETTING GOALS

To enable the Parishes in the Archdiocese of Calcutta to experience the Church as a community through the formation of SCCs.

PART 4: ACTION PLAN

- ❖ To form SCC units in Villages/Paras/Lanes/Wards.
- ❖ To have SCC meetings every month in the units
- ❖ To visit and form Parish Core Teams
- ❖ To train new animators and conduct follow-up programmes for trained animators.
- ❖ To collect the reports of the parishes and present them at the Diocesan Service Team (DST) meetings
- ❖ To have DST meetings once in three months
- ❖ To publish SCC newsletter Once in three months
- ❖ To have Deanery animation and training once in three months
- ❖ To have Diocesan SCC animator's meeting/planning/evaluation once a year.
- ❖ To have Parish SCC day once in a year
- ❖ To encourage parents to give faith formation through family prayers
- ❖ To encourage families to promote vocations to priestly and religious life
- ❖ To empower the youth with the Word of God
- ❖ To promote servant leadership among the SCC members

PART 5: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ❖ What is the "New Way of the Church" as taught by the Church?
- ❖ Give 5 reasons why the Church in the Modern time is emphasizing on SCC?
- ❖ Give 5 ways by which you wish to get involved in Building a participatory Church.(SCC)
- ❖ Suggest 5 ways that will strengthen SCCs in your Parish.

CONCLUSION

Small Christian Communities appeal to those who are zealous for evangelization, seek for communion and love the Church. Although this type of community is not admired in an individualistic, secularized world and church, it is God's will. Life in a Small Christian Community is simply our baptismal brotherhood and sisterhood lived out practically with a few people. We share God's Word, the Eucharist, prayers, our possessions, talents, gifts and time. We share our daily life. These communities are approved and encouraged by the universal Church, biblically based, historically proven to be a leaven for world evangelization, community renewal and to live in communion with nature, other religions and neighborhood communities.

Though the beginning of this effort may be as insignificant as of a small mustard seed, it will continue to flourish by God's grace and providence. Our Blessed Mother will be interceding for us as she did at Cana and with the Apostles as they broke the bread in the upper room. Gradually our Archdiocese will see a renewal and transformation in the lives of the people.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you commissioned the community that you formed with your disciples to go and preach the good news to all nations. Your blessed Mother was with the first Small Christian Community of apostles encouraging and guiding them to do your will. We pray that through her intercession and through our active participation in the SCCs, we may establish your kingdom of love, peace and reconciliation among your children. O Mother help us to live in communities and experience personally Jesus Christ, your Son, in and through them. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.