

# **AsIPA B: Small Christian Communities**

## **Formation for the Christian Community**

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**B\9**

### **SCCs AND ASSOCIATIONS**

*(Duration of the session about two hours or more)*

#### **1) AIM**

To help the participants see the benefit of SCCs and Associations working in collaboration

#### **2) INTRODUCTION**

Associations, Guilds & Movements like St Vincent de Paul Society, Legion of Mary, Charismatic Renewal Groups, Catholic Family and Social Movements, Catholic Medical Guild, Couples for Christ, Youth Associations have existed for many years. Some think that belonging to one of these is the only way of participating more fully in the Church's mission. In our parishes we also have many ministry groups who take care of the liturgy, the sick, the faith formation programmes etc. There are those who consider Small Christian Communities (SCCs) just one of the ministries of associations.

The questions we want to clarify today are:

With so many of our people participating in ministry groups or belonging to associations and movements, do we still need to build up SCCs in the neighbourhoods? If we are already involved and busy in our ministries and associations why should we join our neighbourhood SCCs as well?

Today we will examine the differences between SCCs and Associations and their specific place in the church and parish community.

### **3) CASE STUDY**

#### St Joseph's Parish Church

In St. Joseph's Parish, the 2 priests and the people took pride in the fact that they were very well organized. Some years back, the bishop in his homily said that St. Joseph's is the most active parish in his diocese. St. Joseph's has about 5,200 parishioners. They have a parish council; most of its members have been there for many years and take pride in it. The parish council has four different committees: financial, educational, social and liturgical. They plan many things in the parish according to the needs of the parish.

St. Joseph's has an active conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a strong Legion of Mary and a Charismatic Prayer Group with 50-75 joining the weekly prayer meeting. The parish also has an active youth group with 60-70 members. There are some people who are involved in many committees and ministries at the same time. In all about 5% of the community is engaged in parish life. These committees and associations undertake many social and charitable services in the parish and beyond.

#### St Anthony's Parish Church

The neighbouring parish of St. Anthony, though having half the number of parishioners, started SCCs and has 14 very active SCC groups, each having 25 to 30 families within a neighbourhood. There is no barrier to belonging to these neighbourhood SCCs as long as one is baptized. These communities meet regularly to do Gospel Sharing; they organize many activities through which they have an opportunity to interact with each other and build fellowship. These

SCCs are building the church in the neighbourhood through word, worship and witness. The SCCs have helped them to reconcile with one another and develop a brotherly/sisterly bonding among them. Consequently the differences and alienation based on cultural and economic factors have reduced greatly.

As SCCs they try to reach out to the poor and needy in the locality. They participate in the life struggles of the people around them. They raised funds to support the education of poor children in the neighbourhood and to repair the house of a Hindu widow. Their life of unity and service has strengthened them to come closer to one another and with their neighbours.

Many members of the Small Christian Communities are also members of the different Associations. The parish pastoral council is made up of elected representatives of the Small Christian Communities and the heads of the Associations for a period of three years. About 70% of the community is able to participate in parish life and the Church's mission.

Meanwhile in St. Joseph's parish the priests and the people believe that, "we do not need SCCs since our parish has been very active already for many years."

**Questions for group discussion:**

1. *What are the striking differences between the two parishes?*
2. *In which of the two parishes are the people more involved in the life and mission of the Church?*
3. *What difference would it make if SCCs were started in St. Joseph's parish?*

#### **4) SCRIPTURE**

*Group work (in groups of 5/6)*

*Read the following text and answer the questions below.*

#### **1 Cor.12: 12-27**

##### **Questions:**

1. *What are some of the key words or phrases from this text?*
2. *What are the implications of being parts of the one Body of Christ locally?*
3. *Which of the two above mentioned parishes is closer to the spirit of the Bible text?*

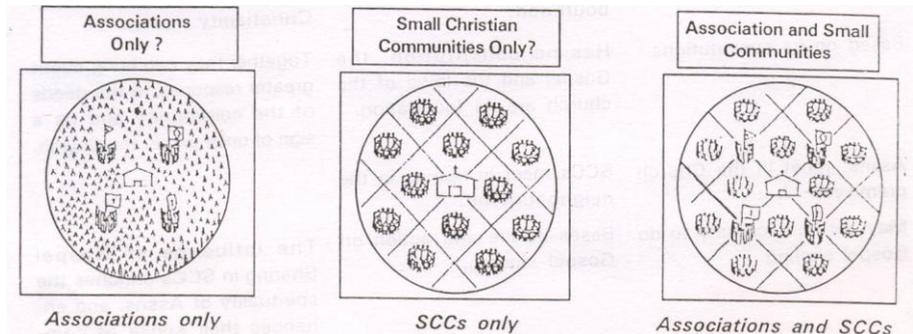
##### **Supplement to question 2:**

- We need to belong to the community and share in everything that happens in the community.
- Every member has an active role and contribution to make in building the community and in participating in the mission of the Church in the neighbourhood.
- Importance of sisterly or brotherly relationship; acceptance of all; bonding with all.
- Each one is unique in the eyes of God and has a unique and important role in building the Body of Christ.
- As members of the one Body of Christ we need to show concern for each other.
- Greater concern should be shown for the weaker people or groups in the community.

## 5) COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS

(Based on Lumko working paper 19,9)

**What have you to say about the state of parishes with the three different situations given below?**



### A. Associations only

1. Membership is specific, voluntary, or optional.
2. Members come from different parts of the parish, may be even from the neighbouring parish.
3. The charisms of some are brought to the service of the community since only few are involved in it.
4. Togetherness is found in the Movements and Associations. The rest of the community remains anonymous, individualistic, as though Baptism does not call all to belong to community.
5. Only a few join the Associations. May give the impression that baptism does not invite all to active involvement, or that participating in the missionary mandate is voluntary.
6. Associations are founded for special tasks, e.g. Youth, Women, Couples, the Poor etc.
7. Associations are run according to their constitutions.

8. Associations meet in the Church rather than in the homes of the people. It may not be necessary for them to do Gospel sharing.
9. Some Associations have a dress code, Hierarchical leadership e.g. President, Vice-President.

**B. SCCs only**

1. By Baptism all are incorporated into an SCC where they live.
2. Members are from the neighbourhood. One is born, by baptism, into a SCC.
3. The charisms of all are brought to the service of the whole community.
4. Everyone experiences a sense of belonging and sense of mission in the neighbourhood.
5. SCCs form the believers into one Body and they witness together in service.
6. Mission is seen as a common responsibility. Everyone is trained and encouraged to participate in the various needs of the community. Talents of each member are also used for the common good.
7. SCCs are concrete expressions of the church in the neighbourhood and are responsible for all the tasks of the church.
8. Has no constitution. The Gospel and the teachings of the church are its foundation.
9. SCCs meet in homes in the neighbourhood. Bases its life and action on the Gospel.
10. There is no dress code. They practice team and rotating leadership. The leadership is non-dominating and facilitating.

**C. Associations and SCCS**

1. Everyone belongs to one or other SCC. All may not belong to Associations.

2. Both have a right to exist. People are free to join associations, but their first duty is to participate in SCCs.
3. SCCs and Associations together activate the charisms of all in the community for the common good.
4. SCCs and Associations working together create a greater sense of belonging and mission in the community.
5. SCCs together are responsible for the whole mission of the parish. Associations may undertake specialized tasks, which are beyond the ability of the SCCs.
6. Together they can bring about greater response to the needs of the community and be a sign of unity within the Church.
7. The influence of Gospel sharing in SCCs enriches the spirituality of Associations and enhances their sense of community and collaboration with the rest in the SCC.
8. The leadership style of SCCs can enhance the Associations.

## **6) CHURCH TEACHINGS**

*Read the following texts in groups of 4/5 and answer the questions below.*

1. "The lay faithful, who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. And to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the church and in the world." (L.G. 31).
2. The Small Ecclesial 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 the civilization of love".  
  
"These communities decentralize and organize the parish community to which they always remain united." .....

“And the Synod of Bishops stated: "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 the cause for great hope for the life of the Church". (RM. 51)

3. “The laity can engage in their apostolic activity either as individuals or as members of various groups of associations. .... There are many forms of apostolate...For the associations established to carry on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work.” (Laity. AA Vat II Nos. 15-18)

**Questions:**

1. *What do these texts say about the role of the laity in the Church?*
2. *How do you understand this text in your parish context?*

**Supplement to question 1:**

- All the lay faithful, not just some, are incorporated to the people of God and share in a sense of belonging together.
- Through Baptism and Confirmation Christ invites all laity not merely some, to share in the great mission of spreading the gospel and witnessing to Him especially in the neighbourhood.
- The SCCs decentralize and organize the parish better. This is a special function of SCCs.
- SCCs are a means for evangelization, more profound communion, a sign of vitality and of new hope for the church. In this the Holy Father John Paul II gives SCCs a unique and important place in the parish life.
- Associations according to their charisms are able to respond to

specific needs of the local Church.

- Many members of associations have expertise they can offer to SCCs in their development of ministries.
- Both need to coexist in the parish and work together.

## **7) DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE BETWEEN SCCS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

*(It is suggested that this section be done in a Role Play with an evaluation leading to the points mentioned below.)*

### **Guidelines for the role-play**

*(The role-play depicts SCC members and Association members having a heated discussion on a few points:*

- 1. The Association heads are not happy about being outnumbered in the PPC – too many elected from SCCs.*
- 2. The SCCs are not happy that they have been told not to assist the poor in their neighbourhood as the Associations are already taking care of them. Using 'we and you', 'us and them' language which shows a lack of appreciation for each ones' roles.*

*The role play will need at least 5 players who are clear about their particular part – as Association members or SCC leaders.)*

### **Questions for buzz session:**

- 1. What are some of the problems between SCCs and Associations that you found in the role play and from your experience?*
- 2. What are the reasons for having such problems in communities?*
- 3. How can we help to create greater collaboration and unity between Associations and SCCs?*

### **Supplement:**

#### **1. Problems**

- Fear that they may become redundant or lose their role in the parish
- Undue preferences or prejudices by priests and the parish council
- Overburdening of Associations with all tasks
- Members of various groups see each other in polarizing way - 'we' and 'you'
- Lack of co-ordination and clarification of roles
- Too many meetings, often on the same day
- Feeling of inferiority

## **2. Reasons for problems**

- Lack of clear understanding of what the Church is
- Lack of understanding of the nature of SCCs and Associations
- Power politics
- Absence of good leadership and formation
- Lack of co-ordination and guidance
- Priests and parish councils organize ministries and events without understanding the role of each association and the very nature of SCC.

## **3. Solutions**

- Regular formation for clergy, parish councils and Association members about what SCCs and Associations are and how they can co-exist
- Parish council co-ordinates the functioning of these bodies, ensuring smooth functioning and co-operation.
- Regular leadership training towards rotating and team leadership
- Openness to discuss problems and find solutions
- Praying together
- Doing some parish activities together
- Trained and committed leaders of Associations can play a vital

role in the building of SCCs.

## **8) SUMMARY**

Both SCCs and Associations are important and have their role in building community and fulfilling the mission of the parish community. The Church teachings since the Second Vatican Council have emphasized the need of SCCs as concrete expressions of the Universal Church - miniature churches (RM 51) - to bring about unity, participation, co-responsibility and parish renewal, which embraces all in the neighbourhood. It is also to be recognized that many Associations have a long history of existence and service. Now the Church wants both SCCs and Associations to function as complementary and mutually supportive bodies, enriching and strengthening the parish community. Since each SCC is the Church in the neighbourhood it is therefore responsible for the missionary mandate of the Universal Church in their respective neighbourhoods. This mandate is the responsibility of all, as the Church is by its very nature missionary (AG 2).

*Conclude with a hymn and spontaneous prayer.*

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