

AsIPA General Assembly III
Hanmaum Education and Retreat Center, South Korea
September 2-9, 2003
Final Statement

SCCs/BECs : Empowering People to Serve

"BECs 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 a new society, the expression of a civilization of love." Pope John Paul II EA #25

I Introduction

1.1. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) effort, we recall with much gratitude to God the process of growth in SCCs (Small Christian Communities)/BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) that we have experienced.

1.2. The First General Assembly in 1996 had less than 40 participants from 6 countries. The Second General Assembly took place in 2000 and brought together 105 participants from 13 countries. New modules on "Leadership" and "Evangelization" were approved during that General Assembly.

1.3. Aware of the need for greater emphasis on service and evangelization, we chose "Empowering Our People in SCCs/BECs to Serve", as our theme for this Third General Assembly. We were 123 participants, lay trainers, priests and religious, from 13 Asian countries, including 15 bishops from Asia and one from South Africa, as well as teams from Papua New Guinea and Germany. Gathered together at Hanmaum Education and Retreat Center of Seoul Archdiocese, Korea, from Sept. 2nd to 9th, 2003, our exchanges came mainly from our own reflections and experiences with SCCs/BECs.

II Proceedings of the Assembly

2.1. The keynote address challenged us in the face of the many pastoral concerns that SCCs/BECs encounter today. Significant among the concerns are:(i) The process of economic and cultural globalization which has severely affected several countries in Asia, eroding deep religious sensibilities, family values and ecology; and (ii) Discrimination, ethnic conflicts and political divisions that require a response from the Church which can be through the SCCs/BECs when they are empowered to serve. Empowerment would involve a new method of faith formation and evangelization in the SCC/BEC, following Jesus' way of leading.

2.2. The reflection and discussion on "Family Life and SCCs" helped us to look again at how the SCC/BEC structure strengthens the family. Healthy families will mean healthy SCCs/BECs. We concluded that the SCC/BEC has the potential to assist families in many ways. Every kind of family can find a place in the SCC/BEC where they can be welcomed and supported. Many families who have been part of an SCC/BEC have begun to pray with the Word of God in their homes and to come together to be at the service of others thereby strengthening the role of the family as the domestic Church called to share the Good News.

2.3. Our session on Ministries helped us to discover:

Ministry is faithfulness to Jesus' call and sharing in His mission.

The community is gifted and capable of responding to needs and challenges.

Ministry needs a spirituality and consciousness that is faithful and responsive, faithful to Jesus and responsive to social needs.

There is a need for formation, training and structures to animate and support ministries in SCCs/BECs. In other words, through the SCCs/BECs the mission of Christ is continued at the very local level.

2.4. The Assembly agreed that a spirituality for SCCs/BECs in the New Way of Being Church Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium, The Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly of FABC, Bandung 1990 (#8,9), consists of:

The centrality of the Word of God

The prophetic role of SCCs/BECs in witnessing to faith in the social, political and economic situations of life.

The need for a deep trust in God with the simplicity and humility of the Gospel and love for the poor.

Keeping in mind the teeming millions who walk along other religious paths to God, our communities must be more consciously involved in the process of building religious harmony.

2.5. Jesus is our model as leader. More than words, our example of serving leadership can have a lasting effect in building communities. Thanks to the SCCs/BECs there has been a gradual transformation towards an enabling style of leadership. Jesus, who cautioned His apostles against this danger of domination, continues to warn us by saying "It shall not be so among you for the Son of man himself came not to be served, but to serve," (Mk. 10: 43,45).

2.6. The experience of SCCs/BECs in Asia is encouraging. However, the process of establishing and maintaining the communities has not been without hurdles.

2.7. To promote SCCs/BECs, the bishops role is of vital importance. Therefore, it was beneficial to

listen to the exchanges of the Asian bishops on their experiences and on their reflections on SCCs/BECs.

2.8. In several dioceses of Asia, parishes have been restructured based on SCCs/BECs. The members of Parish Pastoral Councils and Diocesan Pastoral Councils are drawn from these communities.

2.9. The SCCs/BECs demand a proper understanding of the faith, the Church, the Word of God and of culture. Therefore, regular awareness and faith-formation programs have been organized for the laity, the clergy and the religious.

2.10. The SCCs/BECs have definitely increased the participation of the laity in pastoral planning, in liturgy, in sharing the faith and in social and charitable services and actions.

2.11. As earnest efforts are made to promote the mission of the Church through SCCs/BECs, we encounter difficulties along the way:

Resistance, indifference and apathy from some church leaders, especially priests.

Inadequate knowledge of the Bible and deficient faith commitment.

Lack of coordination and harmonization of various programs, activities, associations and movements in the parishes and dioceses with SCCs/BECs.

Clergy-dominated Church and dominant leadership style in the Church.

2.12. Many of us were welcomed warmly into the meetings of SCCs in the Archdiocese of Seoul before and during the General Assembly. The faith of the Korean people, their determination to be salt and light for the world were inspiring and heart-warming. The abundance of their generosity was very moving.

III Resolutions and recommendations

3.1. We reaffirm the centrality of the Word of God in the lives of our SCCs/BECs and wish to enable greater appreciation of the Word and genuine encounter with Christ. This will require that we deepen our understanding and practice of Gospel Sharing so that the Word can truly be central to our faith communities.

3.2. Through their presence and actions, the members of SCCs/BECs evangelize one another and become evangelizers in their neighborhood.

3.3. Determined to build the participatory Church, we have realized the need to understand and to develop all the gifts of the laity especially in the area of emerging leadership.

3.4. We resolve to be servant leaders as well as promoting a leadership that serves and empowers by giving constant formation to training teams and to leaders at all levels.

3.5. We resolve to form SCCs/BECs as instruments of social transformation. Our SCCs/BECs are called to move towards a deeper sense of their prophetic role with the help of church leaders by providing on-going training and formation.

3.6. Through SCCs/BECs we hope to enrich and strengthen family life and marriage. The importance of catechesis for the entire family was underlined.

3.7. We need to assist dioceses orient their commissions, administration, associations and movements, to strengthen the parish and the SCC/BEC as the basic structure for the Church to carry out its mission in the world today.

3.8. Special attention should be paid to the parish priests by providing training and formation wherever needed. An on-going formation institute for priests would help them in their ministry to SCCs.

3.9. Training for bishops on SCCs/BECs and exchange among them, should be made available.

3.10. As part of the ecclesiology of communion, a course on SCCs/BECs should be included in the curriculum of seminaries and religious houses.

3.11. All participants expressed the desire for better communication and exchange of news and resources at national and international levels. We hope to improve national networks for growth of SCCs/BECs and to promote unity within the diocese and exchange among dioceses. The AsIPA Desk of the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) Office of Laity, will have a great role to play in this work. The AsIPA Desk homepage will be set up as soon as possible.

3.12. We, the participants of this third General Assembly, wish to affirm the need for the AsIPA Desk to continue to coordinate and plan with the Asian Churches for the promotion of SCCs/BECs and training of their personnel.

3.13. We also wish to request that the Editorial Board of the AsIPA Desk continue to produce modules necessary for the formation and growth of SCC/BECs.

IV. Conclusion

4.1. Some of the new members of this Assembly shared: "This is the first time we experience a gathering at the Asian level as a community. We did not just talk about community but we lived as a community. It also helped our growth in community spirituality."

4.2. We are convinced that vibrant SCCs/BECs will help the faithful to experience the Sunday Eucharist in a deeper way as the sacramental bond in the parish community.

4.3. We are deeply grateful to God for this enriching experience, and thankful to our generous hosts: the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, the Archdiocese of Seoul and the local organizer, the Archdiocesan Office of Evangelization, for their hospitality and tireless assistance to facilitate the smooth running of this third AsIPA General Assembly.

4.4. Once again, we continue our journey with Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Queen of Asia. We ask for her maternal guidance in promoting SCCs/BECs especially in strengthening families to evangelize and to serve in the Kingdom way.