



Laity

Small Christian Communities The Fundamental Paradigm of the church

By Bishop Peter Kang, Bishop of Cheju Diocese, South Korea
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THE EARLY CHURCH

JESUS did not work on his own but always worked together with his colleagues forming a community of disciples. He sent these people into the world as apostles. The first apostles did not have any stable place to organise their work of evangelization. They always proclaimed the Gospel just travelling from one place to another.

They gathered at home. They assembled in the family houses of their colleagues listening to the Word of God, sharing bread, praying together. This church assembly in the family was the fundamental unit of primitive Christianity.

In the Roman Hellenistic household the paterfamilias, the father of the house, was

the unspoken authority, and the structure of the family in antiquity was markedly hierarchical. By contrast, in the Christian household or house community this hierarchical model was radically broken up. Early primitive Christianity was a brotherhood and sisterhood of equal partners.

NEW TESTAMENT ECCLESIOLOGY

Acts 2: 1-11 *“When the time came for Pentecost was fulfilled, ...the mighty acts of God.”*

v. 2: *“And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were.”* If we wish to have a comprehensive understanding of this description of Pentecost, we also need to refer to Gen 1:1-2.

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.”

There was nothing but darkness in the

beginning but when the Lord God said with His creative power ‘Let there be light’, then the light, was created and when He blew the breath of life into the nostrils of the man formed out of the clay of the ground, man was created. This means that the creative power of God has come to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

And if we look into chapter 2 verse 3 of Acts, it says: *‘there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them.’*

Luke uses the word ‘tongues as of fire’ to express the appearance of the Holy Spirit. Luke wishes to imply with this word that the creative power of the word of God who had ordered all things to be created, now has come to the Apostles so that they could participate in the creation of a new world. The fact that the Apostles could speak in many languages signifies that they were given the creative power of God.

Luke describes in the following chapters how the Holy Spirit started to transform the world.

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THE CHANGE OF THE APOSTLES

Peter and the other eleven stood up and proclaimed the Gospel. During the passion of Jesus they were dispersed, ran away and betrayed and even after the resurrection of the Lord, they hid themselves locking the doors. But now with the power of the Spirit they declare without any fear that Jesus slain by the leaders of Jews has now risen.

THE CHANGE OF THE COMMUNITY

Acts 2: 42 *“These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”*

These four elements together, the teaching of the apostles, the brotherhood, the breaking of bread and the prayers were the fundamental and constitutive paradigm of the Christian community, which was different from the style of other contemporary Jews. Since these 4 themes are very crucial to the Christian community, Luke develops again these same themes in verse 46, saying:

“Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God.”

Luke tries to emphasize that these four elements form the fundamental structure of the Church which the Holy Spirit wishes to build up.

Mark 6: 34-44 *“So he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them.... Numbered five thousand men.”*

For those people who were like sheep wondering around without a Shepherd, Jesus communicated His word. The word of God is the most necessary bread of life. The most important present Jesus wished to give to people whom he took pity on was the word of God.

But the only thing which the disciples worried about was physical food, the bread to fill their empty stomachs.

Jesus told them: ‘Give them something to eat yourselves.’ It is the mission of the disciples of Jesus to give something to the people to eat, not abandoning them. When Jesus said ‘something to eat’, he meant not only bread, the food which one takes in

the mouth but rather the true food which enriches our whole life.

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups, on the green grass, and they sat down on the ground in squares of hundreds and fifties.

[kai epetaxen autois anaklithenai pantas symposia symposia epi tw kluwru kortw.]

‘*symposia symposia*’ is a very interesting and inspiring expression. In the New Jerusalem Bible it is translated as ‘in groups’. In some other English version it is translated more literally as ‘he instructed them to recline all companies companies on the green grass.’

‘*Symposia*’ means not just a group. The original meaning of this Greek word is ‘to drink together’. The word ‘*Symposia*’ means not just a sharing food together. It specifically signifies ‘to drink together’. To drink together implies that people celebrate together in a gathering like a feast. People drink together normally in a joyful event like a feast. Therefore ‘*Symposia*’ is not just any group or multitude but a group whose members are so intimate that they celebrate a feast, drinking together. This group who could celebrate a feast together would be called a ‘Community’.

It is not just a miracle story of multiplying bread and fish, because in this episode Mark also implies symbolically the anticipation of the Eucharist by its modality of distribution of bread. *‘then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing; then he broke the loaves and began handing them to his disciples to distribute among the people.’*

And Jesus finally completes the foundation of this small community Church with his twelve apostles through the institution of the Eucharist in the last supper.

VATICAN II

IN the first century the Church existed as a congregation gathering in the households of cities or towns. With the increase of Christian communities it was required to give the faithful constant pastoral care accompanying them permanently in their local vicinity rather than just visiting them on an irregular basis.

In the early Church beyond the Apostles there were several people who freely and voluntarily served in the Church Community according to their specific charisma such as Apostles, teachers, prophets, miracle workers, healers. The Church needed to establish a certain hierarchy of authorities to avoid conflicts emerging among the different charisma.

All these new factors brought a certain systemization and a solid hierarchical structure to the Church. I believe that this was indispensable in these circumstances in order to protect and to preserve the Christian Community from diverse heretical movements and disorder. But it is also true that this caused a certain deterioration of active participation of the faithful and charismatic ministries in the Church, which prevailed for the following 20 centuries until the Second Vatican Council.

In the 1960s Pope John XXIII realised that the Church had been too confined and closed towards the world whereas the world had been through an extreme change - experiencing two world wars, a second wave of industrialization, ideological conflicts between capitalism and socialism, promotion of democracy and human rights etc. The Church needed to have a dialogue with the completely changed world and to effectuate an *aggiornamento* in the modern culture. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council with the help of many theologians wished to incarnate the Word of God into the modern world. Looking back over the whole history of the Church, they formulated a complete remodelling of our faith life and structure releasing the 4 major constitutions.

- The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*
- The Dogmatic constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*
- The Constitution on Divine Revelation: *Dei Verbum*
- The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: *Gaudium et Spes*

DEI VERBUM

The Church neglected the Word of God in the past. We may have stressed too much the importance of the Sacraments and the Canon Law and we did not pay sufficient attention to the Word of God which is the real basis of our faith life. Therefore the

document concludes that it is urgent first of all to read, pray, study and proclaim the Word of God. (DV No. 10, 22, 25)

LUMEN GENTIUM

For many centuries the Church stressed too much the celestial and sacred character of the Church using a mystical language, like the body of Christ as the mystical body which included the communion of saints with Christ as the head.

God did not invite some righteous individuals but the whole people of God to be the witnesses of salvation for all humankind. Therefore the Church needs to give testimony and to live the communion (*koïnonia*) of the saved community.

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

Liturgy has been mainly understood as sacrificial rites and prayers entrusted solely to clergy without active participation of the laity. For many centuries the laity were spectators in the Liturgy. Therefore the document urges us to revive the liturgy through more spontaneous involvement of many members of the community which express the grace and salvation of God through our local languages, music and our own cultural heritage. The liturgy becomes more communitarian than individual.

GAUDIUM ET SPES

Jesus Christ is the word of God incarnated in the world who transforms the world reigned by all kinds of injustice and evil into the kingdom of God. Jesus lives in this world and offered his whole life totally to liberate people from sins and evils of this world. But the Church recognizing the world only as wicked and secular and did not make any effort to change the world. The document encourages us to fight against evil and to transform the world into the Kingdom of God realising justice and peace in our daily life.

ALTHOUGH the Second Vatican Council had designed such an ideal blue print of the renewal of the Church, in fact it was each particular local church which had to effectuate the realization of this blue print. During the last 40 years after the Council we have learned and studied the basic spirit of these documents but in reality we have not successfully developed an integral pastoral plan which could comprise all the elements of the above four constitutions.

However, the new trend of small Christian communities which have appeared

separately in different continents, Latin America, Africa, Asia, North America, has made a considerable contribution in realizing integrally the above blue print of the 4 Constitutions.

The small Christian Communities are a little different from each other according to their place and culture. In Latin America they call them Basic Christian Communities. In Africa or in Asia they are called Small Christian Communities, or Basic Ecclesial Communities.

Although each place has developed some variations of their own, the small Christian Communities have the same essential four factors in common:

1. They meet together with the power of the Word of God

In Small Christian Communities the word of God is always in the centre. Christ is the Word of God incarnated into the world. Therefore wherever Christians meet together, the Word of God should take first and central place. Listening to the Word of God, sharing their experiences, the people of God mature as children of God and they develop an evangelical perspective to see, discern and judge the complex realities of our world. This realizes the teaching of *Dei Verbum*.

2. They meet in small groups: Community building

In our parish setting it is actually not possible to develop personal relationships with the other faithful. But in the small Christian Communities the Christians have close contacts with a limited number of members and feel the bond of community life having a new sense of belonging and solidarity based on a common faith. This is what *Lumen Gentium* teaches and wishes us to realise.

3. They pray together in communion with the Universal Church

While the majority of Christians find it quite difficult to pray individually in their ordinary lives, the small Christian community helps people grow together in their spiritual life praying together regularly, following the liturgical calendar of the Universal Church. In small Christian communities the members are deeply influenced in their

spiritual life by others in the community through the sharing of experiences lived in daily life. The small communities present the milieu for a communitarian spirituality. This is what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* also tells us to achieve.

4. They realise the Gospel in their lives.

The Small Christian Communities try to put into practice the Word of God in their concrete daily lives. There are several methods of sharing the Gospels but they all aim not only to meditate on the Word of God but also to live out in their daily life the knowledge they received from the Gospel so that they could contribute towards realizing the Kingdom of God in this world.

The small Christian Communities put us within a powerful context in order to challenge unjust realities in modern society so that we could transform the world into the Kingdom of God which Jesus wished to accomplish. This realizes the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*.

CONCLUSION

LOOKING back from the beginning of the early Christian Church we saw an undeniable inspiring intervention of the Holy Spirit which created the community of the new People of God. And we all know that the Lord God wished to call not just a few chosen people but the whole of humankind to salvation and eternal life. It is God's will that we to be saved through the structure of community. This communitarian structure of the Church existed from the beginning and survived through many centuries but flourished in modern times after the Second Vatican Council especially in the small Christian Communities. It is astounding to see that these small Christian Communities appeared simultaneously but separately in all continents without any artificial leadership of the church Hierarchy. There is no motherhouse or any headquarters of Small Christian Communities in the world while the movements like Legion of Mary, Focolare, or Cursillo have their own head office in some place.

The Holy Spirit, who founded the community of Apostles at the moment of Pentecost, has always accompanied the Church through the history and led the modern Church through the Second Vatican Council and is now working equally in the Small Christian Communities supporting their communitarian activities. ✨

Laity News - Laity Witness

JAPAN - COUPLE BUILDS FARM TO HELP MENTALLY ILL AND THEIR FAMILIES

SHINJIRO Gou, 69, and his wife Ikuko, 65, parishioners of Numazu Church, began Rakuraku Plantation nine years ago as a place of healing for people with mental illnesses and their families.

“One day, one family” is the principle followed at Rakuraku Plantation. The grounds are open all year round with no admission fees charged. There are mandarin orange orchards, vegetable fields, paddy fields and gardens that make up the privately managed non-profit institution. The Gou family began Rakuraku Plantation when their oldest son, now 37, was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 20. During treatment, Ikuko would sometimes take her son on an outing, spending time with him in a quiet park. One day, while they were passing near an orange field in Odawara, her son’s tension seemed to break. She thought to herself, “If some day my son could work in such a place...”

Shinjiro said, “I was focused entirely on work, and even when my son became ill, I left it all to my wife. Once I thought that I, as his father, was the cause of my son’s illness, I took early retirement. I realized that a change of environment was necessary for him to recuperate.”

He learned about all the necessities of farming in two years. Five years ago, he

was certified as a mental health and welfare expert as well. Ikuko said, “The original motive for our move was treatment for our son. With the added power of other mentally troubled people and their families we want to become a beautiful plantation, like a dream where everyone feels free to relax and spend time together... With gratitude for the cooperation of everyone at Numazu Church, from now on, while we are able to support (our guests), I will be happy if we can make this a place of peace.”

<http://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/eng>

VIETNAM: HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam Catholics from a southern parish have welcomed the first woman to head their parish council. About 1,000 people, mostly women, clapped loudly as parish priest Father Jean Baptiste Vo Van Anh shook Theresa Dinh Thuy Mien’s hand and gave her a certificate on her new position on March 7 during a special Mass held in Tan Dinh Church in Ho Chi Minh City. Local Catholic women invited people of other faiths to attend the celebration, held one day ahead of International Women’s Day on March 8, as a way to evangelize.

“I want local women to be empowered to take up parish activities,” stated Father Anh. He said the parish council’s 33 members, half of them women, will advise and help him to manage parish activities. Mien’s three-year term will end in 2011, he added.

The mother of three, who runs a beauty parlor...previously worked at a state-run center for drug abusers for 26 years as an accountant and later as a director. She was a member of the parish council in charge of parish scholarships and providing support for Religious vocations before being elected parish council head.

UCANews - www.ucanews.com

PHILIPPINES - TEACHING AWARENESS OF ROOTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

ASSUMPTION College in the Davao region has taken the lead in an educational awareness campaign to highlight the roots of violence against women and how sexual harassment is manifested in Philippine Society. The college president, Sister Marietta Banayo explained that because sexual discrimination is a daily life issue, sexual violence and harassment content is being absorbed into the general curriculum and not taught as a separate subject.

She explained that the school insists that only gender-sensitive, or non-sexist language can be used on campus and has tailored school policy, practice and all activities to promote the empowerment of women.

Hong Kong Sunday Examiner, Mabuhay News. 12th April 2009

(continued from Youth Desk)

The workshop aimed to:

- Understand the basic foundations and principles of Youth Ministry in the light of the vision of the church
- Explore main components of ministering to the young
- Grow in awareness of youth culture and their distinct spirituality
- Be equipped with basic skills in Catechesis; Relational Youth Ministry ; Youth Social Action and Leadership
- Preparing a youth pastoral plan intended for a particular setting of young people

Highlights of the course include sharing on peak experiences in youth ministry, a recollection led by Bp. Rolando Tria-Tirona OCD DD, Bishop Chairman of the FABC-OLF, visioning, pastoral planning and interactive activities on components in youth ministry. Community building activities and personal sharing enabled participants to reflect on their ways of doing ministry and to be inspired to become more effective instruments for the young. Liturgies likewise, introduced some ways and approaches in animating young people to pray and to have meaningful experiences in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Coming from countries with similar contexts and realities, the meeting deepened the resolve of youth ministers to establish collaboration and networking among them. With this, from an activity-oriented approach, the youth ministers present plan to come up with a more concrete direction towards professionalizing youth ministry within the region and to establishing effective structures in ensuring the growth of the ministry.

The workshop was organized by the Youth Desk with the help of The Catholic Commission of Youth in Thailand. The sessions were facilitated by the Youth Desk Team in cooperation with Bukal ng Tipan Pastoral Center (Philippines). ✂

From the AsIPA Desk

EXPOSURE OF GERMAN BISHOPS TO AsIPA WAY OF PARISH RENEWAL

KOREA - From April 14-22, 2009, a group of 10 Germans including 6 Bishops and including the new President of MISSIO Aachen, came to Korea to have an experience of SCCs and to meet Asian Bishops and Church pastoral workers regarding the renewal process taking place in parishes using the AsIPA method to build SCCs/BECs. They had sessions in Suwon (14-16 April) And Cheju Dioceses (16-22 April) and visited SCCs in 3 parishes.

There were 8 Asian Bishops from 5 countries, led by Archbishop Orlando Quevedo, who also went to Korea to share their own experiences in their respective dioceses. Bishop Oswald Hirmer, Bishop emeritus of Umtata, S. Africa, came as a special resource person.

The German Bishops expressed gratitude for the whole experience which was also an immersion into Korean culture and hospitality. They were open and receptive reflecting their own initial expressed intention: "We have come to learn." In the closing Eucharist, presided by Archbishop Schick, of Bamberg Archdiocese and head of the German Conference Commission on the Global Church, they recognized that the experience of pastoral dynamism they witnessed was a challenge to them to reflect on their pastoral situation in a new way.

JAPAN – Mr Hiroki Nagano of Nagasaki reports:

"We are continuing the effort to spread AsIPA programs in our diocese. Last April we had the fifth SCC introduction seminar and 25 laity participated. In total 230 lay people have participated since 2003. Last 14 January we had our first introduction course for "Our Journey Together".* It was 5 sessions or 10 hours. We had 63 persons who participated with great joy." ☺

**[Our Journey Together is an RCLA text with 47 sessions also usable for faith deepening – available at the Singapore Pastoral Institute – email spi@catholic.org.sg]*

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

AsIPA Training Programme to be held at STA. CATALINA CENTER OF SPIRITUALITY, BAGUIO CITY, PHILIPPINES from 14 – 25 September 2009

OCTOBER

AsIPA 5th General Assembly held at the REGIONAL MAJOR SEMINARY (REMASE), CATALUNAN GRANDE, DAVAO CITY, PHILIPPINES from 20-28 October, 2009

Theme: "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19)

Bread broken and Word shared in SCCs/BECs

From the Women's Desk

BANGLADESH - In 2008 the National Women's Desk assisted the dioceses to conduct workshops to promote women's leadership in the church. In 2009 to celebrate International Women's Day a seminar was organized on "How women are facing recent challenges as women". 95 women were present. Bishop Patrick D'Rozario and Bishop Theotonius Gomes CSC were present. They said that their participation in the South Asia meeting on Women II helped a lot with information and in organizing workshops.

KOREA - Sr. Gratia Kim Sook Hee, Executive Secretary of the Committee for Women of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea, reports that for International Women's Day on 8th March, 23 participants were invited to reflect on the reality and status of women.

On April 2008, her committee held a seminar on professional women's potential to serve the Church. It was designed to discuss the changes needed if the Church is to be one that welcomes women.

Lee Sang-hwa, from the government's Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education, explained some government policies to enhance women leadership, arguing that the Church also needs to encourage women's participation in its decision-making process and to foster the leadership of women in particular.

Park Eun-mi, a member of the Catholic Women's Research Institute of Korea, spoke about the actual condition of women in the Church, saying that middle-aged

women in the Church have much difficulty participating in Church activities. Sr. Kim reported that in various Church committees, only about 10 percent of members are women. The women's committee has thus asked the CBCK to guarantee that 30 percent of parish pastoral council members are women. She emphasized the importance of developing leadership programs for women. The first step is to have an accurate picture of the present reality by identifying the gender of the various office holders, like catechists and parish district leaders, in the Church's annual statistical report. Then, the Church needs to develop areas like counseling, social work and education, where professional women can use their talents.

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(continued from Women's Desk)

She would like to emphasize that women Religious in particular need to play more active roles as Church leaders. For this, their congregations need to facilitate capable and qualified members to act as leaders in the wider Church community in accordance with their charisms.

UCANews, March 6, 2009.

INDIA - The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), Commission for Women prepared material for the Indian bishops' 28th plenary meeting in February last year. During this meeting, prelates from India's 160 dioceses addressed women's empowerment in the Church and society,

along with related issues.

A CBCI survey conducted before the meeting indicated that Catholic women had practically no role in the decision-making bodies of the Church in India.

Sister Lilly Francis SMMI said the survey sought to identify practices that excluded women from decision-making, with the intention of fostering gender sensitivity in Church and society. The survey also highlighted the need to improve the roles of women in the social, political, economic and spiritual arenas.

A year after the meeting, Sister Francis said her commission has responses from

all 12 CBCI regions, who were told to draft practical suggestions to increase gender justice and enhance women's roles in Church and society. All drafts would be presented to the Standing Committee of the CBCI in April, the nun said.

Religious and laywomen were involved with bishops and priests in drafting these plans, she noted. "I think this is a great sign as women were not involved in policy-making earlier."

Chinnamma Jacob, president of the Council of Catholic Women of India, said the CBCI is expected to finalize the regional plans soon, after which the Church would start to integrate them into a national plan.

UCANews, March 6, 2009

From the Youth Desk

ASIAN YOUTH DAY 2009

TWENTY national youth animators, priests and lay leaders from 14 countries met on March 24-26, 2009 in Tagaytay City, Philippines for the preparation of the 5th Asian Youth Day in the Philippines.

The Youth Desk has been organizing preparatory meetings since the 1st AYD to encourage more participation of countries and to develop a truly collaborative ministry for the young in Asia.

The theme of the ASIAN YOUTH DAY events is **YASIA FIESTA! Young Asians, Come Together, Share the Word and Live the Eucharist!**

The schedule of activities are as follows:

November 20-23 Days in the Diocese

Delegates will be staying in 10 dioceses for cultural orientation, host family experience, parish interaction, and community service.

November 23-27 Asian Youth Day

The main event will focus on the theme of the Word and the Eucharist in the formation of young Catholics. Activities include inputs given by bishop and youth speakers, subregional reflection and sharing, YAsian Walk, liturgies and prayer hours & cultural presentation.

November 27-30

Asian Youth Ministers' Meeting

Heads of Youth Commissions of all member countries and affiliates of FABC will look into the pastoral challenges posed by the AYD theme in the area of ministering to youth in Asia

November 27- December 4 Post-AYD Activities

Special workshops and immersion activities. Among the workshops are a Youth Leadership Training by Bukal ng Tipan Center, a Media and Technology workshop co-organized by FABC-Office of Social Communications, UCANews and Radio Veritas.

Preparations are going on in the Philippines through the CBCP- Episcopal Commission on Youth and the Diocese of Imus in coordination with the FABC-Youth Desk.

For more information, please email ayd5secretariat@gmail.com or asiayouthdesk@gmail.com

CATCH THE VISION, LIVE THE DREAM - Youth Ministry Regional Training in Southeast Asia

LAST APRIL 20-24, 2009, the FABC-OLF-Youth Desk conducted a regional training for youth ministers coming from Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. Held in Thailand at the Center of Gospel Peace in Pantathumi, Lamlukka, there were 26 youth ministers - 8 priests, 8 religious and 14 lay leaders.

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