

## 11. BUILDING RELEVANT STRUCTURES

*How should the Church be organised to effectively fulfill her social mission? What structures can enable her to formulate and implement relevant social policies and programmes? This is the crucial theme of this chapter!*

### Towards Relevant Church Structures

*An inspiring vision of the Christian community, exemplified by the early Christians, emerges from the CBCI statements. Our dioceses and parishes should strive to become communities that deeply experience Christ, bear witness to his kingdom and values (his life-project!), and share this Good News with others. In the past, Christians often characterised themselves as communities of faith and prayer, of mutual love and communion, and of care and service of all, especially the poor and the marginalised. Today, they have to add two dimensions and build up **communities of dialogue and collaboration** with people of different faiths and ideologies, and **communities involved in the transformation of society**. Our dioceses and parishes must become inspiring models and microcosms ('little worlds') of the new society we want to build with all our brothers and sisters (168-9).*

To realise such ideals and ensure the active participation of all, **traditional policies, ministries, organisations and structures must be transformed and new ones developed**. The Bishops therefore acknowledged in 1984 and 1986 that *attitudinal and organisational changes are needed in the Church* to respond to today's challenges and involve all Christians, especially the laity, in the transformation of society and the liberation of the poor (92 & 111.).<sup>1</sup> They added: "The organisational change we have in mind refers primarily to **certain participatory structures** urged by Vatican II – **parish and diocesan councils** – and, where applicable, **finance committees** now enjoined by the Code of Canon Law" (95, cf. 111).

In his Keynote Address for the 2005 NBCLC Seminar on "The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium", Bp. Patrick D'Souza emphasised that the Church's "evangelising objective is the

Kingdom of God, that is, *the translation of the love of God into structures of human love*". "The structures of the Church evolved in the course of time" and the **Small Christian Community (SCC)** is "*an alternative structure, which will enable (today's) Church to function relevantly and adequately*".<sup>2</sup> Paul Puthanangady similarly argues that the Church has to take a new shape in the light of her renewed understanding of life and mission. "The basic articulation of this new way of being Church will be the **SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**."<sup>3</sup> This vision and structure was accepted by the seminar participants.<sup>4</sup>

S. Arulsamy highlights **the deep meaning and relevance of participatory structures in the Church**. They "should not be viewed as bodies designed primarily" for organisation and co-ordination, "but rather *as opportunities or means which contribute to the creation of the very being of the Church as communion*. They are structural means" to deepen the bonds of fellowship and collaboration, and "occasions for the charisms of the laity to blossom", which are their own rights and duties.<sup>5</sup>

Y. Irudayaraj further emphasises that participatory structures express a new way of thinking, **the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II**. They uphold both the fundamental equality (code of canon law, #208) and the functional diversity of the members of the Church. The laity do not only belong to the Church, but **are the Church**. Participatory decision-making structures are thus of major importance for the fulfillment of the Church's mission and service. **They should tend to go from mere consultation to full participation**.<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Gremillion moreover highlighted the ongoing transformation of Church structures to make her **a relevant social actor in today's world**.<sup>7</sup> In a very thought-provoking article, "The Place of the Poor in the Church", José M. Castillo raised the issue of **the real participation of the poor in the Church** (Box 11.1). The Christians of our country should be proud (and enthused!) of the fact that **the CBCI clearly voiced the need for the representation and participation of the poor, Dalits, Tribals, women and youth in the decision-making bodies of the Church in India**.

With these perspectives, we will now study the Bishops' reflections on the Church structures at the parish (A) and diocesan

**Box 11.1****The Place of the Poor in the Church<sup>8</sup>**

José Castillo's article is inspired by the following understanding of Jesus: "For Jesus, to speak of the poor was to speak of people who were weak, marginalised, robbed of dignity in the society of his time. *His goal was to situate these people at the centre of his life, at the forefront of his projects and among his dearest friends.*"

As a consequence, Castillo raised the basic issue of **the place of the poor in the Church**. He for example asked: "*What influence do the poor have in the important decisions of the Church? Are the poor consulted? Is their point of view given any consideration? Does it ever occur to anybody that their point of view may be important? What influence do the poor have, not only in the decisions of the Church, but especially... in theology? That is, do the poor shape the way we understand God, explain the Gospel, spell out in what Christian salvation consists?*" Jesus admired the understanding of the "little ones" (Mt. 11,25). Do we do the same?

Castillo concludes: "**What challenge do the poor offer the Church in the new millennium?** First of all, the Church should have no fear of the poor. *Nor should she leave them out of consideration when it is time to reflect, to decide, to act, to teach.*" *The Church should pay more attention to the poor and the marginalised than to the wealthy and the powerful.* "The Church should consider the poor, not as passive recipients of Her attention, but as **active subjects** – even to the point of having them present where analyses and decisions are made." **She would thus follow her founder.**

*The CBCI clearly stated that the poor, Dalits, Tribals, women and youth should be represented and should take part in the decision-making bodies of the Church. Is this actually the case?*

(B) levels. While putting the emphasis on **the social dimension**, we will present a comprehensive picture by successively considering **the following parish structures**: 1) *Friendship, Prayer and Dialogue Groups*, 2) *Pastoral Councils and Finance Committees*, 3) *Lay Ministries and Organisations*, 4) *Structures of Sharing*,

5) *Small Christian Communities*, 6) *Basic Human Communities* and 7) *Action Groups*. We will end Section (A) with a few *Concluding Observations* (8).

**A. Parish Structures****1. Friendship, Prayer and Dialogue Groups**

It may be good to begin with a few words about *Friendship, Prayer and Dialogue Groups*. In fact, such groups can also inspire and support our social involvements. Once, the Bishops spoke of what may be called '**friendship**' groups that can help the laity to live more fully their vocation (78, cf. above, 116). Such groups could also greatly benefit bishops, priests and religious. Groups comprising some lay people, priests and religious should be welcome too. (It is a pity that few such groups exist, at least in a formal or structured manner.) Of course, *this friendly support can also be provided by prayer groups, SCCs, etc.*

The Bishops occasionally refer to **prayer groups or meetings**, either among Christians alone (e.g., 50 & 163) or with people of other faiths (e.g., 119 & 180). The value of such prayer meetings is so widely recognised that it is more often implied than explicitly expressed. Though the Bishops do not often highlight these elements, prayer groups can greatly contribute to a proper faith formation, the renewal of people's spirituality, the development of friendly contacts between various communities, and even the deepening of social awareness and concern.

The Bishops more frequently insist on **the importance of inter-religious dialogue**.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that their statements increasingly emphasise *the social content of such meetings and their relevance for collaboration in answering people's needs* (cf. above, pp. 69-70 & 142-3). **(In practice, however, do such concerns hold an important place in dialogue meetings?)** *In some circumstances at least, dialogue groups could play the role of Peace Committees and Basic Human Communities (BHCs).*

**2. Pastoral Councils<sup>10</sup> and Finance Committees**

*The CBCI Statements repeatedly recommend the formation of Pastoral Councils in parishes* (e.g., 95, 111 & 178). According

to *The Code of Canon Law* (#536), the existence and norms of these councils are to be decided by the Diocesan Bishop, and their vote is only consultative. Yet, in the spirit of Canon 127/2, *wise leaders will take into account their collaborators' views*. **These councils are extremely important.**

The participants of the 2005 NBCLC Seminar however recognised the unfortunate truth: “Although lay people are getting more and more involved in the life of the Church, we have to admit that *ours is still a clergy-dominated Church...* For all practical purposes, *(the laity) are still treated as helpers to the clergy*. Despite the participatory structures introduced into the local churches..., *the laity's role in all these structures is only secondary*.” “In general there is reluctance among the clergy to allow the laity to play their proper role in the Church.”<sup>11</sup> If we are serious about the nature of the Church and lay participation, **a comprehensive evaluation of the functioning (and existence!) of Pastoral Councils, at both the parish and diocesan levels, is imperative throughout the Church in India. And, still more importantly, remedial measures have to be found and implemented.**

The Bishops interestingly added in 1986: “Each parish must have, according to the pattern of local institutions (like panchayats, *sabhas* and *sanghas*) **some sort of a representative body** which will help the community to turn from a passive recipient into an active participant in the life of the Church.” In this context, the Bishops observed that the traditional participatory structures like the ‘*palli-yogam*’ and Catholic *Sabha* (association) “could be a great inspiration” (111). They had previously said in 1984: “We also encourage... the use of local participatory structures like the Adivasi Panchayats, which are found in some areas. Delay in introducing these structural changes (including Pastoral Councils, etc.) would be detrimental to the growth of lay participation.” **The Church should use the existing forms of local governance in traditional and modern India to involve the whole community in decision-making.**<sup>12</sup> In certain areas like some parts of Mangalore, the parishes are also divided in wards of about 30 families with a leader who plays an important role in the Church and locality.

The Bishops moreover speak of **Finance Committees**. Strangely, the *Code of Canon Law* seems to insist on their creation even more

### Box 11.2

#### Are the Parish Councils & BCCs Truly Christian?

Sometimes people rejoice because Parish Councils or BCCs have been started. **But are these and all the other Church organisations truly Christian?** In the previous chapters, the Bishops spoke of the Church and her Good News, her solidarity with the people, especially the poor, her mission to transform society and build a new world. They spoke of the Christians and their commitment to the poor. *But are our Parish Councils, BCCs and all other organisations truly Christian? Are they socially conscious and committed?* Are they basically administrators ‘running the affairs of the Church’, or are they filled with a sense of mission and sensitive to the needs of the neighbourhood? **Are they pro-poor and committed to social justice and societal change in their decisions and the use of money? Would Jesus recognise them as his own? Would he feel at home with them? Participation is not enough! There has to be a genuine Christian orientation!**

than on that of Pastoral Councils: “In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish” (#537). In 1984, the Bishops rightly observed: “The sharing of responsibility in this sphere should not only extend to participation in the administration of finances but also to increasing local financial support. The special competence of lay persons in this field will help the Church to become more self-reliant” (95). The Finance Committees could perhaps be also involved in the implementation of our proposals regarding the **Structures of Sharing** (cf. below, Section 4).

### 3. Lay Ministries and Organisations

The Bishops moreover expressed **the need for new initiatives, services, ministries, associations, movements and structures in the lay apostolate**. *The prevailing ones may not indeed fully respond to today's demands and needs* (cf. above, 104-5). They also pointed out that life-related and action-oriented associations and movements are more appealing to the youth and must be encouraged and guided (above, 122).

I would like to comment on these welcome proposals. **All the existing parish associations/organisations** like the St. Vincent de Paul, Sodality, Legion of Mary, etc., **must be evaluated and reoriented** in the light of the principles enounced by the Bishops regarding the laity, family, women and youth (cf. ch. 8, above 115-23). Their reflections on lay formation and spirituality should also be taken into account (cf. above, 117-8 & 102-4). A *time-frame* should probably be set for this renewal at the local, diocesan, regional and national levels and the overall process should be carried out *with the greatest possible participation, not only of their own members but also of the whole Christian community*. Each association should be asked to make *an action-plan* for the coming years, at all levels. **Whatever new organisations are needed** to concretely care for the poor, elderly, sick, lonely, etc., **must also be created**. A similar process should be followed to determine the orientation, functioning and action plan of these new organisations. *The 'old' and new organisations will thus be able to assume the leadership roles the Bishops encourage* (cf. above, 118).

**'Catholic action movements'** like the YCS/YSM, AICUF and YCW/CWM must be renewed, if needed, and provided enough personnel and finances. All the youth movements at the national, regional or diocesan levels and all the local and parish youth groups should be similarly reoriented and supported. Some resource persons and Committees will obviously be needed to animate and coordinate these groups and organisations, and train their members. *The trainees will become much more motivated when the sessions and courses are directly connected with the tasks and responsibilities they are actually involved in.*

The CCBI envisaged in 1986 **a broad scope for lay involvement in the Church and the world**: "liturgy, faith-formation, pastoral councils, educational apostolate, family apostolate, mass media, social action, new forms of lay involvement" (99). The CCBI was even more complete in 2001: *"There is an urgent need to recognise and promote lay services flowering into lay ministries which build up the Church and society*. Examples of such services/ministries are: to the sick, aged, youth, family, women; the ministry of the Word, catechesis, reconciliation; the promotion of justice and health, community animation, inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, etc. The

necessary formation programmes, installation procedures and guidelines need to be worked out by each diocese according to its unique circumstances" (#2).

For long, the Church employed almost only catechists, who however often had manifold functions and responsibilities. **Today's needs require several new ministries**, more or less specialised. Some of these 'collaborators' (a probably too paternalistic word!), pastoral/social workers/agents, animators, leaders or activists should be involved *full-time*, and others *part-time*. Some may be volunteers, but many must be paid. **They should form a sizeable team in each parish.**

If schools, dispensaries, NGOs, people's movements and Self-Help Groups employ many people, *why not the parishes too? Don't we realise the value and significance of these various services? What a boost these ministries will receive when people are officially appointed and recognised, and even employed and paid.* **This is part of the needed structural renewal of the Church!** All of us can easily imagine how the whole neighbourhood and even the wider society could thus be 'animated' and become engaged in its self-transformation!

#### 4. Structures of Sharing

We already saw that the Bishops exhorted the Christians **to build communities of love and sharing**, where there is no one in need as in the early Christian Community of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. above, 94 & 106). They also denounced consumerism, over-consumption (e.g. 60, 145 & 146) and the monopoly of the rich (146). The Bishops moreover called all Christians to a life of restraint, simplicity and poverty of spirit in a life-style that liberates from the selfish effects of affluence and power (32-3). To combat poverty and hunger, they recommended **to skip a meal on Friday** to share with the poor. Some striking passages also emphasise **the duty of the rich to share with the poor**. The better-off sections must "find ways of making development real to the majority" (148). *It is their duty in justice to "contribute towards the alleviation of poverty"* (160). The Bishops therefore request them "to share their resources for the education and socio-economic empowerment of the

marginalised and the poor” (182, cf. also the recommendations 10 and 11 given above, 146). All this is good and even excellent.

M. Amaladoss similarly points out that, as shown in Acts 2:42-47 and 1 Cor 11,21, “the Christian community cannot celebrate the Eucharist meaningfully if it does not share its goods. The sharing of food and drink is a symbol of **the sharing of life** and all that life demands, not only with Christ, but **also with each other**. In this context, it is difficult to imagine a Christian community where some people are not able to meet their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, while others have plenty... *A community that does nothing to share its goods with the poor has no right to celebrate the Eucharist. Its Eucharist will have no meaning.*”<sup>13</sup>

*Our Christian communities in India have to learn to become much more generous. But no truly adequate structures have yet been created to effectively organise the sharing of goods. Proper structures have to be set up to encourage the well-to-do and all other Christians to concretely and effectively share their goods with the poor.* For instance, the Lenten campaigns should be strengthened and systematically organised for this purpose. Box 11.2 also gives three relevant suggestions which make people directly involved.

**Amaladoss makes two other basic proposals:** 1) *to clearly distinguish in the offertory collection “what is given to support the Church/parish activities and what is shared with the poor”, and 2) to have a proper system of public accounting.*<sup>14</sup> **Concrete ways and means must be found to implement them.** The first suggestion would undoubtedly complicate the well-established system of the Sunday collection. **Yet, there are many advantages.** Most Christians may indeed be more inclined to contribute directly to the poor. *This could be used to sensitise them to various needs. It would also challenge the dioceses and parishes to rethink their financial priorities and become more attuned to the option for the poor.* And it would compel them to explain their needs more clearly, including the financing of the new ministries we just mentioned and the genuine duty to help poorer dioceses and the parishes (cf. above, 146). Once this is done, I have no doubt that the people would be very generous.

### Box 11.3 Solidarity Proposals

The 344 delegates and observers of the 1976 Synod of the Church of South India (CSI) made 3 “**Lifestyle” or Solidarity Recommendations:** “1) to miss a meal a week and set apart that money for people in dire need; 2) to donate half a day or one day’s salary a month for social development work; and 3) to invite once a month one of the poorest families in the community to share a common meal.”<sup>15</sup> **Could such proposals become part of a Solidarity Campaign?**

*The second suggestion, public accounting, will also be very helpful.* If people are well informed of the utilisation of their gifts, they will become much more inclined to contribute. For example, what detailed reports have been given to the people, by the Government or even the Church, regarding their tsunami gifts? **Sharing is a must.** Yet, one should not be satisfied with catchy phrases like “communities of love and sharing” and “there was no one among them in need”. **In today’s situation, the struggle against poverty requires much more radical measures than sharing.** As Amaladoss rightly observes, “*it is not enough that Christians share what they have. They also have to get involved in movements that seek to promote more just economic, commercial and political structures.*”<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

**The Bishops officially adopted a significant new orientation in 1998.** They declared: “**The small Christian communities, in whatever form they can be constituted,** can serve as powerful means in creating this sense of mission, for *it is there that the Christians can come to grips with the concrete evangelising needs of the community of which they are a part.* These communities are like living cells of an organism fully operative and contributing towards the well-being and growth of the whole body. **It is necessary that we foster their creation and growth in all our parishes**” (156). They then remarked that the SCCs share human and financial resources (163). In their action programme, they added that “**a very serious effort must be made to form and foster SCCs because**

it is through these that the role of the Church to be leaven in society can be effectively realised at the local level” (165). These passages emphasised **the role of the SCCs in the evangelising social mission of the Church.**

In their next meeting in 2000, the Bishops affirmed: “It is in the SCCs that all we have described above can become concrete realities in the day-to-day life of the Christian. We warmly recommend the formation of SCCs in all our parishes” (169). The previous paragraphs had reflected on **the call to be re-evangelised** in the four following ways: having a deep experience of Jesus (1) and **building up communities of love and sharing** (2), free from caste and other discriminations (3) and **living in unconditional forgiveness** (167-9, cf. above, 94). **All in all, the Bishops therefore understand the SCCs as local communities deeply living (and witnessing) the life and mission of the Church. They are the Church in a given locality.**

Sometimes using the term Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) as a synonym for SCCs, the CCBI stated that “the priest involves himself in building BCCs for re-evangelisation and evangelisation” (2000, #2.2). It added in 2001: “As the SCCs ensure a participatory, active, vibrant and evangelising Church, **they should become a pastoral priority for the entire Church of India**, as mentioned time and again, especially by the National Assembly of *Yesu Krist Jayanti-2000* at Bangalore. While recognising the important place that ecclesial movements and associations have in the Church, these are called to a fuller understanding of their collaborative role in relation to the SCCs” (#3). The CCBI observed in 2003 that the “wave of fresh enthusiasm” in the Church “to make her own the Good News of Jesus and to share it with others” has been fuelled, among other factors, “by the steady growth of BCCs and Basic Human Communities” (BHCs) (#3).

This is what the Bishops’ Statements said about the SCCs. It is obviously beyond our scope to include a detailed discussion, but a few observations may be useful. The 2005 NBCLC Seminar rightly sums up the role of the SCCs as follows: “**The basic articulation of (the) new way of being Church will be the SCCs.** In such communities we can find the description of the Church as pictured in

the Acts of the Apostles, i.e., *a community whose members were of one mind and one heart and where there was no one among them in need.* It was a community that was nurtured on the Word of God and the Eucharist and lived out a deep Christ experience and was *involved in the neighbourhood with a sense of Christian mission.* On the one hand, the parish will be **a communion of these communities**, and on the other, it will be a community **in communion with all the kingdom forces** that are operating in the neighbourhood.”<sup>17</sup> The SCCs and SHCs will thus struggle to eliminate the destructive and negative forces at work in the neighbourhood and build the new society.

In his 1988 thesis on *Some Aspects of Parish Renewal in Mumbai*, Patrick D’Mello briefly studied the SCC movement in this city. He shows **the undoubtedly positive impact** (mainly at the level of awareness, formation and quality of life) of about 800 SCCs

#### **Box 11.4** **The SCCs in India**

John Paul II wrote that the SCCs “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 civilisation of love” (EA, #25). The 2003 Statement of the National Consultation of SCCs in India further explained that **the SCCs “work for the transformation of the world.** They build the Kingdom of God... by promoting the values of justice, love and peace. In this way they transform prayer into action, faith into deeds, love into action. **In its own neighbourhood, the SCC becomes responsible for the continuation for the mission of Church.**”<sup>18</sup>

In their daily lives, the SCC members concretely live the Eucharist and break themselves for others. *Their piety becomes more communitarian and life-oriented.* The members share their goods among themselves and even with the larger community. They put their talents and gifts at the service of the community, especially the poor and the marginalised. Their relationships are marked by mutual appreciation and support. Decision-making is made in common and in the light of faith. The SCC members integrate the Social Teaching of the Church in their lives and liberate people from dehumanising situations and structures. **They are agents of change in the Church and society.**<sup>19</sup>

and their 7000 community animators or leaders, who attend monthly meetings and organise various activities for the community. D’Mello however expresses **4 areas of concern**: 1) the ‘quick-fix’ approach of inadequately trained leaders who often bypassed the people, especially in the early stages; 2) the lack of involvement of people of other faiths; and 3) the fact that many priests were not familiar enough with this approach. 4) Religious and cultural activities were moreover stressed, while the people’s socio-economic problems were not given sufficient importance.<sup>20</sup>

A 1993 study of 15 parishes by John D’Mello<sup>21</sup> indeed indicated that **the activities taken up in the meetings were distributed as follows**: 1) Faith Formation/Bible Sharing and Prayer (45.8%); 2) Socialising/Fellowship/Self-Development (29.9%); 3) People’s Problems (24.3%). As a result, the participants said **they had been helped in the following areas**: 1) Personal Knowledge/Development (36.76%), 2) Fellowship/Socialising (29.04%), 3) Church Participation/Faith/Prayer (20.20%), and 4) Problem Solving (14%). John D’Mello therefore suggested that, *to become more effective, the BCC groups “now need to move in the line of concerted action, towards problem-oriented issues”*.

**John D’Mello moreover made three pertinent observations from other experiences.** (1) The BCCs in Brazil were mainly built and strengthened as ‘communities’ when they became involved in *common and concerted action*. (2) The BCCs in Nagercoil had a much greater impact on the awareness of their members than on their active involvements. (3) A study of BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community) Cells in 68 parishes of the Philippines showed that their impact was primarily *liturgical*, then *developmental*, and finally *liberationist* (working on social justice issues). These areas were considered as three stages of growth.

Let us conclude. The last two studies suggest that, **in practice, the SCCs function in three main capacities**, namely, as *Prayer/Formation Groups, Friendship/Support Groups, and Action Groups*. The first two dimensions are certainly meaningful and necessary, but they may also absorb most of the time and energy of the SCCs. They moreover risk to co-exist with and perpetuate many elements of the understanding and practices of the traditional Church.

In any case, *if they remain at that level, the SCCs miserably fail to fulfill an essential element, and probably the most important dimension, of the Bishops’ statements and the new way of being Church – that is, their witnessing and involvement in the problems of the neighbourhood.*

According to me, **the SCCs should resolutely focus on their commitment to answer people’s problems.** For this purpose, they can take up some of the relevant guidelines and recommendations of the Bishops (ch. 10) *and see how they can be concretely implemented in the here and now of the neighbourhood, and in collaboration with people of other faiths.* The prayer, friendship and formation dimensions can be meaningfully promoted in this broad perspective. I would even say that *the type of spirituality and formation needed can be better given in this apostolic and liberative context.* This is probably the only way it can be given. In fact, some of the Bishops’ reflections seem to go in this direction (cf. above, 117). If they do not function from the very beginning as action groups, it is likely that the SCCs will never satisfactorily perform their functions and build the communities that are so urgently needed today. They will fail to realise their potential and the hope they raised. **Yet, properly oriented, the SCCs can become a relevant and powerful movement in the Church.**

## 6. Basic Human Communities (BHCs)

The CBCI Statements never spoke of BHCs. The CCBI however said in 2001: “In the Indian multi-cultural, multi-religious context, the SCCs, while preserving their ecclesial identity, should network with all people to promote and nurture **small human/neighbourhood communities** that usher in a society based on love, justice, peace and harmony” (#5). And in 2003 they made the observation we already mentioned (cf. above, 169). The Bishops’ emphasis on the social function of inter-religious dialogue should lead us to greatly multiply the BHCs (cf. above, 142-3). The CCBI exhortation to multiply the Peace Committees is also a step in this direction (cf. above, 145).

The idea of BHCs or SHCs was however very much present in the 2005 NBCLC Seminar. Bp. Patrick D’Souza for example stated that the SCCs “will build up the Kingdom of God in the neighbourhood,

enlisting all the Kingdom forces that are already operating there... This ultimately results in the formation of SHCs, thus seeking, together with all peoples, the realisation of the hope enshrined in the heart of every human being. *This is the Kingdom of God, envisaged by Jesus as a result of the proclamation of the Gospel.*"<sup>22</sup>

Without using the word BHCs, Virginia Saldanha well explains their rationale: "For us in India, it is necessary that the neighbourhood faith community (SCC) opens itself to people of all faiths living within the geographical range of their community, to begin with, and then to the wider society. Through interaction with people of other faiths, we can find a common ground to work for justice and peace in society. Some SCCs have started a 'dialogue of life' by sharing the aspirations, concerns, hopes, joys and dreams of people of other faiths. **Dialogue on this level... often results in a 'dialogue of action'.** *The SCC will thus become the leaven in society, fostering harmonious living, addressing issues together with all people of good will, spreading the life-giving values of the gospel, and creating a society of justice and peace.*"<sup>23</sup>

M. Amaladoss finally observes that the Christian "commitment is to the cause of working for the construction of the kingdom as a community of freedom, fellowship and justice and for *the constitution of such communities on a smaller scale as symbols and servants of the emerging Kingdom.* This is the identity of the Church... Today these may be the BCCs and BHCs... **But they are not ends in themselves but servants of a broader goal, the Kingdom.**" *The BCCs and the BHCs are "economically, politically and socially transforming"*.<sup>24</sup>

## 7. Action Groups

The SCCs and SHCs usually tackle a variety of local/ neighbourhood issues. On account of special situations and needs, they may sometimes focus on a particular problem or concern, at least for a certain period. There should also be **specialised groups or committees** to deal with **specific groups** like Dalits, Tribals, women, child labourers, the unemployed, unorganised workers, slum-dwellers, domestic workers, etc., or **specific issues** like wages, unemployment, human rights, the environment, communal harmony,

justice and peace, secularism, etc. *Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can be listed among such groups.*

So far, the Bishops have hardly mentioned such groups, organisations and movements, which fulfill a specific function. **These specialised groups are however very much needed.** Usually, they are not organised on a geographical or religious basis. *It is essential that many Christians be involved in such groups and movements.* Besides themselves contributing to the transformation of society, they can help to sensitise the whole Christian community and make it involved in broader issues. **Some such groups must**

### Box 11.5 Pastoral Guidelines<sup>25</sup>

The *Pastoral Guidelines* of the 2005 NBCLC Seminar can serve as reminders of our reflections. (For the sake of reference, we kept their original numbers.) **At the national level**, "a methodology for preparing animators of SCCs and faith formation has to be evolved in the Seminary formation" (I. 13). "*SCCs should become the 'New Way of Being Church' in every parish. The parish should become a communion of communities*" (I. 14). **At the diocesan level**, "a Pastoral Plan should be prepared by every diocese with the involvement of all sections of the people of God" (III. 1). "Dioceses should organise social work taking for their criteria the principle of the Acts of the Apostles: '*There was no one among them in need*'" (III. 13).

**III. (At the Parish Level).** 3. "The Parish Priest should extend his pastoral ministry to the whole community of the parish." 4. "The Parish community should become *a community of sharing.*" 6. "There should be special care extended to the old and the sick people of the parish. 7. Healing ministry should be promoted by visiting the sick, taking care of the old and the orphans and helping the poor irrespective of caste and creed. 8. Forming *Basic Human Communities* in every parish is to be encouraged. 9. *Having special concern for the poor and the oppressed section of the parish is a must.*" 19. "Functioning as *agents of reconciliation* in times of communal conflicts is the need of the hour." 20. "Media education should be offered to the youth in order to conscientise them with regard to the evils of globalisation."

therefore be created in the parish or locality. *Being of a more secular nature, they are ideal to foster the collaboration of people of different faiths and worldviews.*

### 8. Concluding Observations

I want to add three comments on parish structures. First, *to promote communion, belonging and responsibility as well as decentralisation and participation, the Church must be structured and organised in relatively small communities* – whether these are wards, neighbourhoods, prayer/dialogue groups, SCCs, issue-based committees, or formations/associations sharing certain characteristics or concerns. Large gatherings can express and promote a sense of solidarity between different groups and communities and must therefore be regularly held, but *small assemblies and communities enable people to enter into deeper communion with one another and reflect on their specific responsibilities and commitments.* The early Christian communities were rather small, thus fostering personal relationships and mutual sharing. As Paul Puthanangady pointed out in a NBCLC talk, to “build up community, *the groupings at the base should first be built up*”. To strengthen the community-building and social-change character of the Church, *we must pay much attention to the creation of small communities.* Without neglecting the broader community, praying, relating and serving in the Church must often be done in small personalising communities.

This is my second comment. The Bishops speak of involving all the Christians in the life and mission of the Church. Though many may basically limit themselves to their family life and professional work, *a much greater number of people should become engaged in parish organisations. This is a must to promote social change.* We should not be satisfied with a few dialogue groups and SCCs in a parish. *There should be dozens and even hundreds of such groups if the parish is large. In fact, all parishes should be divided into small wards or units with their own representative bodies concerned with the life of their neighbourhoods.* These bodies and the SCCs or SHCs should also collaborate and network, not only sharing their experiences, but also addressing issues, conducting campaigns, etc. They must be coordinated and federated

at different levels, always with maximum people’s participation. **Only then can these grassroots groups and initiatives constitute a movement and have a broad social impact.** All the SCCs and SHCs must learn to work in this manner. *They should also be concerned about involving the whole community in various issues and campaigns. This must be an integral part of the New Way of Being Church.*

Now my third comment. The Bishops sometimes recommended that they themselves and the priests and the religious simplify their lifestyle. They also said they should multiply and deepen their contacts with the laity and the people of other faiths, especially the poor and the marginalised. *Actually, their first proposal should probably spring from the implementation of the second.* Parish ‘visits’ and contacts with the people are usually understood at the individual level. This greatly matters, **but our contacts with prayer and dialogue groups and the SCCs and SHGs, are probably still more crucial.**

*Every bishop, priest and religious should regularly take part in various meetings and even be a member of a few groups.* Sometimes, their participation could be as animators, for example in the more official meetings of the representative bodies of the wards, but often also as ordinary members. This is very much needed to dialogue with the poor and the marginalised, grow in solidarity and be more identified with them, and build **the Church for the People and the Church of the Poor.** And also to fulfill our role among the people of other faiths and become **Priests for all Human Beings** (125, cf. above, 114). *Living and working with the people and the poor, at least for certain periods, and being involved in their liberation struggles and campaigns would also greatly help. In fact, it is a must.*

In their 20 General Meetings between 1966 and 2004, the Bishops never took **the parish** as their major theme. It will be excellent if they do it in the near future. *They can then sum up their past recommendations, integrate new proposals, clarify their priorities and present a comprehensive vision of a parish with its desirable activities, programmes and structures.* They can even make **a plan of action** and issue time-bound measures to build the type of Church which is so urgently needed at the grassroots level. **Or, still more importantly, they can launch this process** (cf. below, 179-80).

## B. Diocesan Structures

The Bishops hardly ever spoke of priests' councils (178), priests' senates and diocesan consultors (51). Though the Council of Priests (cc. 495-501) and the College of Consultors (502) are important, we shall not consider them. We shall however reflect on *The Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) and Synod* (1), and some *Other Commission and Committees* (2). We shall conclude this chapter with some reflections on *Participatory Structures and Implementation*.

### 1. Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) and Synod

The Bishops often recommended the creation of DPCs.<sup>26</sup> Fr. Sebastian, the Deputy Secretary General of the CCBI, kindly sent me the following reflections: "Speaking on the nature and function of the DPC in the light of the Canon 511, Fr. Sebastian Karambai says: '**The Diocesan Pastoral Council is the most representative of all the stably constituted consultative bodies.** It reflects the entire particular Church and is composed of clerics, religious and especially lay persons. *Its purpose is to advise the bishop on pastoral tasks and issues by investigating, considering and proposing practical conclusions about them.*'"<sup>27</sup>

"The DPC, duly constituted, is **a nodal and vital administrative agency in the pastoral life of a local Church** for the following reasons. First, it is a link between the universal, national and regional Church and the different participatory structures at the diocesan level. Being the most representative body, the DPC involves the entire local Church in receiving and assimilating various insights and proposals. Second, by its very nature, *the DPC can guide, animate, direct, inspire, and monitor the life and mission of the local Church.* Third, the DPC is in an advantageous position to design some regulatory mechanisms for all the units and constituencies of the diocese. This task cannot be done by a particular organ of the diocese which does not represent all its constituencies."

"When a DPC truly functions according to its spirit and objective, **it is likely that the major concerns of every unit among the laity, clergy and religious and even the society will draw the attention of the local Church.** Where the DPC is not constituted or does not function properly, the main agenda of the local Church

risks to be hijacked by dominant groups, *so much so that certain vital concerns of the marginalised are excluded.* In my reading, this is one of the crucial and major reasons why several recommendations of the Bishops, both at the national and regional levels, have not been taken up by many local Churches. Of course, **the formation of the DPC should be preceded, at least for the first time, by a Diocesan Synod to develop a pastoral vision and action plan for the better governance of the Church.** Without this fundamental spade work, the DPC may run out of energy in course of time and become merely an agency of crisis management."

According to H.P. Moneiro from the National Advisory Council (NAC), the DPC can fulfill three functions. It can serve as a sign of close union (1) and an effective consultative body (2). It can even have an executive role, assuming follow-up action (3).<sup>28</sup> The Diocesan Synod and the DPC should thus inspire, stimulate and orient all the Diocesan Commissions/Organisations and parish structures. In fact, the diocesan and parish structures should mutually influence and challenge one another.

### 2. Other Commissions and Committees

Besides the usual Commissions dealing with various aspects of the life of the Church, **the Bishops have recommended the following Commissions or Committees** to assist and promote the renewal of the Church: 1) Finance Committee, 2) Cell to monitor and remedy the cases of injustice and oppression against women (165, cf. above, 141), 3) Free Legal Aid Cells (to protect the possible victims of corruption and resort to "public interest litigation", cf. 132 & 96), 4) Commission Against Caste Discrimination (128, cf. above, 148-9), and 5) Reconciliation Committee to deal with disputes and conflicts (178, cf. above, 142).

According to me, two other important Commissions should also be constituted. The first is the **Justice, Peace and Development (JPD) Commission** to animate, develop and coordinate the social apostolate of the Church, with a focus on social justice. *The overall mandate of this JPD Commission should be to ensure and promote the fulfillment of the Church's social mission in the diocese.* Vatican II urged that "some agency of the universal Church be set up for the worldwide promotion of justice for the poor" (GS, #90) and this led

Paul VI to institute the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace (PCJP) in 1967 to arouse the Church to full awareness of its role. By 1975, some 60 Conferences of Bishops had established similar bodies or secretariats.<sup>29</sup> Such a Commission will perform different functions than the **Social Service Society** which is concerned with specific development projects. Yet, it can sometimes be linked to it in one or another way.

The Second is a **Diocesan Arbitration and Monitoring Committee** for just payscales and service conditions of Church personnel, including the domestic workers. This Committee's mandate would be to arbitrate referred cases of misconduct by employees, settle workers' grievances, periodically review the payscales and service conditions of workers, and ensure the implementation of the existing payscales and service conditions by Church employers through remedial measures and punitive actions. The Committee should be vested with enough power to fulfill these functions, arbitrate in matters of Labour Relations in the Church and monitor compliance to the Church payscales and service conditions. *Such a Committee is needed, for monitoring is an important dimension of any legislation, which the Church should make on this matter.*<sup>30</sup> This mandate could also be given to the **Diocesan Labour Commission**.

### Participatory Structures and Implementation

A religious priest answered my request for feedback as follows: "The CBCI documents were originally prepared mostly by academicians, experts and theologians to suit the topics discussed in conferences, seminars, etc. They were conditioned by the socio-political-ecclesial pressures prevalent in those times. I am not even sure that most Bishops were deeply involved and convinced! In any case, *the documents reflect the opinions of only a small percentage of the 'Church' in India.* The majority of the laity, religious and priests were left out. They had no participation in the making of the documents. *How can we then expect them to understand, accept and implement them?* The Bishops' concerns and the people's concerns may often be at variance with each other."

*"To ensure the implementation of the decisions, the people at the grassroots parish level should be involved from the very beginning in any renewal process.* Suitable mechanisms and

structures should be carefully created for this purpose. **We need to initiate a People's Movement in the Church.** *A viable, realistic, but ambitious and participatory process has to emerge from the grassroots upwards.*" (I hope that the participatory diocesan and parish structures outlined in this chapter would satisfactorily foster such a process, build a People's Movement in the Church, and enable the people to fulfill their social mission – the mission of the 'Church'.)

My friend then suggests the following **Steps for 2006-2013**: "1. *Preparatory Phase*: (One Year – Jan. to Dec. 2006). All the Catholics in India are systematically contacted and everyone's expectations, concerns and opinions regarding the Church in India are elicited through questionnaires, interviews schedules, etc. 2. *Analysis Phase* (Six months – Jan.-June 2007). The data are scientifically analysed and the major concerns of the 'Church' are identified and prioritised. 3. *Action Plans* (Six months – July-Dec. 2007). Only the top or three concerns are chosen for action. Time-bound plans are worked out at all levels – parish, diocesan, regional, national – and responsibilities are clearly demarcated. 4. *Implementation Phase* (Five Years – 2008-2012). Continuous monitoring and interim evaluations are carried out periodically. 5. *Evaluation* (One year - 2013)."

The feedback finally emphasises that *the bishops especially, but also the priests and lay animators, should be constantly and directly in touch with the people at the grassroots and continuously feel the pulse of the people. Only then will this whole programme prove effective.*" The detailed planning could obviously be discussed and improved, but the overall perspective and orientation is clear. **Such a renewal programme could also be undertaken at the diocesan or regional level.**

Yes, it is possible to initiate **a People's Movement in the Church** and to build **a Participatory Church** at the service of Jesus' mission and kingdom in India – **a Relevant and Liberating Church** concretely involved in responding to today's needs and challenges. *But are we, the bishops and priests especially, truly ready and willing to launch into the deep? Are we truly willing to live, reflect, plan and act in solidarity with the people, especially the poor?*