

Research Article

**Small Christian Communities And Pastoral Council In Arch Diocese Of Trivandrum**

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**Abstract**

The launching of the Small Christian Communities in the Arch diocese of Trivandrum is a milestone in the history of the diocese. The organization of Scc is the smallest cell of the church. It was originated in Phillippines in 1965. A similar system had been in vogue in Latine America years ago. The involvement of the bishops, priests, religious and laity was very thoroughly felt and they were understood to have committed to its formation wholeheartedly. Consequently, the benefit went to all sections especially the laity. The entire SCC was concerned about the promotion of the pastoral mission of the church which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, Body of Christ, a Building of God and it was a sole and necessary gate way to reach the Christ. The study aims at estimating the value the laity possessed in the new set up. Since people themselves became their own rulers, focus was made on studying the structural changes that people the power, and thus fulfilling the norms of democracy .In those days parishes had barely 5% of the laity who was involved in the group apostolate. They belonged to one or several organizations like, Vincent De Paul, Legion of Mary, and Parish Council etc. What happened to the other 95% . The study also aims at bringing to the fore such people to participate in the building of SCCs . Animators and villagers were assigned with the task of collecting data and the obtained data was analyzed and made use of later.

**INTRODUCTION**

In the diocese of Trivandrum, SCCs and DPC (Diocese Pastoral Council) are new realities which helped a lot to make the church more local and participatory. In this article, an analysis is made as to how SCCs become an instrument to organize the DPC of the diocese. DPC is an advisory body of the bishop in his pastoral ministry. The diocese, through the DPC has utilized many and varied gift of its members especially of the laity, in the service of the local church of Trivandrum. The bishop with the help of DPC continues to carry out the mission of church.

**Board of Pastoral Ministry:-**

Every activities related to the church could be included in theme Pastoral. According to Canon 512 and 2, the DPC (Diocese Pastoral Council) must reflect the diocese as a whole. In other words, it must be a microcosm of the diocese. The members of the council are to be elected in such a way that it may include the different areas of the diocese and their social conditions and professions. A lay member should be selected to the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) from the SCCs in the parishes. In case there are many SCC

units, the units leaders should come together to select their representatives. With regard to the selection of Forane Pastoral Council (FPC), the same procedure is followed.

### **Formation of the PPC (Parish Pastoral Council)**

The origin of legislation on Parish Pastoral Council is the same as that of DPC. The sacred congregation for Bishops issued its directory on 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1993, recommending to the bishops the establishment of the PPC in their diocese and it was to be aligned with the DPC.

After the diocesan bishop has listened to the presbyterial council and if he judges it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. The pastor presides over it and through it the Christian faithful along with those who share in the pastoral care of the parish in virtue of their office help in fostering pastoral activity.

The congregation for the clergy and other Dicasteries in 1997, in article 5, and 2 listed the PPC as one among the structures of collaboration in the renewed church after Vatican II. It represents a form of active participation in the life and mission of the church as communication. Though the Living Together 1987 recommended that the Bishop constitutes the DPC in the diocese, it could not be realized until 1990 as the PPC was not functioning in the vast majority of the parishes of the diocese. Then the Bishop recommended to all the priests to form PPC in their respective parishes. The people of the diocese were looking for an opportunity to get actively involved in the church and in its different ministries.

The earlier form of the Parish Yogam (Village Council) by Pradhanes in the parish affairs came to an end through the formation of PPC.

Each parish was divided into small units (or) communities (SCCs) consisting of 20 (or) 25 families. (The number of the SCC units depends upon the size of the parish. So it may differ from parish to parish. Each SCC chose its representative for the PPC either through election or selection. Thus, the PPC in the diocese of Thiruvananthapuram truly reflected the representation of the entire parish. It really became the microcosm of the parish. The co-ordinators of Ministries and SCC of the respective parishes were ex-officio members of PPC. The size of PPC depended on the size of the parish. It could be between seven to twenty members. The members served a term of two years and could serve not more than two consecutive terms, but could be re-elected thereafter. The bylaws of PPC encouraged to hold meetings at least four times a year, but in practice most of the parish councils meet every month.

The council was established so that laity might work together with the parish priests and advise him in establishing, developing, monitoring and evaluating parish planning and budgeting, for a better parish community in Jesus Christ. In Strategic planning, Pastoral council identifies the needs of the parish community, establishes priorities, goals and objectives. The council is to develop vision for the parish. The pastoral council does the strategic planning and implementation only through SCCs because the PPC lay members are elected from SCCs. The proposals and conclusions given by PCC again brought to SCCs through its members. In a way SCC is an instrument built up the parish as a living Christian community.

### **The Formation and Function of FPC (Forane Pastoral Council)**

The parishes of the diocese are grouped into Foranes (or) Vicariates for the purpose of better administration and the development of the parishes and diocese. However, as the Canon says, it is the right of the bishop to promote and co-ordinate the various aspects of the apostolate within the diocese and its individual districts. The Vicar Forane assists the diocesan bishop as the vicar for apostolic and pastoral co-ordination. In doing so he is to respect the autonomy of the parishes, and other institutions in his district. In accordance with diocesan policies and Episcopal directives, the Vicar Forane convinces the association of the Vicariate's clergy, the representative of PCC, Staff of Parishes and institutions involved in the

apostolate and pastoral care and members of laity who are involved in apostolic movements and associations.

The Forane Pastoral Council is apparently a new reality in the diocese of Thiruvananthapuram. It is a network of all Parish Pastoral Councils in a region. The diocese has eight forane councils. It includes all priests of the Forane, representatives of men and women religious, vice – president, Co-ordinators of BCCs, Co-ordinators of Pastoral Ministry, Co-ordinators of Education Ministry, Co-ordinators of Social Ministry and the Treasurers of the parishes of the Forane. Forane Vicar is the President of FPC. It is the concrete way of decentralizing the diocesan activities. In certain sense, it does the same work as the PPC, but in a broader and wider manner. All four ministries function on a regional level and help each other according to the needs of a particular parish. It also creates a vision for the region level activities. It works as an effective body to recommend policies and suggestions for the diocese and parishes.

#### **The Formation of the DPC:-**

As OC (Omnes Christifideles) states, although the members of DPC cannot be said to be representative of the diocesan community in the Juridical sense, it is desirable that as far as possible it be a kind of image (or sign of the whole diocese). It therefore seems most suitable that priests, religious, and lay people reflecting varied needs and experience take part in it. Neither the documents nor the new registration says anything about the method of selection. In the DPC lay members are elected by lay people (or) nominated by the bishop himself, but it all depends upon the nature of the diocese.

The uniqueness of the DPC of the diocese of Thiruvananthapuram is its mode of composition of its members. Though everyone in a parish is a member of BCC irrespective of lay people and religious, the religious especially the women religious function as animators of BCCs. The DPC lay members are to be selected from the BCCs because according to the bylaws of the DPC, the priests and religious have their due representation in the DPC. In practice if one doesn't belong to the BCC he / she cannot be selected as council member. Canonically speaking, BCC doesn't have any juridical value. Therefore one can argue that it is not right to reject a baptized from the pastoral council just because he / she is not a member of BCCs. However, as a diocese of Thiruvananthapuram has adopted BCCs as its fundamental means of pastoral activities and evangelization, it is justifiable and reasonable that a member of DPC has to be a member of BCC. In short, anyone who wishes to be elected as a member of DPC has to be a member of BCCs. This belonging gives him the right to be elected to Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). As a member of PPC he can be selected to Forane Pastoral Council (FPC). Finally he can be selected to DPC only through FPC. Here in the Diocese Pastoral Council (DPC) Thiruvananthapuram, one can see there is an inter link between the DPC, FDC, PPC and SCC.

#### **Basic Christian Community Building Participation in Pastoral Involvement:-**

The primary task of DPC is to assist the bishop in his pastoral activities and in ecclesial community building. The diocese, the local church of Thiruvananthapuram became very active through the involvement of SCC. Thus the diocese practices the vision of Vatican II in her life situation as people of God<sup>1</sup>. It has become a witnessing community by participating actively in the Eucharist and standing for the Christian values of equality, justice and truth. DPC members are involved in BCCs, in parishes and foranes. They know these forums well and are fully aware of the needs of the people. They are part and parcel of these forums. The DPC discusses both spiritual and social issues of the people and find solutions for them. At its very beginnings during its session held on June 1, 1991, the members discussed the diocesan pastoral and social issues. DPC appreciated the decisive role SCCs play in settling parish problems and at

times proposes solutions for the problems in another parish<sup>2</sup>. As the DPC represents different regions, its members highlight the issues of various regions for the DPC meetings. This enables the DPC to get a clear picture of the entire diocese and its activities. Thus, the DPC can see the things in different perspectives for the same topics and find solutions according to the context of the issues.

DPC encourages parishes and communities to celebrate the liturgy with meaningful participation. It encourages the entire parish community to participate actively in celebrations. As a first step, special mass for the children, youth and parents began to be celebrated in different parishes. In certain delicate situations, DPC plays a decisive role to settle the problems between the parishes and within the parishes. A subcommittee was formed in the DPC. Their main responsibility was to visit the problematic parishes and to study and submit the report on the issues. Undesirable and unwanted problems and conflicts develop due to the rivalry and revengeful attitudes between groups. So much so this situation leads to the temporary closure of the parish, thereby creating a lot of inconvenience to the people and the parish priest. On such occasions the bishops would recommend the DPC to study and report the actual situation of the parish with their proposals and suggestions on how to settle the issues.

### **The Structural Organization**

Codex Iuris Canonici, (CIC) 83 doesn't speak about the structure of the DPC, but it gives sufficient freedom of the diocesan bishop to form special statutes for the DPC. Therefore, we will study the structure and role of different office bearers in the DPC of Trivandrum according to the status of the diocese formulated in 1989 and the nine years of its functioning.

Seven Commissions Under Pastoral Ministry

1. Commission for Bible apostolate
2. Commission for Christian faith formation (catechism)
3. Commission for liturgy
4. Commission for Family Apostolate
5. Commission for Evangelization
6. Commission for pious Association
7. Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue

### **Vision and activities of Commissions**

#### **i) The Bible Commission**

The Bible Commission aims at making Bible an integral part of everyday life of faithful. And the commission enables the faithful to explore the meaning of the word of God in the cultural context of Asia in general and India in particular. To achieve this aim, the following activities are initiated.

- i) The Bible Quiz at the diocese and state level.
- ii) Bible Correspondence Course at the state level.
- iii) Bible Society Member Drive.
- iv) Bible Kalolsavam – Literary and cultural contests based on biblical themes at parish, forane, diocese and state level.

Resource Team Formation and Training at parish, forane, diocese level.

### **Commission for Christian Faith Formation (Catechism)**

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Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “Catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church’s tradition. Its principal sources are the sacred scriptures, Fathers of the Church, the liturgy and the church’s magisterium”. To realize this aim the following programmes are initiated in the diocese.

- i) Teacher’s Training
- ii) Primary Training
- iii) Basic Training
- iv) Advanced Training
- v) Leadership camp at the forane level for student’s representatives of Catechism classes.
- vi) Two semester examination.
- vii) Final examination to award merit.
- viii) Inspection of parish level Sunday school functioning.
- ix) Teacher’s meeting in parish level and forane level.
- x) Teachers Retreat in forane level.
- xi) Anniversary celebration in parish forane and Diocese level
- xii) Preparation of text books for LKG and UKG Classes.
- xiii) Preparation of Guide for study material for Thoothoor Forane.

#### **Commission for Liturgy:-**

The implications that have been shaped through Bible reading and interpretation and the significance of doctrine that have been taught the catechism class are transformed into practical realization and celebration in everyday life. To fulfil this purpose the following programmes are initiated.

- i) Formation of liturgical team at the parish, forane and the diocese level.
- ii) Awareness programme (importance of sacramental life, Theology of liturgy, study on different parts of mass, fruitful celebration of liturgy).
- iii) Preparation of Hymn Book, “Virunnorungi” for the liturgical year.
- iv) Preparation of Liturgical Aid, “Neerchalukal”.
- v) Training for (Alter Servers, Sacritans).

#### **IV. Family Apostolate:**

The family Apostolate Commission aims to model the family both as a symbol of the Trinitarian love, care and concern and as an instrument where the Kingdom of God becomes a vivid experience. The major activities under these Commissions are,

- i) House visits (Care for the sick and assistance to the needy)
- ii) Marriage preparation course in the forane level once in a month and diocese level twice in a month.
- iii) Adult Education in the parish level and preparation for marriage.
- iv) Post-marriage course for young couples (who complete 10 years of married life)
- v) Counselling for couples in forane centres.

Marriage Bureau (helping to find suitable partners).

## **V. Commission for Evangelization**

The only mission of the church remains Evangelization. This sole mission of the church is realized in two ways; first, church actualizes the Gospel in herself and second, church witnesses the Gospel to the world.

To realize this purpose the following programmes are initiated.

- i) Training for catechist (Annual Retreat, Bi-monthly Seminars)
- ii) Training for Pastoral Ministry Conveners.
- iii) Theology correspondence course in the Diocese level.
- iv) Initiating Mission Support (large parishes adopting mission parishes for mission expansion and mission maintenance.)

## **VI. Commission for Pious Association:**

Different levels of charism are nourished and enchanted for the spiritual growth of the faithful through different pious associations. Each association is trained to work to realize the vision of the Archdiocese. The main activities are,

- i) Formation of Common Bylaw for the Pious Associations.
- ii) Diocesan level Seminar for Office Bearers.
- iii) Forane Level Retreats.

## **VII. Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue:**

The active presence of multi-religious and multi-churches in India, particularly in Kerala, makes obvious the need for a commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue. The commission aims at contributing dynamically to maintain religious harmony and inter-church relationship by convening periodical meetings with the different religious heads and by participating actively in the programmes of united Christian movement (UCM). Main activities are

- i) Dialogue with different religious head.
- ii) Public meetings to promote religious harmony in the parish level on the occasion of the parish feast.
- iii) Formation of Peace Committees at the parish level to promote religious (having representatives from different religious communities) harmony.
- iv) Collaborating with Christian Churches.

Pastoral planning is the responsibility of the whole people of God. Nevertheless, a small code of the community should be identified to co-ordinate the pastoral plan. This small community is called Parish Pastoral Council at parish level and Diocesan Pastoral Council at diocesan level. It is a new structure of participation and decentralization. In the diocese of Thiruvananthapuram, through the formation of DPC a new style of function has emerged. The purpose of the Pastoral Council is the planning of various aspects of community life. The council grows out of the community of faith to serve the community faith. Given the nature of the council and gifts its membership it serves as a witness to the rest of the community.

The DPC of Thiruvananthapuram concerns itself with every aspect of the community. It discusses, studies, and gives practical conclusions to the bishop on all matters especially of the four ministries in the diocese. Moreover, it concerns on Christian life, worship and spirituality.

## **Conclusion**

## Small Christian Communities And Pastoral Council In Arch Diocese Of Trivandrum

This study gives simply but comprehensive background information on the nature of the diocese of Trivandrum. It is learnt that its establishment is exclusively through Small Christian Communities. SCC is a living cell of the Parish. The DPC was seen as an organism which would investigate and consider matters relating to pastoral activities. Hence one can see the integral link between the SCC at the grass root level to the DPC at the diocesan level. It is good to remember that the council is a relatively new entity, growing church that is grounded in tradition. All this speaks of change. The laity's new role and responsibilities in this new process are two of the most notable aspects affirming that change.

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