
BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES



The Edmundston Diocese Church owes a huge debt of gratitude to Fathers José Marins and Philippe Van Den Bogaard, to Sister Teolide Maria Trevisan, and to Ms. Rita Cutarelli, the South American team that came to our Diocesan Centre, September 9 to 13, to hold a session on basic Christian communities. I also want to thank the Filles de Marie de l'Assomption Sisters in a very special way, especially Sister Julie D'Amour, the superior general, who made this session possible.

A HELPFUL SESSION

A session such as this happened at an fitting time. For three intensive years, 1987 to 1990, the entire diocesan Church was involved in the Synod process as it discerned what the Holy Spirit was telling it at that time of its history. The parish missions that followed the diocesan Synod were seen as a period of evangelisation to help us better discover and share the precious heritage of God's Word. As soon as I arrived in your midst in 1994 I continued the task undertaken by stressing the importance of every person and of human dignity, and by asking that every baptised and confirmed Christian continue to find his or her mission in the midst of this world; this in fact was the subject of my first pastoral letter of Pentecost Sunday 1994. Then, following discussions held throughout the diocese, I wrote to you again, at Pentecost 1995, to stress the importance of having communities that show concern for all their members. As an immediate follow-up to this pastoral letter, I asked that as of January 1, 1996 there be a pastoral council in each parish. During the course of this year I visited every francophone parish to introduce and encourage the local pastoral council; I shall be doing the same during the coming year, as regards the anglophone parishes. The pastoral council is a team called to play a determining role in the life and development of our communities.

THE TIME HAS COME

It appears to me that the time has now come for us to build basic Christian communities within our parishes, to make these parishes more vibrant, more welcoming, and more missionary. We need to discover together that we form one people, a chosen people, a priestly, prophetic, and royal people, a people animated by the Spirit: my Pentecost 1996 pastoral letter was an act of thanksgiving for the marvellous work accomplished among us by the Holy Spirit.

WHAT ARE B.C.C.S?

The facilitators of the Edmundston session did not give any definition of basic Christian communities: they spoke especially about their own lived experience. Therefore we borrow a definition or description given by Pope Paul VI in his exhortation on evangelisation. Blossoming here and there in the Church but especially in South America, these communities were born of the need to live more intensely the life of the Church; they arose out of a desire to discover a more human dimension than what larger church communities can offer. They can simply sustain in their own way at a spiritual and religious level the worship, faith development, Christian charity, prayer, and communion with their pastors. These small communities meet together to listen to and meditate on the Word of God, for reception of the sacraments and Christian fellowship of people sharing a kindred interest such as age, culture, or social situation: couples, youth, professionals, people who

are joined together in a common struggle for justice, aid to the poor, or human promotion. The basic Christian community is not a new parish organisation but a Church united to all the other Churches.

WHAT Do B.C.C.s Do?

B.C.C.s are composed of people who listen to life, to the needs of their milieu, and who ponder these needs in the light of the Word of God. These communities are basic because they are at the level of the people and their dimensions and nearly family-size, with relations being easier and simpler than within large parish communities. Focused on the people and the needs of the milieu, B.C.C.s strive to live the Gospel that sends us out to others. Hence, once some experience has been acquired, as they add to their numbers, these communities send their more capable members forth to create other communities. They are not closed in on themselves but are open to the Spirit, the Church, and the world. Wherever they are they strive to be leaven in the dough. They do not try to bring others into the Church but they imitate the first Christians by being a Church in the world, transforming this world from within, little by little.

ACTS 2:42

In the footsteps of the first Christian communities which the Acts of the Apostles describe as being devoted to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, members of basic Christian communities desire to live the Gospel of Jesus to the fullest. Nothing is a stranger to these people: they feel bound to their brothers and sisters. They are aware of who they are as disciples of Jesus. They recognise that they are fully committed in building up the Kingdom, and in transforming their milieu according to the Gospel. The Word is ever present in their lives; the Bible is not a closed book on a bookcase shelf. They must daily listen to the voice of humankind, to the cries of their brothers and sisters, and know how to listen to the voice of God. Gathered into communities, these Christians share a special hope that comes from Jesus who so loved the world that he gave up his life for it. The basic Christian communities develop disciples who can take on responsibilities in social affairs, who can act as Christian leaders in our society. In other words, basic Christian communities are the Church on the march, a Church that daily becomes a sign of salvation, a sacrament of liberation for our world. At the end of this session, I hope that throughout our diocese we be able to develop such vibrant, dynamic, missionary cells listeners to the Gospel that is proclaimed to them, and the special recipients of evangelisation, that will become in turn and hastily, proclaimers of the Gospel.

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