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The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community for the Asian Church

Wahyu Rusmana [a,1]

Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome, Vatican [a]
yohaneswahyurusmana@gmail.com [1]

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Abstract:

Discussions about parish institution today often end in its crisis. It seems that this institution is unable to carry out its functions in the modern world. On the other hand, so far, despite the emergence of new movements in the Church that are becoming the reference point in the life of some Christians, there is no institution that has replaced the parish yet. The parish remains a reference institution that shows the real face of the Church in society. On 20 July 2020, the Congregation for the Clergy published an instruction entitled "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church". This paper is an invitation to read and reflect on the pastoral conversion in parish life that focuses on the context of Asian Church priority to be a participatory Church and communion of communities. By applying the analytical method, we will examine the content of the instruction in confront with the context. In this way, finally we can find out the main points of how this instruction encourages pastoral conversion which should become the concern for the Asian Church. Therefore, this work helps us to understand better the importance of community conversion which means becoming a missionary community with the following two levels: all different parish communities that build up the entire parish and the parish community itself.

Keywords:

A New Way of being Church, community conversion, instruction of congregation for the clergy, parish, pastoral conversion

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Introduction

"The end of 'parish civilization'!" said the French sociologists Danièle Hervieu-Léger and Françoise Champion. This statement was not made carelessly but it was based on religious practice changing research in France society. There had been significant change in the way of church believers.[1] However, regardless of the various responses to this statement, the deep question is: are parish institutions really no longer relevant in the life of the Church in today's world? Of course this paper cannot cover all the problems that exist regarding parishes because the author does not have the capacity to do so. In line with the pastoral conversion that has been echoed by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, this paper is more about an invitation to reflect on pastoral conversion in parish life from the instructions issued by the Congregation for Clergy by looking at the uniqueness of the Church in Asia. By using the analytical method, we will first look briefly at parish figures in the Catholic Church and then explore the contents of instructions on parish pastoral conversion; the next things are the peculiarities of the Asian Church and lastly, analyzing the pastoral conversion of parishes for the Asian Church.

Why Talk About the Parish?

Nowadays, is the discussion about the parish institution still important that makes the Congregation for Clergy issues instruction on parish life? The situation presented above by the two French sociologists can be a portrait of a situation that certainly cannot be generalized; even though there are general conditions about parishes. Circumstances can be different in other parts, cities, countries or even other continents. The parish culture like a few centuries ago may not be actual, but what about the parish institution?

Parish institution is a way of church life which is a product of history. Parish is a pastoral choice in the history of the Church which was born in the fourth to fifth centuries as a result of the evangelisation process in the countryside. Because of this situation, pastoral care in the countryside was then entrusted to priests. Initially, the ecclesiastical structures of dioceses were found in cities. Even so, the parish structure

[1] Cf. Danièle Hervieu-Léger - Françoise Champion, *Verso un nuovo cristianesimo? Introduzione alla sociologia del cristianesimo occidentale,* trans. Fausto Savoldi (Brescia: Queriniana, 1989), 57-61.

is still far different from the parishes that exist in modern times because the bishop still has many reservations. The parish structure developed as we can see today was a result of the Council of Trent. In this council, the responsibility of a parish priest for the faithful was emphasized by obliging to live in their respective parishes. The parish institution after the Council of Trent became very meaningful for the life of the Church because it was also supported by other decisions such as the establishment of seminaries for the formation of priestly candidates and the establishment of parishes if there were too many faithful.[2]

This means that the parish institutions have gone through a long history and of course have undergone many changes in line with changes in society. Some developments further enrich the identity of parish figures. The word parish becomes rich in meaning. It is not only a place for gathering and praying for the faithful, but also an institution that is in the dynamics of social life. Therefore, this institution is also a concern of sociology and history. The existence of many meanings indicates a change towards the maturity of this institution but on the other hand also indicates a crisis. This crisis also means that this institution is an institution that has the power to continuously adapt to changes in the surrounding society. The parish institutional crisis did occur. However, it will be more useful to see how this institution has changed and how it will play a role in the future than just dealing with the crisis that occurred. [3]

In the midst of the existing crisis, the parish institution has shown itself to be an institution whose presence is still needed today. This happens because until now, there has been no institution that guarantees the presence of the Church in the world other than the parish.[4] The published instructions also highlight the value of the parish in the contemporary world. This is found in chapter II and III of the document. The parish has a long history and has had a fundamental role in the life of Christians and in the development and pastoral work of the Church

[2] Cf. Franco Giulio Brambrilla, "Mutamenti e nuove forme della parrocchia. Una riflessione ecclesiologica," in *Ripensare la parrocchia,* ed. Servizio Nazionale per il Progetto Culturale della CEI (Bologna: EDB, 2004), 58-61. See also Vincenzo Bo, "La storia della parrocchia" in *Parrocchia e pastorale parrocchiale*, Vincenzo Bo, Severino Dianich and Gerardo Cardaropoli (Bologna: EDB, 1986), 28-30.

[3] Cf. Luca Bressan, *La parrocchia oggi. Identità, trasformazioni, sfide* (Bologna: EDB, 2004), 77-78.

[4] Cf. John Paul II said, "Whatever one may think, the parish is still a major point of reference for the Christian people, even for the non-practicing" in *Catechesi tradendae,* n. 67, EV 6/1918.

from the beginning.[5] The parish is a response to a specific pastoral need, to bring the Gospel close to the people (IPC 7). Furthermore, the teachings of the popes regarding the value of the parish are cited in the document (IPC 12). Saint John Paul II specified that: "Whilst the Parish is perfected and integrated in a variety of forms, it nevertheless remains an indispensable organism of primary importance in the visible structure of the Church", whereby "evangelisation is the cornerstone of all pastoral action, the demands of which are primary, preeminent and preferential".[6] Subsequently, Benedict XVI taught, "the parish is a beacon that radiates the light of the faith and thus responds to the deepest and truest desires of the human heart, giving meaning and hope to the lives of individuals and families".[7] Lastly, Pope Francis recalled how "the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers".[8]

Therefore, the discussion about parishes is still relevant because parishes still have an important role in church life. What needed is the ability to continually change and improve in order to be faithful to its missionary vocation.

The Instruction "The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church"

On 20 July 2020, the congregation for the clergy published an instruction entitled "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church". This instruction issued by the Congregation for the Clergy is approved on June 27, 2020, by the Holy Father, and at the end of the document it was shown that it was promulgated in Rome, June 29, 2020 on the Solemnity of Saints

[5] The Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church". (July 20, 2020). https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html (access 10.12.2020), n.6. Henceforth we use the abbreviation IPC and mention the number from the document directly on the main text.

[6] John Paul II, Discourse to Participants at the Plenary of the Congregation for the Clergy (October 20, 1984), ns. 3 and 4: Insegnamenti VII/2 (1984), 984 and 985; cf. also Id., Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), n. 67: AAS 71 (1979), 1332.

[7] Benedict XVI, Homily during the pastoral visit to Our Lady Star of Evangelisation Parish of Rome (December 10, 2006): Insegnamenti II/2 (2006), 795.

[8] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 28: AAS 105 (2013) 1032.

Peter and Paul.

The background in which this instruction given to the Universal Church is explained in the presentation of this document. Monsignor Andrea Ripa, Undersecretary of the dicastery, indicated that this document with two other previous documents (*Ecclesia de Mysterio: On certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the ministry of priest*, published on 15 August 1997[9] and Instruction "*The priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish community*", published on 4 August 2002[10] wanted to give particular attention to the many ministers who exist in the parish community with the aim of highlighting the specificity of each service in a single evangelising mission. He wanted to remind that in the Church there is a place for everyone and everyone can find their place in the one family of God while respecting each one's vocation.[11]

The document does not want to give "New legislation" but proposes the best application of the existing law. From the experience of the people of God, the dicastery intends to place itself at the service of some pastoral and 'experimental' choices in a spirit of discernment. In addition, it recalls the nature of the missionary church which conducts the greatest co-responsibility and collaboration among all the baptized.[12]

Cardinal Beniamino Stella, the perfect member of the Congregation for the Clergy, in his interview on this document said that the document was born from the need to orient the renewal of ecclesial structures in a missionary sense. However, the situation had changed. In the Western world, the scarcity of the priest is an objective aspect. On the other hand, the boundaries of the parish have changed the cause of the most accentuated human mobility. Facing this situation, he explained, it is

[9] This is interdicastery document. See "Instruction On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in the Ministry of Priest" (August 4, 2002) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html (access 16.12.2020).

[10] Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction "The priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish community". http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_20020804_istruzione-presbitero_en.html (access 16.12.2020).

[11] Cf. Andrea Ripa, The presentation of the instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church". http://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/Dox/Istruzione2020/Presentation_EN.pdf (access 16.12.2020).

[12] Cf. Andrea Ripa, The presentation of the instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church".

necessary to look beyond the idea of the traditional parish. The parish should be a research structure: it obeys the new requirements, but also takes into account a broader perspective, which looks at the Church in its universality.[13]

This document contains 124 numbers which are divided into 11 chapters, begin with an introduction and ended with a conclusion. The introduction (IPC 1-2) presents the basis on which this theme will be pursued. The foundation is the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. The realization of this idea faces social and cultural changes. This situation pushes internally in the particular Churches to reorganize the form of entrusting the pastoral care of parish communities, also learning from the many forms of the new experience that better correspond to today's needs of evangelisation. This vision is always in the same line with Pope Francis who reiterated "creativity", which means "seeking new paths", that is, "seeking the way for the Gospel to be announced". The present Instruction represents a precious opportunity for pastoral conversion in a missionary sense. In fact, they are invitations to parish communities to come out of themselves, offering instruments for a reform, even structural, oriented towards a style of communion and collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and concern for the proclamation of the Gospel (IPC 2).

The first chapter speaks precisely on the central theme of the document: pastoral conversion. Intends pastoral conversion as a missionary choice by Christian community in the decision so that capable of transforming everything and become an adequate channel for the evangelisation of today's world, rather than for self-preservation (IPC 5). Chapters II and III speak on today's parish: on the contemporary context and its value today. The parish has a long history and has played a fundamental role in the life of Christians and in the development and pastoral work of the Church from its beginnings (IPC 6). Since its inception, the parish as a house in the midst of houses has stood as a response to a precise pastoral need, to bring the Gospel close to the people through the proclamation of faith and the celebration of the Sacraments (IPC 7). In the contemporary world the parish is called to face the territorial configuration that has a peculiar characteristic, in which the increased mobility and digital culture have expanded the

[13] Interview with Cardinal Stella on July 20, 2020 by Fabio Colagrande, "Stella: servono parrocchie capaci di uscire e cercare i lontani". https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2020-07/intervista-stella-istruzione-parrocchie.html (access 16.12.2020).

boundaries of existence (IPC 8) and also these cultural changes and the changed relationship with the territory (IPC 9-10). The value of the parish is to read the signs of the time to adapt its service to the needs of the faithful and to historical changes (IPC 11). According to the teaching of the conciliar fathers and successive popes, the parish, in listening to the Spirit, is called to find other ways of closeness and proximity (IPC 14).

Chapter IV explains about mission, the guiding principle for the renewal of the parish. When the parish does not live by the spiritual dynamism of evangelisation, it runs the risk of becoming self-referential and fossilised (IPC 17). It is necessary to identify perspectives that allow the renewal of "traditional" parish structures in terms of mission. This is the heart of the desired pastoral conversion, which must touch the proclamation of the Word of God, the sacramental life and the witness of charity (IPC 20). The word of God is the food that nourishes the Lord's disciples and makes them witnesses of the Gospel in different conditions of life, the parish must educate them to read and meditate on the Word of God through diversified proposals for proclamation (IPC 21). In addition, the celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, the substantial moment of the constitution of the parish community is important. The Christian community welcomes the living presence of the Crucified and Risen Lord in it (IPC 22). For this reason, there is a need to rediscover Christian Initiation in the perspective of the permanent following of Christ and promotes dialogue that favors being together and the growth of lasting personal relationships (IPC 23 and 25).

Chapter V contains the idea of the parish as a community of communities. In the same line with canon law, the subject of the Church's missionary and evangelising action is always the People of God as a whole (IPC 27). The various components into which the parish is divided are called communion and unity (IPC 28). In the "spiritual and ecclesial style of shrines", the parish becomes a precious instrument for growing in fraternal communion and, upon returning home, making one's places of daily life more open and hospitable (IPC 30). "Sanctuary" opens to all, the parish, also called to reach out to everyone, without exception, reminds us that the poor and the excluded must always have a privileged place in the heart of the Church (IPC 33).

Chapter VI further elaborates on the pastoral conversion that should reach from the conversion of persons to those structures. The conversion

of the structures, which the parish must propose itself, requires a change of mentality and an interior renewal, above all of those called to the responsibility of pastoral leadership (IPC 35). Trauma and wounds must be avoided; it is important that the processes of restructuring of parish and, sometimes, diocesan communities be carried out with flexibility and gradualism (IPC 36). This renewal does not only concern the parish priest alone because it involves in the conversion that concerns all the components of the People of God (IPC 37). Each baptized person, by virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the charisms received, becomes active participants of evangelisation (IPC 38). The mission to which the parish is called, as the driving force of evangelisation, therefore concerns the whole People of God in its various components: priest, deacons, consecrated men and women and the lay faithful, each according to their own charism and according to the responsibilities that correspond to them (IPC 41).

Chapter VII talks about the various possibilities of grouping or subdivisions within the diocese. The pastoral conversion of the parish community in a missionary sense takes shape and is expressed in a gradual process of renewal of the structures (IPC 42). Today a new relationship has been born between the faithful and the territory. For example, for some decades, expressions such as "pastoral units" and "pastoral regions" (IPC 43) have been added to the parish and vicariates forane, which foreseen in the current Code of Canon Law. The document offers the line to follow on how to proceed with the erection of a grouping of parishes. The grouping, as well as the erection or suppression of parishes, must be carried out by the diocesan bishop in compliance with the regulations provided for by Canon Law, that is, by incorporation. As a condition of the legitimacy of this kind of measures it is necessary that the reasons referred to are directly and organically connected with the parish community concerned and not on general considerations or theories, or based solely "on principle" (IPC 48). Furthermore, the document reminds us that, "to promote pastoral care through common action, the diocesan bishop can bring together several neighbouring parishes in specific groupings, such as vicariates forane; in various places they take on names such as those of deaneries, or even of "pastoral zones" or "prefectures" (IPC 52). This chapter also explains the particularity of the pastoral units and pastoral regions according to the lived experience of some local Churches (IPC 54-61).

Chapter VIII talks about the various ways of entrusting the pastoral

care of the parish community following canon law. The ways are divided into two: the ordinary ones and the extraordinary ones. The examples of ordinary entrustment are: to the parish priest, to the parish administrator, to priest *in solidum* and to the parochial vicar (IPC 66-78). Instead, as an extraordinary way, the diocesan Bishop can entrust a participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish to a deacon, a consecrated men and women, laity, or even to a group of people (for example, a religious institute, an association) in such pastorally problematic circumstances, to sustain the Christian life and to continue the evangelising mission of the community (IPC 87). These persons will be coordinated and guided by a priest with legitimate faculties, constituted "Moderator of pastoral care", who is exclusively vested with the power and functions of the parish priest, even if he does not have the office, with the consequent duties and rights (IPC 88). The other faithful, on the other hand, have "a share in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish" (IPC 91). For this extraordinary remedy, the People of God must be adequately prepared, then taking care to adopt it only for the time necessary, not indefinitely (IPC 89).

Chapter IX still continues from the previous chapter talks about parish offices and pastoral ministries. The document reminds us of the collaboration with every person of goodwill in the daily activities of the parish. There are some stable assignments in it; based on which the faithful accept the responsibility for a certain time of service within the parish community, for example: to catechists, altar servers, educators who work in groups and associations, charity and to those who dedicate themselves to the different types of counselling center or listening center, to those who visit the sick (IPC 94). According to the norm of law, the lay faithful can be instituted as readers and acolytes in a stable form, through a special rite, according to can. 230, § 1 (IPC 97). In addition to what is pertaining to the Lectors and Acolytes permanently established, the Bishop, in his prudent judgment, may officially entrust some tasks to deacons, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful, under the direction and responsibility of the parish priest following the foreseen norms and particular conditions for example: for the celebration of a liturgy of the Word on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, the administration of Baptism, the celebration of funeral rites (IPC 98).

Chapter X explains some organisms that are willing to encourage greater ecclesial co-responsibility. Those bodies for example the parish finance council and the parish pastoral council. When a community of

the faithful cannot be erected as a parish or quasi-parish, the diocesan Bishop, after consulting the Presbyteral Council, will provide for its pastoral care in another way (IPC 115). The parish finance council is a consultative body, in each parish it must necessarily be constituted, chaired by the parish priest for the management of assets. It can play a particularly important role in fostering the culture of co-responsibility, administrative transparency and subsidizing the needs of the Church within parish communities (IPC 106). Another body is the parish pastoral council; leaves the evaluation of the erection of a pastoral council in parishes to the diocesan bishop (IPC 108). The Pastoral Council highlights and realizes the centrality of the People of God as the subject and active protagonist of the evangelising mission (IPC 110). The main function of the Parochial Pastoral Council therefore lies in researching and studying practical proposals regarding pastoral and charity initiatives concerning the parish, in harmony with the journey of the diocese (IPC 112).

The last chapter (Chapter XI) reminds us of the offerings for the celebration of the Sacraments. It is an offer which, by its nature, must be a free act on the part of the one offering, left to one's conscience and sense of ecclesial responsibility, not a "price to pay" or a "fee to exact", as if it were a kind of "tax on the sacraments". In fact, with the offering for Holy Mass, "the faithful contribute to the good of the Church and share its concern to support its ministers and works" (IPC 118). In any case, "the appearance of bargaining or trade must absolutely be kept away from the offering of Masses (IPC 121).

The conclusion reminds us that in the light of the recent Magisterium and considering the profoundly changed social and cultural contexts, this Instruction intends to focus on the theme of the renewal of the parish in a missionary sense (IPC 122). In today's world, pastoral action needs to go beyond the mere territorial delimitation of the parish (IPC 123). It is necessary to deal with a pastoral action which, through effective and vital collaboration between priests, deacons, consecrated persons and laity, as well as between different parish communities in the same area or region, is concerned with identifying together the questions, difficulties and challenges concerning the evangelisation, seeking to integrate suitable ways, tools, proposals and means to face them. Therefore it demands that the historic parish institution not remain a prisoner of immobility or a worrying pastoral repetitiveness but, instead, put into action that "outgoing dynamism" which, through collaboration between different parish communities and a strengthened communion between clerics and

laity, make it effectively oriented to the evangelising mission, the task of the entire People of God, which walks in history as the "family of God" and which, in the synergy of the various members, works for the growth of the whole ecclesial body. Therefore, in addition to highlighting the urgency of such a renewal, it presents a way of applying the canonical norm that establishes the possibilities, limits, rights and duties of pastors and laity, so that the parish rediscovers itself as the fundamental place of evangelical proclamation, of the celebration of the Eucharist, a space of fraternity and charity, from which Christian witness can shine for the world.

Orientation for the Asian Church

Talking about the Church in Asia, in a certain way, we must always keep up in mind "A New Way of Being Church" in Asia, which is the fruit of contextualizing the experiences of the divine, set in the circumstances of Asia, especially of the local church. This affirms the insight that the theology is local - coming out of local history, local culture, and local social and economic experiences.[14] The expression "A New Way of Being Church" is the idea promoted by the FABC or *The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* which refers to the context of a participatory Church as a sign of communion, of unity that forms the community. As far as ecclesial life is concerned, as early as 1990, the Bishops' Conferences of Asia (FABC), in the fifth plenary assembly in Bandung, Indonesia, recommended an alternative vision, an argument on the A New Way of Being Church in Asia.

The statement of the fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC declares how New Way of being Church will be realized:

> 8.1.1. 1) The Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and "covenant" communities). There, they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are "in one mind and

[14] Cf. Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 13-14.

heart."

8.1.2. 2) It is a *participatory* Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful–lay, religious and cleric alike are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.

8.1.3. 3) Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all.

8.1.4. 4) It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a *prophetic sign*, daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come.[15]

This Bandung Assembly has a chapter on "A New Way of Being Church in Asia in the 1990s". Its ecclesiology is based on the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II. However, this ecclesiology is creatively adapted and developed for the Churches of Asia.[16] Furthermore, this new way of being Church in Asia requires a different ecclesiology, one that decenters the Church in the sense that it makes the center of Christian life and worship not the Church but the Reign of God. This sort of Copernican revolution in ecclesiology sees the goal and purpose of the mission of the Church not to be the geographical and institutional expansion of the Church (the *plantatio ecclesiae*), but to be a transparent sign of, and effective instrument for, the saving presence of the Reign of God, the reign of justice, peace, and life, of which the Church is a seed.[17]

Following this vision, the FABC through the AsIPA (*Asian Integral Pastoral Approach*) promotes a method of integral formation to the members of the community through a participatory communion of small Christian communities. The proposal of the AsIPA (*Asian Integral*

[15] FABC, "Journeying Together Toward the Third Millenium", Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly, Bandung, Indonesia 27 July 1990, in *For All The Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991. Volume 1,* eds. Gaudencio B. Rosales–C.G.Arévalo (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992), 287-288.

[16] Paul Steffen, "The Asian Integral Pastoral Approach -A New Way of Being Church in Asia-. A contextualized and concrete model for the evangelizing Mission of the Church, *SEDOS Bulletin* 46, Nr.3-4 (2014) 64.

[17] Peter C. Pan, *In Our Tongues. Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 14.

Pastoral Approach) takes into account the Asian, collaborative context, which is nothing more than an Asian pastoral, in a word an integral pastoral.[18]

On sixth General Assembly of FABC, the bishop discussed the threefold dialogue in Asia: with the many different faiths, different cultures, with the poor. From this discussion they mentioned that the central pastoral need of the Church in Asia were Basic Ecclesial Communities and Basic Human Communities. The Church in Asia is aware that achieving the Kingdom of God is not possible without collaboration with others because Christians are mostly in the minority situation. The basic ecclesiastical community must collaborate with others in society to build 'basic human communities'. [19] From the reflection above, we can see how central the role of communities is. These communities are commonly referred to as small Christian communities/ basic ecclesial communities or other communities that are part of a parish. Through these communities an integral formation is achieved for their members; through these communities a network of basic human communities is also built in order to be able to realize the kingdom of God in plurality religion, cultural plurality and poverty.

Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community for the Asian Church

We clearly see that this instruction seeks to encourage a greater practice of communion which is the center of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. Moreover, it follows the line of thought of Pope Francis on pastoral conversion which is the way to be ever more missionary. In other words, it has to be always continuously promoting the ecclesiological idea of the council. Of course this does not contradict what the Asian bishops claimed in the FABC session and the Church in Asia continues to strive: to be a participatory Church, a communion of

[18] Cf. Report of the Consultation on Integral Formation, Malaysia 3 November 1993, "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach towards of Being Church in Asia (ASIPA)", in, *For All The Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences Documents from 1992 to 1996.Volume 2,* ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), 107-111.

[19] See FABC, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: service to Life," Final Statement of the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (January 10-19, 1995, Manila, Philippines), n. 1-3, in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Document from 1992 to 1996,Volume 2*, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997),1-3.

communities. This is precisely the ecclesiology of the Asian Church. In terms of ecclesiology, the church is defined primarily as a communion of communities. Hence, this Asian way of being church places the highest priority on communion and collegiality at all the levels of church life and activities.[20]

The instruction of the pastoral conversion is an invitation for the Church in Asia to make "*examen conscientiae*" on how she lives the "New Way of Being Church"; especially in how to support basic ecclesiastical communities and other communities which are inseparable parts of the parish. Do these communities really flourish and become a place where the participatory Church grows? This instruction proposes a step from the conversion of people to that of structures found in the sixth chapter (IPC 34-41). Looking at the pastoral conversion from the people to the structure for the Asian Church, we should pay special attention to the community conversion. Therefore, the stage from personal conversion to that structure for the church in Asia cannot be separated with the conversion of the community. In other words, this instruction is an invitation to be more missionary through personal conversion, community conversion, and structural changes.

The community conversion must be taken into account because there are always the dangers of not being faithful to the spirit of a communion. The FABC has already consciously pointed out some of these dangers in community life. There is a possible danger of becoming too inward-looking and too exclusive. This is the situation where the community has a lack of the link with the society where he lives, the parish, the diocese and the universal Church.[21] Of course these attitudes of exclusivity and self-closure did not help to build Basic Human Community. The idea of community conversion should be seen in the two levels of the community: each community that builds the parish and the parish community itself. If there is no conversion of the communities that build up the parish, it is unlikely that there will be conversion pastoral of the parish.

In line with this instruction, Pope Francis also emphasized on how

[20] Peter C. Pan, *In Our Tongues,* 17.

[21] Cf. FABC, "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church: Conclusions" (March 5, 1977, Hongkong), no.48, in *For All The Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991.Volume 1*, eds. Gaudencio B. Rosales– C. G. Arévalo, (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992), 77.

the parish is not an outdated institution but continues to need mission-oriented reform.

> The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters. [...] We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.22

Conclusion

Despite facing the challenges of the times, the parish still has an important role in the life of the church. The crisis facing the parish is actually a state of changing social and cultural situations which the Church has also faced in the course of its history up to now. Parish situations are very diverse and discernments are needed to always be faithful to its mission. Instructions issued by the Congregation for the Clergy invite each member of the Church to return to his identity and missionary calling. They try to raise the enthusiasm not to be afraid to carry out parish pastoral reform within the parish itself and within the diocese with various examples of pastoral breakthrough choices that have been made. Particularly for the Church in Asia, this instruction encourages parishes to see whether they really are a communion of communities, and an invitation for the Small Christian Community to truly become a community that goes forth, not the other way around being too inward-looking and to be exclusive. Therefore, beside from personal and structural conversion, in particular, community conversion is also needed.

[22] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 28: AAS 105 (2013) 1032.

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