

Reflecting on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church of Korea

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Introduction

Quite a number of the laity, religious and priests have been interested and involved in SCCs in various ways since the archdiocese of Seoul in Catholic Church of Korea officially initiated SCCs in 1992. The SCCs have been highlighted over and over as a pastoral priority by the annual pastoral letters of most dioceses and the final documents of the Synod of six dioceses--Seoul, Incheon, Suwon, Daegu, Chungju and Busan--for the past two decades. Cardinal Stephen Kim, former archbishop of Seoul said promoting SCCs were the most meaningful pastoral achievement through 30 years of his period as archbishop of Seoul when he retired in 1998.¹ The present bishop of Jeju, Bishop Peter Kang also recalled the vitalization of SCCs as the most significant pastoral work during his period as an auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Seoul.²

In the process of preparing answers of the Catholic Church of Korea to the *Lineamenta* of synod of bishops which was held in October 2012 with the theme “the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian Faith”, the Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea had held a workshop with researchers, experts and pastors in the field in June 2012. It also consulted with responsible leaders of all dioceses about 72 questions on the *Lineamenta*. One of the most noticeable aspects from their reports and discussion was about the SCCs. The SCCs were certainly appeared for answers to several questions throughout the *Lineamenta* in positive ways. The SCCs were recognized and affirmed strongly as an effective instrument for a new evangelization. Most dioceses reported SCCs have been fostered in order to actualize a new evangelization.³

These examples show SCCs have been regarded as a key point of vision and pastoral priority of the Catholic Church of Korea though many difficulties and challenges of forming SCCs have remained.

¹ 가톨릭신문 [The Catholic Times], 24 May, 1998.

² Young Ho Park, "주교로서의 삶과 신앙 [the Life and Faith as a Bishop]," 가톨릭신문 [The Catholic Times], 28 July, 2002.

³ The Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea, 제13차 세계주교대의원회의 의제개요 답변서 마련을 위한 워크숍 자료집 [The Workbook for preparing answers of Catholic Church of Korea to the *Lineamenta* of 13th Synod of bishops “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”], (Seoul: The Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea, 2011).

This study will examine why and how SCCs have been promoted and which aspects of SCCs should be more considered and resolved in order to develop SCCs authentically in the Catholic Church of Korea in the perspective of the vision of the Second Vatican Council. The study will be experiential and reflective oriented rather than theoretical and theological. In this study, the history of the Catholic Church of Korea will be introduced briefly. The process, goal and background of fostering SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea will be examined. The four essential elements of SCCs and the renewal of the parish pastoral structure in accordance of the vision of a participatory Church will be explored. The gain, challenge and suggestion to the SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea will be reflected. This study will focus on the process, vision and outcome of the SCCs of the archdiocese of Seoul and the diocese of Jeju⁴ among sixteen dioceses in Korea though some results of surveys on SCCs conducted several dioceses will be investigated too. The example of two dioceses can show overarching aspects of SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea.

1. Overview of the History of the Catholic Church of Korea

Catholicism was introduced to the intellectuals of the *Choson* Dynasty as one of the new practical ideas and knowledge in the 17th century made available through Catholic books translated into the Chinese language. They studied these books on Catholicism and tried to put the books' message into practice by themselves. In 1784, Seung Hoon Lee (1756-1801), one of the scholars who studied Catholicism, was baptized in Beijing, China, returned to Korea, and began to baptize other Koreans.⁵ It was the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church of Korea. These believers had *Myongryebang* (명례방) gatherings as a Christian faith community.

Likewise, in Korea, we have the unique situation where the Catholic faith was voluntarily accepted and spread by the laity and their faith communities without foreign missionaries and priests until 1795.

The conservative government offices steeped in Confucianism considered Catholicism as subversive and full of dangerous ideas and threats due to its values of dignity, rights, and equality of human being regardless of class, gender, and race. In the context of Confucianism, these values of Catholicism were regarded "as a dangerous belief that contravenes the social hierarchical system."⁶ In particular, the Catholic Church's prohibition of traditional ancestor

⁴ Basic Statistics of the Diocese of Jeju-Prefecture Apostolic: 1971, Diocese : 1977, Parishes: 25 / Mission Station: 9, Parishioners: 69,438 (11.9% of population of Jeju), Bishop: 2 (one of them is retired), Priest: 47 (Diocesan: 34, Religious & Missionaries: 7, from other Dioceses: 6), Nuns: 104 / Major Seminarians: 19 in The CBCK, *한국 천주교회 통계* [The 2011 Statistics of the Roman Catholic Church of Korea], (2011.12.31).

⁵ Seok Woo Choi, "한국천주교회의 기원 [the Origin of the Roman Catholic Church of Korea]," *사목 [Ministry]* 91 (1984): 5-7; "The History of the Catholic Church in Korea," <http://www.cbck.or.kr/> (accessed 27 November 2009).

⁶ DaiWi Chung, "Christianity and the Religious World of East Asians: The Principle of Three Religions as One," in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: A Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, ed. Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, KyoungJae Kim, (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 270.

rites, which originated from Confucianism and permeated all Korean people, brought about cultural conflicts and persecution.

As a result, the severe persecution and suppression of Catholics lasted for almost 100 years, from 1791 to 1886, and approximately 10,000 of the faithful, including 10 priests, died as martyrs.⁷ From among the martyrs, 103 were canonized in 1984 of whom 11 were clergy and 92 were laity—47 of the laity were women and 45 of them were men.⁸

Finally, in 1886, the Catholic Church of Korea obtained freedom of religion, but underwent a dark period during the Japanese occupation and the Korean War. After these political, social, and cultural upheavals, the Catholic Church of Korean has rapidly grown up.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Catholics in Korea have multiplied outstandingly in number. The activities and engagements of social justice, peace and welfare of the Catholic Church in the process of democratic movement against military dictatorship resulted in the growth of Catholic Church in Korea. According to the 2011 statistics of the Catholic Church of Korea, it consists of sixteen dioceses and 1,647 parishes. There are 5,309,964 Catholics, 10.3 percent of the total population, with 4,621 priests.⁹

Throughout the history of the Catholic Church of Korea, the laity's active participation in the mission of the Church and their spirituality of martyrdom and witness became the cornerstone of the Catholic Church in Korean. These examples are still radiant and significant to the Catholics in Korea today. Indeed, they are also a source of nourishing SCCs as the basis for the parish from the grass-roots.

2. The Process of Fostering SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea

1) Initiating SCCs

Most dioceses of the Catholic Church of Korea have officially promoted SCCs since the archdiocese of Seoul initiated SCCs in 1992 as its long-term pastoral priority aiming at 'new evangelization.' It was immediately stimulated by the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC which pronounced 'a new way of being Church: a participatory Church' toward the renewal of the Church. However, it originated from the Second Vatican Council and its communion ecclesiology.

Gradually, the archdiocese of Seoul has developed models, methods, training courses, programs and materials to actualize SCCs. Many dioceses have adopted this vision of SCCs and employed the approach of the archdiocese of Seoul.

⁷ Seok Woo Choi, "초기 한국교회의 사회적 정치적 상황과 선교 [the Social and Political Situation and Mission of the Early Period of the Roman Catholic Church of Korea]," *사목* [Ministry] 157 (1992): 6.

⁸ Chang Seok Kim and Seok Woo Choi, eds., *Lives of 103 Martyr Saints of Korea* (Seoul: Committee for Bicentennial Commemorative Projects of the Catholic Church in Korea, 1984), 162.

⁹ The CBCK, *한국 천주교회 통계* [The 2011 Statistics of the Roman Catholic Church of Korea], (2011.12.31).

In this process, in 2002 Jeju diocese initiated SCCs on the diocesan level relatively late in comparison to other dioceses. The present bishop of Jeju, Peter Kang, who initiated the implementation of SCCs in the archdiocese of Seoul, has intensively promoted SCCs in Jeju as the pastoral priority and essential source of the renewal of the Church since he became bishop of Jeju diocese in 2002. Concretely, the office of evangelization of Jeju diocese researched other diocesan examples of promoting SCCs in order to develop their own integral plans of SCCs. As a result, the implementation process of SCCs for the period of eight years was designed in three growing stages.¹⁰

2) Transforming pre-existing *guyeok* and *ban* gatherings into SCCs

The very unique feature of fostering SCCs in Korea, in comparison to other countries' SCCs is the Korean effort to transform pre-existing *ban* (반, 班: geographically divided section) and *guyeok* (구역, 區域: district making up of several *bans*) gatherings into SCCs. *Ban* gatherings existed in most parishes in Korea since the 1970s. *Ban* was the basic units of the parish which was uniformly divided on the basis of a residential area. It came from the idea of the government's control structure on people. *Ban* was organized mainly as the administrative structure of the parish to help priests manage a parish efficiently. Therefore, the general feature of attendance of *ban* gatherings could be described as passive listeners, receivers and helpers of pastors. However, the starting point of forming SCCs in Korea has been based on pre-existing *ban* gatherings. When SCCs were introduced and urged to transform *ban* into SCCs, most of laity and priest didn't recognize the differences between *ban* and SCCs. This tendency still remains in Korea.

3. The Goal and Background of Fostering SCCs and the Second Vatican Council

The Church of Korea has reflected on the necessity of renewal of the Church and sought a way towards communion of community, community of service and community of witnessing the gospel in the perspective of the Second Vatican Council. The prophetic voice of the Second Vatican Council has resounded and inspired the people of God in the Church of Korea. Promoting SCCs was certainly associated with this reflection and vision of the Church.

In particular, before SCCs were planted into the Catholic Church of Korea by the institutional Church on diocesan level in 1992, when the 200th anniversary of the Catholic Church of Korea was celebrated in 1984, in the "Management of Church (교회운영)" of the Agendas of the 200th Anniversary National Pastoral Council, basic ecclesial community (BEC) was already introduced as a pastoral method for renewal of parishes based on the communion

¹⁰ Jeju diocese, *천주교 제주교구 소공동체 활성화를 위한 모범안 [A Model Plan for Revitalizing the Small Christian Communities of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jeju]* (Jeju, Korea: Roman Catholic Diocese of Jeju, 2008), 8-9.

ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.¹¹ This Pastoral Council articulated it would be ideal to develop *ban* gatherings as basic ecclesial communities.¹²

The fundamental goal and background of promoting SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea correspond to the vision of the Second Vatican Council and to the sign of the times. It is the on-going process of interpreting and implementing the vision of the Second Vatican Council.

1) Renewing the Church

Cardinal Stephen Kim announced the launch of evangelization through SCCs in 1992. He described the necessity of forming SCCs related to renewal of the church. He regarded SCCs as a desirable model of a new way of being church which could resolve facing difficulties and challenge of the Church as follows: The faithful has lost a sense of belonging and solidarity as a community of *koinonia*. The growth of the Church in terms of size and number caused an enlargement of parishes. In this circumstance of parishes, the faithful are not able to experience a sense of belonging, solidarity, community and *koinonia*. It is also difficult for the parish pastors to have personal relationship with parishioners.¹³

Bishop Peter Kang explained concrete reasons for forming SCCs reflecting on the reality of parishes today in Korea. He pointed to the increasing number of non-practitioners of faith as demonstrating that the Church baptizes people but seems to fail to evangelize them, and to accompany them on their journey of faith. Therefore, SCCs should be formed in order to overcome these challenges today.

A parish has been the smallest basic unit of the Church throughout the long history of the Church. However, our parishes today are too big to know one another, and to gather together. In order to vitalize a parish, SCCs should be formed which actualize interpersonal relationship and sharing with the sense of belonging among parishioners.¹⁴

Likewise, SCCs are regarded as the ecclesial core of the Church, which could bring about renewal of the church towards communion of communities.

2) Participation of the People of God

As the crucial key of vitalizing SCCs and the ultimate aim of SCCs, the deep participation and *koinonia* of all the faithful were highlighted. In order to embody the early ecclesial community within us, we should be patient and make efforts for a long time. Fostering an authentic community inevitably requires the mutual respect, cooperation and devotion of all the

¹¹ The Committee for the National Pastoral Assembly, *The Management of Church* [교회운영] (Seoul: Archdiocese of Seoul, 1984), chapter 21, no 67-72.

¹² The Committee for the National Pastoral Assembly, *The Agenda of Regional Ministry* [지역사목의안] (Seoul: Archdiocese of Seoul, 1984), section 53.

¹³ Seoul archdiocese, *1992 사목교서* [1992 Pastoral Letter] (1992); *1992 사목교서* [1993 Pastoral Letter] (1993).

¹⁴ Jeju diocese, *2003 사목지침서* [2003 Pastoral Guidelines] (2003), 6.

people of God. We should deeply understand what the Church is all about toward becoming an authentic Church. First of all, we have to learn about the concept of the Church based on *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council. We should start learning the identity and role of SCCs in this Church. In the understanding of this ecclesial plan of the Holy Spirit, we should seek to learn about the vocation and role of each of us.¹⁵

This remark articulates that above all, the faithful—the clergy, religious and laity—should be aware and learn about their ecclesial identity and mission as the people of God, and the meaning of SCCs in the Church. Furthermore, it urges that all the faithful should partake actively in various ministries in discovering their own charisms.

3) Transforming the World

Cardinal Stephen Kim pronounced the Church should bring the good news to the Korean society affected by materialism, individualism and secularism.¹⁶ The pastoral letter of diocese of Jeju also showed clearly that fostering SCCs is connected with the role of the church in the world as well as renewing the Church. The goal of vitalizing SCCs is to renew the Church toward an authentic community in communion, fellowship, unity, and sharing. It is the total paradigm shift of the Church. Furthermore, it aims to transform the world. It could be achieved by community of the all the faithful in cooperation and solidarity, not by individuals.¹⁷

The SCCs are described as a community of witnessing the Word of God which could contribute to a paradigm shift of the Church, partake in social justice and peace and recover the dignity and rights of human beings in the world. The SCCs are understood as entities in which the Reign of God makes itself present. The SCCs consciously seek to live out the values in their neighborhood that characterize the Reign of God: equality, participation, fellowship, and communion.

4. The Four Essential Elements of SCCs

The characteristics of SCCs, in terms of the four elements based on the presentation of AsIPA and Lumko¹⁸ which have widely permeated into most of dioceses in Korea, have been developed in the Catholic Church of Korea. Though they are very similar to AsIPA and Lumko's, they have been deepened through exploring four major constitutions of the Second Vatican Council—*Sacrosanctum Councilium* (SC), *Lumen Gentium* (LG), *Dei Verbum* (DV), and *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) and the *New Testament*—focused on Acts 2: 42-47 and Mark 6: 34-44.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Seoul archdiocese, 1992 *사목교서* [1992 Pastoral Letter] (1992), 2.; 1994 *사목교서* [Pastoral Letter] (1994).

¹⁷ Jeju diocese, 2004 *사목지침서* [2004 Pastoral Guidelines] (2004), 4.

¹⁸ The four elements based on the presentation of AsIPA and Lumko are; 1) the members of SCCs gather in the neighborhood, 2) the common element of SCCs is gospel sharing, 3) they act out of faith and serve others, and 4) SCCs are linked with the universal Church

¹⁹ Woo Il Kang, *The Fundamental Paradigm of the Church* (Jeju: Jeju Diocese, 2009), 2-9.

Firstly, the faithful meet in small groups to experience a community life. A faith group seeks to consist of all family members, and meets regularly in their homes by turns. In this gathering, the faithful can newly experience fraternal bonds, living fellowship, mutual concern and care, close contact, and a sense of solidarity based on the common faith. In sum, it aims to build a ‘community life’ out of faith. The Church should show testimony and live communion (*koinonia*) of the saved community (*LG*. no. 1, 9, 23; Acts 2: 42, 44; Mark 6: 39).²⁰

Secondly, the faithful gather together in the power of the Word of God. The members of SCCs are oriented toward listening and sharing the Word of God together as the center of SCCs in order to dwell in Christ who is the Word of God incarnated into the world. Through this, the faithful become spiritually nurtured, and matured in evangelical perspective to see, discern, and act the reality of the world (*DV*. no. 10, 21, 22, 24-25; Acts 2: 42, 46; Mark 6: 37, 41-42).²¹

Thirdly, in SCCs the faithful aim to put the Word of God into practice in the concrete daily life in their neighborhood. They seek to respond to one another’s and their neighbors’ needs. It is the way to live out evangelizing action for transforming the world into the Reign of God in a particular place and time as the disciples of Jesus (*GS*. no. 47-52; Acts 2: 44-45, 47; Mark 6: 38, 43). In this element, the prophetic role and responsibility, and concerted missionary endeavor of the faithful as a community, not but as individuals, are underlined.²²

Fourthly, the faithful of SCCs pray together in communion with the universal Church. SCCs support individual believers to grow together in their spiritual life through praying together regularly, gospel sharing and other liturgical rites and celebration. SCCs create the milieu of communitarian spirituality (*SC*. no. 7, 24, 51; Acts 2: 42, 46-47; Mark 6: 41).²³ The unity between SCCs and the universal Church is more deeply illuminated to some extent in terms of the holistic spiritual growth of the faithful in connection with the spiritual communion of the universal Church rather than merely in their link to the parish pastors. The awareness and effort of deepening spirituality of the faithful through SCCs should be more enhanced in order to vitalize and sustain SCCs as a living basis of the Church.²⁴

Furthermore, the above four essential elements of SCCs are relevant to the basic mission of the Church—*koinonia* (communion/community), *kerygma* (the Word of God), *martyria* (witness), *diakonia* (service), and *liturgia* (worship). This viewpoint deepens and underpins the ecclesial entity and reality of SCCs derived from the Church tradition as well as a pastoral response to the needs, and the signs of the time today.

²⁰ Ibid., 7-9.

²¹ Ibid., 3-4, 7, 9.

²² Ibid., 5, 8-9.

²³ Ibid., 3, 5, 9; Francisco F. Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 137-138.

²⁴ Personal Interview with Bishop Woo Il Kang, “SCCs and the Jeju diocese”, by Joo Hyun Ro (Jeju: 31 October, 2009).

5. Renewal of the Parish Pastoral Structure

A structure of the Church searching for the vision of the Second Vatican Council, community of communion--a participatory church, should correspond to this vision. “Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved” (Mt 9; 17).

The dioceses engaged in fostering SCCs in Korea have been aware of reorganizing the structure of the parish pastoral council in order to enable leaders of SCCs to partake in decision-making process and leadership role. According to diocesan reports and papers on the SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea, the renewal of the parish pastoral council’s structure is indispensable. In other words, it means SCCs should be a basis of the parish pastoral council.

Concretely several dioceses—Seoul, Jeju, Suwon, Daegu, Incheon--have institutionally undertaken to transform the existing structure of the parish pastoral council, which is made up of specialized committees, and oriented to functional operation, efficient management and a centralized system. A new model of the parish pastoral council envisions a new style of parish structure based on SCCs in which representatives of SCCs become the basis for, and participate in, the planning and decision-making process. This new style of parish structure enables the faithful in SCCs to take responsibility and authority as the subject of carrying out the parish apostolate in continuity and consistency regardless of individual priest’s pastoral interest and preference.

Concretely, after the Synod of the Archdiocese of Daegu,²⁵ the system of the parish pastoral council was reorganized for the active participation of the faithful, especially, of the SCCs.²⁶ In particular, the office of evangelization in Jeju diocese presented two types of ‘new model of parish pastoral structure’—one is for twelve parishes in the city and the other is for thirteen parishes in the suburbs or rural areas—and required all twenty five parishes to apply it.²⁷ In this regard, diocesan pastoral structure and departments were also reorganized to embody a participatory system and mode of operation.²⁸

Renewing the existing parish pastoral structure seeks to enable SCC leaders, most of them are women in Korea, to participate in ministry in leadership—planning and decision-making position—as the representative of their SCC members. The leaders of SCCs could deliver the

²⁵ The First Synod of the Archdiocese of Daegu started November, 1997 and finished October, 1999.

²⁶ Pastoral Ministry Office of Daegu and the Integral Pastoral Research Center, *The Status Quo and the Prospect Daegu Archdiocese*, 11.

²⁷ Jeju diocese, *시의분당 사목조직 개편안 [the Proposal for the Renewal of the Parish Pastoral Structure in the Rural Areas]*(Jeju, Korea: Jeju diocese, 2009); Jeju Diocese, *천주교 제주교구 소공동체 활성화를 위한 모범안 [A Model Plan for Revitalizing the Small Christian Communities of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jeju]*, 20-25; Nohyeong Church, 46.

²⁸ Jeju diocese, *제주교구 사목조직 개편안 [the Proposal for the Renewal of Pastoral Structure of the Jeju Diocese]*, 2-14.

voice of the people of God at the grass-roots level to the whole Church through a shared participative leadership.²⁹

In July 2011 in the regular meeting of directors of diocesan pastoral department in the Catholic Church of Korea, they requested the CBCK to research this agenda in-depth. Renewal of the parish pastoral council in Korea has been urged gradually and more extensively in the connection of SCCs in terms of participation and co-responsibility of the laity and a new leadership style, shared participatory leadership from the viewpoint of the Second Vatican Council.

6. Gains

1) The power of the Word

A regular Gospel Sharing (mostly weekly meeting) was recognized as a pivotal activity of SCCs. It has the most considerable impact on SCCs. Through the gospel sharing in SCCs the Word of God, the risen Christ becomes the essence and source of faith and community.³⁰ The gospel sharing helps SCCs members to integrate faith and life and strengthen the Word-based faith life. More frequent SCC gatherings inspire them to more often reflect on their lives in the light of the Word through the gospel sharing. The Word and prayer become a source of consolation, healing, encouragement, and hope for their new life. A result of survey on the degree of the helpfulness of SCC in personal spiritual growth is related to the gospel sharing in SCCs. It revealed the gospel sharing in SCCs supported that SCC members could strengthen themselves in accordance with the Word.³¹

(Personal) Spiritual Growth		Accordance between the life and the Word	Frequent prayer	Reading Bible and contemplation	Deep faith	Frequent every day's Mass	Frequent Holy Hour	Etc.	Non-response	
	Seoul (2005)	47.90	17.40	14.70	13.20			2.7	4.0	100
	Jeju (2008)	31.3	14.6	12.7		3.1	0.3	6.8	31.3	100

²⁹ This aspect was also pointed out related to SCCs by the Asian colloquium on ministries. "We believe that shared participative leadership can be promoted as a style for our Basic Christian Communities where there is consultation, dialogue and sharing. Thus the people will feel responsible for and part of the decision-making process in matters that affect the whole community.: "The Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church," 77, no. 46.

³⁰ Emmanuel S. De Guzman, "AsIPA Research Project Report: the Diocese of Jeju, Korea" in F. Macalinao SJ, ed., AsIPA Research Project, *East Asia Pastoral Review* Vol 48 (2011) No.1-2 (Quezon City: EAPI, 2011), 55-57.

³¹ The Research Center for Integral Pastoral Approach in Archdiocese of Seoul, *소공동체 현황과 과제* [The tasks and present condition of the SCC] (Seoul, Korea, 2005), 242-248; Jeju diocese, *제주교구 소공동체 현황과 과제-서귀포 본당 신앙실태조사 연구보고서* [The tasks and present condition of the SCC of the diocese of Jeju – The Report on the Survey of the Faith Life in Seogwipo Parish], (Jeju, Korea, 2008), 117-118; DaeGu Archdiocese and The research Center for Integral Pastoral Approach, *대구대교구 현황과 과제* [The present condition and prospect of the DaeGu Archdiocese], (Daegu, Korea, 2007), 193.

Daegu (2007) (the evaluation of the clergy)	34.6	1.8	26.5		5.9	.7	14.7	15.8	100
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Regular gospel sharing in the SCC gathering, which reflects on life experience in light of the Word of God, enables them to empathize with members’ complex problems, mistakes, and failings. For the gospel sharing leads SCC members to open their hearts to and share their lives with one another in trust and sincerity. It provokes them to embrace others’ weakness, fragility and vulnerability as well as their goodness. Cardinal Stephen Kim remarked that “the sharing of the gospel in small communities is the most effective way of making the Word of God felt at the very core of our being.”³²

2) The participation of the laity

Fostering SCCs achieved positive results in growth of the laity and the vitalization of the lay ministry. Lay persons’ increasing awareness and participation of vision and mission of the Church as a communion of communities and a participatory Church toward evangelization.

Many new lay leaders have been emerged. In the archdiocese of Seoul, there are about 20,000 leaders of SCCs. Lay leaders became active as agents not of the clergy but of the People of God in their parishes and SCCs when they understood the essence of communion ecclesiology and lay ministry. They began to develop as active agents to carry out the ministry and mission of the church with responsibility by being offered concrete opportunities to share and live out the duties of the Church through SCCs.

The role and participation of the laity are highlighted in carrying out the mission of the Church in the world as well as the Church. The work of all God’s people is the same as that of their shepherd. It demands the deep consciousness and awareness that the Christian faithful are incorporated into Christ through baptism. The People of God share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and kingly office, the three-fold mission received through baptism. It necessitates co-responsibility of the laity in ministries with religious and clergy. All the faithful are brought into communion and at the same time sent on mission.

3) The new awareness and discovery

The significance of SCC gatherings has been approved as follows: a) it creates circumstance to encourage all members of the family—children, parents and the old—to join the SCC gathering together. The SCCs become the basis of faith formation for all, especially for the faith education of children, b) it enables those who do not belong to any apostolic and active associations or groups of a parish, especially the isolated old and handicapped, to join SCCs more comfortably and easily, c) having SCC gatherings at homes and sharing life stories enhance

³² AsIPA Desk, *AsIPA General Assembly III*, 34.

SCC members’ understanding of other members’ lives deeply, d) it brings SCC members to look closely at the daily lives and needs of one another, and understand one another more deeply.

These experiences lead them to look at their own pains and sufferings in different ways. For SCCs members say the life of each member could be likened to the mirror of our life which shows covered facets of life and brings us to reflect on the deeper meaning of life.

7. Challenge and Suggestion

1) SCCs and modern society

Some people, especially priests in the Catholic Church of Korea have still doubted whether SCCs are possible or suitable to be planted into Korea today. Some say community-centered life itself does not harmonize with people’s life style, mindset and value in modern society characterized by secularism, materialism, individualism, consumerism, globalization and nomadic life style.

However, a survey on the topics related to SCCs, taken during the Synod of the archdiocese of Seoul in 2002, showed that the majority (77.9%) of the priests supported the current pastoral process of SCCs.³³ On the prospect of the SCCs, “will succeed, with difficulty,” gained 43.7% of the responses and “will fail” gained 22.1% of the responses.³⁴

In addition, the result of several surveys on the prospect of the SCCs below shows “SCCs must exist and be developed.” It gained 64%, 33%, 58% and 40% of the responses from four dioceses. At average, a half of the responses very strongly supported SCCs. The second highest ranking was “promoting SCCs should not be forced.” It gained 22%, 23%, 37% of the responses.³⁵ This response seems to be a neutral position. It means neither respondents’ approval nor opposition to SCCs. This outcome is associated of the process which the SCCs have been promoted as diocesan policy or pastoral priority in top-down process in Korea. According to other responses of the survey, the SCCs are absolutely necessary to renew the Church even though there are also challenges, obstacles and difficulties faced.

	Seoul	Jeju	Gwangju	Daegu
	2005	2008	2007	2007
Very Necessary(need more development)	64.40	33.2		40.2

³³ The Synod Office, The Survey of Public Opinion of Clergy in Synod of Archdiocese of Seoul, (Seoul, Seoul Archdiocese, 2002), 8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The Research Center for Integral Pastoral Approach in Archdiocese of Seoul, *ibid.*, 242-248.; Jeju diocese, *ibid.*, 117-118.; Gwangju Archdiocese, *교구설정 70주년 기념 평신도 설문조사 결과 보고서* [The Report on the survey of the Laity for celebrating the 70th anniversary of establishing diocese], (Gwangju, Korea, 2007), 26.; DaeGu Archdiocese and The research Center for Integral Pastoral Approach, *ibid.*, 193.

'Musts' to recover the identity of the Church			57.61	
Not to be forced	21.60	23.1		36.8
Push ahead with the consideration of the associations			20.29	
the business of the Church leaders			10.14	
already enough	7.50	5.9		4.3
need to have alternative	2.00	3.4		4.6
had never thought about this	1.60	4.2		11.1
to be more familiar with the Bible				
The increase of the community activities				
SCCs are not a true picture of the Church			1.45	
have no idea			10.51	
Et Cetera (ETC.)	2.80			
Non-response		30.1		3.0
	100.0	100.0	100.00	100.0

2) The way of understanding SCCs

Some priests are indifferent or reluctant or hesitating to foster SCCs. There are many different reasons such as their lack of understanding SCCs, demanding needs and efforts for paradigm shift of the model of the Church and leadership style. They tend to evaluate that SCCs have not had successful outcome sufficiently in parishes since SCCs were initiated in 1992. Some priests may have expected to get progressive and successful results of SCCs in a short period of his time as a parish pastor. In regarding to this aspect, as the biggest difficulty it has been pointed out is a considerable number of priests have not fully understood what SCCs are all about. In this understanding of SCCs, SCCs may be perceived as merely a movement or a method solving problems and difficulties or a kind of auxiliary service in parishes rather than as the church itself renewing the parish toward communion of communities.

Having a shared vision of SCCs and a proper understanding about the vision and participation of the laity are pivotal conditions for revitalizing SCCs. As parish priests' role and willingness is essential for forming SCCs, making common ground of the vision of SCCs among priests should be continuously activated.

3) The process of promoting SCCs and leadership

Some may still regard SCCs as a sort of policy or movement from the top. They have been opposed to the accelerated and forced top-down process of promoting SCCs. They criticize that those who have initially urged SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea remains in clergy-centered church, strong hierarchical system and dominant leadership style. They insist this process and

leadership style do not coincide with the vision of the Second Vatican Council. The attitude of unilateral decision, dominant leadership and clericalism in the Catholic Church of Korea is influenced by Confucianism, patriarchy and hierarchical bureaucracy of the Korea society.

The genuine power of nourishing SCCs organically lies in the dialectical dynamism and integration of the vision, mission and spirit of being a participatory Church rooted in “a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension.”³⁶

At the point of leadership, the leaders and facilitators of SCCs need to pay more attention to understand and develop a new style of leadership for enhancing SCCs in the perspective of a participatory Church based on communion ecclesiology, Trinitarian communion, and the way of Jesus life and ministry. Indeed, active facilitators of SCCs in Korea as well as other local churches in Asia have emphasized, the authentic embodiment of “a non-dominating and enabling style of leadership is crucial in the building of SCCs.”³⁷

4) Putting the Word into the action

The interests and activities of SCCs are limited to the parish works or only SCC gathering itself. Concretely, the weakest point of SCCs is in not taking action to respond to the needs of their neighborhood. Most of the SCCs at the grass-roots level of the Church have not been actively involved in social issues yet. So far many dioceses’ focus on SCCs has been predominantly inward-looking of the Church. A result of survey on the degree of the satisfaction of SCC’ action conducted by the diocese of Jeju in 2008 showed SCC members were not highly satisfied with actions or activities of SCCs.³⁸

	very high	high	high or not	low	very low	Non response	
Percent (%)	2.8	9.9	29.3	17.5	9.3	31.3	100.0

The SCCs should deal with the matter of how they could be more interested in and participate in social and local issues prophetically. The SCCs should make efforts in order to move forward toward the world beyond the Church. The SCCs’ participation in local society is neither optional nor secondary. It is the essential vocation and responsibility of SCC members, the laity living in the world. With regard to actualizing the witness of faith in action in SCCs, more practical and pastoral action plans could be considered: a) to provide formation and training course on the social teachings of the Church, especially, *Gaudium et Spes* for SCC members, b) to encourage and support SCCs and the family to engage in the concerns and issues of their neighborhoods and local society, c) to promote SCCs to participate in protecting the natural environment as Pope Benedict said “if you want to cultivate peace, protect creation,”³⁹

³⁶ John Paul II, *I Will Give You Shepherds (Pastores Dabo Vobis)* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), no. 12.

³⁷ The Final Statement of the Fourth AsIPA General Assembly, 183, no. 5.3.

³⁸ Jeju diocese, *ibid.*, 110-111.

³⁹ Benedict XVI, "Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace," <http://www.vatican.va/> (accessed 30 January 2010).

d) to facilitate SCCs to collaborate with other associations of the parish and other religions, and non-profit organizations in dialogue and solidarity for social justice and peace.

The witness of faith in action in the world is the way to realize the identity and role of SCCs as centers, instruments, and agents of evangelization, inculturation, and transformation of society.

5) Types of SCCs

An overwhelming type of the SCC meeting in Korea is characterized as women's gathering. Mostly women and men have their SCC meetings separately. This tendency is due to their meeting schedule and the influence of Confucianism. In general, women have their SCC meeting during the day. Most SCC meeting for men is held in the evening because of their job. The type of gender-mixed SCCs, sometimes with children too, has not been activated apparently.

In addition, the SCCs and *ban* of the parish have been organized and divided in accordance of a residential area. This type of SCC in Korea is prevailing. At the parish level, it enables all the faithful to belong to a certain SCC regardless of their economic or educational levels, social status, abilities and personality.

Likewise, the main reason of showing similar type of SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea is that the key feature of SCCs is thoroughly parish-based small communities. It means that fostering SCCs has been promoted systematically in pastoral planning and policy by the institutional Church. As a result, 'territorial' SCCs have been formed. Other types of SCCs such as so-called 'voluntary' SCCs that emerge from the grass-roots spontaneously have hardly been created.

Some people suggest that various types of SCCs need to be more developed beyond a residential area of the parish in order to vitalize SCCs for the future. The result of survey below, "Intention of participation for the new type of SCCs", conducted by the diocese of Cheongju in 2006 shows parishioners' differing opinions about the way of organizing SCCs.⁴⁰

	Enthusiastic	Positive	Not interested	Dislike	
SCC according to the same interest	28.4	48.2	20.9	2.5	100.0
SCC with the family members including children	27.7	44.5	24.4	3.5	100.0
SCC with the couples	25.9	43.8	26.3	0.9	100.0

In sum, the Catholic Church of Korea needs to take steps forward progressively in order to create some conditions and possibilities in which various 'voluntary' SCCs can emerge and harmoniously exist alongside 'territorial' SCCs. In this respect, the Church is asked to listen to

⁴⁰ The Synod Office of CheongJu Diocese, *좋은 본당 일구기-신자 설문 분석 결과* [Making the Good Parish-The Report on the Survey of the Faithful], (Cheonju, Korea, 2006), 60.

the needs and desires of the faithful, and consider an attempt to design a trial parish in which ‘voluntary’ SCCs can be created and exist interdependently with SCCs in accordance of a residential area of the parish.

6) Terms for SCCs

According to the documents of the “International Consultation on SCCs” at the University of Notre Dame in USA in 1991, the names, terms, titles, and expressions for SCCs from 1976 to 1991 that existed all over the world are numerous and wide-ranging—over three thousand different names.⁴¹ In addition, the outcome of the research of the Church of the Philippines on SCCs in 1995 showed that there were ninety-three names given to SCCs in the different dioceses of the country.⁴²

In contrast, in the Church of Korea, almost all communities of the parish have been very similarly called either ‘SCC’ or ironically ‘*ban* SCC’—*ban* (반, 班) itself is the name of a pre-existing or a still existing gathering of the faithful before the establishment of SCCs. The argument about what could be the most appropriate name for indicating SCCs has been often raised.

This uniform name of SCCs in Korea signifies a similar process of forming SCCs, and a similar pattern of characterizing and sustaining SCCs. The phenomenon of using the term SCCs is associated with the impact of adopting the research results of Lumko Institute in South Africa. In fact, another term, ‘basic (ecclesial) community’ was used in Korea in 1980s.⁴³ However, comprehensive interpretations on the meaning of SCCs have been developed in the Church of Korea.

It could be worthwhile to reflect on the meaning of ‘SCCs’ deeply, and rethink locally what could be the best way to name SCCs in the context of Korea. For various terms for SCCs themselves signify different theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral implication, emphasis and response to local concerns and needs in a particular context. In other words, how SCCs are named and called shows the primary identity and role of SCCs and vice versa.

7) Women’s participation in leadership

Lay women leaders of SCCs, the same as other lay women in different ministries, are still regarded as passive helpers or as prolonged arms of priests, to be ordered around with limited responsibility or without shared responsibility and authority although they are called leaders. SCC lay women leaders are not fully aware of their identity and role as authentic leaders of the community and the Church.

⁴¹ John Paul Vandenakker, *Small Christian Communities and the Parish* (Kansas: Sheed&Ward, 1994), 97-99; Healey and Hinton, eds., 4, 7-8.

⁴² Claver, *The Making of a Local Church*, 94.

⁴³ The Committee for the Pastoral Council of the Roman Catholic Church of Korea, *교회[교]의 운영* [the Agenda of Ecclesiological Management] (Seoul, Korea: The Catholic Publisher, 1984), no. 67-69.

In addition, SCC women leaders' participation in the leadership positions of the parish structure is not sufficient and appropriate. It should be enlarged. Despite women's more active engagement in the activities of the parish than men, women have been distant from the leading roles of decision-making and planning process of the parish. Even though the constituent members of SCC leaders as mostly women, paradoxically, the number of men, the leaders of *guyeok* who coordinate some SCCs according to district, is more than the number of women. The SCC women leaders should be more empowered and respected in order to achieve full equality and participation in the Church.

In this regard, several dioceses have consistently striven to transform the existing system of the parish pastoral council into a new paradigm in which SCC leaders, the basis of the parish, could actually participate in the leadership positions of the parish. However the pattern of lay women's ministry in leadership has not yet improved in accordance with the vision of a participatory Church, especially a shared participative leadership in co-responsibility.

The renewal of the parish structure needs to be better promoted, considering the status of SCCs and women leaders of SCCs in the context of Korea. The paradigm shift of the parish pastoral structure and the renewal of the Church require a deeper awareness of the faithful about women's dignity, rights, and responsibilities. It is also demanded to develop and provide awareness and formation programs of lay women's identity and role, especially their ministry in leadership

8) SCC leaders' responsibility

For the majority of SCC leaders, actually the heaviest burden is taking many responsibilities and overlapping duties at once due to belonging to not only SCCs as a leader but also other apostolic and active associations of a parish. Not a few SCC leaders say they have taken three or four responsible positions at the same time because of lack of active participants. Sometimes, these demanding duties and schedules result in some difficulties in their family lives.

It is important to encourage SCC members to develop their gifts and charisms, and empower them to participate in different ministries with shared responsibility and authority through SCCs. The more SCC members partake in SCC activities together, the more they discover their talents, giftedness and potential to contribute to community. Emerging and rotating leadership and teamwork in SCCs and other church structures will bring about qualitative growth.⁴⁴

9) Aging trend and low attendance

Among women leaders of SCCs in the archdiocese of Seoul in the year of 2005, percentage by age is 5.1% in their 30's, 36.2% in their 40's, 43.1% in their 50's, and 15.4% in their 60's. Women leaders in their 40's and 50's account for 79.3% of all SCC leaders.⁴⁵ Relatively young

⁴⁴ The Final Statement of the Fourth AsIPA General Assembly, 184, no. 6.

⁴⁵ Won Jun, *The Small Christian Communities in the Korean Catholic Church* (Jeju: Jeju Diocese, 2009), 16-17.

people are not interested in joining SCCs. In some cases, the schedule of SCCs gathering itself, during the day time, is not suitable for those who have jobs. Sometimes, there are only two or three participants, usually elderly women, in a SCC gathering despite SCCs leaders make great efforts to encourage a larger attendance. These situations alarm SCCs should listen more carefully to the young people's needs and take a look closely to people's life style today in order to find out the way to have them at SCC's gathering.

It is necessary and urgent to ponder creatively how SCCs could prepare and generate the circumstances which are able to respond and embrace the younger generation and rapid change in the world, for the present and future of the Church and society. Fostering SCCs is an on-going process of renewing the Church in the context of a particular place and time. As Pope Paul VI says, SCCs are "a cause for great hope for the life of the Church" (*EN*, no. 58).

10) SCC gathering in members' homes

Most of SCCs leaders respond that organizing SCC gathering in members' homes in turns is one of the difficulties faced. They say its main causes are as follows: a) offering a house for SCC gathering burdens the host with preparing food, b) some members dislike showing their life situation to others, c) some are not able to hold a gathering in their house at all because it is too small or too poor. Sometimes, it causes that they avoid joining the SCC gathering itself.

However, at the same time, many SCCs leaders agree to meet in members' homes despite the above difficulties. Some SCCs leaders say that having the SCC gathering once a week helps SCC members simplify preparation for food. They proposed a guideline about setting up food for SCC gatherings in order to reduce its burdens. But most of them respond that sharing food or meals together, in an appropriate level, at members' homes after a SCC gathering helps to enhance the fraternal bond and intimacy among SCC members.

11) Inculturation

One of the most important reasons why SCCs should have gatherings at members' homes in their neighborhood is that SCCs are the incarnation and presence of the Word and the Church in the very place of people's lives. It means that the SCCs must be inculturated in its place, time and people. In other words, when SCCs become truly inculturated, SCCs could be a genuine force for evangelization.

SCCs discern how the gospel and the Christian tradition speak to their particular situation, and put it into practice through an integration of their faith and life. "The vocation of the small Christian communities is to be keeper of the Church's conscience for inculturation. Winning or losing the future also depends on them."⁴⁶ The SCCs is described as the "keeper of the Church's conscience for inculturation"⁴⁷ as well as a center and genuine force for evangelization (*CL*, no. 61; *EA*, no. 25). Furthermore, inculturation should be understood relevant to the laity's participation in the mission of the Church. The SCCs push toward a participatory Church are an

⁴⁶ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), 270.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

inseparable relationship with inculturation always to be pursued. At this point, the Asian bishops emphasize the necessity of the participation of all the people of God in inculturation, particularly the laity: “a wider inculturation of the gospel at every level of society in Asia will depend greatly on the appropriate formation which the local churches succeed in giving to the laity” (*EA*, no. 22).⁴⁸

In the Catholic Church of Korea, inculturation of SCCs require mutual dialogue with the social, environmental and unique cultural aspects of and popular religiosity. Inculturation is the process and the result of discovering the local Church’s own identity and roles. In this regard, it is not only necessary but also urgent to reflect on how the SCCs in Korea have been inculturated and what more is needed for inculturation of SCCs.

Conclusions

Today, emerging SCCs in the Church is a world-wide phenomenon. Fostering SCCs has brought about the growth and more active participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our time and places which guides the Church to respond to the signs of the time, and renew herself.

In other words, SCCs are not merely one of many movements in the Church, but rather are the Church in movement. SCCs are a hope of the Church becoming a greater reality in the world and in people’s life. “I am about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Is 43:19).

Renewing parishes towards community of SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea has been sought fervently in order to implement a vision and teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the FABC too. Also regarding SCCs in Korea, the evaluations and results of dioceses, parishes and individuals have been shown to range across a broad spectrum. These different responses and acute arguments on SCCs are acceptable and necessary for developing SCCs in integral pastoral approach in Korea. “Do not cling to events of the past or dwell on what happened long ago. Watch for the new thing I’m going to do. It is happening already -- you can see it now!” (Is 43, 18-19).

Lay leaders of SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea have become hopeful signs of embodying a participatory Church. Their lived experiences and witness of and through SCCs embracing suffering, pain, grief, and anxiety as well as goodness, joy and hope of the people are becoming good news to the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor and the Church who is on the pilgrimage of renewal. Their vibrant voices filled with the Holy Spirit are deeply resonant as a song of peace, life, hope and love beyond the Catholic Church of Korea.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possession and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any

⁴⁸ John Paul II, "Ecclesia in Asia," no. 22.

had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:43-47).

In 2012 the committee for small Christian communities of the CBCK held the 11th SCCs national gathering for three days (from Sept. 18 to Sept. 20 at Aron's center in Suwon) and SCCs regional gathering at three dioceses (on Sept. 4, 11 and 12) to celebrate the 20th anniversary of initiating SCCs in the Catholic Church of Korea in line with celebrating both the 50th anniversary of opening the Second Vatican Council in 1962. In addition, the Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea has taken a nationwide survey on SCCs. These works aimed at looking back on the process of promoting SCCs for the past two decades and move forward to integral approach and praxis of SCCs in our daily lives based on the Korean context. We pray that the Word of God and the authentic vision of the Second Vatican Council will guide the Catholic Church of Korea to realize a participatory Church through SCCs for the all the people of God.

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