

Comunidades Eclesiales de Base -- CEBs (Small Christian Communities) in Argentina

By Alejandro Marina



SMALL COMMUNITY OF MEDAL FAMILAGROSA
BUENOS AIRES - ARGENTINA

As St. John Paul II used to say, “Latin America is the continent of hope.” This conviction is the result of experiencing the vitality and renewing power of Latin American Church that was expressed through the small communities that, as an ecclesial model, emerged in the late 1960s. After the Vatican II, and its invitation to build a church in dialogue with the modern world, Medellín (II Conference of the Latin American Episcopate), found in the small communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base -- CEBs) a new way of building church: Number 10 of

the Conference Document speaks for the first time in an ecclesial document about the CEBs. Medellín is like the Baptism of these Christian communities and Puebla (III Conference of the Latin American Episcopate) was its Confirmation. This prophetic intuition that emerged from Latin America would generate “a new way of being Church” (but, no “a new Church” as maliciously some have said), and would promote new lay ministries, something that had not happened until now. *Cecilio de Lora, Libro del Congreso Continental de Teología, TOMO II, 2013 pag. 436.*

They have also meant a process of theological renewal, not only pastoral. Actually, they reflect a new way of understanding the Church and of being an active part of her. Born as a sign of hope for the church, they have been walking between lights and shadows, joys and pains: The CEBs are the manifestation of the theological renewal movement emerged from the Vatican II and from the Latin American ecclesial experience. The 1970s were times of hopeful birth of the CEBs. In the 1980s CEBs multiplied greatly, but went through difficult times ranging from suspicion, disqualification and even condemnation. In the 1990s they suffered indifference and identity confusion, equating them to an ecclesial movement. Many came to believe that they even had become old fashioned. The Latin American Episcopal Conference of Aparecida came back to talk about them as though Medellín and Puebla been raised up: a new and hopeful reality for the Church. It is for this that we live in a new time that the Spirit has given us, to continue considering CEBs as "ecclesial initial cell structure and focus of evangelization" (DA 178) as the primitive communities are described in the *Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2: 42-47).*



SMALL COMMUNITY OF NUEVA VERA CRUZ
COCHABAMBA - BOLIVIA

Presentación en la página de los Encuentros Nacionales de Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (in [Comunidades Eclesiales de Base-Argentina-](#)

A brief overview of the journey of the small communities in Argentina:

- 1966-1970: In Medellin, Bishop Marengo presented a paper on Theology and Methodology of BCCs, indicating the existence of experiences. The bishops try to adapt the guidelines of Medellin Document to the reality of Argentina: In the Document of San Miguel (Implementation of Vatican II and Medellin to Argentina), chap. 15 says: "... We consider CEBs of great importance to revitalize parishes pastorally, and also a suitable instrument for evangelization and physical presence of the church in marginalized sectors geographically "
- The Episcopal Commission in 1970 proposed CEBs among its priorities.
- 1976-1979: 1976, in the Dioceses of Quilmes, was the beginning of a new period for the CEBs in Argentina. Later, in 1978, some experiences began in Formosa, Goya and other Dioceses in the north of the country.
- 1981-1986: In 1981, CEBs starts meeting together. Gatherings were done in Resistencia, Formosa, Quilmes, Goya y Reconquista. In these years, pastoral letters and Synods make the option for the CEBs, and the parish as "community of communities".
- 1986-1987: It's began the preparation for the First National Meeting of CEBs. It would be in Santiago del Estero with the slogan of "CEBs, the new face of Evangelization".
- 1988-1990: This was a richer and hopeful time for CEBs. The board meets to schedule, review and inform about diocesan and regional works. The Bishops Conference of Argentina named Mons. Rubiolo as counselor and approve the National Board.
- 1990: Second National Meeting of CEBs in San Justo (Buenos Aires) with the slogan: New Evangelization since the poor.
- 1996: Third National Meeting in Viedma, Río Negro, under the slogan: "In a culture of death, CEBs celebrates life".
- 1997: 4th National Meeting in Formosa under the slogan: "CEBs, hope of the poor in times of jubilee".
- 2001: 5th National Meeting in La Rioja, under the slogan: "Since fidelity and martyrdom, CEBs build the Kingdom of God".
- 2005: 6th National Meeting in Rosario (Santa Fe), under the slogan: "Renewed CEBs, are seeds of a new society".
- 2009: 7th National Meeting in Salta, under the slogan: "CEBs, presence and Jesus's liberator mission, where people fights for life".
- 2013: 8th National Meeting in Quilmes (Buenos Aires), under the slogan: "With Jesus of Nazareth, by a life in dignity".



Now, we are in a new time. A Pope from Latin America who knows the reality of our communities that walk between cries and joys. A time of conversion and renewed hope for all the Church. During my own ecclesial and pastoral experience I have realized and that small communities are still very necessary to build the church. In the small communities in which I have participated in Argentina, Cuba and Bolivia we had the experience of an ecclesial life born from the sharing of joys and sadness, anguishes and

hopes (Eucharistic Prayer V) of all men and women.

In CEBs, we have learned that, the small communities are part of the great community

(whole parish and society), and that's why their meetings palpitate what is going on. There emerges a strong compromise with reality. They worry about and engage with the transformation of those issues that make impossible a worthy life for all people. They build equity relationships and they are an ecclesial presence serving with society.

In small communities, the reading of Gospel and the liturgies make sense because they are like bread broken and shared for a plenty life for all (*John. 10:10*).



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