



## BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND PASTORAL COUNCIL IN ARCHDIOCESE OF TRIVANDRUM.

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### ABSTRACT

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

### KEYWORDS :

#### INTRODUCTION:

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

#### The Evolution of the DPC in the Diocese of Trivandrum

Pastoral council is always seen as a symbol of the common responsibility of the people of God manifested in sharing and shouldering of pastoral concerns. The DPC in the diocese of Trivandrum is born with an adequate preparation. It is an embodiment of the active participation of the laity in the diocesan pastoral activities. There are many factors which play their role in the realization of DPC in the diocese.

#### The Structure of the Board of Pastoral Ministry

The present form of the Pastoral Ministry in the diocese of Trivandrum is the result of a long process and development. The year 1988 bore witness to the formation of the Board of Sacred Ministry and the Priestly Training. After a couple of years of its formation, a Board of various commissions was formed for the effective functioning of Catechists, Bible Apostolate, Liturgy, Vocation and Media. With the formation of BCCs the diocese of Trivandrum emphasized the importance of the laity in the diocese. Both laity and clergy showed great interest and concern in this new mission for a better church.

As a first step, the Bible was made available to all with subsidy from the diocese. Some selected priests, religious and laity were sent for a special training to equip themselves to take up the new challenging mission of the diocese.

However the 1990 Evaluation team observed the absence of active lay participation in the diocese. This provided an opportunity for a structural change in the Ministries. The proposal for a new structure recommended the inclusion of lay people in the Ministries. This led to the new formation of the Board of Pastoral Ministry, with seven commissions. They are the commissions for:

- i) Christian Life Formation (Integrating the present Commissions for Bible Catechists and Liturgy)

- ii) Family and Lay Apostolate.
- iii) Vocation.
- iv) Youth
- v) Evangelisation
- vi) Pious Associations
- vii) Ecumenism and Dialogue

#### Functions:-

The Board of Pastoral Ministry Functions with a Director, Secretary and an Executive secretary for each commission. All the diocesan commissions have a vicariate representative at the diocesan commission. It comprises the vicariate representative for the diocesan commission and a representative from all the parishes for the vicariate. The vicariate representative at the diocesan commission, functions as the secretary of the vicariate commission. Further in order to co-ordinate the forane Level Pastoral Ministry, a priest was also appointed. In 1994 both BCCs and Media became Independent Commissions.

#### The Objectives of the Pastoral Ministry

- i) To prepare the diocese of the Trivandrum as a part of building the Kingdom of God.
- ii) To form a community to live in the Bible.
- iii) To make sure to the people's participation in building the Kingdom of God.
- iv) To have effective and meaningful participation in catechism and liturgy.
- v) To conduct Bible Studies.
- vi) To build a community based on high values and morals.
- vii) To have an effective vocation for the different religious congregations.
- viii) To reform the Pious Association based on the Gospel.
- ix) To reform and renew families and their relations.

#### A New Way of Being the Church:

Since the Living Together, the diocese of Trivandrum has been in the forefront of renewal of Christian life. The formation of BCCs was a landmark of this renewal in the diocese. The renewal attempts proposed the way for the active participation of the people in the BCCs meetings, in the liturgical services and in their social commitments.

This attempt to be a new way of being the church placed heavy responsibility of DPC members. The DPC members had to establish grass root level relationship with BCCs Units and its members. In his keynote address on the "Emerging New Vision", Bishop Soosa

Pakkiam stated, "The Vision is one of making the diocese of Trivandrum, not just a church for the people but of the people. He insisted that the Church of Trivandrum to be the people of God, has to be motivated and has to act according to the context and the needs. In this the DPC has a tremendous responsibility as the members represent the people from different regions, economic and educational levels. Through active participation in the diocese' four Ministries, the DPC becomes the full fledged body of the diocese and works for the whole of the diocese.

#### **The Composition of DPC:**

As noted earlier, DPC is a relatively new reality in the diocese of Trivandrum. With its formation, the bishop has offered enormous opportunities to the laity to participate in the pastoral duties of the Bishop and to make use of all their gifts and talents for the growth of the Church. DPC is composed of Christ's faithful who are in full communion with the Catholic Church : Clerics, members of the institutes of consecrated life and especially lay people.

According to the bylaws promulgated in 1989, the DPC of the diocese of Trivandrum comprises three categories of membership.

#### **Role and Responsibilities:-**

The DPC serves as a consultative body to the bishop. Its concern is not of the administrative operations, rather of pastoral vision and planning. Therefore its role is to guide the bishop through their advice and suggestion in fulfillment of his Pastoral Ministry. Apart from the bishop who serves as president, council members serve in a variety of roles. These roles and responsibilities may be performed by certain individuals for a definite period of time.

#### **The President:-**

The Bishop of the diocese takes the role of president. In his role as president, the bishop does not facilitate the meetings but rather oversees and participates in all council deliberations. He sheds light on church teachings and diocesan background (or guidelines and actively listens to council's deliberations.

#### **Vice – President:**

In the absence of the bishop and with his permission the Vice-president convenes the council and presides over it.

#### **Secretary:**

The Secretary shall be appointed by the president from among the elected members. He convenes the council according to the direction of the president and maintains the necessary documents.

#### **Joint – Secretary:**

The Joint – Secretary is to be elected by the DPC Members. He will work along with the secretary. But in the absence of the secretary, he does the work of the secretary.

#### **Styles of Functions:**

The DPC in Trivandrum functions in three ways. They are as General Body, Executive and Standing Committee.

#### **General Body:**

The General Body of the Pastoral Council is convened at least once in a year. Ten days' notice shall be given to the members; special (or) extra – ordinary meetings shall be convened whenever the bishop wants to hold them.

In the actual functioning of DPC, one can find bimonthly gatherings. There have been at least four gatherings per year held in the life of DPC. The Secretary gets the topics for the meetings either from the president (or) from the agenda committee and it is sent to the members along with the relevant data and information prior to the meetings. Regarding the quorum, the bylaw stipulates one fourth and 2/3 of the total members.

#### **Working Committee:**

The working committee is a small committee which consists of the

President, Vice – President, Chancellor, Procurator, Secretary, Joint Secretary and four elected members from the general body of whom there may be a religious sister and the rest lay people.

#### **Standing Committee:**

The Standing Committee is always to assist the bishop with due proposals and suggestions with regard to the Pastoral Care and functioning of the DPC. When the need arises, the bishop requests the Standing Committee to meet together to discuss and propose their concrete suggestions to deal with the current issues and problems of affecting the diocese. Hence the Standing Committee consists of qualified persons representing various sections of the people of the diocese.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

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

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