

# SOCIAL SERVICES OF THE BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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## Abstract

The contributions of the Catholic Church to the society are unquestionable and undeniable with regard to evangelization, education, health and social transformation. A historical look at the origin of Basic Christian Community in Kottar Diocese shows that they have emerged chiefly as a movement of the laity.<sup>1</sup> The laity has promoted a de-centralized and participatory approach to life, administration and structures in the church as well as in the village. In this process, Basic Christian Community have insisted upon certain values such as renewal in Christian life, community dimension, integration of faith and life, equality of women, critical awareness of the social realities and concentration of the poor, the literate masses, etc.<sup>2</sup> They have made use of awareness programme and group dynamics as methods, to impart these values among the people. In the whole process they have emerged as leaders for the on- going formation of Basic Christian Community.<sup>3</sup>

## Keywords

Education, Christian community, Administration, Leadership

In the formation of Basic Christian Community the Diocese of Kottar experienced great difficulties in getting the right leaders. The directors motivated Basic Christian Community leaders to reflect on four topics- leadership based on appointing, volunteering and electing, emerging leadership, team leadership and rotating leadership, which helped them to formulate leadership policy in the commission.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Sathiyadas from Sahayanagar, Mr. A.X. F. Fernandes from Rajakkamangalamthurai, Mr. Chellathurai from Kanavoor, Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence. V., *History of the Catholic Church in Kanyakumari District*, Nagercoil, 2002, p.28.

<sup>2</sup>The *Golden Jubilee of Kottar Diocese, Souvenir, 1930-1980*, Nagercoil, 1981, p.27.

<sup>3</sup> Narchison. J.R., *Called to Serve. A Profile of the Diocese of Kottar*, 1983, p.19.

<sup>4</sup> Report of Kottar Diocese Force, Bishop's House, Nagercoil, 2002, p. 40.

Xavier Adimai from Mulagumoodu, Mr. Amalraj from Venkode, Mr. Christober from Pallam, Mr. Javis from Nullivai, Mrs. Gracy from Manaligarai, Mr. Raja Titus from Palavilai, Mr. Bright from Thrithuvapuram Mrs. Selvi from Palliyadi, Mrs. Birgith from Vavarai, Mrs. Kanmani from Elanthavilai, Mrs. Padmini from Perumankuzhi, Mrs. Sisily from Munchirai, Mrs. Hilda from Thadicarakonam, Mr. Singh from Mangalakunttu and Mr. Augustine from Punnainagar emerged from the programmes and evaluations conducted in different times. They have appeared as 'emergent leaders' in the Basic Christian Community movement since 1990.<sup>5</sup> They are prepared to accept the fact that others may develop greater abilities than themselves. They dedicate to work in teams and want team members to be as equal as possible. They help people to discover ideas and solutions by themselves. He or She asks guiding questions in order to animate people to think further and deeper.

The first Basic Christian Community conference was held at Bishop's house, Nagercoil, on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1993.<sup>6</sup> It was attended by 230 lay people coming from all over the Diocese. The conference was inaugurated by the Bishop Leon Dharmaraj who, in his opening address, spoke of the importance of the role of the emergent leaders in the Basic Christian Community movement. In this context four workshops, conducted in the vicariate levels Thrithuvapuram on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1990, Mulagumoodu on 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1990, Kottar on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1990 and Colachel on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1990, gave them motivation and enthusiasm to work for Basic Christian Community.<sup>7</sup> These people, grouped at vicariate levels, are headed by vicariate coordinators. Among the emergent leaders Mr. Sathiyadas, Mr. A.X.F. Fernandes, Mr. Pious Xavier, Mrs. Selvi and Mrs. Gracy reveal themselves as the part of meaningful service to Basic Christian Community movement down the ages. Mr. D.Sathiyadas, retired Primary School Headmaster from Sahayanagar parish, came forward to Basic Christian Community ministry with his wife C.Amalapushpam in 1985.<sup>8</sup> As a Lay Minister envisioned by the teachings of Basic Christian Community, he became a disciple committed to the mission of the Kingdom of God. He worked for greater social justice to enable people to reach full

<sup>5</sup> Villayarayan. J.M., *The Diocese of Kottar. A Review of its Growth*, Part II, Nagercoil, 1956, p.24.

<sup>6</sup> Nachison. J.R., *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Co-ordination of Commissions, Kottar, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Arokiasamy, M., *The Christian Life and Ministry in the Diocese of Kottar*, Nagercoil, 1986, p. 13.

humanitarian and integral liberation and to facilitate the emergence of a new society through awareness education especially at the Basic Christian Community.<sup>9</sup> He offered spiritual inspiration and moral support to those involved in this cause of justice, while visiting Basic Christian Community meetings. In general, he facilitated the growth and spread of Basic Communities in the villages of Colachel, Kottilpadu, Muttam, Mulavilai, Mangalakunttu, Mathiravilai, Konnakuzhivilai, Konamcadu and Midalakadu from 1986 to 1996.<sup>10</sup> Mr. A. X. F. Fernandes, a Lay Minister from a coastal village Rajakkamangalam thurai, is a forgotten hero who contributed his time and energy to the growth of Basic Christian Community from 1990 to 1995.<sup>11</sup> He made visits to many interior villages and gave talks in the community meetings.

As the president of Basic Christian Community movement, he rendered his service to parish, zonal, vicariate and Diocesan executive co-ordinations. In the conferences, he spoke of the urgent need of social development through the Basic Christian Community. He provided educational support, medical aid, help for poor women, etc. Mr. M. Pious Xavier, a volunteer in the Basic Christian Community movement from Madathattuvilai parish, served for the establishment of Basic Christian Community till 2000 after his retirement in Government Cooperative Society.<sup>12</sup> With the wider framework of his relationship with society and people at large, he deepened his relationship with priests, Basic Christian Community leaders and executive members enjoyed communion with Basic Christian Community. Given the place and role of the volunteer in the life and mission of Basic Christian Community, Mr. Pious Xavier coordinated various ministries of the Church. Mrs. S. Selvi, who is a teacher, has been offering her voluntary service to the growth and development of Basic Christian Community in Mulagumoodu vicariate since 2001.<sup>13</sup> With an initiation of Br. Jesudasan trained catechist, she came forward to the Basic Christian Community ministry. In identification and solidarity, she is one with the people, sharing everything in their life.

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>10</sup> Agniswami. T.R., *The Shrine of St. Francis Xavier at Kottar*, Nagercoil, 1952, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Report of Kottar Diocese Force, Bishop's House, Nagercoil, 2002, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> A Hand of Book of Basic Christian Communities, Kottar Diocese Nagercoil, 2006, p.30

<sup>13</sup> Ponnumuthan, S., 'A Search for Basic Christian Community Spirituality', in *Vaiharai*, Thrichirapalli, 2002, p. 22.

Efforts made for social development of all people in Basic Christian Community are her main works. She gives out a number of teachings and instructions, the central point of which is that she has come for gathering people as communities.<sup>14</sup> People enjoy serving through the communities where God is alive. Mrs. T. R. Maria Gracy, who is working in the store of Carmel School at Manaligarai, is recognized as a volunteer in the Basic Christian Community movement since 2005.<sup>15</sup> She has evinced special interest in meeting people in Basic Christian Community. She has the responsibility to assist in the welfare programmes conducted by the Basic Christian Community commission in different zones.<sup>16</sup> As she is the secretary of the Diocesan Executive Committee, Mrs. Gracy motivated in the meetings that the status of Basic Christian Community in the parish level should be evaluated by the full – timers under three headings: a) training programmes, b) formation for conducting meetings, and c) action plan. The voluntary initiative on the part of Mrs. Gracy has an opportunity to be acquired with the Basic Christian Community formation too. Mr. Raja Titus came to Basic Christian Community from Palavilai Basic Christian Community coordination in search of work. He found a job as a full-timer with Thrithuvapuram vicariate in 2005. In 2000 he worked in an ingenious way for the growth of Basic Christian Community in Thrithuvapuram zone.<sup>17</sup> He has a vision of social change for the country. He wishes to foster the development of Basic Christian Community through seminars and conferences conducted in zones and vicariates. The vision for tomorrow – a vision of a more equitable, humane, productive and peaceful world – is to be found in his speeches. Mr. Bright, working as a school clerk, came to Basic Christian Community as the president of Thrithuvapuram vicariate in 2004.<sup>18</sup> He was a true seeker of God in Basic Christian Community.

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<sup>14</sup> Narchison, J. R., *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Directory of the Diocese of Kottar*, 1993, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Halloram.J.O., *Small Christian Communities*, Bangalore, 1997, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Hand Book of Basic Christian Community, Nagercoil, 2006, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Narchison. J.R., *op.cit.*, pp.41-42.