

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) Involvement and Its Relation to the Spiritual Growth of the Filipino Urban Youth

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Abstract

This research endeavors to describe the involvement of a selected group of Catholic Filipino youth in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) and how such involvement contributes to their spiritual growth. The BEC has been integrated by some of the parishes in Metro Manila Area in their respective systems to mobilize manpower and enhance people involvement through the grassroot-level of evangelization. Utilizing the purposive sampling method, the researcher worked with the youth of Sagrada Familia Parish (Caloocan City), Sta. Quiteria Parish (Novaliches City) and San Jose Agudo Parish (Quezon City).

Youth involvement was measured based on the length of membership in the BEC. Indicators of spiritual growth were incorporated in the survey questionnaires, with subscales on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The researcher-made instrument was content-validated by an expert in the BEC. It was also pre-tested and shown to have a correlation coefficient of 0.824.

Results of the survey indicate that involvement of the youth in BEC has a weak correlation to their spiritual growth. Benefits gained from community involvement, areas for improvement, and recommendations were threshed out in a Focus Group Discussion conducted for the three (3) represented communities.

Key Words: Youth involvement, Spiritual growth, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Metro Manila parishes

Research Focus: To present a relationship between involvement of the youth in Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) vis-à-vis their spiritual growth

Introduction

Sandra Schneiders' (1986) broadly defines spirituality as "a process of striving to integrate one's life in terms of self-transcendence toward the ultimate or highest value one perceives" ("Theology and Spirituality,

Rival or Partners," *Horizons*, as cited in De Guzman, 2012). In other words, spirituality is a process in which a person seeks to be holy through the path of wholeness, integration, or being fully human.

Focusing on Filipinos' brand of spirituality, in particular, Gaspar (2010) defines spirituality as essentially the pursuit of a path to holiness, or in the vernacular, "*landas ng pagpapakabanal (dalan sa pagkabalaan)*." Among the twelve purposes of Filipino spirituality that he outlined, nine apply to the youth, namely,

- contextualizes the legacy within family and kinship ties
- accepts our specific way of coping with tensions and insecurities through humor, creativity, food and hospitality
- revisits the folk wisdom of the Indigenous Peoples and grassroots groups
- deals with the shared identity (*kapwa*) of both human and nature beings
- encourages us to live our lives characterized by integrity and compassion vis-à-vis following God's will
- engages in actions that liberate the poor
- works towards all kinds of transformation (personal to societal, gender to class, culture to faith traditions, as well as the cosmic)
- facilitates dialogue and enhances a sense of forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict transformation
- promotes a mystical relationship with the Divine by a sustained prayer life, contemplation and silence towards a deepened relationship with God

Evolving from 'Third World' realities, Filipino spirituality is a spirituality that is highly attuned to the experience of poverty, at least the material or economic kind. Filipino spirituality naturally resonates with the Christian conception of poverty because of the following: the Catholic social teaching about the church being a "Church of the Poor," the concept of *kenosis* or the self-emptying of Christ, the Biblical examples of Christ himself "in his poverty and in his care for the poor." the often-heard emphasis on the poor or "preferential option for the poor," and the vision of the *anawim* as a people who are "both materially poor and poor in spirit." These are all concepts in which Filipinos who are mostly materially poor yet spiritually inclined will feel most at home. (Picardal, n.d.)

It is within this Catholic purview that the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) have been established in Third World countries, such as the Philippines. Gustavo Gutierrez (1988), in the preface to his book, *A Theology of Liberation: 15th Anniversary Edition* (as cited in Picardal, n.d.), regards the BECs as being "a

manifestation of the Church of the poor,” but it should be clarified that this view of poverty and “the poor” is far from the Marxist concept of the poor as limited to the working class (proletariat), a sector in perpetual animosity with the ruling class (bourgeoisie). Despite its emphasis on the desire to lift poor people out of their abject existence, “the Church of the Poor does not mean a Church made up exclusively of the materially poor and that excludes the rich” (2nd Plenary Council of the Philippines, 124, p. 48, as cited in Picardal, n.d.).

This “preferential option for the poor,” nonetheless, is understood as one having a target subject (the poor) and an audience to which the appeal to help is made (pastors, leaders, and the middle and upper classes). This is a view of the Church of the Poor “from above.” Needless to say, there is a corresponding view of the Church of the Poor “from below,” i.e., from the perspective of poor people themselves: “the idea that the poor are not only evangelized but they themselves become evangelizers” together with “the idea of the active participation of the poor in the life and mission of the Church.” Ultimately, this vision of the Church of the Poor, in PCP II’s view, “can be actualized in BECs” (*PCP II*, 137, p. 52). (as cited in Picardal, n.d.)

One major attribute of the spirituality of the Church of the Poor is its being ecclesial or communitarian, meaning being mainly “a community of disciples that live in communion and that participates in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and kingly/servant mission.” This non-individualistic form of spirituality is the one being proposed for the local church, particularly in BECs. It is a spirituality that “values fellowship, unity in diversity, solidarity, partnership, friendship and sharing.” (Picardal, n.d.)

Researching on BECs, De Guzman (2012) observes that historically speaking, the BECs are “a recent phenomenon” that was initiated by parish priests, even though it was meant to be basically “a lay-led movement.” Membership is mostly grassroots, i.e., lower-income members of the parish who gather for Bible studies and initiate masses, prayer, and faith-sharing sessions that are geared toward addressing members’ problems and the community at large.

BEC members often attest to a faith experience that goes beyond privatized practice of the faith (*pang-sarili lang*) and ecclesiasticalized practice (*pang-simbahan lang*). From a view of self as lacking in power, dignity, independence/freedom, virtue/wisdom, and joy, they report revelations, i.e., a positive view of self in

terms of dignity, freedom from vices/sin, stroth family relationship, and the like, as well as an improved view of their fellowmen. (De Guzman, 2012)

Consequently, members view the BECs as a place where they discover God, an omnipotent yet kind deity who is actively and personally involved in their lives. In short, BECs are seen and experienced as God's kingdom on earth. Even more importantly, they see BECs as the place where members are inspired to involve themselves in the larger society where they belong, as they realize how personal and social problems are interconnected and thus necessitate a wholistic view. (De Guzman, 2012)

They connect these changes to their new discoveries of God. They declare a God who is compassionate, "incarnated among us," "accompanies us everyday," a personal friend, a guide, generous, forgiving, and present in "our struggle for justice and freedom." Moreover, while they view God as a God who is for all, rich and poor, he helps the oppressed the most and acts on every situation, and He is one who is experienced, a source of strength, and someone who loves equally, even those who have sinned. God's kingdom, they say, is experienced in the present life whenever there is love, hope, compassion, mutual support, justice and peace. The human being, although weak and sinful, can change his/her life because of the love of God, who wills nothing less than his/her total salvation. They believe that God cares for them and takes sides with them to change the situation in life and in the larger society. BEC members say that they have a responsibility to work with God to remove any oppressive situation; they must be involved in the affairs of the community and the larger society, especially on behalf of the poor and those victimized by injustice. (De Guzman, 2012)

The BECs are seeing more and more that the problems they are facing are interrelated and thus, must be looked at as a whole. They point to the structures of society as key factors that bring about a social order, which they perceive as characterized by chaos and inequities. "One may say that the BECs' sense of holiness is deeply personal yet social," De Guzman (2012) concludes.

Currently, there is a dearth of studies on spirituality among Filipino youth involved in the BECs, particularly in Metro Manila. This paper attempts to make a contribution in this area by providing an overview of the behavior, issues, and concerns of Catholic youth as they immerse themselves in communal activities in

their respective parish churches. Moreover, the information gathered from this study can serve as a feedback mechanism as to how BECs among the youth groups are handled. This will also determine the level of influence of institutionalized religion on the human/spiritual formation of the youth. Lastly, how a Christian community as a social construct contributes to the development of humanness of the Filipino youth is substantiated.

Method

The involvement of the youth in BEC communities as well as their spiritual growth in such communal experience was captured through the use of a descriptive research design. Survey questionnaires were constructed to measure the participants' spiritual growth as translated in thought, feeling, and behavioral dimensions. The English form of the questionnaire was read and content-validated by a professor at St. Vincent School of Theology, an expert in the study and practice of BECs. Since the participants are Filipinos, the researcher requested a Filipino professor/linguist to translate the contents of the survey questionnaire into the native tongue.

Participants of the study include the youth who have been actively involved in the BECs for at least one year. Their ages ranged from 13 to 25. There was an attempt to gather more information from as many parishes in the Metro Manila area, but out of the five parishes, only those from three parishes were able to participate in the study: Sagrada Familia Parish (Caloocan City), Sta. Quiteria Parish (Novaliches City) and San Jose Agudo Parish (Quezon City). One parish that was excluded had BEC for adult community only, and the other parish had BEC youth but had conflict of time when they were scheduled for the survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

The three FGD groups were preselected by the respective leaders of the parishes. Five persons composed a group for the two parishes, except for one parish which only had four, but possessed the communication skills (i.e., being spontaneous and comfortable using Filipino) and personal qualities (e.g., open,

trusting and sincere) to participate in the FGD. They were notified on the use of a recorder during the group session and other research considerations.

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationship between the years of involvement of the youth in BEC and their spiritual growth. Field notes from the three FGDs were content-analyzed. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to form a holistic interpretation of the study.

This study was influenced by some of the rigors in the research framework conceptualized by Talisayon (2005). It followed logical-positivistic rules of empirical validity through the data gathered in the survey questionnaires. Furthermore, it was reflective-interactive, as the researcher observed the guidelines of a phenomenological research, since she herself participated in that human experience (FGD, Core group member that organized the BEC at Sagrada Familia Parish, and Observer in some prayer-group sessions) she sought to understand and interacted fully with the group of Filipino youth she is studying.

According to Talisayon (2005), transpersonal experiences are not necessarily extraordinary, special or even paranormal. Some examples of experiences that are quite common but could be transpersonal are: (1) occasions when one is so absorbed in doing something that one “forgets himself” such as listening to music, community service, artistic work like dancing or singing, contemplative prayer, trance-like chanting, etc.; (2) life transforming experiences triggered by extreme crisis, joy or pain; (3) extraordinary or superhuman feats during times of emergency; (4) peak experiences such as near-death experience, miraculous healing, ecstatic vision that substantively change one’s character, attitude or life-course; (5) metanoia or conversion experience; (6) discernment, intuition or sensing of spiritual cues.

Instruments

Inspired by the *Handbook on spiritual growth: A guide for Catholics* (Romain, 1993), the researcher constructed an instrument that was locally adapted and tailored-fit to the psyche of the youth. For content-

validity, consultation with and approval of the expert in the ideology and practice of the BECs were done. The 18-item tool was pilot-tested for Cronbach's alpha reliability, and it showed a high correlation coefficient of 0.824.

Subscales on thoughts, feelings, and behavior were equally and randomly assigned, with 6 items for each subscale.

Questions on thoughts included the extent of being self-critical; being critical of others; having anxious preoccupations about the future and about one's needs; self-concept as being inferior or superior to others; constantly comparing oneself to others if one is "ahead" or "behind" others in some area of his/her life; and having the tendency to view God as judgmental, such that one has to do the right things to win God's approval.

Regarding feelings, the following were asked as to: the extent of how one is in touch with himself/herself than with what God wants for his/her life; how frequent one feels numb, empty, or cranky within; how afraid to discover what is really going on deep inside oneself and how he/she tries to avoid this by living on a more superficial level; how one can be self-reliant without God; if one would be happier, how he/she could better control the people and external circumstances in his/her life; having a hard time separating what one does from one's identity, i.e., feeling personally put down when someone criticizes the way he/she does something.

Dimensions on behavior were looked into, with a focus on the extent of how one spends more time asking God to do what he/she wants than praying for the grace to do what God wants; when one feels down, he/she frequently turns to certain activities, e.g., smoking, drinking, sex, shopping, work, gambling, eating, etc., so the he/she will feel better; how one sometimes lies about his/her involvement in this behavior; how one's behavior causes problems for him/her, whether it is physical, relational, or whatever is the nature of the distress; how one has tried to stop a maladaptive behavior/vice, but he/she inevitably goes back to it; how one becomes defensive when others confront him/her about his/her behavior.

Findings

Table 1: A Demographic Profile of BEC Youth Participants

Pax #	Parish A Kawan	Years of Involve ment	Pax #	Parish B Area	Years of Involve ment	Pax #	Parish C Barangay	Years of Involve ment
1	San Bartolome	3	15	Area 7	3	33	Barangay 137	2
2	San Bartolome	3	16	Area 8	2	34	Barangay 130	2
3	San Bartolome	3	17	Area 7	1	35	Barangay 131	2
4	San Bartolome	4	18	Libis Chapel	1	36	Barangay 130	2
5	San Bartolome	1	19	Area 8	2	37	Barangay 130	1
6	San Simon	3	20	Area 5	1	38	Barangay 130	2
7	Ina ng Laging Saklolo	7	21	Area 4	1	39	Barangay 130	1
8	San Bartolome	4	22	Del Rey Chapel	4	40	Barangay 131	1
9	San Simon	2	23	Del Rey Chapel	4	41	Barangay 130	2
10	San Simon	2	24	Del Rey Chapel	3	42	Barangay 126	1
11	San Felipe	5	25	Del Rey Chapel	3	43	Barangay 130	1
12	Ina ng Laging Saklolo	5	26	Libis Chapel	3	44	Barangay 131	1
13	Ina ng Laging Saklolo	8	27	Area 8	2	45	Barangay 129	2
14	Ina ng Laging Saklolo	3	28	Libis Chapel	1			
			29	Area 6	1			
			30	Area 6	1			
			31	Libis Chapel	1			
			32	Area 5	5			

Legend:

Parish A - Sagrada Familia Parish; Parish B - Sta. Quiteria Parish; Parish C - San Jose Agudo Parish

Sagrada Familia Parish- BEC otherwise known as Mumunting Kapitbahayang Kristiyano (MKK) started in 1990. Every MKK is named after saints and evangelists. It is composed of 5 areas, namely: Area 1 (San Santiago, St. Jude, San Juan, San Bartolome); Area 2 (Santo Tomas, San Simon, San Jose, Ina ng Laging Saklolo); Area 3 (San Pablo, San Matias, San Felipe); Area 4 (San Andres, Jesus Nazareno, Nuestra Senora de Gracia) and Area 5 (San Pedro, San Mateo, San Lorenzo Ruiz). Prayer meetings are held separately for the adults and the youth.

Sta. Queteria Parish- Small communities are assigned specific areas or chapels. There are 9 areas and 4 chapels. BEC started in 2005. Adults and youth used to be members of the same area or group. However, since the youth were inhibited to open up during the sharing part of the prayer meeting, eventually, the youth formed their own groups that evolved from the mandated organizations, e.g., choir, altar boys, where they are actively involved.

San Jose Agudo Parish – BEC started in 2014. Small communities are named after the barangay where the parishioners belong. The members of BEC started as active members of the choir, altar boys or volunteer catechists. Some are recipients of the scholarship program of the parish. Drawn to

participate in creative activities of the parish, these young people continue to serve and participate in the mandated organizations and simultaneously involve in BEC activities such as Bibliarasal and prayer meetings.

Parish	Variables	Thought	Emotion	Behavior	Overall	Remarks
	Mean Score	4.5714	4.9643	4.3095	4.6151	
A	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r)	-0.1188	-0.2529	- 0.2770	-0.3311	Not significant at $\alpha = 0.05$
	Mean Score	4.3241	4.8704	4.0278	4.4074	
B	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r)	0.1893	0.1267	0.1975	0.2095	Not significant at $\alpha = 0.05$
	Mean Score	4.1410	4.9614	4.2051	4.4359	
C	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r)	-0.4658	0.1349	0.0754	-0.2006	Not significant at $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 2:
Correlation between the Youth's Involvement in BEC and Spiritual Growth

Legend:

- 1 – very high level of spirituality
- 2 – high level of spirituality
- 3 – moderately high level of spirituality
- 4 – moderately low level of spirituality
- 5 – low level of spirituality
- 6 – very low level of spirituality

Based on the tabulated values of the mean spirituality scores of the respondents from the three (3) parishes, it shows that the respondents have **spirituality levels ranging from moderately low to low (around 4)**.

Based on the tabulated values of “r”, Pearson’s correlation coefficient, (see Over-all column) there is a **low correlation** (0.2 to 0.3) existing between the length of membership of the respondents in the BEC and their spirituality level. The negative sign of “r” in parishes A and C shows that the spirituality level of the respondents is inversely related to length of stay in the BEC. The longer they stay in the BEC, the lower their spirituality becomes. The opposite is true for respondents in Parish B. However, in both cases, the computed correlation coefficients are not significant, meaning there is no correlation between a person’s level of spirituality and his being a member of BEC.

Table 3: Summary of Focused Group Discussion

<i>Meaning Units</i>	<i>Number of participants who reflected the theme</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Benefits Earned		Theme 1: BEC as an instrument for personal growth
-self-confidence developed	(2)	
-idle time turned into meaningful moments/productivity	(2)	
-sense of belonging	(3)	
-youth acknowledged in their parish involvement	(1)	
-experience of catharsis/talk-out	(1)	
-venue for self-discovery	(1)	
-self-transformation	(1)	
Other Gains/Contributions		Theme 2: BEC as a venue for Social development Spiritual Nourishment
-vicarious learning	(1)	
-no more fear and hesitation dealing with the elders	(1)	
-awareness of God's goodness	(1)	
-prayer as a source of strength	(2)	
-God's presence felt despite the recurrent family problems	(1)	
-the grace of forgiveness	(1)	
Demands and Challenges Faced by the Youth		Theme 3: BEC as a struggling community
-time management in terms of work and service	(1)	
-lack of commitment	(1)	
-peer group influence	(4)	
-lack of group facilitating skills	(1)	
-the lure of technology and social networking	(1)	
-no continuity in activities that sustain the interest	(1)	

Theme 4: BEC as an evolving community

Suggestions and Recommendations

- family involvement in the parish (1)
- purposeful activities for the youth (1)
- youth given voice in the plans of the Church (1)
- motivating children and grooming them to be
2nd liners in the formation program for the youth (2)
- continuous study on faith coupled with
varied approaches on the transfer of learning (1)
- inspiring and touching experiences during the
Feast headed by Bo Sanchez and company (1)
- passion/enthusiasm for leading the group (1)
- deep spirituality (1)
- different approach for facilitating youth groups (2)
- leaders as role models (2)
- enthusiastic, warm, dedicated and
personal invitation of BEC leaders to their
members (1)
- effective group facilitating skills (3)
- sustenance of motivating activities for the youth (3)
- paying forward through service in the Church (1)
- giving chances to other members
to develop leadership (1)
- switching youth-cluster assignments to have
varied learnings from different groups (1)
- cooperation of the laity with the parish priest (1)

Discussion

Youth involvement was measured based on the length of membership in the BEC. Indicators of spiritual growth were incorporated in the survey questionnaires, with subscales on thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The researcher-made instrument was content-validated by an expert in BEC. It was also pre-tested, with results showing a correlation coefficient of 0.824.

It should be noted that the inferential statistics applied in this study has no capability to generalize due to its failure to achieve a probability sampling. While the data yield a strong internal validity, its generalizability is low because findings are limited only to the three participating communities.

Results of the survey indicate that involvement of the youth in BEC has a weak correlation to their spiritual growth. Benefits gained from community involvement, areas for improvement, and recommendations were threshed out in the focus group discussion conducted for the three (3) represented communities. Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) and Mumunting Kapitbahayanang Kristiyano (MKK) are interchangeably used because they mean the same thing.

Strengths and Contributions of BECs to the Youth Groups

Results of the survey show that there is no correlation between the person's level of spirituality and his involvement in Basic Ecclesial Communities. This implies that inputs shared during the Bible reflections and sharing group sessions can contribute to spiritual nourishment. Nevertheless, how this spirituality is translated into concrete action, is a personal response of the individual that may be translated into different forms such as attendance in the meeting, participation in community outreach, or generously sharing one's talent in any Ministry or mandated organizations of the church. Chandler, Holden, and Kolander (1992) have affirmed that a clear manifestation of spirituality is an active search for something outside the self that leads to greater knowledge that further leads to one's capacity to love, perform well and persevere in life.

Concrete benefits, i.e., advantages one can gain in this communal involvement, namely vicarious learning, sense of belonging, awareness of God's goodness, venue for self-discovery, and self-transformation, were testified to by some of the participants in the following statements:

“Ate Ericka started our BEC youth. She kindly asked us to join prayer meetings. Eventually, we started forming peer groups within our BEC. At first, we didn't take these meetings seriously. We even laughed most times. However, the light-hearted talks unconsciously became serious. Slowly, all of us who were reluctant became more comfortable in sharing our problems. Hence, we are more organized now. It's normal for people to be shy at the beginning, especially when sharing.” (*Nagstart po ito, yung youth po namin, si Ate Ericka. Niyaya niya po kami magprayer meeting, tapos ayon, umpisa po barkada, mga kaibigan po doon sa lugar*

namin, na-ano kami, sumama kami, ayon. May mga biro-biro sa umpisa, may mga kulitan, may mga ano, di namin sineseryoso. May mga mga tawanan pa. Yung mga sharing namin pabiro, pero ano, di namin namamalayan unti-unti kami nababago. Tapos may mga umpisa, siguro nahihiya, hindi nagshe-share, dinadaan sa biro, pero habang pinagpapatuloy ang MKK namin, ayon, unti-unti naman nila nasasabi kung ano yung mga naging problema, saka nagiging organized na po. Siempre sa umpisa, may mga nahihiya diyan, may mga hindi magshe-share, kaya ayon po. SFP.)

“I’ve been a part of the BEC for one year. When I started to join AYL, and a lot of youth were present and it was around that time we started the BEC. Also, my friends in BEC made a difference in my role as a BEC member. The greatest change that happened to us was being enlightened and inspired to know God more. Also, I felt God’s presence in my life despite the problems that would come my way. I know that he’s there to guide me regardless of the difficulties.” *(Ako po ano, bale one year na po ako nagbi-BEC. Simula po nung sumali ako sa AYL (?), tapos nagkaroon ng maraming youth, dun po kami nag-start mag-BEC. Yung malaking pagbabago po sa akin, nagkaroon kami ng isip kasi mas nakilala ko si God and, at the same time, kahit na may problema ako, alam ko na laging andyan sa ’kin si God. Alam ko na binabantayan Niya ako kahit anong problema man yun. Tapos kahit saan man, andoon yung mga kaibigan na nasa BEC ngayon kaya malaki po ang pagbabago na makasama sa BEC. SQP)*

“Although I wouldn’t receive any scholarships from BEC, I still had a strong inclination to join because I really wanted to serve God. I was inspired to stay here since I was learning a lot of things, while gaining new friends. The BEC has become my heaven because I feel comfortable in sharing my problems and sentiments. I am very happy to be here. This is my comfort zone.” *(Yung hatak po sa ’kin ng BEC, kahit naman po wala akong matanggap (scholarship), nagseserve pa rin ako dahil para po sa Kanya, hindi na po dahil sa sinasabi ng iba. Nahikayat po ako kasi ang dami ko na pong naging kabigan dito, ang dami ko na pong natutunan. Dito po nakakapaglabas na ako ng mga nararamdaman ko, ng mga problema, nakahanap po ako ng parang heaven po. Parang pagdating dito, masaya ako pag andito ako. Comfort zone po. SJP)*

“I joined the BEC around the same time I joined the SMW during 2009. I was with the elders when I started. Before joining, I didn’t have any concern towards other people. I prioritized myself above everything. I was very self-centered. However, in MKK you learn to listen to other people when they share. Through MKK, I was once full of pride but I learned to be humble. Also, I didn’t interact with people that much.” *(Nagstart po ako nung nagstart din po ako sa SMW e, so mga year 2009, ganun po, tapos nagstart ako sa mga matatanda. Sila po yung mga kasama ko, yung KPC po namin. Nagbago sa ’kin dati kasi wala akong pakialam sa mga nangyayari sa iba. Talagang yung sa ’kin lang yung ganun, walang yon yung talagang natutunan ko sa MKK*

kasi kailangan mong makinig doon sa nagsasalita, sa nagshe-share. Tapos po ayon, mapride po akong tao, tapos doon ko naworkout yung pagiging kailangan mong ibaba yung sarili mo, parang ganun. Doon ko natutunan – yun yung nabago sa 'kin. Tapos di po ako masyado nakikisalamuha. SFP)

“If I didn’t join BEC, maybe I would be married. I actually have suicidal tendencies. Until now, I still don’t know why He accepted me. Through the BECs, I realized that Christ doesn’t want us to leave. Even the gospel last time stated that, “nothing can separate us from Him”. If ever you feel like you’re lost, the Lord will be there to guide you. God sent Jesus to us as an instrument to find our way back to Him.” *(Sabi ko nga ano, sabi ko nga sa kanya, siguro kung di ako pumasok diyan, siguro may asawa na ko. Meron po kasi akong suicidal tendency, may ganun po ako. Siguro ngayon di ko alam kung bakit niyo pa ako inako sabi ko dahil hindi niya maintindihan inaano niya na baliwala naman yan e parang sa sarili mo lang. Kaya sobrang nakikita ko po na ayaw ni Kristo na talagang mawala ka e, kaya nga po yung Gospel po last time ‘walang bagay na makapaghihiwalay sa kanya.’ Naliligaw ka ng landas? Andyan siya para i-guide kayo. Bumabalik man doon, parang si Christ din ang gagawa ng way para po actually bali yung nagsend, si Kuya naging instrument din siya ni God e. SFP)*

“My friends from BEC are very supportive. If they feel that I have a lot of problems, they will never fail to ask me how I am doing. I think they became more supportive since they always read Bible verses. However, there are friends outside BEC who (I feel) are only there when they need something. Hence, I feel more at ease with BEC.” *(Yung BEC po na kaibigan ko po, sobrang supportive po nila sa akin. Pag alam po nila na ganito ako, maraming problema, sasabihin nila, ‘Oh, anong nangyari sa ‘yo?’ ganoon. Ganoon po sila palagi. Supportive kasi nagbibigay sila lagi ng verse sa Bible. Pero yung sa iba ko pong kaibigan, wala lang, nararamdaman ko lang po sila pag may kailangan sila. Kaya mas okay po ako sa BEC. SQP)*

“The Lord gave me the talents such as singing and dancng. These talents aren’t put to waste since I am able to share it here. I am a choir member and also, I dance if they require me to do so. Through this, I feel a sense of purpose because the Lord gave me these talents to serve other people.” *(Yung talent na binigay ni Lord sa akin na sing and dance, napapakinabangan ko siya through pag-serve dito. Kasi bilang choir and then pag kailangan sa mga BEC, yung mga kailangan ng mga sasayaw, kailangan ng mga magtuturo, napapakinabangan ko. Alam ko naman kasi na binigay ni Lord yung talent na to para may paggamitan. SJP)*

The idle time turned into meaningful and productive moments, was disclosed by two participants:

“Before, when I wasn’t still involved yet in BEC, I used to be idle in our house and what I usually did was to stroll around without limit. Wherever and whoever is possible to go and to be with, I made it possible, just to get rid of my boredom. But the moment I got involved in the church thus, as when BEC was introduced to me, I have become active because of the formation being held every night. As a youth, we are assigned to do dramatization, so regular practice is practically needed. Therefore, my idle time has been used for the constant practice in the presentation related to formation. Moreover, our constant togetherness with each other brings us closer to each other since we do the drama every night.” *(Noong dati po kasi, nung hindi pa ako nagbi-BEC, kapagka walang ginagawa sa bahay, ang ginagawa ko gala, as in gala po talaga. Kung saan po pwedeng pumunta, kasi bored po ako sa bahay, kasi may mga pasok din po. Nung nainvolve po ako dito sa simbahan, dito sa BEC, kasi po nagkaroon po kami ng formation every night. Bilang youth ina-assign po kami na magdramatize. Dun po kami, siyempre paghahandaan po namin yun. Yung oras na nabobored ako, nagiging oras ng practice namin para magpresent sa formation namin. Mas naaano yung pagsasama naming youth dito, kasi ilang gabi po yun na iba-ibang drama yung ginagawa namin. SJP)*

“Like what he said, before BEC, I was a person who always wanted to go outside and be with my friends. My free time was wasted doing just those things. When I started to join BEC, my friends weren’t okay with it at first. However, eventually I explained to them the BEC and they were proud of me. Soon after, I started to ask them to join because I was really happy being a BEC member. Through the BEC, I get exposed to different programs while having a chance to bond with a youth and form new friendships.” *(Simula din po nung pumasok ako dito sa simbahan, naging parte ng BEC. Tulad din po ng sinabi niya, nung hindi pa po ako naiinvolve dito, laging gala o kaya tambay sa mga kaibigan. Parang yung mga free time ko po, nasasayang lang po sa mga ganoong bagay. Simula po nung pumasok ako dito, although yung mga kaiigan ko po nun, medyo nagtatampo po sila. Nung mas nagtagal na po ako, at naexplain ko na po sa kanila, natutuwa po sila. Sabi nila ganito na daw po ako ganyan. Tapos inaaya ko na din po sila. Tsaka sobrang naging masaya po ako nung naging part ako ng BEC. May iba-ibang formation, tas may iba-ibang program na napupuntahan, nasasamahan. Nagkakaroon ng bonding yung mga youth. Mas marami pong nakikilala. SJP)*

“Currently, I’m on my 3rd year and 3rd month actively joining BEC. There’s a difference being a member of BEC than before when I was only a child that I don’t even know what I am getting into like simply doing Bible study and praying the rosary. All of those activities did not make me a better person because I was doing all those things very shallow and no depth at all. Now that I am an active member of BEC, it changed me a lot and even made me a sensitive, compassionate, and responsible person. Like for example, I already know how to give special regard to other persons in a selfless way. I also became a mindful and broad-minded

person.” (*Ako po 3 years and 3 months na rin, magti-three months na rin sa BEC. At sa akin po siguro, may pagkakaiba kasi po as bata dati, ngayon nagiging teenager na. Kasi yung ano naming parang wala lang, punta dito pag nagba-Bible study, kasi mahilig po kaming pumunta dito sa Bible study, sharing-sharing simula pa nung bata pa tas magrrosaryo. Noong times na yun, parang binabalewala lang, parang syempre pag ganyan, ‘Ay may pagkain dun, punta tayo.’ Ganoon po talaga kami nung bata, pero po ngayon, siyempre, iisipin mo na dapat ganyan ganyan. Ang iisipin mo ay yung matutulong mo sa kanila, ano yung mabibigay mo, hindi yung ibibigay nila sa inyo. Ang pagkakaiba nun ano, mas naging attentive ako sa mga bagay-bagay, mas naging bukas yung isip ko, naging mas malaki yung pagiiisip ko sa mga bagay-bagay. SQP*)

The sense of purpose or the so-called search for meaning in human existence was recognized as fundamental to spirituality (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Elkins, et al., 1998; and Lindsay, 2002). Similarly, such sense of direction or purpose is a component of resilience which is parallel to the spiritual dimension of meaning in life

It may be inferred that the belief system of the youth evolved from hesitation to the optimism that they are taken care of and appreciated in their efforts by the seniors in the community. As Benard (1995) and Rayner and Montague (1999) in their studies suggested, a certain belief system guides the youth to believe that they are taken care of constantly by a loving presence which requires hope and optimism as well. The fear that was overcome and the encouragement given by the elders were shared by the following participants:

“When I started joining the BEC, if before, I was a shy and timid person, especially with the elders, now not anymore. I can already speak out what I want to say, and I have gained self-confidence that I could be able to talk without getting nervous. Eventually, my relationship with my friends has become deeper and deeper.” (*Dati po kasi, kapag free time, maghapon po kami sa bahay nung kaibigan, tambay, nanunuod lang po ng kung ano-ano. Simula po nung sumali ako sa BEC, kung dati po nahihya ako na makipagusap sa ibang tao, lalo na sa mga matatanda, parang nahihya po ako na may masabi. Pero nung nagstart po yung BEC dito sa simbahan, mayroon pong mga formation na bawat barangay may itatanong. Tapos dun po nagkakaroon ng pagkakaisa sa sagot. Kaya parang nawala po yung kaba, tapos mas lumawak yung pagkakaibigan po namin. SJP*)

“They’re more than just like my family; in fact, I am able to share my feelings with them especially with the elders like Sis. Ruby and Sis. Rose. These elders have taught me a lot by giving me pieces of advice which I do not receive from my father.” (*Actually, parang ano, mas nakakapagshare po ako dun sa MKK. Yung mga matatanda po, sila Sis. Ruby, Sis. Rose, yung mga ano po namin. Tapos ayon, nabibigyan ako ng advice na hindi ko narereceive dun sa father ko. Yun po yung sa akin. SFP*)

“One thing, my confidence was also developed because of my exposure in BEC. I was also a shy person before, especially in front of the elders because I know they are full of wisdom and knowledge, and that I could hardly tell them what I wanted and give my opinion and suggestions. But now, no more. I’m a changed person. The activities in the BEC every night help me build my confidence, and one good thing that happened is that we youth members can freely mingle with elders now without fear and hesitation. We are already comfortable with each other doing those formation activities every night.” *(Ako po, nakadalawang taon na po ako. Dati palang, medyo malapit na ako sa Kanya, kay Jesus, sa church. Tapos nung BEC na, mas lalo pang napalawig, kasi dati may times na nagda-doubt pa rin ako. Simula nun, parang naging way of life na siya eh. Kasi gabi-gabi, yung tuloy tuloy, yun yung grabe eh. Kasi yung mga activities, mayroon siyang agenda na dapat makuha at every night, nagagawa namin siya. Isa pa, katulad din nung kanya, yung sa confidence. Kasi talagang mahiyain ako, nahihiya ako dun sa mga elders na may mga alam sila, nahihirapan ako mag-suggest. Pero habang tumatagal yung panahon, nasasanay ako sa kanila, na pwede pala, pwede akong magsalita, pwede akong mag-suggest kung tama. Nadagdagan yung confidence ko. Pag sinabi kasing youth, parang ang hirap isama sa mga elders kasi yung ideas iba eh, hindi tugma. Pero sa mga activities na nagawa naming yung every night na formation, nagkaisa yung youth saka yung mga elders. SJP)*

“There were people who gave me advice, the KPC (Kawan Pastoral Council). They really helped me at times of self-doubt. They would always reassure me that I can do my tasks. The KPC gave me the extra push and confidence to believe in myself. I would always say that if we weren’t participative in the church activities, we would be nowhere.” Note: KPC is a group of leaders within the Kawan or cell unit, representing different Ministries of the Parish (Worship, Education, Temporalities, Youth, Family Life, Public and Political Affairs, Research and Documentation). *(May mga nagaadvise din sa 'kin, yan yung mga KPC (Kawan Pastoral Council). Sobrang nakakatulong talaga sila, kasi sila yung nagsasabi sa 'kin na 'Ate di ko kaya to,' ganito, ganyan, sabi nila 'Hindi. Kaya mo yan!' Parang sila po yung nagpupush sa 'kin, nagbibigay sa 'kin ng confidence na kaya kong gawin yon, so siguro nga katulad nga nun, lagi kong sinasabi na siguro kung di tayo active sa simbahan, ano tayo ngayon? SFP)*

The Struggles and Challenges Faced by the BEC Youth Groups

Psychological bonding is, indeed, a very crucial aspect of self-anchoring. Involvement in BEC affirms how the sense of belonging among the youth becomes a source of psychological bonding, an aspect of self-anchoring. If the nuclear family is absent, a formal group may function as the source of self-identification and sense of bonding for the youth. In the study of Fernando (1997), the impact on adolescents as regards their

values and self-conception may be attributed to the school, the church and other established institutions.

Similarly, the Filipino college participants recognized that the family, friends, God and material things are the main sources of their security or insecurity.

Results of the study showed that there is no significant relation between the youth's involvement in BECs and their spiritual growth, manifested in their thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, and Wigfield (2002) asserted that from late childhood through adolescence, self-esteem and competence tend to decrease. This implies that it is normal for adolescents to have a self-concept that is fair to poor because they are at a developmental stage of searching for their identity.

Research participants vented out their low feelings in certain activities as follows: food trip (27); strolling around or /shopping (8); media (TV) and social networking e.g., Facebook, Wattpad, etc., computer games (5); sleeping (5); music, such as listening to or playing an instrument (4); preoccupation with work (4); drinking alcohol (3); smoking (3); “*nangungulit*” (being pesky to friends, for want of something better to do) (1).

These behaviors are reflective of what Shave and Shave (1989) observed to be “extreme mood swings”_ among adolescents. The high-level and unpredictable emotional reactivity, they explained, characterizes this stage of development, resulting in behavioral maladjustment, such as anger, depression, embarrassment, excitement and sadness. They observed further that these are typical teenage responses that are, to the outsider, often “grossly inappropriate” especially in response to even the most worthless incidents. This difficulty in fine-tuning their emotions are often triggered by emotions associated with shame (feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, and ridicule), leading to such strong ego defenses, such as projection, regression, denial and disavowal (Shave &Shave, 1989).

Indeed, other participants engaged in the following activities, with each item representing one activity: “*pag-iyak, pagdarasal, pakikipagkuwentuhan, pagbabasa, pagsusulat, at paghanap sa aking mga kaibigan.*”

Three participants did not specify their answer, while two did not answer the question: “When you feel low, by which activity do you vent out your emotion?”

Among the struggles and challenges faced by the BEC youth include laziness, work demands, the lure of media, technology and social networking, materialism, peer influence, time management as regards work and community involvement, role modeling expected from leaders, lack of commitment, attraction of other organizations because of the activities/facilitator as illustrated in the following:

“I also felt bouts of laziness, but there were people who really wanted to joining MKK, and you’re the only one they’re waiting for.” (*Nararamdaman ko rin po yung minsan tinatamad, yung ganyan, tapos yung para sa kanila, yung sila talagang gustong-gusto mag MKK, tapos ikaw na lang yung hinihintay. SFP*)

“In my case, I felt uncertain when I became a member. My work as a seaman doesn’t allow me to go regularly. There are times where I really want to serve, but I had to report to the office and leave home.” (*Sa akin po kasi, yung pagdagdag ko, parang alanganin. Sa ’kin, maging part ka ng ganito. tas bigla ka na lang aalis. Kasi sa ’kin, sa trabaho ko po kasi, diba, seaman po ako. May parang tatak na dito na ito yung mga nagawa ko, ito na yung mga gagawin ko. Tas tatawagin, report ka sa office, tas biglang alis ka na. Kahit gusto mo pa mag-serve sa ganitong araw. Yun po yung pangamba ko, yung biglaan. SQP*)

“It’s so hard in our generation to recruit new youth members because of the influence of the different technologies, and also the influence of the social media greatly affects the views and values of the individual youth. Their way of thinking focuses on the material world and that they don’t see the value of spiritual life. They don’t even see the beauty of being involved in church apart from the material things.” (*Kasi may mga kabataan po na, yun nga po, naliligaw ng landas kasi... di ba po mayroon po maagang nabubuntis, kasi po kapag naka-anak ka na, hindi ka na part ng youth, kasi nga po nakaanak ka na; parang ang hirap na po ngayon. Tapos, siyempre po may mga grupo rin po sila sa labas, yung mga gangster-gangster, mga ganun po kasi. Ngayon po, parang ang hirap po sa generation namin na makahanap po ng mga kabataan, kasi marami na nga pong nakaka-impluwensya sa kanila, yung social media... kaya mahirap po. Kasi parang yung ano po, yung pag-iisip po nila ngayon nakatoon lang po dito sa mundo. SJP*)

“I also worry about my work that I will not be able to balance my time between my work and God. Sometimes even on Saturdays I got work in school. There is a conflict with our schedule in Basic Ecclesial

Communities because Saturday is also our schedule for our prayer meeting.” (*Ayon, siguro ang kinatatakutan ko, na mawalan ako ng oras para makipag-usap sa mga tao ganun, makipag-usap kay God, ayon. Yung trabaho po, kung бага, gusto ko po sana mabalance ko yung trabaho na ganito sa trabaho, ganito yung kay God, yung time na to na kung minsan kasi parang hindi naiiwasan yung trabaho na Saturday kasi yung MKK namin eh. SFP*)

“The truth is that peer group is the hindrance. Every Saturday is our schedule of MKK. Day of Saturday is our bonding/get-together of peer group. They will get mad at you when you don’t hang out with them to bond as a group. Since I am a friendly person trying to please them in any way, I could hardly resist their invitation. Once in a while, I will not attend prayer meeting just to please them so that in the future by the time I have my own family maybe I’ll get serious in my life.” (*Sa akin po, sa totoo lang, yung balakid yung barkada. Pag Sabado kasi, MKK namin. Para kasi, pag Sabado, get-together/ bonding. Sila talaga yung tipong magtatampo pag di mo napagbigyan, siempre kakantyanan ka pag di ka sumama. Ayun talaga na naano ko na balakid barkada talaga. Siempre palakaibigan tayo kakantyanan ka ng kaibigan, ganun. Pero kahit papano, kunwari isang beses siguro, di ako aattend para maano ko sila, ganun. SFP*)

“It’s hard to be committed because when you get married, even meetings we’ll be hard for you to attend to. It’s either work or change of status.” (*So, yun yung sa commitment. Kasi daw pag nag-asawa ka na, kahit meeting pa, mawawala na sa ’yo. Yun ba yung sinasabi mo? Either sa trabaho o change ng status. SQP*)

“I don’t know if we’re allowed to say this, but we were once threatened by the “CALM” or the Christ Ambassadors Catholic Institute. They told us that there’s no specific parish that leads them. It’s also Catholic and it has activities like ours. We we’re really threatened because our youth might transfer to them. However, Father told us that if we are already in a certain parish, why would we choose another? I guess my fear was anchored on losing our members.” (*Na te-threaten po kami dun sa isang org na yun.... Pwede po bang sabihin?.... Yung Christ the King... “CALM.” Christ Ambassadors Catholic Institute.... Ang sabi po kasi nila, wala daw po specific na parokya ang humahawak sa kanila....Catholic po siya. Opo, ganito rin po, may mga activity rin po. Dun po kami na-threaten. Yun yung kinatatakot ko na baka maano, baka makuha lahat ng youth. Pero ngayon naman, nakiki-usap na kami talaga na ano, na parang—ang word po sa amin ni Father, kung ano, nandito ka na sa parokya mo eh, lalabas ka pa.... Yung lang naman yung kinakatakot ko, yung maubos kami. SJP*)

“....So that’s why inactive parishioners can see Christ in those who are already active in BEC and other activities of the church. If that happens, we can easily invite them to join BEC. Group leader and/or facilitator should set good examples, like not saying bad words especially in public places because this wrong way of action can be very disappointing. The challenge for the group leader and/or facilitator is to become a role model.” (...*So, dapat sa bawat isa sa atin ay makita na nila si Lord sa atin para ma-invite natin sila, kasi kung ikaw punong-alagad ka, nakikita nakikipagmurahan ka sa labas, di ba ang lumalabas sa words mo hindi maganda... ‘Ay yan ba yung ano?’ Kaya sira ka na. Kaya kailangan talaga, maging role model ka. Malaking hamon sa mga leaders talaga. SFP*)

“We, the youth, are always together, but it’s really difficult since every Friday, we go to the Feast of Manila by Fr. Bo Sanchez.” (*Kami po kasing mga youth, sama-sama po din kami, although kasi po mahirap Yun. Every Friday po kasi, nag the the-Feast Manila po kami. Yung sa kay Bo Sanchez po. Pero dun po kami sa may SM Manila, bali po kay Brother Oved. Dun po, kay Daddy O. SJP*)

Greater Opportunities for the Youth Groups of BEC Based on the Recommendations Given by the Youth

Two more papal speeches delivered in his recent Philippine visit practically spelled out the bright prospects for spiritual growth inherent among local youth.

In Pope Francis’ speech at the Meeting with Families in Mall of Asia, Pasay City, on Jan. 16, 2015, he extolled the value of the family as the training ground for Christian values/virtues. He challenged the youth formed in the bosom of family values to get involved in society, to get out of their comfort zone and send out the message that there is a bigger family out there, the family of man, Christ’s kingdom itself. In his own words, he appealed: “This means being ready to go beyond your homes and to care for our brothers and sisters who are most in need. I ask you especially to show concern for those who do not have a family of their own. In particular, those who are elderly and children without parents. Never let them feel isolated, alone and abandoned, but help them to know that God has not forgotten them.”

In his speech at the University of Santo Tomas specifically addressing Filipino youth on January 18, 2015, he basically repeated the same call by telling his audience “to offer yourselves passionately and honestly

to the great work of renewing your society and helping to build a better world.” He tried to win their attention further by paying attention to their particular milieu: a world bombarded by a constant exposure to novel information, thanks to cutting-edge communication technology. However, he next issued cautionary words, particularly the necessity of drawing distinctions between knowledge and wisdom and the dangers of getting lost in one’s focus due to the glut in information and the novelties of constant technological innovation: “But there is a real danger of living in a way of accumulating information. We have so much information. But maybe we don’t know what to do with that information. We run the risk of becoming museums of young people that have everything but without knowing what to do with them. We don’t need youth museums, but we do need holy young people.”

In this separate occasion, he invited his audience anew to step up in Christian spirituality by daring to love, specifically, to appropriate his typically surprising turns of phrase, “by becoming a beggar,” i.e., by opening oneself, in humility, to love, receiving love instead of just mechanically or methodically giving it via the usual donor-recipient relationship, in which statuses are unequal, with the former placing himself/herself implicitly on a superior plane than the latter. Pope Francis said that the knowledge that one is as poor as the next person indicates a certain spiritual maturity.

With such a role in society, the youth apparently can be effective evangelizers through the BEC. The following are some of their own suggestions and recommendations in this regard:

“What attracts me to our parish is first of all my family. My father and my mother are active in church and so are my other brothers. All my older brothers were done in being a sacristan. Now I’m currently a sacristan, which means we all want serving the Lord. Later on, I heard that there is this so-called MKK – Munting Kapitbahayang Kristiyano. It’s Ate Ericka who invited us to join MKK and greatly influenced us including my other friends.” (*Nakapag-akit po sa ’kin, unang-una po, yung pamilya kasi yung panahon po ng mama ko at papa ko, active po sila sa simbahan, tapos po yung mga kapatid ko dumaan sa sacristan, tapos ayon po, pumasok na rin po kami sa pagiging sacristan. Kung бага, andun na rin po yung pagseserve namin*

kay God. Tapos unti-unti, nalaman ko na meron pala sa Kawan na tinatawag na MKK, Munting Kapitbahayang Kristiyano. Minsan nga tinatawag naming MMK. Ayun po, biglang nalaman ko po na, kung бага sabi ko sa sarili ko, 'Ano ba yun, bakit hindi natin subukang sumali dito?' Si Ate Ericka yung ano namin, yung nag-invite saming mga kabataan na sumali sa MKK. SFP)

“Of course our family attracted us to join since our family is very religious. My aunt was a former coordinator, but she’s still active even now. During that time, the kids were fond of extra activity and it was the trend in the Church. Eventually, the groups of kids and adults came together and now we have formed a BEC in our area.” *(Siyempre yung family. Kasi yung family namin, yung amin kasi talagang religious sa simbahan. Yung tita ko dating coordinator. Ngayon, hindi naman na siya coordinator, pero active pa rin naman siya. That time kasi, siyempre 'pag bata mahilig sa extra activity, eh nauso dito 'yun sa simbahan. Pag sinabing may activity na ganito, grupo-grupo. Diyan, diyan ako nagstart na sumali sa mga ganito, makisama-sama. Hanggang nakabuo kami ng (MKK) ganito sa area namin. SQP)*

“Being an active member of the Education Ministry, it made me feel that I belong because I have been part of its plan. Usually, plans are only made by old members of the said ministry but now we youth have already the voice to give ideas/opinions concerning plans for the church. We are glad we are given the opportunity to be a part of the church ministry.” *(Bilang part naman po ng Education Ministry, naramdaman ko po na kaisa na talaga ako kasi naging parte po kami ng pagpapalano. Siyempre ang pagpapalano po, mas nagagawa ng nakakatanda, pero ngayon po, nagkakaroon po kami ng boses sa mga pwedeng gawin. Gaya po ng sinabi niya, malaking factor po ang kabataan po; mas marami na, dumadami sila. SJP)*

“The only person who influenced me is Sis. Ruby, a hardworking person. I really don’t know what she has in herself that you can not resist her invitation. It’s hard to explain that every time she invites me, “Let’s go, let’s have prayer meeting,” I can’t say no to her. She is really God’s gift to me. Now, young kids are the same with what I am with. They are all eager to have a prayer meeting even just once a week because prayers for them are important. They want that their prayers are also being prayed for by the other members of MKK because they believe that praying for other people is more effective.” *(Ang pinakanakaano sa 'kin, ang nakamotivate sa 'kin, sila sis. Ruby. Sis. Ruby napakasipag po talaga niya. Di ko po alam kung anong meron sa kanya, na parang meron sa kanyang something na di mo matanggihan pag nag-ano ka. Pag 'Huy, tara, ano*

tayo, MKK, ' tapos mga kasama ko pa nun mga matatanda, tapos ayun, sila yung mga, si Sis. Ruby yung pinakahumatak sa 'kin noon e.' SFP)

“Every summer I am attending Catechetical studies for the children and we’re doing it especially in the lower part of areas. Everything that I’ve learned, a compilation of what I’ve learned from the school and from our church, I am able to share those learnings to the children. I teach them all about God. Then, I teach them how to pray the rosary and I explain to them the importance of God’s existence in their lives and how God works on them everyday. I still want to study more on the catechism so that I can share more with the children about God.” *(During summer, nag-aaral po ako ng catechist, tapos bumababa po kami ng mga areas. Tapos, kung ano yung nalaman namin, kung ano yung nalalaman ko, shine-share namin sa mga bata. Tapos, kung ano yung nalalaman ko dito sa simbahan, shine-share ko sa mga bata, inaano ko sa kanila, yung ganito—‘Sino si God sa inyo?’ ‘Ano ba yung ginagawa niya?’ Tapos, ‘Paano siya napako sa krus?’ Para madebelop yung alam nila about kay God. Para malaman nila, tapos magtuturo kami ng rosary, mga ganun po. Tapos pinaaalala namin sa kanila yung kahalagahan ni God sa buhay niyo. Tapos yun parang, nung dati akong bata na, ako yung nakaupo, ako yung nakikinig—ngayon, ang gusto ko, sila naman ang makinig sa akin. Kaya, tri-nay ko talaga na magkapag-aral ng catechist, para i-share naman yung nalalaman ko dati hanggang ngayon sa mga bata. SQP)*

“Aside from brotherhood, we have a scholarship program in our youth ministry. We are all scholars here in our church and we have our own sponsors. Because we are scholars, in our own little way, we do all our best to serve in our church, and that is our way of paying it forward for the blessings we got from our sponsors. We are lucky to be scholars here because the little amount for us is also a big thing for us in that it can still extend help to support our studies.” *(Tapos ako po, bukod po sa kaibiganan, may programa sa scholars po kami dito. Mga scholar po kami ng parokya. May sponsor po kami. Tapos yun po, pag scholar po, yung binibigay po namin, ito yung paraan kung paano namin sinusuklian yung mga tulong na binibigay nila samin. Kahit po maliit na bagay, parang ang laki-laking bagay yung binibigay nila kasi nakakatulong sa pag-aaral namin. SJP)*

“I want to continue to pray for other people. I want to pray more so that I can include the needs of my neighbors in my prayers. A person once told me that, prayer is stronger when people pray for you, rather than just praying for something by yourself. I want to offer them my prayers since I know how powerful prayers are. Furthermore, being SMW member makes you firmly believe in God’s promise since I always read the His words. I also want to enhance my speaking skills since I was inspired by the speakers in *The Feast*.” *(Sa akin naman po, yung ginagawa ko, gusto ko rin i-continue yung sa pagdadasal sa ibang tao para masama sa dasal*

mo yung pangangailangan nila, yun. Siguro maibabahagi kasi may nagsabi sa 'kin po 'pag pinagdasal, malakas daw yung power pag iba yung nagdadasal sa 'yo kaysa ikaw yung nagdadasal. Tapos yung pagiging SMW, hindi ko talaga siya bibitawan kasi proclamation siya ng word of God. Binabasa mo yung mga salita ng Diyos e. Tapos gusto ko rin po i-enhance ang sarili ko sa pagiging speaker. Gusto ko po magbigay ng talk kasi nakwento ko po yung sa 'The Feast', maganda po kasi dun. Nagbibigay ng talk, tapos yung mga kabataan, sobrang ang daming pumupunta dun. SFP)

“We include in our planning BEC activities that will be done while the barangay is undergoing formation. The main activity that we thought of is the Bibliarasal. The youth does Gospel sharing during Sundays. On the other hand the Bibliarasal is Bible sharing. It includes everything inside the Bible.” *(So kasama po dun sa pagplaplano namin yung 'Ano po ba gagawin ng mga BEC habang nag-u-undergo ng formation po yung ibang barangay?' Eto po yung mga naiisip po namin gawin: magkakaroon po kami ng Bibliarasal. Yung Bible sharing po na ngayon po ginagawa na ng youth. Yung sa youth lang po, is Gospel sharing lang po yung every Gospel pag Sunday. Pero yung Bibliarasal po, parang Bible sharing—kung ano na po yung nilalaman ng Biblia. SJP)*

“I suggest that they re-implement the formation which heavily involves the youth. The youth enjoys presenting and doing activities. These activities encourage the youth to participate with us more. They even enjoy presenting plays in the church during December.” *(Gusto ko po sana maibalik, suggestion ko maibalik yung formation na kasama yung, as in involved talaga yung youth. Yung sila yung magpre-present, kasi po, dun po ako nakahatak ng youth eh. Pagkasinabing 'Uy may ano, magdrama-tayo sa simbahan,' go sila lahat. Dun po. Kagaya po, kasi every December po... SJP)*

“The one we talked about earlier, the CALM, they are heavily grounded on worship. Worship is what they use to attract people to them. On the other hand, I think it would be nicer to attract members through workshops for the youth. This will serve as a catalyst to attract more youth. These workshops will be our start, then eventually this will become a line of the BEC. Furthermore, the BEC wants to gather a community for Christ by showcasing the talents of the youth because right now it's what the youth normally prefers.” *(Yung kanina po pinag-usapan natin, yung sa CALM, nadadala po sila sa mga ano, sa worship-worship. Ay yung sa way na pag-attract, siguro po maganda po may maikling workshop para sa mga kabataan. Kasi yun po yung magiging bala natin para maakit sila. Bali yun po yung magiging simula, tapos habang tumatagal, in the process, ano, magiging ano pa rin siya, magiging in line pa rin siya sa BEC. Bali ganun rin po yung target niya para mag—ang target niya para maging sama-sama, pero ang paraan niya para makuha, yung para*

mashowcase yung talent nung mga kabataan. Kasi kadalasan po, yung mga kabataan ngayon, yun po ang gusto nila. SJP)

Conclusion

According to Macasaet (2012), spirituality among young Filipino Catholics is an “ongoing” process, a “work-in-progress” and, as such, can not be aligned with the mature spiritualities of the old congregations. However, this level of spirituality has its own pluses: it is characterized by dynamism, constant evolution, and with things not being easily categorizable, the avoidance of stagnation/fossilization. Filipino youth spirituality’s “tentative character,” therefore, can only be described in broad “brushstrokes.”

Fortuitously, at the time the writing of this research was being finalized, Pope Francis visited the country, and in his ensuing series of speeches, he practically mapped out the mandate of the Church for the youth, if not the growth areas or challenges particular to this demographic.

In his speech before the religious leaders and the youth at the University of Santo Tomas on the 18th of January 2015, Pope Francis emphasized that “the most important subject to learn in life is to learn how to love. Learning is not just acquiring information without knowing what to do with it, but through that love, the information bears fruit.” With this as overarching goal, Pope Francis proposed the pursuit of integral spirituality (or integration) through what he called the “use of three languages”: the heart, the mind, and the hands acting in harmony. This is a great reversal of the well-known critique of Filipino spirituality by Jesuit priest Fr. Jaime Bulatao: that Filipinos in general practice “split-level Christianity,” which is characterized by a blatant disconnect between what one believes in and one actually practices in real life.

Learning how to love, Pope Francis expounded, also means readiness for God’s surprises, as though to give Him a clean slate with regard to His will. This is another reversal, but an expected one, because what gives Christian spirituality its tension is the opposition of self-will versus God’s will. Loving this way – the youthful way, as Pope Francis implied, is an exciting enterprise, a great adventure. One concrete manifestation of this, he went on, is to “leave your pockets open and empty,” like St. Francis of Assisi did, but dying “with a very full

heart.” This way of loving is what he referred to as “[the] good life.” Incidentally, this referral to the ideal Christian life may be either a fulfillment or another reversal (depending on who is looking) of the oft-cited St. Irenaeus quote, “The glory of God is man fully alive” and a similar passage from John 10:10, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

In a surprising gesture during his homily at the Manila Cathedral on January 16, 2015, Pope Francis addressed his audience, restless Filipino youth included, with an exhortation to evangelism by appealing to their Filipino-ness. Here, he again reminded about the Filipino nation’s unique position as a beacon of Christianity in the whole of Asia, recognizing how the faith has been deeply embedded in the very identity of Filipinos through the centuries. “Filipino culture has, in fact, been shaped by the imagination of faith,” and “has inculturated the Gospel and continues to embrace its message.” He continued by being more specific, saying, “Filipinos everywhere are known for their love of God, their fervent piety and their warm devotion to Our Lady and her rosary.” He then used this source of national/ethnic identity and pride to challenge everyone “to be an ambassador for Christ,” which means “above all to invite everyone to a renewed personal encounter with the Lord Jesus.” In more specific terms, he said this means:

- “[calling] everyone to conversion, to an examination of our consciences, as individuals and as a people;”
- “[acknowledging and combating] the causes of the deeply rooted inequality and injustice which mar the face of Filipino society,,,”
- [living] lives of honesty, integrity and concern for the common good;
- [creating] ‘circles of integrity,’ networks of solidarity which can expand to embrace and transform society by their prophetic witness.”

In Pope Francis’ speech at Malacañang Palace in Manila after his courtesy call on President Benigno Aquino III in Jan. 16, 2015, he recognized that the coming “[celebration] of the fifth centenary of the first proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on these shores” can not help but point to some expectation of fruit-bearing, in which Filipinos, he said, inevitably have a role to play. One’s involvement, he implied, is to be expected in building a “society worthy of the goodness, dignity and aspirations of the Filipino people,” particularly the work of “ensuring social justice and respect for human dignity,” most especially “[hearing] the

voice of the poor.” He also highlighted the importance of family as the training ground for the values necessary for a society to see these fruits in concrete.

In this regard, the BECs are in a perfect position to deliver such broad expectations. The results of this research show that the involvement of Catholic Filipino youth in BECs can have a role to play in all of the above papal exhortations because such an involvement, though it appears to be weakly correlated to spiritual growth, is nonetheless able to animate members’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a way that keeps local church life alive and promote local youth spirituality. That the youth be given the voice in the planning and evaluation of the parish activities is highly recommended. Adult parishioners are encouraged to journey patiently with the youth as the latter grow and learn from their experiences with mature individuals.

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