CHAPTER - III

CRASS - ROOT LEVEL CHRISTIAN STRUCTURE
(ANBIYAM) IN KOTTAR DIOCESE

Kottar Catholic Diocese is one of the biggest dioceses in India in terms of population¹. About 5.5 lakhs catholic people live in this diocese within a small territory. There are more than 275 parishes². The concept of Basic Christian Communities became a reality in Latin America and Africa. It was on this model, some church priests gave their heart and soul to make it as a reality in Kottar Diocese. In the initial stages, it was not accepted well by the people and the church leaders. It was the Second Vatican Council³ in its document on laity opened the doors of the church for the community around it. In new concept that the community is the church gained such momentum. The participatory model of the church, the spring of responsibility both by the laity and clergy through the Anbiyams (an Association based on Love). ‘Anbiyam’ is the name given for the Basic Christian Community in Kottar Diocese⁴. Anbiyam is a common Tamil name referring to a community based on love. The word Anbiyam has been coined from its root Anbu which means Love. The community that

². Ibid.
³. Vatican Council II from 1962 to 1965 held in Rome.
experiences, lives and proclaims that unconditional love is rightly called Anbiyam in Tamil Nadu. Anbiyam in singular or Anbiayms in plural form are called for understanding Basic Christian Communities.

**A. Vatican II (1962 - 1965)**

During the fifty years since the Vatican council II, the Catholics carried the council documents forward with openmind, honesty and love of God\(^5\). The Changes made in liturgy made the people to understand the religious worship in their mother language\(^6\). Formerly the Holy mass was celebrated either in Latin or Syriac. The use of vernacular in the liturgy permitted the people to rediscover who they were and what is their identity today. Liturgical changes after the council delivered people from the solitary nature of private devotions to them to participate in Christian fellowship and to strengthen the catholic community\(^7\). There is an inculturation of Indian culture also in the liturgy and the attitude of the people. The Indian custom of sitting in the floor in the church, and taking

\(^5\) Vatican II held from 1962 to 1965 at Rome.
Arati were officially encouraged by the church. Vatican II encouraged liturgical adjustment in baptism, wedding, burial and thanks giving.

The laity had great expectations that the Vatican II have given them a new constitution for doing the church work. The Degree on the Apostolate of the Laity “encourage the laity to intensify their apostolic activity ‘Inter mission of the church’ to be more active in spiritual ministry and parish administration. The laity become involved in liturgy, catechism, instruction, caring for the sick and looking after senior citizens. Laity, religious and other groups gather together to plan functions. The laity are very creative in their work for the church. The laity looked for occasions to participate their Parts in various ministries”. But there are churches in which the priests are not allowed the active participation of the laity. They thought that the laity would infringe their right.

After the document on Laity from Vatican II, there were hopes and much good will to help the church. Although the Laity are members of pastoral councils and financial Communities, the catholic tradition of hierarchical power can limit lay involvement. Lay participation in the

8. Ibid., p. 23.
10. Personal Interview with Mr. S. Justin Durairaj, aged 63, parish council member of Thuckalay, dated 24 June 2011.
church is limited to the pastors to share power\textsuperscript{11}. Human rights and social advocates find it necessary to help their connection with the church to have freedom to do their services\textsuperscript{12}. Kottar Diocese though it is sharing power to the laity, does not give more power equally to laity. In all the decision making matters, the veto power is kept with the Bishop. So in practice, full power is used by the clergy. These are occasions in which the laity struggle to share power. Such efforts seldom serve successes in many matters\textsuperscript{13}.

In spite of much hard experiences the Basic Christian Communities (Anbiyams) are acting as a powerful brake to curtail the monopoly of the clergies in deciding matters pertaining day-to-day administration, the grass root Christian of the Diocese. It is a success strong in narrate that the church leaders implemented the vision of Vatican II is to reality. In Kottar Diocese such initiatives were started at least 25 years after the Vatican II. To make the people to understood the spirit of Vatican II fell upon mutely the clergy. Some enthusiastic clergy, who really wanted to share power to the laity, initiated the democratic ideas of support from the laity. But lack of support from the Bishop and senior priests bolted out the idea in the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Personal Interview with Rev. Fr. Dr. Arokiasamy, SJ, St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli, dated 21 October 2011.
\textsuperscript{12} Terene, T. Fay., op. cit.
\textsuperscript{13} Personal Interview with Mr. John Bright, aged 50, Voice President of Holy Trinity Church, Parish Council, Thirithuvapuram, dated 28 June 2011.
\end{flushleft}
beginning. But slowly and steadily the dream of learned priests became a reality\textsuperscript{14}.

In 1988, the service committee of the Kottar Diocese published a very good document on “Power from bottom”. This document has given a new direction and approach for formation and working of Basic Christian Communities (‘Anbiyam’)\textsuperscript{15}. With this document, the Bishop Leon Dharmaraj opened the door of the diocese for lay participation in power sharing. Though the Bishop met with severe criticism he moved forward to make their programme a reality\textsuperscript{16}. For the first time, the people in Kottar Diocese began to tell about ‘Anbiyams’ though they did not understand the meaning of the term fully. It has been discussed in the previous chapters about the meaning of Anbiyam. It is a get-together of the catholic people of a locality to share their Christian experiences, difficulties and sufferings of life\textsuperscript{17}. We can be different and how the common people communicate with their secular world in all its wonders and challenges. The Anbiyam organization gave a new thrust to the leadership qualities of the lay people. Some fifty years ago, the parish priest alone was the learned person in a

\textsuperscript{14} Personal Interview with Fr. S. Vincent, aged 57, Former Director of Anbiyam Commission, Vetumani, dated 21 June 2011.
\textsuperscript{15} Vincent, S., \textit{Eraiychivediyalukku Anbiyam} (Tamil), Kottar, 2001, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{17} Personal Interview with Fr. S. Vincent aged 57, Former Director of Anbiyam Commission, Vetumani, dated 21 June 2011.
parish. At that time he was the pilot of the activities of the church. But today the situation has changed. The percentage of literacy of Kanyakumari district is above 90 percent\textsuperscript{18}. In such a situation the role of the elite in the church organization has become critical. The clergies with the old ideologies began to face a new educated generation. Hence, conflict is bound to come. The church at times began to think against the spirit of Vatican II. After sections 200 of the Holy Church, laity have the right to participate in the administration of the church\textsuperscript{19}. The rule 212 of the Common Law says that the laity has every right to put forward their grievances to the authorities of the church\textsuperscript{20}. Section 285 of law states that the clergies never take charge of the worldly power generated post. It is on this; in Kottar Diocese still the clergies enjoy all the worldly posts. But the lay people are still spectators of this trash of love. However, this brought a change in the power system of the diocese. As a result, the usual power – cliques who were dominating the diocese allowing no say for the lay people, had to swallow their pride when people who did not have any voice so far began to express themselves collectively and structurally.

\textsuperscript{18} Census of India, 2011, Kanyakumari District.
\textsuperscript{19} Common Law, Section 210.
\textsuperscript{20} Common Law, section 212.

The establishment of Anbiyams in the Diocese of Kottar opened a new epoch in the history of Christianity in Kanyakumari District. The diocesan parishes were established with the administration of Mudutham (head of the catholic village committee) system in interior places and Melunchiar system on the coastal areas from the time of the missionaries. They were responsible for the administration of the parish with priests. Gradually they lost their importance due to the growth of ward system in the parishes till 1978. People experienced the ward committee system which gained more importance in the parishes. In the new committee system a group of members were appointed by the priests in consultation with the like-minded people, for the administration of the affairs of the Church. This new system had its limitations also. The priests appointed only influential persons in the villages, and they were not directly elected or accountable to the people. But the shift was important in the sense that power was transferred from a single person or a single family to a group of persons.\(^{21}\)

Establishment of Anbiyam in the beginning of the eighties received good appreciation from the people who experienced communitarian life

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through the participation, though the opposition from the power structures appeared an obstacle to Anbiyam formation. Initially many Church leaders were hesitant to promote them due to the fear of the threat to the existing structures and power equations in the Church\textsuperscript{22}.

They felt that the existing committee system was enough for them. But majority of the people identified themselves with the new system of communities and the religious head in the village supporting it. The power groups had to yield, and a de-centralized and participatory system of administration was established. They faced difficulties one after another and Anbiyam passed through its ups and downs. When the diocese for promoting Anbiyams came to know the communitarian spirit, it took great interest to help Fr. M.J. Edwin in 1980\textsuperscript{23}.

The 1986 pastoral letter of the Bishop Rev. M. Arokiasamy points out the limitations of the approaches on the part of the Church in the past, and takes a definite stand in understanding itself as the radical Church and spells out its action programme for the future\textsuperscript{24}. In the vision and action programmes for the future, participation of the laity in the life and activities of the Church, especially in the power structures of the Church, is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Anbiyam Report, Diocese of Kottar, Nagercoil, 2000, p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Then Oli, Nagercoil, 1980, p. 54.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Arokiyasamy, M., \textit{The Christian Life and Ministry in the Diocese of Kottar}, Nagercoil, 1986, p. 6.
\end{itemize}
highly emphasized. Formation of small groups at the parish level is recommended in order to promote good relations and dialogue with the Church. It is to be noted that the pastoral letter visualizes Anbiyams as an important characteristic of the radical Church to bear witness to the God’s kingdom. The pastoral letter emphasizes very much the importance of forming small groups to promote healthy relationship and dialogue among the people. The mention in the pastoral letter about Anbiyams, as the way of bearing witness to God’s kingdom, was of encouragement for those who were already involved in the formation of basic Christian communities\textsuperscript{25}.

Anbiyams were started first as prayer groups in different places. Since the charismatic movement was active in the district at that time, under its influence, it was easy to form prayer groups in the village. These prayer groups conducted meetings regularly, and it was an accepted phenomenon. Slowly, these prayer groups began to discuss issues pertaining to the village and the Church. The attempt to trace the process of prayer group renewal and the various factors involved there was to show that the people were gradually prepared at different levels already. All the factors mentioned above may not have directly advocated or visualized the formation of the Anbiyams. Some may not even explicitly feel at ease

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
about the concept of Anbiyams. But most of them, willingly or unwillingly, seem to have played a preparatory role, and served as a background, in preparing the people to be open to the realities of changing times\textsuperscript{26}.

However, in the nineties 25\% of the diocesan parishes found more acceptances among the Church leaders as well as among the people\textsuperscript{27}. In 1992 the Catholic Bishop Conference of India proposed BCCs as the New Way of Being Church and the best form to tackle the pressing needs of the Church. Many parishes accepted this reality in the process of Anbiyam formation\textsuperscript{28}.

It is made very clear that Anbiyams are not just pious associations, but they are mere pious associations, it is enough to gather in the Church. The Anbiyams have to embody the Church’s preferential love for the common people and have to take up issues which affect human life in all its dimensions in the light of the teachings of the Church. The Anbiyams differ also from the pious associations or even those Movements, which close their eyes to the social needs of the people. In taking up the social issues, the Anbiyams can not be narrow minded. If it takes up only the

\textsuperscript{26} Then Oli, \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{27} Anbiyam Report, Nagercoil, 1990, p. 21.
issues related to one particular parish or diocese, it can claim to be the light of the nations. The Anbiyams are working for the common good of the people of God. The diocesan pious association members are not open towards the new trend and renewal in the parishes. It is a big challenge to make them understand Anbiyam and its approaches.

The response of the people to the programme of Anbiyams is positive and in certain places, they are highly enthusiastic about it, because it opens up the possibility for the simple people in the Church to express the faith experience from their own perspective. People considered to be neglected and far from the Church are made to come closer and the Church not only speaks to them but is also able to listen to and learn from them. In some parishes, Anbiyams also play the role of breaking the established power structures in the Church and in villages and initiate a decentralized and participatory system of administration. The Anbiyams present a participatory and a people centred model of the Church.

The period from 1978 to 1992 witnessed a new trend in the history of Anbiyam in Kanyakumari District. In the Diocese of Kottar, Kottar Vicariate modified 12% of the parishes, Colachel 23%, Mulagumoodu

29. Personal Interview with Fr. S. Vincent aged 57, Former Anbiyam Director, Nagercoil, dated 29th, March 2011.
40% and Thiruthuvapuram 30% as participatory and people centered. Six hundred and forty two Anbiyams have been formed in seventy four villages in this period by the central team consisting of twenty full timers and fifty volunteers. Twenty five Seminarians, forty four Religious Sisters, twenty trained Catechists, twenty five Animators and seventy lay people had been given Seminar and training by Rev Fr. M. J. Edwin in Anbiyam formation in 1980, 1982, 1985, 1989 and 1991. They were given the Basic Introductory workshops and training based on Why Anbiyam?, What is Anbiyam?, How to form and sustain Anbiyam?, Laity participation in the Church and society, New methods of conducting Anbiyam, Biblical and theological aspects of Anbiyam, Social analysis, Vision and Mission, Objectives, Anbiyam in Magisterium, Lumko Series and the effects and results of Anbiyam. Anbiyams spread on a geometrical progression in the district of Kanyakumari due to the network for the social and material uplift of the Catholic people.

C. Anbiyam Expansion

The diocese decided to expand the Anbiyam mission to the entire diocese. With the encouragement of Catholic Bishop Conference of India

(CBCI) and Tamil Nadu Latin Bishops Council (TLBC) and the direction of Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio and Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Letter Evangelii Nuntianti, Bishop Rev. Leon A. Tharmaraj released a circular on 25 January 1993 focusing on Evangelization and Basic Christian Communities to mark the 450th anniversary of the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in India and in the region of the Diocese of Kottar.

As soon as Rev. Fr. V. Arulraj assumed the directorship of Anbiyam in 1993, he regarded it as his duty to establish Anbiyams in all parishes. He preached the spirit of evangelization in view of the vision and mission of Anbiyam to 50% parishes and published a special issue on Anbiyam in Then Oli, the diocesan monthly in April 1993. It created mass awareness among the people to know about the better pastoral work and to help them grow in Christian commitment and live the Gospel in a responsible manner individually, as a family, as a community and as good citizens of the country. The first diocesan conference of Anbiyam was held on 30 January 1993 to bring together the priests of the diocese and representatives of the 642 basic communities functioning in seventy four

37. Ibid.
localities of the diocese in order to reflect on Evangelization and Basic Communities, and to celebrate this new way of being Church. The effort of this conference pushed forward 90% of the parishes to establish Anbiyams\textsuperscript{38}.

A meeting of the central steering committee for Anbiyams was held in July 1994 to evaluate and to plan further the process of building Basic Communities. The meeting was chaired by the Bishop Rev. Leon A. Tharmaraj and was attended by fifteen persons\textsuperscript{39}. On the study report based on growth and development of Anbiyam submitted by Fr. Micheal Nayagam, Director of the Commission of Anbiyam was discussed and the participants made the following observations: 1. The number of lay volunteers for BCCs is insufficient, 2. while the participation and cooperation of parish priests in the functioning of BCCs has increased, the need for more involvement of parish priests in communities is desired, and 3. Some arrangement has to be made to meet the travelling expenses of lay volunteers. The meeting made the following proposals: 1. BCCs should reach all the parishes by the end of December 1994, 2. Thiruthuvapuram Vicariate has to establish a lay resource team as early as possible, 3. A team of priests to promote BCCs is to be formed in

\textsuperscript{38}  Paul Richard Joseph, R., \textit{op. cit.} p. 87.

\textsuperscript{39}  Adithalam, the News Letter of Anbiyams, Bishop’s House, Nagercoil, 1994, p.2.
all the Vicariates and 4. Vicariate Directors are to contact personally the priests of those parishes where BCCs have not yet been established40.

In 1991, Christian Life Survey was conducted in small groups especially Anbiyams. The Anbiyam people submitted their answers to the questions prepared for nine sections41. Each question was so formulated as to contain a positive statement of a value. In 1995 after collecting answers, more than 70% of the diocesan priests gathered at Vicariate levels to discern the future plan of action and arranged their parishes to establish Anbiyams42.

In 1995, six groups consisting of Holy Cross Sisters at Vellicode, Holy Cross Sisters at Packiyapuram, St. Anne Novices at Packiyapuram, Presentation Sisters at Vaniyakudy, St. Anne Sisters at Colachel and the Deacons of St. Paul’s Seminary at Thirithuvapuram were formed and had first-hand experience of Anbiyams. All the six groups expressed their feeling that BCCs should be established in all the parishes. By the end of July 1995, the diocese had about 2000 Anbiyams in 244 villages43.

The laity office of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) organized a seminar on Basic Communities in Kottar from 1 to 15 March 1996. Lay people, religious and Bishops took part in this seminar. They were taken to different villages of Arokiapuram, Mathal, Ettamadai and Kurumpanai to have direct learning from the communities. As part of the learning process, there were interactions about the efforts of building communities in various countries. The participants who felt strengthened and supported requested that similar seminar to be organized in future also as to make Basic Communities the life style of the Asian Church\textsuperscript{44}.

In 1996, Great Jubilee 2000 was prepared in small groups as well as communities\textsuperscript{45}. The objectives of the Jubilee 2000 cannot be different from those of the Vatican Council II. Hence, by listening, meditating and putting into action the teachings of the Council, which are nothing but the specifications of the mind of Christ for the present times. It insisted that communities should prepare for the dawn of a new era of justice, peace, joy and fellowship among all the human beings and for a rejuvenated Church which will make its own the joy and hope, grief and anguish of the people. In this preparation 50\% Anbiyams took part. It provided information and knowledge that is needed to provoke their thinking and

\textsuperscript{44} Anbiyam Report, \textit{op. cit.}, 1996.
\textsuperscript{45} Bishop’s Circular, No. 49/ 2000.
need for a change in their attitude and existing structures to meet the new challenges of living as an Anbiam\textsuperscript{46}.

The Anbiyam Conference of 2002 was held at Nagercoil on a general discussion of Basic Christian Communities on 20 September 2002. Eight hundred and fifty members from four Vicariates participated in it. The programme presided over by Rev. Fr. E. John Kaulandai, then Vicar-General was followed by a report collected from the functions of Anbiams\textsuperscript{47}. Fr. M. Peter delivered a talk on Basic Christian Community Spirituality. The life and mission of the Anbiyams in the Church and the Society was the topic on which Fr. N. John Damascene, Director of the Commission of Anbiyam made a speech. On the analysis of the study he explained the Positive impact of the BCCs first and then he brought out Anbiyam Challenges. The participants were divided into four Vicariate groups to plan their activities for one year. At the Vicariate level Fr. M. Peter, Fr. C. Amirtharaj, Fr. N. John Damascene and Mr. Raja Titus conducted their training programmes on 5 October 2002 at Colachel for Colachel Vicariate people 562, 16 November 2002 at Assisi for Kottar Vicariate people 400, on 22 November 2002 at Thirithuvapuram for

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{47} Paul Richard Joseph, P., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
Thiruthuvapuram Vicariate People 551 and on 14 December 2002, at Mulagumoodu for Mulagumoodu Vicariate people 470\textsuperscript{48}.

**D. Forward movement: 2004 – 2009**

With the establishment of Anbiyams in Diocese of Kottar, the Bishop Rev. Leon A. Tharmaraj had the satisfaction of doing work on the interior parts of the district. Rev Fr. E. John Kulandai, the Vicar General and Fr. J. Francis Xavier, the Coordinator of the Pastoral Commissions, were credited with this work\textsuperscript{49}. The general part of the diocese remained an unfulfilled dream of the administrators. With much dedication Rev Fr. M. X. Rajamony, Rev Fr. V. Hilarious, Rev Fr. C. Amirtharaj and Rev Fr. V. Robert arrived at Thirithuvapuram in June 2004 towards establishment of pastoral and social structures for the Vicariates of Thirithuvapuram and Mulagumoodu\textsuperscript{50}. They saw the rapid growth of Anbiyams consisting of more than 1500 in seventy four parishes and 146 substations of the two Vicariates of the diocese. For four years from 2000 to 2004, they involved in people’s development works and trained the people in their duty, right and need to involve in social action through the parish grassroots

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Adithalam, *op. cit.*, 2004.
structures. They got an opportunity to visit the parish priests to make a separate pastoral and social structure for the two Vicariates on the basis of the Christian documents with its aims and goals for guiding the movement.

Diocesan Platinum Jubilee celebration was started in the Anbiyams level in 2004. Separate retreats were organised in the Anbiyam zones. One day seminar was conducted for BCC leaders and Animators on 29 November, 2004 at Animation Centre, Nagercoil. Old and New Way of Being Church, Gospel Sharing according to seven steps method and the Salient features of BCC were the themes and discussions were held. Two hundred and ten men and women participated in the seminar. People experienced the enduring presence of Christ in the Anbiyams through the celebration of sacraments in the Jubilee. Such celebrations are an indication of the lively faith of Anbiyams. The leaders witnessed that the domestic Church Anbiyam was firmly established in their villages.

52. Ibid.
54. Adithalam, op. cit., 2004
In 2004, the Diocesan Commission of Anbiyam was divided into two units Anbiyams of Kottar and of Kuzhithurai\textsuperscript{56}. The Kottar unit consisting of Kottar and Colachel Anbiyams was headed by Rev Fr. P. K. Challaian and Rev Fr. R. Paul Richard Joseph was in charge of Kuzhithurai unit consisting of Thirithuvapuram and Mulagumoodu Anbiams\textsuperscript{57}. To make the mission in their areas a success, they obtained masters over vicariate coordinations respectively. As the Bishop Rev. Leon A. Tharmaraj decided to have the co–ordination meetings separately, Rev Fr. R. Paul Richard Joseph met the religious sisters and trained catechists to cooperate for his task in his two Vicariate programmes\textsuperscript{58}. He prepared a regular and a periodic evaluation of animation team by the people and by themselves of the programmes conducted, their animation skill, the ability to work as a team and their ability to involve the people in a process of interaction\textsuperscript{59}.

The Director of Anbiyam visits all the diocesan vicariates and zonal level coordination meetings and offers encouragement to revive the spirit of the Basic Christian Communities. The director visits every month the Thirithuvapuram Vicariate coordination meeting held at Vettumani St.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Personal Interview with Br. V.M. Selvamony, aged 55, Anbiyam Activists, dated 25\textsuperscript{th}, April 2011.
\textsuperscript{59} Adithalam, \textit{op. cit.}, 2004.
Anthony’s Shrine, Mulagumoodu Vicariate coordination meeting at Thuckalay Udayathargai Vicariate building and diocesan executive meeting held at Kuzhithurai Thedal, and of Kottar Vicariate co-ordination meeting held at Nagercoil Assisi Campus, Colachel Vicariate co-ordination meeting held at Colachel St. Marys Higher Secondary School campus and diocesan executive meeting held at Nagercoil coordination office.

The Tsunami of December 2004 not only affected the normal lives of the people of Kanyakumari District, but it has struck down the functioning of the Anbiyams also in many of the coastal villages. The coastal people were psychologically weak. The Tsunami has shattered their hopes and aspirations in lives. Having lost all that they had, there was anxiety, fear and uncertainty about their future. In order to build the confidence, and hope for the future to the people who were living at the stage of helplessness and hopelessness, a well-thought out counselling programme was designed through Anbiyams with the active participation of the experts. The affected people were brought back to normal life. In

63.  Ibid.
Kottar and Colachel Vicariates, ten members of Task Force conducted various sessions to revive the Anbiam64.

Anbiyam units, which function in almost all the parishes, have an important place in the growth of the diocese. They are the basic social structures of the parish. Only when they become strong the parish becomes lively and the local Church flourishes. So the Parish Pastoral Council which has to show concern to the growth of the parish should also show great concern to the growth of Anbiyam65. Since Anbiyam units are the indispensable basic structures of the Church Community, the members of the Parish Pastoral Council are as a rule elected from the Anbiam units. It will be fitting and fruitful to elect those who take part in the Anbiyam unit meetings regularly. If a member is not able to take part regularly, he/ she must be a person who is interested in Anbiyam and takes part in the meetings as often as possible. The Anbiyam office bearers should inform the Parish Pastoral Council about the participation of its member in the Anbiyam meetings. If a member fails to attend the Anbiyam meetings continuously for three months, he/ she will lose membership in the Parish Pastoral Council. Through regular attendance of the Pastoral Council member in the Anbiyam meetings, the opinions of the people can reflect in

65. Ibid.
the Parish Pastoral Council and likewise the people can also be informed of the acts of the Council\textsuperscript{66}.

**E. Evaluation and Experience of Christian Communities in Kottar Diocese**

Efforts to form Anbiyams started in 1970 in the world. The beginning of Anbiyams at Saral, Thentamarikulam, Kulasehram and Kadiyapattinam did not make any hard way in Kottar Diocese. The Catholic Sevasangam made wonderful contribution in these places. Unfortunately, people did not take it in the right sense. But in 1978, Rev.Fr. M. J. Edwin started Anbiyams in Kodimunai parish\textsuperscript{67}. He gave little for the Basic Communities as Anbiyams. Kodimunai parish was the first in whole of India to formulate Anbiyams. Within two years Fr. Edwin made the whole administrative structure of the parish based upon Anbiyams. He accepted the criticism and all matters of the church were organized by the Anbiyams. What is discussed in the Anbiyams would be taken in to the Parish Council. A new democratic experiment was conducted at Kodimunai\textsuperscript{68}. It is none other than Fr. Edwin. In his experiment at least one representative from each Anbiam should be there in all the organizations

\textsuperscript{66} Rules and regulations of Parish Council, Diocese of Kottar, 2009, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{67} John Damascene, N., Challenges to Basic Christian Communities, in Vaihari, Thiruchirapalli, 2002, p.50.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
such as building committee, economic welfare committee, women’s committee, the children committee, the catechism committee, liturgical committee and youth club\textsuperscript{69}. This first experiment was discussed in many national forums; lot of interested elite wrote articles on this experiment. The Vatican news agency also discussed the Kodimunai experiment\textsuperscript{70}.

**F. Personalities behind the formation of Anbiyams**

Rev. Fr. Edwin was the parish priest of Kottar Diocese from 1988-1992, got his M. A. degree from the University of Manila in Journalism. Then he worked as the editor of SAR News paper\textsuperscript{71}. He was very busy in creating neighborhood parliament in all places of the Diocese. In 1988, he was the Co-ordinater for the Anbiam organization and he created diocesan Taskforce. It comprised of priests, sisters, and social service activists of 25 members\textsuperscript{72}. In spite of the hard efforts of Rev Fr. Edwin, the concept of Anbiyam did not make any head way in the Diocese\textsuperscript{73}.

In 1989, the Bishop of Kottar, Leon Dharmaraj made it compulsory to the laity and to formulate a policy programmed “Live in” to the priests

\textsuperscript{69} Personal Interview with Fr. S. Vincent, aged 57, Former Director, Vettumani, 26 June 2011.

\textsuperscript{70} Basic Christian Communities, Kottar Report, 2000.

\textsuperscript{71} Maria David, A., \textit{op. cit.}, p.116.


\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}
of the Diocese\textsuperscript{74}. To make it a reality in 1992 he arranged for many formation programmers under the following terms such as 1, Introduction of Anbiyam, 2, A profile on theology, 3, How to conduct a meeting in Anbiyam 4, Thoughts of society 5, Health and hygiene 6, Public Relation. Experts were invited from different walks of life to animate in the topics\textsuperscript{75}. Hence, the meaning and the concept of Anbiyam were made popular. The parishes were made as the centre of Anbiams\textsuperscript{76}. During the time of Fr. Edwin 642 Anbiyams were entered\textsuperscript{77}. Due to these efforts Anbiyam concept became a reality.

In 2006, the Catholics were about 4,85,000 in Kottar Diocese. There were about 132 parishes\textsuperscript{78}. The Diocese had worked with a mission motivations. In 1986, a new policy document was created. It was called ‘Christian Life and Mission’\textsuperscript{79}. The policy documents of the diocese gave new blood to the function of the church. Followed by Rev.Fr. Edwin, Rev Fr. Arul Raj (1992-1994) became the Director of the Anbiams of the Diocese\textsuperscript{80}. They created an impression, among the people that Anbiams

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{74} Conclusions of the priests’ Live-In, Diocese of Kottar, 1989, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{75} Anbiam Report, \textit{op. cit.}, 1992.
\textsuperscript{76} Personal Interview with Fr. M. J. Edwin, aged 69, Founder of Anbiam, Nagercoil, dated 20th. June 2011
\textsuperscript{77} Pavalavizhz Malar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{78} Kottar News Letter, Bishop’s House, October, 2006, p. 254.
\textsuperscript{79} Diocesan Report, 1986.
\textsuperscript{80} Pavalavizhz Malar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 43.
\end{small}
were the important functionary of the parish. They published a booklet Adithalam\textsuperscript{81}. Rev Fr. N. John Damascene became the Director in 2001. He was in office up to 2004. He created 2456 Anbiams\textsuperscript{82}. He conducted and submitted a survey report on the challenges of the Anbiams. His report showed that the Anbiyam set up had reached its maturity in Kottar Diocese\textsuperscript{83}.

One of the chief motives of Anbiyams movement is to form decentralized and participating structure. Accordingly structural dominion as in the administrative part of Anbiams reflects the principle. Having these objectives in several programmers are conducted for the animation of Anbiams at various levels, to clarify about the different types of leadership in general and the types of leadership to be promoted in Anbiams. The thrust of these formation programmes have been to prompt a service oriented, participatory decentralization and people centered approach in leadership and structures taking from the unit level to the district level\textsuperscript{84}.

The Diocese has 175 parishes and 208 sub stations having 3006 Anbiyams\textsuperscript{85}. It is to be remembered that when the diocese was created in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[81] Adithalam is a weekly news letter of Anbiyam Commission.
\item[82] Pavalavizhz Malar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 43.
\item[83] John Damascene, N., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 50 – 61.
\item[84] Anbiam Report, \textit{op. cit.}, 2010.
\item[85] Adithalam, \textit{op. cit.}, 2011.
\end{footnotes}
1930, there were 25 parishes and sixty five substnations with a Christian population of 95,000. But today the population of the diocese of better 5, 50,000\textsuperscript{86}. For the purpose is Administration and pastoral development, the former Bishop Leon Dharmaraj divided the territory in to two parts. The Kottar and Colachel Vicariates formed into one and another unit and Thirithuvapuram and Mulagumoodu vicariates another unit may be called as Kuzhithurai Diocese. Structural changes had been made in the Kottar Diocese to accomodate the functions of two units separately. Therefore each unit began to work separately under a director. The Director of the proposed Kuzhithurai Diocese is Rev Fr. M. Joseph Wales Raja\textsuperscript{87}.

As mentioned earlier, there are four Vicariates in Kottar Diocese such as Thirithuvapuram, Mulagumoodu, Colachel and Kottar. Each Vicariate is divided in to various Zons. Thirithuvapuram Vicariates consists of 8 Zones such as Thirithuvapuram, Melpalai, Melpuram, Vavarai, Vencode, Kappikadu, Marthandam and Kulasekhamam. The Mulagumoodu Vicariate consists of 8 Zones namely Mulagumoodu, Palliyadi Thundathuvilai, Kandanvilai, Mycode, Manalikarai, Thuckalai and Murasamcode. Colachel Vicariate has four Zones namely Colachel, Muttom, Enayam and Mangalakuntu. Kottar Vicariate consists of 7 zones.


\textsuperscript{87} Report of Coordination of Commissions, Kuzhithurai, 2010, p. 145.
such as Kanyakumari, Saral, Ettamadai, Nagercoil, Rajakkamangalam, Carmelnagar and Ramanathichen Puthur. Each Zone has many parishes and substation. They all have Anbians. For example, the Thirithuvapuram zone has 9 churches under their jurisdiction having nearby 80 Anbians⁸⁸.

Each zone has a Director and an executive body on the administration of the zone⁹⁹. Each Anbiam is a small church. Because a church has a priest and the priest has link with the Bishop and the Bishop has link with the Vatican. So the Basic Christian Communities are the parts of the Universal Church⁹⁰. These Anbiam has to play a vital role in today’s society. The policy of privatizations and decentralization made such charges in today’s world. Consumerism in the order of the day, People began to give importance to materialism. So values are associated with material progressiveness.

It has become a danger in the society. People began to loose faith in church. Belief has become a matter of faith in church. Belief has become a matter of reasons and logic. Exploitation, corruption and poverty have become the order of the day. In such a situation, the response of the church

⁹⁹. Fr. K. Mariadas is the Zonal Director of Thirithuvapuram Zone, where zonal coordination gathers.
should cater to the needs of the people through a strong Christian faith. The Second Vatican Council opened the closed windows to share the responsibility among the laity. Hence, the basic unit Anbiyams should be shaped in such a way to meet the wide vision of the church.

In Old Testament, liberation of the poor people is taken into three ways. They are liberation from economic hurdles, liberation from bondage and political liberation. The Basic Christian Communities are the church of the poor, good news centre and the place to reflect to the values of Christ. People in participations are coming to the centre. Hence, it is a place to develop leadership and fellowship.

Man wants to live in society with fellowship. Man is not an island. But he is a social being. Each one needs the help of others. In the beginning human beings lived in love and in union with each other. But in due course, the growth of capitalism resulted the development of individualism. Hence, the second helped on the 20th century many developments which altered the face of faith. Hence, Anbiyam has become an alternative to develop humanism and human right from the bottom. One

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93. Ibid., p. 44.
94. Joseph Prasad Pinto, op. cit., p. 179.
hour in a little community spend in a house or in any place for the gathering of Anbiyam, makes a difference in life and faith. After initial prayer, the Anbiyam people pray for the sick and the affected people. They discuss the issues of the people. What is to be decided in the Parish and the Diocese is taken from here. If the bottom is strong, the structures will also be strong. Hence, the Anbiyams work as the basic structure of the church.  

G. Lay Catechists as the backbone of grass – root structures

The full-time Catechists are an asset to pastoral ministry and missionary work in Kottar Diocese since 1969. Formerly many of the interior parishes had the so called Upadesiars – a factotum at the service of the Parish priest. The traditional upadesiars possessed a meager knowledge of Christian doctrine and practice. To help implement the programmes of renewal initiated by Second Vatican Council, more and more trained catechists were required. The Diocese prepared candidates from Tamil Nadu Biblical Liturgical and Catechetical Centre (TNBCLC), Thindivanam. Total number of Catechists is 21, among them 9 retired and they have been at mission-work. The Catechists do various kinds of services as for example, preparing the people for a fruitful celebration of the sacraments, preaching the Word of God, promoting catechesis,

95. Ibid.
conducting seminars, building up Christian communities, visiting the sick and the like\textsuperscript{97}.

From the history of the Anbiyam mission in Kottar Diocese, it is evident that 10 Catechists J. Siluvaimuthu, S. Vincent, A. Selvaraj, V. Nesaiyan, G. Yenose, R. Aruldas, R. Yesudas, S. Arulanandam, S. Joseph Edwin and V. M. Selvamony worked hard and actively collaborated with Anbiyam Directors like Rev. Fr. M. J. Edwin, Rev. Fr. V. Arulraj, Rev. Fr. Micheal Nayaham, Rev. Fr. S. Vincent, Rev Fr. P. K. Chellaian, Rev Fr. Paul Richard Joseph and Rev Fr, Wals Raja\textsuperscript{98}. They established Basic Christian Communities in all the diocesan parishes with the support of Parish priests and coordinated in the Parish, Zonal, Vicariate and Diocesan levels. The heroic role they played in the pioneering efforts at establishing Anbiyam structures can not but fill with admiration and gratitude those who are aware of it. Not only in the past, but even today they actively involved in the Anbiyam Commission. They reached to far-flung villages (Parishes and substations) so as to establish Anbiyams regardless of intractable difficulties which they had encountered. Bishops M. Arokiasamy, Leon Tharmaraj and Peter Remigious, diocesan conferences in various Vicariates and Zones have acknowledged with great

\textsuperscript{97} Devaraj, S., Lay Catechists in the Documents of the Church, in \textit{Vidyajoti}, November 2006, p. 849.

\textsuperscript{98} Quinquennial Report, Bishop’s House, Nagercoil, 2012, p. 55.
admiration the important and significant role of them in the life and mission of the Anbiyam\textsuperscript{99}.

For the former Vicar General John Kulandai [2000 – 2005], the work of the Catechists, despite its remaining lowly and hidden, is very precious and valuable due to the fact that the Basic Christian Communities in different Vicariates and Zones would have been built up but for their tireless and self-sacrificing service\textsuperscript{100}. When the Anbiyam mission was understood in the traditional perspective of organizing leading to conversion of people for the establishment of grass-root structures, the Catechists G. Yesudas in Mulagumoodu Vicariate, V. Nesiyin in Kottar Vicariate, V. M. Selvamony in Colachel Vicariate and R. Arudas in Thirithuvapuram Vicariate were considered to be animators and helpers in the missionary enterprises in which the priests, religious sisters and lay volunteers like D. Sathiyyadas in Mulagumoodu Vicariate, A. X. F. Fernabdes in Kottar Vicariate, A. Chellathurai in Colachel Vicariate and John Bright in Thirithuvapuram Vicariate, played the principal role. They devised a modus operandi in order to sow the seed of democratization in Kottar Diocese. The guiding principle was not to exert

\textsuperscript{100}  Personal Interview with Fr. E. John Kulandai, aged 67, Former Vicar General, dated 1 March 2011.
any force but with firm approach of conviction, making them rooted in the new democratic experience of the Anbiyam mission\textsuperscript{101}.

After establishing structures like Parish coordination, Zonal coordination, Vicariate coordination and Diocesan coordination, the Anbiyam movement was facing a difficult situation in the course of time owing to the shortage of fulltime workers. So the assistance of laity to sustain the movement became imperative. There were volunteers like Mrs. S. Mary, A. Pushpa Rani, S. Raja Titus, P. Padmini, R. Gracy and R. Selvi helped to Catechists. Rev Fr. M. J. Edwin, the great visionary worked as Anbiyam missionary about thirteen years (1979 – 1992) in Kodimunai parish,\textsuperscript{102} coordination of Pastoral Commissions and Anbiyam Movement. He believed that the success of the Anbiyam Movement depended on the good will of the Catechists. The Catechists realized that if their mission enterprise was not to be lost in future, it should be perpetuated through the publication Adithalam\textsuperscript{103}.

The Catechists visited the villages and conducted random survey for ground work. After collecting all the details, they prepared people to come

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\textsuperscript{101} Paul Richard Joseph, R., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{102} Kodimunai is a coastal village situated along the Arabian Sea, almost 22 kilometers from the district capital, Nagercoil. Fr. M.J. Edwin took charge as the parish priest there in 1979.
\textsuperscript{103} Then Oli, \textit{op. cit.} March 1988, p 14.
\end{flushleft}
together for Anbiyam meeting. To build up the community, formation programmes were given with the help of local leaders. It was one of the ways of building Basic Christian Communities in Kottar Diocese. They spent a great deal of time with the people, listening to the stories of their lives, sharing their hardships and encouraging them to shake off their superstitious practices. For the democratic work, they promoted Anbiyam as people – centred or community centred, based on co-responsibility, non-dominating leadership and social transformation\textsuperscript{104}. As reported in the annual reports, these Catechists helped the Parish priests in so many ways; they introduced the Parish priest as Coordinator of the Anbiyams of the village; they volunteered to conduct on-going formations; they assisted them in revising census. In substations, where there was a shortage of priests, the Catechists shouldered the responsibility of evangelization\textsuperscript{105}.

Although they had formal and animation trainings, they did a marvellous job in the Anbiyam field. Indeed, some of them are men of extraordinary talents. Some are good at composing songs. History proved that the Anbiyam ministry of the Catechists. The catechists served as authentic ministers in the diocese. They deserved well organized professional training and adequate remuneration for a dignified life is

\textsuperscript{104} John Damascene, N., Challenges to the Basic Christian Communities, in \textit{Vaiharai}, 2002, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{105} Then Oli, \textit{op. cit.}
successful and ever flourishing. They are instrumental in maintaining cordial and harmonious relationship between the priests and people. Had the Parish priests come to Anbiyam coordination in the village without the assistance of Catechists, the people would have looked askance at them. The teamwork and involvement of the Catechists in the growth and development of Anbiyam as establishing grass-root structure of the Parish, Zonal, Vicariate and Diocese level is indispensable. Their labours have far-reaching efforts in Kanyakumari district\textsuperscript{106}. Therefore, if the Anbiyam – story of Kottar Diocese is so famous in Church History, the credit goes not only to the priests and religious but also to the lay Catechists who are the backbone of grass – root structure.

\textsuperscript{106} Personal Interview with V. M. Selvamony, Former Anbiyam Animator in 1991 and office staff in 2004, dated 12 April 2012. Mr. V. M. Selvamony after his postgraduate studies in English Literature and Christian Studies, was appointed as a Lay Catechist in Kottar Diocese in 1991. He made a study of what the Church has affirmed in recent times about the role and importance of Lay Catechists in the Church, especially in Kottar Diocese.