

## **Our Community in Crisis**

June 10, 2007

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The peace, hope and joy of the Lord be with you all.

**OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY IS IN DEEP CRISIS AND INTERNAL CONFLICT.**

The Lord brought us to Lamentations for this year 2007. But no one could have imagined the conflict and disunity that the top leaders in our community would be facing now. We are in crisis. I am deeply concerned.

But first, since even I am under attack, and there are those who would question my authority to speak, I am involving myself because CFC is the community I love and will spend the rest of my life in. Do I have the right to speak? Of course, and so does anyone else in our community, especially if there is a great threat to our very life and mission.

Further, my wife Gerry and I were here from the very start, I have witnessed the blessings of God upon CFC for the last 26 years, I can see what is really going on, and I do have a responsibility, together with everyone else, to protect our life and mission.

### What is the concern?

At the very heart of my concern is the tension between the parent CFC and the child GK. Briefly, this has to do with:

- (1) The social versus the spiritual dimension of the work;
- (2) The tendency of certain top leaders of GK to exclude the Family and Social Ministries in real integration in the GK work;
- (3) Looking on CFC as basically just a resource base (warm bodies, money, territorial presence, integrity) but not fully submitted to the overall governance of CFC.
- (4) The singular focus on GK that denigrates the other pillars, such as Pro-Life and Social Ministries.

The above are causing serious disunity and tension in CFC, especially among top leaders. Some would say that it is just a conflict between Tony Meloto and myself. This is not true.

Let me make it very clear, I am not against GK. Those who want to put me down have spread the lie that I am against or am attacking Tony Meloto or GK. But my record speaks for itself. All my books, articles, talks, teachings and papers are in strong support of GK. I do believe God gave GK to CFC so that it could do the wonderful work it is doing. As for Tony, he is my brother, with whom I have issues. For 7 long years I was Tony's defender and supporter. But the issues have persisted and the tension deepened, and I precisely want to confront the issues because of my love for and support to GK.

Exacerbating this tension is the lack of dialogue. Tony Meloto does not want to have a dialogue or even meet. He does not attend our fraternal household meetings and he does not attend the meeting called by the Council to talk about the issues. Unfortunately, the Council itself, while having many meetings with different leaders, has not been eager to meet with me or with Lachie Agana. I and Lachie have always been the ones pursuing them for a dialogue. While there have been some meetings, there has certainly not been enough talking among us.

#### Is this about power and control?

There are also those who insinuate that I am just after power and control. Again this is farthest from the truth, and my record bears this out.

(1) When CFC went separate ways with Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon (LNP) in 1993, I voluntarily relinquished my position of Executive Director and did not stand for election to the CFC Council for the 1993-1995 term.

(2) When I sensed the Lord wanting the Council to take command responsibility for collective guilt of the whole community, I voluntarily stepped down from the Council and being CFC Director last February 20.

(3) When I saw how the top leaders (the 7 in the former Council) were in conflict, I said it was no longer a question of who was right or wrong, but we needed to acknowledge that we were the problem, and so I proposed that the 7 of us should not be available to the new Council (2007-2009). Luis Oquinen and Issa Santos of GK agreed with this in principle, and the members of the Board of Elders (12 present out of 15) all agreed with this. However, the Council (of 4) did not agree.

(4) Even as I was trying to find ways and means of resolving some of the conflicts, and thus proposed being given the opportunity to name additional nominees to the Council, I told the Council and Bp Gabby Reyes that I would exclude myself.

Even now, I have no problem being excluded, if that is what it will take to gain moral ascendancy and thus be given the opportunity to help bring peace, reconciliation, healing and unity to our community.

Elders should not hold on to position, especially if they are the cause of conflict and disunity. This calls for simple humility, *delicadeza*, not hardening our hearts, and confidence in our deep bench of leaders, especially the younger ones.

#### The current issue

The current issue right now is that our bishops, deeply cognizant of the conflict within CFC (especially among each one of the 7 brothers in the former Council), have issued a letter to the Elders Assembly strongly recommending the 7 to talk about the issues and for the June elections to be postponed. They wisely say that major decisions should not be made in a situation of deep conflict and division.

The 3 bishops who issued the letter are: Bp Gabby Reyes (Chair of the Episcopal Commission on the Laity and our CFC National Spiritual Director), Archbp Angel Lagdameo (President of the CBCP) and Bp Soc Villegas (under the direct authority of Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, Archbishop of Manila). We can see that collectively they truly represent the Church hierarchy.

The bishops issued their letter last June 7, with Bp Gabby Reyes himself bringing the letter to the

Home Office. However, instead of bringing the 7 together to talk, the Council issued its “CFC Council Statement” the next day, June 8, but dated (antedated?) June 6, regarding the holding of the elections on June 22. Then the Council issued its letter to the bishops also on June 8 but dated June 7, rejecting the postponement of the elections. The bishops had just released their letter, and the Council was immediately rejecting it. Why?

I believe this is very disrespectful to the bishops. As such, this can endanger our evangelization work, as the other bishops in the provinces (and even abroad) may look on CFC as disobedient at worse or as disrespectful at best. This can also endanger our official recognition, as a National Association of Lay Faithful by the CBCP and as an International Lay Association of Christian Faithful by the Holy See (Vatican).

Further, the bishops’ letter was addressed to the Elders Assembly. The Council did not have the right to reject the bishops, as they do not speak for the Elders Assembly. Neither did they consult the Elders Assembly. They simply bypassed and usurped the power and authority of the Elders Assembly. This is very disrespectful to the Elders Assembly. This is so ironic, being done by those so intent on legalities.

But will postponing the elections cause greater disunity as the Council claims? I believe not, since we precisely will have the opportunity to talk about the issues and work at healing and reconciliation. But how about our time-honored tradition and process of elections? Well, what the bishops are asking for is just a postponement, not a total scrapping. Besides, when David and Jesus’ own disciples “violated” the sabbath and did what was unlawful, Jesus defended them, saying “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.” (Mk 2:24-28). By the same token, our processes are at the service of our community. When the bishops are so concerned that they issue such a strong recommendation, it is improper for us to cite tradition or processes.

Brothers and sisters, our bishops are not “pakialamero.” They have better things to do than to involve themselves in petty quarrels. But this is not the case with CFC. They see that what is happening as very serious and can indeed threaten the very life and mission of CFC, which is the life and mission of the Church herself. The bishops are acting as concerned pastors, aside from the reality that they love CFC, just as we do. Why can we not heed these holy and discerning pastors given by God to us, among other things, for our protection? Why are we so quick to deny the spiritual discernment of our 3 bishops, whom we know to be holy men and loving pastors? Are we not a Catholic community?

#### My posture

I am for peace, healing, reconciliation and unity. I do understand that we are in Lamentations and God is pruning us, so I can look at the difficulties and challenges quite positively. We have much to learn. But for us to learn the lessons of Lamentations, we need humility. In humility, we must defer to our beloved bishops.

If the elections, contrary to the direction of the bishops, are still held this June 22 as the Council insists, without dialogue and without hearing the Elders Assembly, I cannot in conscience participate. I cannot defy the bishops when they are in the right and are just so very concerned about

our well-being.

The Elders Assembly on June 22 does not have to go to waste. I can see certain things it can profitably take on.

- (1) Start working on the issues, or at least defining them.
- (2) Appoint a Lamentations Commission that will look into the issues.
- (3) Set parameters and timetables.
- (4) Appoint an interim governing "Council."
- (5) Even look into changes in the by-laws proposed by the BOE.

### My appeal

I ask the current **Council** to humbly heed the bishops. I ask my brothers to be at the forefront of working at healing and unity, and this entails not being legalistic or unyielding or even disrespectful to our bishops. I continue to assure them, as I have already done so, that I look on them as my brothers and continue to extend the hand of peace.

I ask the **Elders Assembly** to seek the truth. In this, you may freely ask me anything and I will try to answer objectively. I know from reports that there are those doing a demolition job on me. But I have nothing to hide. I aspire for no position. I am your brother who all this time, in spite of my own shortcomings, have tried to be faithful to God and CFC and to all of you. I believe you can still rely on me to stand for truth and justice.

Since Manila is the center of our global work and is the center of governance over CFC, I ask the **Metro Manila elders** to seriously consider the proper posture we should have in relation to the Church hierarchy. It must be no other than respect and submission. You know that I myself have been very strong on lay empowerment and on recognizing the shortcomings of some clergy. But these 3 bishops are beyond any reproach, and are very clearly holy men of God. Their word, and their common discernment, should bear much weight for us.

I ask the **Area Heads** to consult with the **Area Councils**, and for them together to go to their bishops for advice. Any backlash from this action of the Council will affect our evangelization in your provinces. And you cannot point to the Council because the bishops' letter is addressed to the Elders Assembly, which include you (Area Heads).

I ask our beloved **bishops** to be patient with us. We are your children who are quarreling. You have lovingly tried to intervene as pastors. You have been rejected. Please forgive us. There are still many of us who look to you for wisdom and guidance and who are obedient to holy Mother Church. Please continue to show us the way.

And to all my beloved brothers and sisters in CFC, forgive us our transgressions. Forgive us for falling short on our being pastors and models. But please continue your work. Be focused on Jesus. God loves CFC and will continue to use CFC in the power of the Spirit. For those among us who stand in God's way, God will deal with us. Please pray for us.

This is the feast of Corpus Christi, the body of Christ. May the Lord look kindly upon us in CFC,

the body of disciples He has raised, and faithfully renew His favors and mercies upon us all.

May God bless us all.

In the service of Christ,

Frank Padilla

On the feast of Corpus Christi

Note: This is sent to the global family, as the letter of the Council has been sent to the global family, in the interest of fairness, truth and justice. I also attach the bishops' letter, which as far as I know has not been sent out by the Council.