

## **Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life**

### **Frank Padilla as Founder of CFC**

CFC was started in 1981 through the initiative of the *Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon Community* (LNP). In January 1981, LNP gathered 16 couples who went through a Life in the Spirit Seminar, with the intent of bringing them into LNP. But instead they were kept together for a few months after the LSS, until it was decided that a new group would be established to emphasize family life renewal. It would be an outreach of LNP. In June of 1981, Couples for Christ (CFC) was born, with the 16 couples as members. Frank and Gerry Padilla were among the 16.

Frank had never claimed that he was the founder of CFC. In the midst of many bishops, including Cardinal Sin, saying through the years that he was the founder, Frank kept saying he was not. A number of times he even put it in writing to the CFC membership. He did not want to take claim to being founder.

Well, Frank was wrong. He did not understand then, as many do not understand now, the meaning of being founder. The meaning of founder is taken in the Church context of ecclesial movements, which the Holy Spirit raises from time to time throughout the history of the Church.

### **The meaning of founder**

Who is considered the founder of a lay association? There are 3 prerequisites. One, historical, that is, he was there from the beginning, having been called by God. Two, canonical, that is, he put together the constitution (statutes) or way of life of the association. Three, charismatic, that is, he embodies the whole vision and mission of the association, and incarnates the spirit of what the association is and has been called to do. He translates the charism into a particular way of life.

Frank was there from the very start in 1981. He was there as part of a small group of leaders when CFC had its very first formal planning session in 1982, which came up with the statements of vision, mission and philosophy. He was an incorporator of the corporate entity established in 1984, the Couples for Christ Foundation Inc. (CFCFI), tasked to carry on the mission of CFC. He quickly emerged to be a top leader, and in 1985 was already the Executive Director, running the day-to-day work of the whole CFC. In 1986 he went fulltime for CFC. He was brought into the LNP in 1982 and quickly rose through the ranks, becoming Coordinator (Coordinators were the top leaders of the community) in 1987.

In 1993, there was a split, by mutual agreement, between the parent LNP and the child CFC. This was due to basic fundamental differences in vision. LNP wanted CFC to just be one of its outreaches focusing on married couples, not to expand too much or too widely, not to do much of provincial or even foreign work. But the true calling of CFC

was emerging, that of an evangelistic and missionary community, fostering rapid and massive growth, and ministering to every member of the family. LNP was inward-looking while CFC was outward-looking. LNP wanted restricted growth while CFC was moving into rapid and massive evangelization. LNP did not see CFC doing too much work outside the Philippines while CFC was gearing up to bring its work into all the countries of the world. So the very life and direction of CFC was the very threat seen by LNP to what it had envisioned. The separation was inevitable, if God was to be obeyed. Frank led CFC through this whole process.

In 1996, Frank secured CBCP recognition for CFC. In 2000, Frank secured Vatican recognition for CFC.

### **Three phases in the life of CFC**

There are 3 significant phases in the life of CFC—1981, 1993, 2007. 1981 was the founding of CFC. 1993 was the re-founding of CFC. And 2007 was the restoration of CFC.

The stirrings for the fullness of the life and mission of CFC began early in the 1980s, but it was in 1993 that the CFC charism achieved its fullness. By 1993, the direction of CFC had become radically different from and diametrically opposed to the direction its parent LNP wanted for it. In fact, it was this difference that caused the separation. With its “new” existence, CFC experienced a re-founding. Throughout this time, Frank was the initiator, proponent, mover, visionary, leader and chief defender of the new CFC. In this sense, it is clear that Frank is the founder. He was the overall leader of CFC, he was the one who had a clear vision of what the Lord wanted and he led in pushing for that vision, he was the rallying force in getting the overwhelming majority of CFC members to remain with him in the re-founded CFC.

But how about 1981? The normal secular thinking is that the founder is the one who started the group. And that of course is LNP. But remember that we are talking about God’s work, and it is God who has His plan and intent for any authentic movement that He raises. God intended CFC to be what it became, and not what LNP wanted it to become. So more importantly, transcending human time and dimension, the relevant questions are: what was God’s intent for CFC, what was His plan, what did He ultimately intend to cause to happen, whom did He bring in at the very start to carry out His plan? And so would it not be true that God brought Frank into that small group that became CFC in 1981, precisely because He knew what He would cause to happen, and Frank would be the main actor in His plan? And God used Frank from that time on. Frank was at the core of the leadership that began to develop the thrusts and programs of CFC, even as he was not yet the overall leader. With this understanding, we can then accept that even for the very start, at the founding of CFC, God intended Frank to be the true founder.

In truth, the re-founding in 1993 was only in relation to its being brought to what God intended it to be when it was founded in 1981. From the very beginning, God intended

CFC to be what it became after the separation. There was no change in course. There was only the lack of understanding, on the part of LNP, as to what God had allowed to be founded in 1981. Thus the latter years before and right up to the separation were difficult, in that LNP was unwittingly preventing CFC from fully becoming what God intended. But what God intended never changed---from 1981, through 1993, and now in 2007 and beyond. Thus, CFC re-founded in 1993 was really the CFC God originally founded in 1981.

Now the crisis came in 2007, and CFC split into two. Why? Because God will not be thwarted in His plan. And so as CFC veered away from its authentic calling, God allowed the crisis, and eventually the split. We can even say that God not just allowed but actually intended the crisis to happen (just as in 1993). God is going to accomplish His plan in spite of our blindness, ignorance and sin.

Much has already been said about the crisis and so will not be repeated here. But Frank tried to renew CFC from within through his restoration movement, to restore CFC back to its authentic charism from which CFC had veered away. But the other side would not accept this, and eventually drove Frank away, after unjustly firing him from all his services. Seeing the very charism and vision and mission of CFC being destroyed, Frank started CFC-FFL, which is true to CFC's vision, mission and charism. CFC-FFL is the CFC that is led by the CFC founder.

So the 2007 crisis in CFC was according to God's plan, to bring CFC back to His original intent. Perhaps the crisis was also intended to bring Frank to an acceptance of the reality of being the founder of CFC, so that finally all the elements of God's plan for CFC would be in place.

### **The founder and charism**

The charism of a particular Church association is a gift given and entrusted to the founder. The charism is given to a particular person and not to a group of people. The charism is then shared by the founder with other people who decide that they have the same calling as that of the founder.

It is the founder, to whom the charism is given, who is responsible to properly respond to the Spirit. Such responsibility cannot be delegated. The founder ensures that such charism is always rooted in Christ, otherwise it will be the charism itself that will divide the association. The founder interprets how the charism is lived out in the day-to-day life of the association. This is why the founder is also called the keeper of the charism.

As such, the well-being and unity of the association, based on its particular charism, is dependent on the presence of the founder, for as long as he is living. God's call to the founder is for life.

## **Recognition by the Church hierarchy**

Many bishops, such as Cardinal Vidal, Archbp Lagdameo (President of the CBCP), Bp Reyes (Chair of the Episcopal Commission on the Lay Apostolate and Spiritual Director of CFC), Bp Villegas, all accept Frank as the founder of CFC. When Frank visited the Holy See last September, Cardinal Rylko (President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which gave CFC its Vatican recognition) also affirmed Frank as founder.

In humility and submission to God's will, Frank now also accepts that he is the founder of CFC.

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