

CELEBRATING 500 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PHILIPPINES (1521 TO 2021)

A PROPOSAL FOR THE RE-EVANGELIZATION OF THE NATION

We are facing exciting times in the life and mission of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. By extension, since the Philippines has a prophetic calling to be a light in Asia and even to the world, what happens in this nation will have a big impact on what happens in the world.

Our nation received its Christian faith from Spain. Ironically, that nation, plus all the other Christian nations that God used to spread the faith throughout the world, are becoming more and more secular and humanist. The foundational aspects crucial to the faith, that of family and life, are severely threatened.

The Philippines, even though still considered a strongly religious nation, is threatened as well by the dark forces that are engulfing the world. While the churches are packed, only 15-20% of all Catholics regularly go to Church on Sundays. While divorce and abortion are not legal, more and more Catholics are separating, aborting and contracepting. While society is still fairly conservative, premarital and extramarital sex are becoming widespread, and there is increasing homosexual activity.

Today the dark forces are marshaling their strength for a final push against the culture of life and against the Catholic Church. These are powerful forces, such as the European Union, the US government under President Obama, elements of the United Nations, billionaire philanthropists, liberal media, homosexualist and radical feminist forces, etc. Given the position of our nation as still a bastion of Christianity, of traditional family and of the culture of life, the Philippines is a major target.

We need to prepare for the onslaught of evil upon our land. This is especially critical since the enemy is already within the Church, whether these are increasingly liberal Catholic educational institutions, feminist nuns, Catholic politicians promoting reproductive rights, etc. But more importantly, we need to prepare to fulfill our destiny as God's light to the world.

This then is a proposal, to be implemented in 2011 and for ten years thereafter, culminating in 2021 on the 500th anniversary of Christianity here, for the re-evangelization of the Philippines.

MAJOR ASPECTS OF THE PLAN

While there are many things that should be looked to in order to strengthen the Church and prepare her for the ongoing struggles of this third millennium, we should focus on the most important fundamentals. These are the following:

- 1) Re-evangelization. Living transformed lives in Christ.
- 2) Family renewal. Strengthening the nuclear family.
- 3) The culture of life. Defending life.
- 4) Building the Church of the Poor. Working at social justice.

Re-evangelization is crucial. Nothing much else can be done unless our people are renewed in Christ and living in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is for both laity and clergy alike. To be God's light in the world, we must grow in the very holiness of God.

Family renewal is crucial. The family is the basic unit of society, and as Pope John Paul II has said, the future of humanity passes by way of the family. The enemy, knowing this, seeks to destroy the family. The family is the most basic ecclesial community and is the mission base for doing evangelistic work outside the home.

Defending the culture of life is crucial. This is the fight of the third millennium. The evil forces are concentrated on promoting the culture of death, and are committed to spread its errors throughout the whole world. The US government is leading the charge, with a strong commitment to having abortion as a universal human right.

Working against poverty and social injustice is crucial. The very mission of Jesus is to bring good news to the poor—spiritual, material, emotional, societal. Building the Church of the Poor is the only way true peace and even prosperity in the land can be achieved.

Re-evangelization

There should be a program that is effective in bringing people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The program should be replicable throughout the parishes, to be conducted by laypeople under the guidance of the clergy. The program should provide for an ongoing support environment, so that the initial transformation in Christ will deepen.

It should be a program that has proven effective in bringing people to Christ in every situation and with people of different backgrounds. Such a program is the Christian Life Seminar (CLS). This consists of 9 different sessions. With simple training, mature parish leaders can handle this program. The CLS effectively leads people to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and to look to living their lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. It promotes a charismatic spirituality, which is the spirituality of the early Church.

After the CLS, the graduates find their support group in the many different associations within the parish. These associations have many different formation programs, which can serve to deepen the faith of their members. An important aspect of formation is the Biblical apostolate, with a program such as the Liturgical Bible Study (LBS) that builds capability to proclaim/share the Good News to neighborhood groupings such as the BEC model of being Church.

Family renewal

While the program starts with individual renewal, since each individual needs to personally experience transformation in Christ, it must move on to renewing marriage and family life. Family is crucial to the well-being of individuals and of the whole nation. Family is also the most basic educational institution for raising God-fearing men and women.

Crucial to the evangelization of the family is the role of the men. Traditionally many of those who are active in the Church are the women. But family renewal cannot happen unless the men assume their proper role as head of the home according to the plan of God.

Here there should be marriage enrichment seminars and retreats, as well as youth and family formation courses. Further, there should be smaller cell groups to which couples and other individuals can belong to, where they relate to their peers and support each other in the Christian life.

The culture of life

There should be intensive pro-life formation. The different pro-life groups already have all the material. What is needed is to have a deliberate and sustained pro-life teaching and training, conducted by laypeople but supported and even pushed by the parish priests.

Pro-life groups should also form an effective coalition (not necessarily formal) where there is united effort whenever needed, where there is a sharing of resources, and where functions would not have to unnecessarily overlap.

Work with the poor

This should be a program that effectively works at poverty eradication, while providing the poor with spiritual inputs. It should be concerted and replicable, and able to be done by parishioners on an ongoing basis.

One such program is a holistic work of poverty alleviation that involves values formation, building homes, and providing soft programs for education, health, livelihood and environment. It builds physical communities among the poor, which communities would be perfect as Basic Ecclesial Communities.

Under the leadership of the parish priest, this work would involve all parishioners and all parish organizations. Funding will come not only from parishioners but also from the national and international organizations of the parish groups, from Filipino associations abroad (connecting provincial and regional associations with their own provinces and towns), and even from sister parishes in the First World.

This program, if supported by all the parishes, can rapidly work at poverty reduction, without necessarily straining the resources of particular individuals or groups. At the same time it strengthens the faith, the family and the culture of life.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Many things are already happening in the Church today. There is much activity. There are many good programs. However, we do see that Church attendance is low, and even those who are regularly attending Church are not necessarily growing in lives of holiness. This includes the clergy.

Let us examine our situation.

- * How many percent of Catholics attend church regularly? How can this be increased to a much higher percentage?
- * How many Catholics live out their faith when in government or private business?
- * How many Catholics are still living without benefit of marriage, especially among the poor?
- * How many Catholics who have more in life actually share their resources with the poor?
- * How many clerics are true men of God and are true pastors?

Why is such a project important?

The Philippines, according to God's plan, has a prophetic role to be His light in Asia and to the world. But unless something is done, the Philippines may go the way of all other Catholic nations where the faith has greatly diminished.

Is the Philippines on that downward road?

The Philippines is still recognized as a strongly Catholic nation. Churches are still full on Sundays. But what is the reality?

- * Only 15-20% of all Catholics attend Mass regularly every week.
- * Many corrupt government officials, tax-evading businessmen, and miscreants of all kinds are Catholics.
- * Many Catholic women use contraceptives, and many Catholics favor the reproductive health bill.
- * Many Catholic couples among the poor are not married in Church.
- * Many Catholics are being lost to fundamentalist sects and cults.
- * Not many Catholics go to regular confession.

Of the Catholics who are basically good people who still go to church, many are not striving to live lives of holiness. And most do not participate at all in the life and mission of the Church.

HOW IS THIS PROGRAM DIFFERENT?

There are already many pastoral programs and activities in the Church. Do we need another one? It is precisely that there are many programs and activities, but still there is that downward direction, that we need another fresh approach, one that hopefully would truly be Spirit-inspired.

What would distinguish this approach from others?

There would be a number of distinct elements:

- (1) It would be a concerted project of the whole Church, mandated and led by the hierarchy.
- (2) It would target the critical basic areas that are needed for revival, and those are: evangelization, family renewal, the culture of life, and work with the poor.
- (3) It would mobilize the laity through means that enable massive implementation from the top down, all the way to each and every Catholic throughout the whole nation. This includes the culture of person-to-person evangelization.
- (4) It would utilize proven programs and approaches.¹

What is needed is a concerted deliberate program of action, supported at the very top and by all the clergy.

What are our goals?

The following indicators, many of which are not evident in the lives of many Catholics today, should be our goal:

- * Having a deep personal relationship with Jesus.
- * Looking to grow in holiness of life.
- * Having a well-established prayer life.
- * Knowing and living the Bible.
- * Fidelity in promises/vows made, be it marriage, priesthood or the religious-consecrated life.
- * Vibrancy in Christian family living.
- * Purity among the youth.
- * Couples adhering to NFP and not using contraceptives.
- * Sharing their faith and evangelizing.
- * Servant leadership.
- * Honest citizenship.
- * Financial stewardship and transparency in government/Church finances.
- * Caring for and empowering the poor.

¹ This is basically the pastoral approach of CFC (CFC-FFL). CFC grew in 20 years to over one million members, eventually brought its ministry to 160 countries, and was recognized by the Holy See as one of the new lay ecclesial movements. With the support of the hierarchy, its work can be easily replicated and become even more massive.

If we can say that the above are happening in the lives of Filipino Catholics today, then let us just go on with what we already have. But the reality is that the above are more of the exception rather than the rule. Many Catholics are in fact not really living Christian lives.

PRACTICAL PROPOSALS ON HOW TO PROCEED

It starts with a decision of the Catholic hierarchy (through the CBCP) to embark on this 10-year program of re-evangelization.

Then a central committee is formed to do the planning. This will be a two-month planning, from February to March 2011. The committee will regularly report to the CBCP on its progress. After this time, people will undergo training on the different programs of formation as needed.

March 2011 will be the formal launch of the program, with a Eucharistic celebration on Limasawa Island in Leyte (officially declared as the authentic site by the Historical Commission), at the site where the first Mass was celebrated by the Spaniards.

Some practical elements

Annual **conferences** -- one national and several echo conferences regionally on the level of the ecclesiastical provinces.

Themes for the annual conferences for the decade:

2011-2012	Proclaiming Christ (evangelization)
2012-2013	Renewing the family
2013-2014	Uplifting the culture of life
2014-2015	Servant leadership ²
2015-2016	Building the Church of the Poor
2016-2017	The Filipino diaspora in the service of the nations
2017-2018	The Christian in society, politics, economics and the environment
2018-2019	Serving Christ and his Church ³
2019-2020	The Blessed Virgin Mary in evangelization and family renewal
2020-2021	The Philippines as God's light to the world

* Underlying all the above would be the call to holiness.

Logo, song and prayer for the decade.

An annual day of fasting for this intention.

Step-by-step

² For both laity and clergy.

³ Including life and service in the parish, and BECs.

February 2011 - March 2011 (Preparatory stage)

Approval in principle by the CBCP.

Appointment of a working or central committee. Working out the whole framework of programs and activities for the decade.

Coming up with the logo, song and prayer for the decade.

March 2011

Launch of the decade of re-evangelization of the Philippines, with a Eucharistic celebration on Limasawa Island.

2011-2021

Continuous training of lay implementors, with the attendant clerics, in Manila as well as regionally in each ecclesiastical province. Training means they actually go through the programs, and are given inputs on how to then mount the programs themselves.

From the ecclesiastical provinces, the training and programs can move down to the dioceses, and from there down to every parish.

The programs are implemented as trained laypeople are able to conduct them. These programs are ongoing throughout the decade.

March 2021

Eucharistic celebration by the Holy Father in Manila.

THE PROGRAMS

The very first is the **Christian Life Seminar (CLS)**.⁴ It is designed to bring participants to conversion, transformation and renewal in Christ. It consists of 9 separate sessions, which can be given in nine consecutive weeks, or in a shorter compressed way (e.g., three weekends, or even in one weekend if necessary). The CLS is a proven way of bringing lapsed or inactive Catholics back to the Church, transforming nominal Catholics to a vibrant and committed life in Christ, and deepening the faith of those who are already active.

After the CLS, for continuing support and formation, there will be a **monthly prayer assembly** in the parish (or a diocesan facility). Here there will be worship, personal testimonies, teachings, and fellowship.

Many follow-up **formation programs** will be made available. Among others:⁵

⁴ This is the CLS of the CFC-FFL. It is like a slightly longer Life in the Spirit Seminar. The last talk will be modified to become generic and pave the way for continuing participation in the parish.

⁵ This is not an exhaustive list.

- * For married couples -- Marriage Enrichment Retreat
- * For youth -- various youth formation modules
- * For Bible appreciation -- Liturgical Bible Study
- * For pro-life -- SAFE⁶ and other pro-life modules
- * For work with the poor -- Church of the Poor Retreat
- * For servant leadership -- various leadership modules
- * Family catechesis

The dynamics of the program for re-evangelization

Everyone goes through the CLS, hopefully including the clergy. For the clergy this is desirable for the following reasons:

- (1) So that every Filipino Catholic will be on the same page on this common journey to the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the nation;
- (2) So the clergy, especially the parish priests, can be fully knowledgeable about the CLS and thus be able to better promote and support it; and
- (3) So that their own spirituality can be further enhanced.

The CLS, in Manila as well as in the various ecclesiastical provinces, is first mounted for lay leaders already involved in the dioceses/parishes and in the various religious groups and lay movements. This is so that they can then be trained to mount the same program for people down the line.

From the initial batches, participation in the CLS is fueled by the person-to-person evangelization of those who have already gone through it. This is actually important for the evangelizers themselves because such a lifestyle of evangelization goes a long way to deepening one's spirituality. Further, it is the only way to eventually reach everyone.⁷

The dynamics of the program for the poor

There are many ways to serve the poor. Many of these ways are already happening, and of course should continue. But we propose a particular program that should be more effective,⁸ for the following reasons:

- (1) It is a holistic approach to addressing all the important needs of the poor—shelter, health, education and livelihood;
- (2) It is replicable throughout the nation, and so can be done on a massive scale;
- (3) It will not unduly burden individuals and groups in serving the poor, as the work and financial requirements will be shared;
- (4) It gives parishioners a live situation where they can truly care for the needs of the parish's poor on an ongoing way; it is Church of the Poor in action;
- (5) It will be a vibrant model for BEC.

⁶ Subtle Attacks against the Faith Explained.

⁷ Especially the lapsed or nominal Catholics who cannot be reached by the parish priest or by parish groups.

⁸ CFC-FFL is currently building Restoration Villages. The name is appropriate, to signify the restoration of the dignity of the poor through decent housing and community living.

The first step is to explain the program (which we will call work with the poor or WWP) to the parish priest and to the Parish Pastoral Council, perhaps together with leaders of the parish organizations. Hopefully they will take on the vision.

Next is to solicit a piece of land, good for perhaps 30 to 100 homes, with each home lot perhaps 50 square meters.⁹ This is not difficult in the provinces, where we can usually find a land-owning Catholic willing to make such a donation. There should also be space for a multi-purpose hall cum chapel, a pre-school, a courtyard, and perhaps space for agricultural purposes, such as vegetable patches, etc.

A team then trains the parish team.

Beneficiaries are selected, and given values formation. The different parish groups can be allocated a certain number of beneficiaries,¹⁰ for whom they will find the funds for the house,¹¹ and help build the house.¹²

The support programs of health, education and livelihood follow.¹³ In these, the expertise and resources of the different parish groups will be tapped—doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.

The WWP can be implemented first by having a pilot site in each of the ecclesiastical provinces. Then it moves on to a site in each of the dioceses. Then it goes to a site in each of the parishes. The parish adds more sites until there is no more homeless Filipino family.

The trainers for the expanding work will come from the dioceses/parishes that have the initial sites, which sites will also become model villages.

Additional funding can later be secured abroad. These can be from charitable foundations, from Filipino associations,¹⁴ from sister parishes in the First World.

FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS

There are five very important, if not crucial, aspects to be considered, if this decade-long evangelization program will be effective, and result in revival in the Philippines.¹⁵

⁹ The house itself is 20 square meters.

¹⁰ They can choose from among their poor, homeless members.

¹¹ The groups can tap on to their national and even international organizations.

¹² The *bayanihan* style will help bond rich and poor in the parish.

¹³ These can of course also be simultaneous if warranted.

¹⁴ Regional and provincial Filipino associations abroad will be encouraged to build villages in their home provinces or home towns.

¹⁵ By and large, these five aspects are not emphasized in current official Church programs. For purposes of this paper, we do not mention other all-important aspects such as the Eucharist, the Bible, family renewal, pro-life, work with the poor, etc., because these are already emphasized.

(1) Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The baptism in the Spirit is intended for growth in holiness and worldwide evangelization. Jesus himself said, “But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). It is the baptism in the Spirit that will enable us to become witnesses (to be so, we need to grow in holiness) and to be empowered to effectively proclaim the gospel to the whole world.

Baptism in the Spirit happens in the sacrament of Baptism, and then is reinforced in the sacrament of Confirmation. But many baptized and confirmed Catholics are not living Christian lives, not growing in holiness, not evangelizing. What is needed is a renewed infilling of the Spirit, that will result in a renewed outpouring of the Spirit. The CLS is designed to start that process.

Baptism in the Spirit confers spiritual gifts. There are two kinds—the sanctifying gifts and the charismatic gifts. The former help us grow in holiness. The latter help us serve and do the work of evangelization. Both are crucial. There are seven sanctifying gifts (Isaiah 11:2-3a). There are 9 basic charismatic gifts (1 Cor 12:4-10). There are additional charismatic gifts (1 Cor 12:28, Rom 12:6-8, Eph 4:11, 1 Pt 4:9-11).

In the Church the spiritual gifts are often spoken of. The charismatic gifts are less so. But for the work of massive evangelization, the charismatic gifts are crucial.

Baptism in the Spirit results in a so-called charismatic spirituality. Such is very important for growing in holiness, for vibrant worship, for building community, for service to the Church.

Consider that charismatics in the Catholic Church and Pentecostals in the other churches are the fastest growing segments of the Christian churches in the world. In the Philippines, consider that the largest religious groups are charismatic in their spirituality—the Catholic El Shaddai, the evangelical Jesus is Lord, even the cult Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Consider that the spirituality of the early Christians, reflected in their worship, was charismatic. Even our ancestors in the faith, as reflected in the book of Psalms, were charismatic in their worship.

No one of course is forced to become a charismatic. Other types of spirituality are valid and desirable in the Church. But the evidence in the experience of many Christians is that more are prone to grow in holiness and to become evangelizers if they experience charismatic spirituality.

(2) Growth in holiness

Holiness is hardly talked about—whether in homilies, teachings, even recollections and retreats. But holiness is the one key aspect that is necessary if a Christian is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Many Catholics are unrepentant sinners who need to repent. But it is not just a question of turning away from serious sin. It is not just being a good person. The call is to be like Christ, to be holy as God is holy, to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. The call is to deny self, take up one's cross, and follow Jesus. The call is to a life of integrity, of living the truth, of self-sacrificial love.

This is not about theology,¹⁶ or catechism,¹⁷ or fulfilling Church obligations,¹⁸ which are of course all important, but it is a matter of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection. It is about putting on the mind of Christ. It is being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is leaving all and living all for God.

The Philippines can only become a light to the world if Catholics grow in holiness.¹⁹ It is only then that the very light of Christ will shine in and through us.

(3) A covenant

Christians have a covenant with God, by which God reveals to us that He is our God and we are His people. If we live the life He has prescribed for us, we will experience peace and prosperity.

It would be helpful to have an actual written covenant that we would voluntarily enter into that would describe important aspects of our relationship with God and commitments that we make to Him. Those who finish the CLS and wish to participate in the decade-long evangelization program would then be like “card-carrying members.” We would have a concrete and constant reminder of God's call to us. It will be a tool for growing in holiness.

The covenant could be something like this:

Trusting in the Lord's help and guidance:

1. I shall live as a follower of Christ.
 - * Pray and read the Bible daily.
 - * Strive for holiness and Christian perfection.
2. I dedicate myself to the task of building a strong family for Christ.²⁰
 - * Invest myself in time and effort for home and family.
 - * Live out and defend the culture of life.

¹⁶ There are in fact many dissident theologians.

¹⁷ Head knowledge will have to be applied to day-to-day Christian living.

¹⁸ Many Mass goers do not live Christian lives the rest of the week.

¹⁹ This is for both laity and clergy.

²⁰ This is for every member of a family, whether married or single. Everyone belongs to a family. For clergy, they have their spiritual families.

3. I shall be a committed and active member of my parish community.²¹
 - * Love and serve my parish.
 - * Relate in love, loyalty and respect with all parishioners.
 - * Actively participate in parish events.
 - * Support the parish with my time and finances.
4. I shall be a witness to the world of God's love.
 - * Actively evangelize and do mission.
 - * Love and care for the poor.

May the Lord Jesus Christ, with the intercession of our blessed Mother Mary, help me to faithfully live this covenant, for His greater honor and glory and for the good of my brothers and sisters.

(4) Evangelization and mission

Most Catholics have no idea about being evangelizers or missionaries. But this is a fundamental call to all Christians. In fact, if we are aware of the Great Commission and do not do it, then we are committing a sin of omission. It is a serious matter, as the salvation won by Jesus on the cross can be experienced by people only through the work of proclaimers of the gospel (Rom 10:13-17).

The program of re-evangelization can only reach every Catholic Filipino in a decade if those who are evangelized become evangelizers themselves. Everyone can participate because we will promote person-to-person evangelization in the normal day-to-day environments of our lives. We reach out to those whom we interact with on a regular basis—relatives, friends, co-workers, schoolmates, neighbors, parishioners.

Becoming evangelizers also moves us into holiness, as we more and more think and speak about Christ, and deliberately amend our lives to become more effective witnesses.

(5) Lay empowerment

The laity need to be empowered. The whole Philippines cannot be re-evangelized in a decade unless the laity take their proper place and role in the mission of the Church.

The laity need to know their inherent dignity as Christians, and the attendant privileges and responsibilities. They participate in the life and mission of the Church not as a concession given by the Church hierarchy. They are not extensions of the parish priest, but of Jesus himself.

For good order, the bishops, and through them the clergy, exercise overall responsibility and authority over the Church (each bishop in his diocese).

²¹ Except for those in religious communities, though they are welcome to participate in the parish also.

In this decade of re-evangelization, much of the actual work will be done by the laity. The clergy are already burdened with what they are doing, and so will just basically oversee and provide guidance to the work of the laity.

A DECADE OF GRACE

Given the call of the Philippines as God's light in Asia and to the world, the decade of 2011-2021 will be time of bountiful grace for the nation, where God will work powerfully to build this nation to fulfill its destiny. God's grace and strength will be more than enough. We just need to do our part.

(December 28, 2010)