



July 12, 2007

To the Members of Couples for Christ

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Love and Peace of Jesus!

I am writing this letter in order to clarify some things that were mentioned in the letter, dated July 2, 2007, of Brother Joe Tale to the CFC members in the name of the CFC Council.

In the third paragraph of the letter, Bro. Joe says that the newly elected seven-man Council after the anniversary celebration in Luneta, on June 24, visited me. That is true. Bro. Joe narrated what they told me. But he did not include in the letter what I told them regarding the election of the CFC Council, held on June 22, and other relevant matters. Because my response was not narrated in the letter of July 2 and because of the way the letter was written, it can easily be misinterpreted that I approved of the election and that everything is all right even if the Elders' Assembly did not follow the second strong recommendation of Archbishop Lagdameo, Bishop Soc Villegas, and myself. The second recommendation was that the election in June of the seven-man Council by the Elders' Assembly be postponed until the two conflicting groups in the CFC have a common understanding regarding the problem that divides them, or, at least, have come to an agreement regarding the election so that both sides will respect the results of the elections and in that way the unity of CFC would be maintained and irreparable division would be avoided.

I told the newly elected Council that I did not approve of the election because the strong recommendation of the bishops regarding the election was precisely directed to the Elders' Assembly, as the highest decision-making body of the CFC, but the majority of the Elders' Assembly did not follow the recommendation.

The election that the three bishops recommended to be postponed was the usual election of the seven members of the Council, who will serve for a term of two years. The reason for the postponement was that the group of Bro. Frank Padilla said that the nominees for the election were unfairly chosen and therefore they will not respect the results of the election. On the other hand, the National Council composed only of four (Frank Padilla, Tony Meloto, and Lachie Agana had resigned in February, 2007) insisted on having the election of the seven members of the Council in June, 2007. To maintain the unity of CFC and to avoid an irreparable division, the three bishops recommended that the election be postponed until the two sides arrive at an agreement regarding the election so that both sides will accept the results of the election.



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The group of Bro. Joe Tale and the group of Bro. Frank Padilla made extra efforts in order to forge an agreement regarding the election so that the election could go on. After four days of meeting, they were able to come to an agreement, namely, that the remaining four members of the Council (three members had resigned from the Council in February, 2007) would remain as hold-over members of the Council and only three new members of the Council would be elected last June. The seven would then be temporary members of the Council and their term will end in January, 2008.

In the mean time, the group of Bro. Frank Padilla and the group of Bro. Joe Tale will go on with their dialogue until they solve their disagreement regarding the relationship of Gawad Kalinga to the other ministries of CFC and their disagreement as to whether the Gawad Kalinga is veering away from the vision-mission and guiding principles of the CFC and is sacrificing evangelization and spirituality for the sake of social action. Once they have arrived to an agreement regarding these issues, the election of the permanent Council of CFC, who will serve for two years, will be held, even before January, 2008.

This was the win-win proposal regarding the election that the group led by Bro. Frank and the group led by Bro. Joe forged during the 4-day dialogue.

Bro. Frank and Bro. Joe came to me to tell me of the good news that the two groups have reached an agreement regarding the election and therefore the election could be held in June. Both groups committed themselves to convince the other members of the Elders' Assembly, the highest decision-making body of the CFC, to adopt this win-win proposal regarding the election. I was happy regarding this win-win proposal because, since the leaders of the two conflicting groups, accepted this proposal, the others in the Elders' Assembly will also accept it.

Looking back at the events, I think the group of Bro. Joe Tale did not support whole heartedly this win-win proposal. They did not campaign enough for it, to say the least.

Two days before the election, there was a retreat for the Elders' Assembly. How come the four-man Council invited Fr. Mario Sobrejuanite, who they knew would speak unfavorably of the three bishops' action of making recommendation regarding the election because he said the bishops were unduly interfering in the internal affairs of CFC. Instead of exhorting the Elders' Assembly to adopt the win-win proposal, which the bishops endorsed, he practically told them not to give importance to the bishops' recommendation and decide for themselves.

As spiritual director of CFC, I phoned Bro. Joe Tale, the next day after the retreat, that I wanted to talk to the Elders' Assembly. He made me talk to the Elders' Assembly that evening and, maybe, only one-half, were present, because I learned later that there was no scheduled meeting of the Elders' Assembly that evening. The elders were notified of the meeting only at 3:00pm or 4:00pm of that day. I would have wanted to speak to all the members of the Elders' Assembly. Had he really wholeheartedly wanted the Elders' Assembly to adopt the win-win



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proposal, he should have let me talk to the Elders' Assembly just before the referendum on the win-win proposal, which was held the next day.

What I cannot understand is that everybody was talking about reconciliation and unity during the retreat of the Elders' Assembly and just before the referendum on the win-win proposal. The referendum was whether to accept this win-win proposal, which was a big first step towards reconciliation of the two groups. The majority of the elders rejected the proposal and instead chose to go on with the election of the seven members of the Council - something which had been opposed by the group of Bro. Frank. This decision to go on with the election was divisive, as was proven by the walk-out before the election by the group of Bro. Frank Padilla. There was really no valid reason to reject the win-win proposal. If this proposal is approved nobody's rights are violated, no damage is done to anyone. Besides, the Elders' Assembly will be in communion with the bishops, one of whom is the spiritual director of the CFC.

Some claim that if the election is postponed, the constitution of CFC, which was approved by the Securities and Exchange Commission will be violated and CFC will get into trouble with SEC. But many organizations, recognized by the S.E.C., postpone their elections if they have a valid reason - something which the SEC allows. In fact, I was told that some years ago the election of the seven members of the Council was also postponed because of the difficulty of holding the election on the prescribed date.

By going on with the election of the seven members of the Council, the Elders' Assembly did the opposite of what they were proclaiming, namely, that they wanted to have reconciliation and unity.

The 4th paragraph of this same letter of Bro. Joe Tale says the following: "We once again express our regret to the community that our beloved bishops were convinced by some of our leaders to get involved, unnecessarily, we believe, in our own internal organizational matters." First of all, it is good to remember that the three bishops were not making impositions but were just giving strong recommendations. Secondly, the matter they involved themselves in was not just about "internal organizational matters." The matter is not just organizational or regarding the election but it is about a threatening irreparable division of the CFC. The serious disagreement is caused by the complaints of the group of Bro. Frank Padilla that CFC is veering away from the vision-mission and guiding Catholic principles of CFC and that Gawad Kalinga is overstressing social action at the expense of evangelization, catechesis, and spirituality. These serious complaints have to be looked into as to whether they are true or not. The bishops had a recommendation regarding the election because the election was connected with this serious complaint or concern. This complaint of the group of Bro. Frank involves "the integrity of faith and morals." Surely as spiritual director of CFC, I have a right, even the duty, to be involved. Archbishop Lagdameo, Bishop Soc Villegas and myself as shepherds, who have CFC members in our dioceses, are not breaking any law or unnecessarily interfering in CFC by making recommendations regarding this problem. Canon Law, the law of the Church, in Canon 305,



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says: §1 "All associations of Christ's faithful are subject to the supervision of the competent ecclesiastical authority. This authority is to ensure that integrity of faith and morals is maintained in them and that abuses in ecclesiastical discipline do not creep in. The competent authority has therefore the duty and the right to visit these associations, in accordance with the law and the statutes. Associations are also subject to the governance of the same authority in accordance with the provision of the canons which follow."

§2 "Associations of every kind are subject to the supervision of the Holy See. Diocesan associations are subject to the supervision of the local Ordinary, as are other associations to the extent that they work in the diocese."

Besides, in the Statutes of Couples for Christ, which the Vatican approved, page 10, number 9.3 says: "COUPLES FOR CHRIST will live out its life and mission in communion with the bishops"; number 9.31 says: "COUPLES FOR CHRIST recognizes, defers to and actively submits to the authority of the bishop as shepherd of his particular diocese" and 9:322 says: "COUPLES FOR CHRIST is open to a visitation from the bishop at any CFC meeting or event, and to any special meeting to be called by the bishop for any purpose." If one is faithful in following the letter and spirit of the aforementioned CFC statutes, he will not say that the recommendations that the three bishops made were unnecessary interference in CFC. On the contrary, he will follow them. And, if he will reject them, it is because he has a serious reason for doing so. But, as I showed in the earlier part of this letter, there was no valid reason for rejecting the recommendations. On the contrary, there were good serious reasons for following them.

Besides, the threatening irreparable division in the CFC is not just an internal affair. CFC is present in most of our archdioceses and dioceses in the Philippines. If the CFC is divided, our parishes and dioceses will also be affected.

The purpose of three bishops' recommendation that unless the two conflicting groups come to an agreement regarding the election, the election of the seven members of the Council be postponed was in order to maintain the unity of CFC and to avoid an irreparable division of CFC. Because the Elders' Assembly rejected the recommendation of the bishops, the division in CFC is getting deeper and worse. I hope it is not irreparable.

Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, let us humbly pray to our Lord Jesus Christ that this crisis in the Couples for Christ be solved according to His will.

Yours in our Lord,

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