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Dear brothers and sisters,

As our community faces its biggest challenge, and as we see the early signs of a possible break-up of our community, let us continue to pray – and pray very hard – that God will keep our community united and whole. By sharing with you our reflections and thoughts, we are making an appeal for concerted prayer and supplication to God, who is All-powerful, to act now and touch the hearts of the two people who can immediately help end this current conflict. With God's grace of humility and self-sacrifice, our prayers for unity in the community can be realized.

We ask everyone to offer their nightly family rosary for this one intention.

May God bless us all!

JUN and JEAN

Aquila *and* *Priscilla*

By their fruits you will know them

Mt 7:20

The current conflicts and disagreements among some of the top leaders of the community is ultimately an issue of discernment. If we accept the premise that these top leaders are basically good people and renewed Christians – except that, just like everybody else, they occasionally manifest their human weaknesses, for example, the use of hurting words directed at the person when trying to argue a point that tends to escalate rather than solve the conflict – then we must dissociate our minds from thinking that they do this deliberately to undermine, if not destroy, the community. We must assume that they too love the community and that they sincerely believe that their position in the conflict is the right one.

At the core of the conflict is the nature of the work with the poor in Gawad Kalinga. The specific issues are many and not simple. But they basically boil down to the following: One side feels that GK, as a ministry and pillar of CFC, must be a means for evangelization, rather than an end by itself. As such, it must be nothing more and nothing less than an expression of our love of God. The other side does not disagree with this position. However, it feels that, in order for GK to actively involve all sectors (the word is inclusive), the spiritual aspect of the work (meaning the Christian nature of the work) need not be made too explicit, and that social actions would speak more powerfully than words. Of course the issues have become personal and muddled, as words and emails are exchanged containing what the other party feels are hurtful statements, partial truth or erroneous conclusions or perceptions. The seemingly unreconcilable positions led to the suggestion that CFC and GK should separate, with CFC

remaining as a lay organization recognized by the Vatican and GK falling under the social apostolate of the Church.

But as the CFC-GK tension remains unresolved, the conflict somehow had an unexpected turn. The conflict has become one within CFC itself, with one party saying that some leaders of CFC have become too legalistic, that they do not want to give up position and power, and that they continue to ignore the bishops. And thus instead of the conflict treading towards an unwanted possible split between CFC and GK, the tendency shifted towards the unwanted possible split of CFC itself.

Brothers and sisters, in the midst of all this, various ideas, proposals and thoughts have emerged, some more explicit than others. The overwhelming desire is, of course, to keep the full CFC structure intact, with GK being one of its ministries and pillars.

A second idea is to separate GK from CFC. In this manner, GK can develop on its own. Since poverty is pervasive, the work needs to be massive and inclusive. The battle cry would be liberation and not so much salvation, although this is not to be completely ignored. Heroes are needed to bring the millions of poor out of poverty. Eradicating poverty would be, essentially, the desired end.

A third idea is to divide GK into two, with one part remaining with CFC and another part becoming a separate work. That part of the work of GK that involves exclusively the CFC community where the focus is evangelization through dialogue with the poor would remain with CFC. The other part that involves other sectors where the focus is a massive, inclusive

effort for eradicating poverty would be devolved into a charitable non-governmental organization, much like World Vision or Habitat.

The fourth idea is to divide CFC itself into two semi-autonomous organizations, CFC Philippines and CFC International, with the current National Council leading CFC Philippines and Frank Padilla leading CFC International.

All these ideas or proposals are not sinful in themselves. And the break up of organizations is not necessarily evil. Such break ups have happened to religious organizations such as the Franciscans and the Carmelites. Even the temporary loss of Church recognition is not necessarily disastrous. The Society of Jesus was banned by the Church for a time, and yet we see how strong, active and successful the Jesuits are today.

The course for the community to take is a matter of discernment. If the conflicts and issues can be reduced to this and if the leaders involved in the conflict would refrain from using hurtful words or from assuming malice in certain statements where there is none or from digressing from issues to personalities then an acceptable solution would be possible.

Brothers and sisters, let us all pray, reflect and discern what is good for the community. Let us reflect on the words of Jesus: *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them (Mt 7:15-20).*

Our own discernment is that we should try our utmost best, we should exhaust all means, we should explore all possibilities in order to keep CFC united with GK as one of its ministries and pillars. Only if this proves to be impossible, that we should consider the idea of

CFC remaining one, and GK divided into two: a GK within CFC where the work for the poor is a major means for evangelization; and a GK where the work for the poor is to be all inclusive and massive aimed at eradicating poverty.

But we should not give up trying to keep CFC (with GK) united and whole. We must storm heaven with our prayers and sacrifices to implore God to act to keep intact this community that he created. Nothing is impossible to God, even as we are now seeing statements of some CFC communities outside the Philippines informing of their suspension of cooperation with CFC Philippines.

The solution is in God's hands but also in the hands of two people – Frank Padilla and Tony Meloto. The personal and ideological differences between them have started since several years ago – and this has crept into their spouses, children and other members of their immediate families. Thus the current problems and concerns started – and continued almost imperceptibly for years – while Frank was Director of CFC and Chairman of the GK Board, and Tony was a member of the CFC Council and Executive Director of GK.

Brothers and sisters, we enjoin all of you to pray – and pray very hard – for God to touch the hearts and minds of Frank and Tony so that they may talk with each other to settle their differences, forget about past personal and family hurts, and forgive as Christians, as servants of Christ, as brethren in the CFC community. And having reconciled, they can talk with the present CFC International Council and arrive at an acceptable arrangement that would keep the CFC community united and whole, with GK one of its ministries and pillars.

Impossible? Nothing is impossible to God! And we are all aware of it! God who can move mountains, can certainly move hearts! Miracles do happen!

Frank and Tony, the solution to the conflict is in your hands. You may choose to act now or answer to God for not having at least tried for one last and final time!