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Bishop Reyes sheds light on CFC split

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Manila, September 6, 2007 - CBCP Episcopal Commission on the Laity and Antipolo Bishop Gabriel V. Reyes expressed concern over the reported split within the Couples for Christ (CFC).

In a five-page statement released to the CBCP Media Office late Thursday afternoon, Bishop Reyes said they discussed last August 28 important matters about the Couples for Christ with the complaint of Bro. Frank Padilla that “Couples for Christ, because of Gawad Kalinga, is veering away from the vision/mission of CFC and from Catholic teachings and because of Gawad Kalinga enough manpower and resources are not given to the other ministries like evangelization and catechesis.” It was also reported Social Action “is too much stressed at the expense of spirituality and evangelization.”

It was mentioned that “on several occasions, in wanting to get more donors and partners for its projects, it is hiding its identity as a CFC project or ministry and also its connection with the Catholic church.” Specific instances were mentioned during the closed door meeting that lasted from 10:00 A.M. to past 6:00 P.M. at the CBCP’s Commission on the Laity office at CLP Building in Intramuros.

Bishop Reyes said Bro. Jose Tale, the new Couples for Christ leader acknowledged “Gawad Kalinga is a child of CFC, is a ministry of CFC” and “that Gawad Kalinga cannot be separated from CFC.”

Bishop Reyes said the CFC statutes were approved by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines and by the Pontifical Council for the Laity of the Vatican. He cited the first paragraph of the Statutes of the Couples for Christ under the heading “Nature and Purpose,” says “Couples for Christ is a private international association of the faithful of pontifical right recognized by the Pontifical Council of the Laity. It is committed to the work of global evangelization and renewal, with the goal of winning the world for Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

The prelate from Antipolo said “to evangelize is to follow the command of Our Lord Jesus: “Make disciples of all nations” and hastened to add “CFC should not downplay or downgrade this purpose of CFC for the sake of getting more donors or partners.”

He added the teachings of the CFC and the Catholic Church were the ones that inspired CFC members, who provide most of the manpower in Gawad Kalinga, to work for the poor through Gawad Kalinga. He said “Gawad Kalinga was meant to be a witness to Christ, that it was the teachings of Jesus Christ and love for Him that made people work for the poor in Gawad Kalinga.”

Bishop Reyes cited two more statutes, namely 9.1 and 9.61 which state that Couples for Christ is a Catholic community, though open to membership by non-Catholic Christians, will follow whatever guidelines on relationship with non-Catholics that the bishop may have for his diocese.

He said another complaint by Bro. Frank Padilla and his group was Gawad Kalinga’s acceptance of donations even from corporations manufacturing contraceptives contradicting CFC’s pro-life stance. Bishop Reyes said Mr. Tony Meloto’s answer published at the Philippine Daily Inquirer “proves that this complaint is true.” He quoted Tony Meloto that “GK is non-partisan. We do not take any side in building a nation in the same manner that we do not pass judgment on any corporation that we engage. We do not even ask them what their (corporations) products are as long as they want to help.”

In his statement, Bishop Reyes said “if Gawad Kalinga wants to operate more freely and more broadly than the vision/mission and nature of CFC will allow, then let it be a civic organization or an organization with a vision/mission and nature different from that of CFC.”

Bishop Reyes said he recalled Frank and Gerry Padilla are members of the Pontifical Council for Family of the Vatican. He said “the Council is headed by Cardinal Trujillo and is composed of bishops, priests and lay people as they were appointed to this Council mainly because Frank was then ‘head’ of the CFC.”

He added the Pontifical Council for the Family “is against receiving funds from corporations that produce artificial contraceptives.”

“So there is an additional reason that urges Bro. Frank Padilla to object against receiving donations from drug companies that produce contraceptives,” Bishop Reyes said.

Dialogues have been made to address these complaints but eventually led to a stalemate.

Bishop Reyes said the CBCP “has no authority over the Couples for Christ in the national level,” because “it can only make recommendations to the Couples for Christ.”

He said only the Vatican, “through the Pontifical Council of the Laity, has the authority over it in the national and international level,” although every diocesan bishop has authority over it in his diocese as each diocesan bishop “has power to deny permission to CFC to function in his diocese, even if the association is international.”

The prelate said the CBCP through the Commission for the Laity “has the duty to inform the Pontifical Council of the Laity about the CFC regarding matters that it deems to be serious.”

“Since Bro. Jose Tale and the CFC Council committed to stop the practice of Gawad Kalinga from accepting funds from companies that produce contraceptives, the CBCP Commission for the Laity will not make any report about this to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.”

“In the light of this, the original CFC, with Gawad Kalinga as one of its ministries, retains its recognition as an

international private association of the faithful, which was given by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 2005,” Bishop Reyes said.

It will also remain its recognition as a national private association of the faithful, which was given by the CBCP in 1996.

Money matters were never an issue between the contending parties.

Bishop Reyes said discussions were made whether the two contending groups can still unite. “After an exchange of views, the two groups decided that ‘the most acceptable option at the moment is to separate ways due to some clear differences in mission, charism, and other points of deep disagreement.’” However, Bishop Reyes said both parties are not closing the door on remaining as one united CFC. This separation would diffuse “the heightened and mounting tension and animosities between the two groups caused by accusations hurled against each other.”

The original CFC with Gawad Kalinga under Bro. Jose Tale “continues as a national and international private association of the faithful,” while the group of Bro. Frank Padilla “will form the Couples for Christ for Family and Life” and “should start as a diocesan association, “then later can apply for recognition as a national association if it has branches in other dioceses and even later as an international association.”

Bishop Reyes said “as a diocesan association, it can go to other dioceses provided the bishop of the place permits.”

He stressed “as long as the names are explained it will not cause confusion” for in the Philippines, there are groups with almost similar names as Marriage Encounter and Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Mother Butler’s Guild and Mother Butler’s Mission Guild, among others.

Bishop Reyes said he issued the clarification “because some news reports and columnists have misinterpreted some things that transpire or were said in the dialogue.”

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