

Note: Below is the text of what Tony Meloto's letter which he shared (read) during the Mission Core Gathering (MCG) at the Ateneo de Manila gymnasium on May 3, 2009 – on the MCG video.

SOLIDARITY

I want to share with you some reflections from an aging warrior looking to the future with great hope.

Last night I had a most welcome visit from old friends. It was Joe Tale who came first, followed by Joe Yamamoto and Joey Arguelles, to affirm old ties and to express a proposal for GK to have its own distinct Board of Directors that will allow it to effectively respond to its growing work. It meant members of the IC stepping down from the existing board to devote to CFC evangelization and for a new set to join, which may include CFC leaders and some members of the IC, to respond to the equally urgent task of poverty reduction and nation-building. Joe stressed that the spirit of the proposal was for greater empowerment of both CFC and GK, to remove confusion and to restore relationships.

I was surprised by the unexpected proposal but it tugged at my heart when it opened to me real possibilities of achieving solidarity by everyone, starting with the IC and the GK Board, accepting the value of both CFC and GK as the fullness of our Christianity and our citizenship. They are distinct boards with one spirit. It is one heart, one mission, one work - with independent governance - that is interdependent with each other. The work of GK is blessed with Ateneo President Father Ben Nebres in the board, who has great respect for both CFC and GK.

Integral to the idea is the intensified encouragement for every CFC member to serve the poor in GK communities and to forge closer collaboration among GK workers who are now free from unnecessary constraints and conflicts. This will enhance evangelization and encourage CFC members serving in GK to be more faithful to their CFC covenant. Finally, if the spirit is right, and I have no doubt that it was in that room last night, the dualism that creates confusion and a sense of divided loyalty between two valuable missions that are integral to each other will vanish. This will give us the inspiration and the joy to be empowered in both service to God and neighbor. The spirit that I refer to is about solidarity and not separation, passion and not imposition, faith in action and not passive obedience.

As we clear the air and nurture the spirit, I am excited by the impending reality that every member of the community that I love will finally receive the gift that they rightfully deserve: 1.) the joy of being CFC, 2.) the pride of being part of the community that grew GK out of faith, and 3.) the honor of being Filipino with a viable development formula and a clear path to redemption the GK Way – kalinga, bayanihan, padugo, walang iwanan – caring, sharing, heroic sacrifice, leaving no one behind. If we are faithful, there is clear certainty in my heart that we can build a peaceful and prosperous nation that truly honors God. This honor belongs to the best in CFC, the best among Catholics and the best among Filipinos who genuinely care for our country and our people.

The challenge for all of us now is how to remain in the right spirit; the structures, systems and other operational details on the ground will naturally follow if the spirit from the top is right. I have no doubt that it is so. This much I can say: I will honor the spirit; I will help others know Christ by walking the talk; I will always treasure CFC and my friends in the community and I will encourage my children to continue

our mission for God and country. I will be at MCG this Sunday to express my solidarity and deep affection for our community and my availability to travel with the IC where I can be of help to our mission of evangelization, family renewal and work with the poor.

My trip to Sulu two weeks ago prepared me for last night. It deepened my faith and broadened my perspective.

First, it taught me to trust the people I have been conditioned to mistrust, by putting my life in the hands of Muslims at the heartland of rebel territory.

When Mayor Munib Estino called me brother, welcomed me in his home and bestowed upon me and all GK workers the protection of all Tausugs in his town, it was a sacred moment that healed old wounds, tore down historical prejudices and showed me the power of love over fear. I grew an instant affection for my Muslim brothers and sisters, which hopefully will pave the way for more from the Christian majority in this country to show genuine concern and end a long period of neglect of the Muslim minority. But this moment would not have come to me if not for the love of brothers and sisters in CFC who nurtured me and my family for 24 years and provided the grounds for the seeds of our faith to grow. If I can trust a Muslim that I just met, I must continue to trust my brothers and sisters who have treasured my friendship all these years. Trust, not talk, is the key to lasting friendship and peace. There is trust that we need to nurture internally within CFC, and trust that we need to build externally. I did not go to Sulu to offer religion; I was there to practice my faith by giving care and friendship.

Second, I went to Sulu and Zamboanga for the Bayani Challenge and the Highway of Peace trusting the leadership of the new Davids and the heroic support of our CFC communities in Mindanao; honestly, I had no hand in the preparations but I went where I was told to go by young people who used to take directions from me. Everywhere I looked in both places I was surrounded by the next generation of believers and patriots for God and country. I did not stay long, secure in the thought that God's work will continue beyond me.

The three brothers from the IC also did not stay long, but their hugs assured me that we all wanted the same things for our community and for our country. Through our sincere act of sacrifice and humility, we will continue the mission of renewing the face of the earth and pass it on to the next generation of leaders in CFC.

This brings me to the final point why I am filled with an overwhelming sense of hope as a result of last night's divine encounter, whatever others may make out of it. I am turning sixty on January 17 next year and I feel the days getting shorter and climbing stairs getting harder. I want to celebrate an important milestone in my life surrounded by friends who share my dream of a nation where there is justice and abundance for all, where our grandchildren can roam the streets at night without fear because no one is in need. I want to spend it in the company of brothers and sisters of my deepest affection in CFC and the GK communities, in the country that we all love.

Antonio Meloto
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