



## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

877 Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, West Triangle, Quezon City

P.O Box 718, Manila Central Post Office, 1099 Ermita, Manila

Telephone: (632) 426-1729 \* 426-3790 \* 436-9157 Fax: (632) 426-1729

E-mail: [ogs@uccpchurch.com](mailto:ogs@uccpchurch.com)

Website: [www.uccpchurch.com](http://www.uccpchurch.com)

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To All UCCP Members,

For the past few weeks the General Secretary and I have been the recipient of **vicious and malicious attacks** from Prof. Everett Mendoza. His first blast of email was not enough because, clearly, he was unable to make a convincing argument. Thus, he is now pleading with his audience not to trust us. Instead of conjectures, I will focus on facts. As Michelle Obama has aptly stated, **when they go low, we go high**. We will take the high road on this.

The GS and I have known each other since the mid-80's, when I assumed a committee leadership and he was the president of the CYF. I then succeeded him as the 2<sup>nd</sup> national president and we both sat in the Executive Committee. We also worked together when I was a commissioner of the CYSM of the NCCP while the GS was the executive secretary.

Our long history of friendship and of working together allows us to operate on the gut level. We can say to each other what needs to be said because we do this without malice and that these statements are made with good intentions. This gut level relationship makes work easier. There is a word for this, **TEAMWORK**.

When I assumed the position of National Treasurer, this teamwork has been expanded to include the bishops of the jurisdictions. When we started the OGSM framework, this teamwork has been extended to all national and jurisdictional staff.

**Professor Mendoza states that we should not be trusted.** He cites biblical references as reasons but offers no real proof other than conjectures. For the benefit of the readers and members of the church, I will state here facts as to what is happening in the church.

- The wider mission support increased in the previous quadrennium, and this increase continues under the current administration at a pace never seen before. The WMS is growing at an average of 30% per annum. At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> year, we had Php 7.6M. At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, it reached Php 13.2M. This year we are on target to hit Php 16M. There is no **better testament to trust than this accomplishment**. Our members are witnessing the positive changes happening around. The increased vibrancy and heightened sense of urgency is in the air.

- For the first time in our history, we are implementing one plan and this allows the whole church to move in one direction. The OGSM has provided us a framework to finally operationalize the strategic plan approved more than 10 years ago. This is the reason why having the plans and budget approved has become very easy, because the plan of the national office is addressed towards meeting the needs of the conferences.
- In the course of operating under the framework, we have sought the participation of the different stakeholders. For the last three years, we have organized the All Leaders meeting as a venue for the Conference Ministers to be apprised of what is happening and what plans are afoot. This has also become a venue for them to receive training on various topics to make them better equipped to meet the challenges of their mission and the expectation of the people they serve.
- **Financially, the church has become less dependent on our foreign partners.** Foreign support now accounts for less than 30% of our total budget and receipts. We have never achieved this level of performance and this would not have happened without the support of the conferences, institutions, and other stakeholders.
- We have been very prudent in how we have been spending the increased resources. Whereas before more than 40% of the receipts were used for overhead expenses, now it is 30%. We have become more efficient in our program operations and thus have freed up more funds to be used for the other needs of the church, especially those that are unfunded.
- Instead of letting our money sleep in the bank, we have used our financial resources to provide financial assistance to our institutions with a win-win formula.

I can go on and on but suffice it to say that these initiatives in this current administration have certainly provided us the credibility to be trusted because we have delivered and, in some instances, more than what was committed. **There may have been failures and challenges and we offer no excuses except to do better.**

**On the issue of Gaisano**, there was no objection to the contract by the CSRD as a committee. The chair of the CSRD happens to be the nephew of Prof. Mendoza - which information Prof. Mendoza has not disclosed and is the source of these incomplete information - did not agree but the rest of the members did. When did the opinion of one person have greater weight than the majority other than in a dictatorship? **Prof. Mendoza further insulted the National Council members** stating they were merely compliant. Did it occur to him that they were making the right decision?

And if the National Council, without preempting them as he did, decided that this Vistaland proposal is acceptable because it solves our problems, does it mean they abdicated their power and authority? For Prof. Mendoza they did, but on the contrary, they will be exercising their powers to do good!

There is a word for the process we have adopted wherein a major decision is offered to a larger body for appropriate action, this is **DEMOCRACY**.

And I think herein lay the first problem. He thinks, he analyzes, he surmises, he concludes; Prof. Mendoza thinks and believes he has the monopoly of the truth. If there is any opinion or conclusion that differs from what he has decided on, it is wrong. More than that, he also assumes, as he has written, that the moral compass of others is likewise wrong because they also differ from his.

This analysis of mine may be wrong, but how else can anyone explain what he wrote stating the National Council is wrong, the National Executive Council is wrong, the one Management Board is wrong, the members of the CSRD who has agreed to the venture are wrong, the General Secretary is wrong, and I am wrong. Worse, we are all morally wrong!

These are the same groups who have approved the plans, budget, and direction of the church in the last three years which have allowed us to progress and improve. Just look at the facts above!

As I have stated in my reply to the FOC in Prof. Mendoza's first letter, **he imagines problems and offers theoretical solutions, I look at real problems and offer REAL solutions.**

This is not the right venue to start a debate on Prof. Mendoza's proposal. From someone who has been involved in organizational development here and around the world, we have tried it and it does not work.

Let me throw the question the other way. Why should the people trust Prof. Mendoza and his cohorts? He had been the chairperson of the General Assembly. Appointed as the chief theologian of the church not long after. He has held various powerful and important positions in the church in different capacities. Despite all these achievements, why do our church workers continue to suffer? Why do they continue to be deprived of their pension and other basic benefits? Prof. Mendoza had the opportunity to do something and he wasted it! Now that we are at the cusp of finally solving these decades old problem, **Prof. Mendoza wants us to stop and, in essence, continue with the old ways.**

In his last letter, he pleads for a delay of this process until the next quadrennium. From a condescending stance, he now presents himself as a **"grasshopper standing in the way of the giants in the church."** The request for a delay any decision until the next quadrennium is merely a disguise to prevent a solution from happening! It is clear, that Prof. Mendoza's priorities are misplaced. **He prefers our church workers continue to suffer than having a minute fraction of our property – 3,749.69 square meters -- be developed and used wisely** so that these same church workers shall have a better future. **When did land become more valuable than people!**

Let it be stated that we have not rushed into this. The matter to develop and use our properties wisely for the benefit of the church has been made a long time ago! It is only now that this is finally being implemented. So please, do not make it appear we have not done due diligence on this matter because neither you nor your nephew understand what is at stake!

I think one reason for this is that Prof. Mendoza believes and has theologized that **pastors and church workers should remain poor.**

If he has just read the stewardship plan of the church, he will notice **there is nothing there about being rich.** All these financial management, property development, and technological advancement are aimed towards improving the most important asset of the church, our human resources. I am not a theologian, but I know that this is certainly biblical, and a primary responsibility of people being entrusted with God's creation.

It is unfortunate that we are on opposite positions on this. While the current administration desires to lift up the state of our church workers, Prof. Mendoza's position is to retain the status quo and let the church workers continue to struggle in meeting life's daily challenge.

Why should Prof. Mendoza's audience trust him when he does not understand their situation? Prof. Mendoza does not have the credibility, I may be wrong here, but I do not think he has served as a local church pastor longer than 5 years. He has never been in a situation when the pastor is unsure of where to get the next meal or will there be enough funds raised to receive a salary. Let us not even talk about family. He has lived a comfortable life as a seminary professor and is now enjoying retirement.

I live a comfortable life and make no excuses. I have worked hard to be where I am and to provide for my family. **Prof. Mendoza does not know me and, yet he has imputed evil intentions as my motive in this position.** Let me set the record straight.

I dare say that I am not your ordinary national treasurer. I carry with me expertise in a lot of fields honed through years of involvement in development work, financial management, real estate development, and organizational development. I did not aspire for the position because I needed a job. In fact, my wife asked why I wanted to make my life more complicated and difficult when I could be enjoying life's comfort from the work that I do.

Well, I aspired for the position because I wanted to make a positive change. I would not limit my job description on what is stated in the constitution, I was prepared to do more than what is provided. I am ready to do what is needed to be done because the **welfare of our church workers is in crisis.** Several National Treasurers have worked before following the job description but again I ask, have the problems been solved? This is my primary and main motivation. And this resolve was strengthened by what I have heard and seen.

In the last general assembly in Legazpi City, one of the first questions asked to me after the election was when can the UCCP establish a pension plan. My reply was we will try and look for short-term, mid-term, and long-term solutions. How can I answer when I do not know what is the status of the situation. And not long after that I drafted a strategic stewardship program which was approved by the CSRD and NEC and later confirmed by the National Council.

I had my baptism of fire as the National Treasurer when I first attended the Church Workers' Convocation in Silliman in August of 2014. After presenting the grand stewardship plan I drew up, I was asked by a retired pastor when will he receive his pension, and my best reply was **"Sorry, we do not have the money."** I wanted to disappear then. I knew that no grand plan will amount to anything unless it answers the basic needs of our church workers. And this is a matter of utmost urgency because **our retired church workers are getting old and are dying.** We need to act fast while they are still alive, and it is the church's responsibility to take care of them after they have devoted their life to the church.

**I took that question as my personal burden as National Treasurer.** This question keeps ringing in my ears, a constant reminder that there is much work to be done. I have spent countless nights thinking of how to solve this problem. Those people who are working with me know this, especially the Bishops of the Church!

Prof. Mendoza should not preach about **trustworthiness, motive, and credibility** because **I have always acted in good faith, operated with a high level of accountability and transparency.** Using the welfare of our church workers as my beacon in finally finding the solution of having **social justice for our church workers** in the UCCP.

Prof. Mendoza has stated his position and I have stated mine. Let those tasked to make a decision do so.

Please be assured that I will play fair and if the decision goes his way, I will not undermine it. I do expect and hope that he can do the same.

  
**Larry Millan**  
*National Treasurer*