



## **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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### **A PASTORAL LETTER**

#### *A Call for Trust and Confidence*

**Beloved in the Household of God,**

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

As we approach and prepare for the 11th Quadrennial Assembly of the Church, we continue to celebrate God's provisions and sustenance for us to do the mission and ministries God has entrusted to our care and management.

Taking seriously God's call for mission and ministry, we have agreed in the meetings of the Conferences, the National Executive Council, the National Council, and the General Assembly, to develop idle lands of the Church to generate income for the various ministries and programs of the Church, to support our church workers in their education and to provide for their health benefits, pension and other needs. Yes, we celebrate God's provisions and sustenance. Yes, we celebrate God's gifts of people and material resources. What we do with God's gifts as good stewards is our way of saying thanks to our God, who is our Provider and Sustainer.

As a Church, through the different bodies mentioned above, we have decided to manage these gifts through the following means:

- One of the ways our local churches and conferences contribute is by giving Wider Mission Support, a meaningful symbol of our life together, of our sharing a common vision and the pursuit of common goals. These two quadrennia have seen an increase in the giving of the WMS. Since 2010, there has been an increase of over 300%, and this increase continues at a pace never seen before. Since then, the WMS has been growing at an average of 30% per annum. At the end of the first year of this present quadrennium, we had PhP 7.6M. At the end of the 3rd year, it reached PhP 13.2M. This year we are on target to go beyond this amount. 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 ecclesial plan and this allows the whole Church from the Conferences up to move in one direction. The OGSM has provided us a

framework to finally operationalize the strategic plan approved more than ten years ago. This is the reason the plans and budget have no difficulty in being approved, because the plan of the National Office is addressed towards meeting the needs of the conferences.

- In the course of operating under this 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 responsibilities and the expectations 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.

The above-mentioned facts and figures attest to the sincerity and prudence of the leadership of the Church. They are fruits of learning and painstaking labor.

A review of our history, especially in the recent past decades, would tell us how the Church struggled to survive.

As the General Secretary responding to queries on property development of the Church, I have stated that the UCCP has come out of the post-colonial era and has asserted itself to be an autonomous church free from its so-called “mother-churches” from the USA. The acid test for the church was the tenets of the so called “Three Self Movement”: that of being self-governing, self-propagating, and self-reliant. The first two we were able to live up to, but we have utterly failed in the third test, that of relying on our own/internal resources to finance the church’s basic and fundamental ministries, and its own administrative and organizational set-up.

We had to continue to be highly dependent on foreign sourcing. We had to suit proposals to the priorities of funding agencies to be able to access resources. What were considered traditional ministries such as Christian Education or Evangelism and the financing of our organizational machinery were hardly funded from outside source.

In the meantime, our church workers were at the mercy of the local churches. There was no standard salary, which is still true to this day. Many, up to this day, receive less than the minimum wage in their respective regions. A significant number are still not covered by Social Security. Of those enrolled, many have gaps of payments as at one term they are in a church which can afford to pay SSS premiums, then in another term they are assigned to a church which cannot do so. We do not have a sustainable

financial assistance for retired/retiring church workers. We barely have a Health/Hospitalization Benefit, nor a realistic Mortuary or Death Benefit Plan.

At the end of EY 2009-2010, the year before this present administration took over, the total WMS receipts was just over PhP4 million. Yet we needed PhP4.8 million if we were to give the P2,500/quarter/church worker. We asked, where will we get that amount?

In 2008, the National Council made a painful decision to have a moratorium on the GA support to ministerial students, as there were simply no funds.

When our administration took leadership, we discovered that there was an accumulated PhP28 million deficit. Monies from Trust and Designated Funds were used. The good news is that because of prudent financial management and belt-tightening, we were able to return half at the end of the quadrennium 2010-2014. Before the end of this present quadrennium, we have already wiped out the deficit.

There are, indeed, concrete problems needing concrete solutions.

There were two major campaigns in the past: the Self-Reliance Fund Campaign and the 2nd Mile Giving Campaign. But these were largely targeted at members giving to the fund. Both did not meet their targets.

But even if the target of PhP5 million was reached in the Self-Reliance Campaign, the interest earned by that fund in today's bank interest is very miniscule. Only 10 church workers would benefit if given P2.5T/quarter, and we have more than 500 qualified recipients.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow that today we are generating resources. Our increasing local giving through the Wider Mission Support is astounding. We are able to give pensions to retired church workers on a more regular basis, as well as mortuary and health assistance. It goes on to say that local churches and conferences are doing their share of faithful stewardship and even have trust and confidence in the national organ and its leadership.

As we move forward, we will continue to realize our thrusts of faithful and responsible stewardship of the resources of the Church to strengthen its capacity to fulfill its various ministries and eventually become self-reliant, and of comprehensive human resource development that will ensure capable, responsible and effective leadership for future generations.

The aforementioned thrusts entirely support the previous actions taken by the GA in Cebu in 1990 and in 2002 in Baguio City:

On the Conversion of Church Institutions to Stock Corporation

Voted GA90-72: To refer the following recommendation to the Legal Committee for study and recommendation to the Executive Committee: "To study the possibility of converting all existing institutions where properties are exclusively owned by UCCP, to stock corporation and that all stocks be in the name of UCCP."

On the Establishment of Stock but Non-Profit Foundation/or Stock but Profit Organization/Corporation

Voted GA90-73: That should the feasibility study on the establishment of church related stock but non-profit foundation or stock but profit organization/corporation be found viable, the 4th Quadrennial General Assembly mandates the Executive Committee and appropriate body to establish and organize the same.

Voted GA7-2002-39: To approve the recommendations of the Policy Discussion Group on SRD as amended:

1. The Church shall establish a non-stock investment and management company that may be incorporated as a foundation duly owned by UCCP. It shall serve as the principal or holding company that will manage investments and income generating ventures to support the total lifework and ministry of the Church.
2. All real properties of the Church (used, under-utilized, unutilized and idle) shall be utilized to pursue its mission and witness programs.

We continue to praise God that the recently-concluded Special National Council Meeting held on December 4-5, 2017, once more has proven how it is to dwell together in unity which is good and pleasant not only for us congregating leaders and members but to God who is at work to unite us to God and to each other.

The special NC Meeting was called for when at the last regular NC Meeting in Lubao, Pampanga, it was requested that the NEC be allowed to explore the possibilities for development, including sale of Church properties. It was voted to give the National leadership the authorization to do so with the colatilla that they will return to the NC for final approval of whatever proposal they will be getting. Thus, at the special NC Meeting in Malate, Manila, the National leadership presented a proposal given to them by a developer.

At this special meeting, two important items were decided upon:

1. VOTED NC 2017-12-02: That we accept the proposal of Vista Residences for the UCCP to enter into a joint venture agreement to develop the property into a high-rise mixed-use condominium project under the following terms and conditions:
  - a. That the share of the UCCP shall not be less than 1.1 Billion Pesos;
  - b. That the share of the UCCP on the commercial part of the project shall not be sold.
2. VOTED NC 2017-12-03: To confirm the joint decision of the CSRD and the NEC that PhP500 million from the proceeds of the sale of UCCP in the joint venture with Vista Land be allocated as endowment fund for the benefit and welfare of the church workers.

Lengthy and sometimes heated discussions during this special meeting took place. Questions on readiness in our part to enter into such a joint venture were raised. Questions on bidding and feasibility studies, gains and loses should we enter into this venture, and so on, were passionately raised.

Your leaders adhered consistently to the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws. We know fully well that we are duty-bound to fulfill the "Law" (the UCCP CBL in our case) following the examples of our Lord Jesus Christ while doing our best to discover venues and avenues to generate resources to support the ministries of the Church. Indeed, we need capital, not at the expense of the poor and the marginalized

but for the well-being of the churches, church workers and Filipino people now and in the coming generations.

As we prepare ourselves for the coming UCCP 11th General Assembly on the theme, “Doing Christ’s Mission in these Changing Times” and the 70th Founding Anniversary, we enjoin you, brothers and sisters in Christ, to pray with us and make your love of Christ and his Church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, evident with your trust and confidence in the GA leaders and the whole of the general membership. We believe these changing times is an opportune time to be open to change rather than closing ourselves for fear of change. For as long as we remain faithful to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of God’s Reign, we shall adopt to change. And as the saying goes, nothing is permanent but change.

Finally, aware of our accountability to a just and loving God who longs for genuine and meaningful change in the lives of peoples and nations, and to our accountability to God’s people, we commit to the realization of our Vision, Mission and Goals and the thrusts we have agreed upon as we give flesh to the various ministries of the Church.

Surely now and in the years to come, there shall be celebrations of victory in our firm resolve to participate in God’s work of transforming both church and society. This is our vision. This is our action: to develop the Church’s human and property resources to support the ministries of the Church and to eventually become self-reliant.


In Christ’s service,

  
**BISHOP REUEL NORMAN O. MARIGZA**  
General Secretary


  
**BISHOP ELORDE SAMBAT**  
North Luzon Jurisdictional Area

  
**BISHOP JAIME MORILES**  
East Visayas Jurisdictional Area

  
**BISHOP JOEL TENDERO**  
South Luzon Jurisdictional Area

  
**BISHOP MELZAR LABUNTOG**  
Northwest Mindanao Jurisdictional Area

  
**BISHOP ERMEGENCIO PADILLO**  
Middle Luzon Jurisdictional Area

  
**BISHOP HAMUEL TEQUIS**  
Southeast Mindanao Jurisdictional Area

  
**BISHOP JEZER BERTOLDO**  
West Visayas Jurisdictional Area