

## **Megachurches as Spiritual Capital Centers in Metro Manila, Philippines: Evidence from Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF)**

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### **Introduction**

Megachurches attract congregants because they offer a strong deposit of spiritual capital and other capital that contribute to the overall well-being and happiness of an individual, organization, and perhaps even a nation. If spiritual capital can be defined as "the power, influence, and dispositions created by a person or an organization's spiritual belief, knowledge, and practice" (Palmer and Wong 2013, 8), how do megachurches generate spiritual capital for their congregants? What attracts and predetermines vibrant, healthy, and growing Megachurches in the Philippines? While there have been increasing studies on spiritual capital, very few studies have been undertaken about the nature of the spiritual capital within mega-churches. While it remains an academic puzzle, when we know why and how Megachurches generate spiritual capital for their congregants, we could advance and use this study to unlock the enigma of why and how megachurches have grown in the Global South. This study asserts that megachurch leadership investing in spiritual capital empowers its congregants to acquire and attain individual happiness, organizational development, and a greater political voice. Megachurches, like Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF), are a symbolic representation of spiritual capital and other resource capitals because of their power and influence in the religious landscape. This study examines Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF) to find out why and how CCF is growing as a megachurch in the religious landscape of the Philippines.

### **Defining Spiritual Capital and Its Implications to Religious Individuals, Organizations, and Nations**

Berger and Hefner define spiritual capital as "a subspecies of social capital referring to the power, influence, knowledge, and dispositions

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created by participation in a particular religious tradition” (Berger and Hefner, 2003; Grace 2012, 9). However, most scholars reject this definition and see spiritual capital as an “independent form of value” rather than merely a subset of social, cultural, and religious capital. According to Palmer and Wong, spiritual capital can “generate and transform social and material relations” (Palmer and Wong 2013, 1). They find that religious and spiritual communities are leading in developing civil society organizations (Palmer and Wong 2013, 2). The most succinct definition of spiritual capital comes from Alex Liu: “Spiritual capital is the power, influence, and dispositions created by a person or an organization’s spiritual belief, knowledge, and practice” (Palmer and Wong 2013, 8).

Resources are created when people invest in religion. Woodberry writes, “In the process, they build up spiritual, material, intellectual, and social resources that shape both themselves and society” (Woodberry 2005, 2). Iannaccone’s research shows that religious communities have the “skills and experiences specific to one’s religion, including religious knowledge, familiarity with church ritual and doctrine, and friendship with fellow worshippers, which produce religious resources that people define as valuable and explain religious behavior (Iannaccone 1990, 299). While Woodberry differentiates between spiritual capital and other forms of capital, he clarifies that religious people view “their relationship with God as central and that they emphasize and actualize that relationship in their group activities” (Woodberry 2005, 1). Woodberry’s concept of spiritual capital among religious people is a “form of investment” with the hope of some return; in other words, people acquire various forms of capital—spiritual, social, cultural, and even financial. Spiritual capital is both a resource and a repository “that people draw on to meet various challenges—sickness, political oppression, ethical choices, or social problems. Religious organizations are also “sources of moral teaching and religious experiences that may motivate, channel, and strengthen people to reach particular ends” (Woodberry 2005, 2).

Woodberry first argues that highly religious people’s investment in spiritual capital positively impacts their physical well-being: they live longer, have fewer mental problems, and recover more quickly from sickness. They exhibit less risky behavior, are more socially involved, have higher self-esteem, and have greater happiness (Woodberry 2005, 4-5). Second, while there are dark sides to religion in some parts of the globe, religion is generally instrumental in increasing democratization and obedience to the rule of law (Woodberry 2005, 5). Third, mounting empirical evidence shows that religious people who invest in spiritual capital become personally involved in helping. They “tend to volunteer more time and give more money to help people informally and to support

both religious and non-religious voluntary organizations” (Woodberry 2005, 5). Fourth, while religious people use religious ideals to convert people, religious education promotes literacy that has implications for a society’s economic well-being. Woodberry acknowledges that these perceptions of religion might tempt some researchers to consider only the positive side of religion. However, these are general tendencies rather than a universal truth. Different researchers might focus on other factors that create a common good. Woodberry admits that religious and non-religious organizations can develop these general tendencies (Woodberry 2005, 7).

### **The Conceptual Mapping of the Role of Megachurches in Urban Metro Manila**

Even before megachurches developed in Metro Manila, Christian churches had been recognized as prominent organizations with an important role in shaping a city’s public life. Despite the increasing influence of secularization and modernization—antagonists that push religion out of the public discourse—Christian churches in the Philippines remain change agents for social and political transformation. Delotavo’s analysis of the church’s role in the Philippines points out that the church “remains at the forefront of moral empowerment, an agent of political change, a political refuge, and the most influential opposition against corruption” (Delotavo 2016, 225). In addition, Delotavo notes that “the church with its interrelated relationship with the state was instrumental for nurturing life and as a therapeutic institution that has a repository of transcendent values that heal an ill nation” (Delotavo 2008, 154).

Megachurches nurture urban life as centers of great spiritual significance and hubs of community cohesion. The study of megachurches in Metro Manila was of significant interest to some Asian scholars in the 1990s. Julie Ma, an instructor in missions at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in 1997, identified some growing churches in Metro Manila that she considered megachurches (Ma 1997, 2). Her qualitative study showed that these megachurches arose from the Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition. The founding pastors of these megachurches had different histories and motivations. Some built big congregations based on signs and wonders experienced or performed by these founding pastors. Some pastors had visions and dreams. Some started Bible studies and fellowship meetings, while Western missionaries began others.

Megachurches in the Philippines have significantly changed the congregational life of their members. These megachurches own

campuses and multisite fellowship meetings. They have shifted from using TV media to web pages, Facebook, YouTube videos, and live streams at a fraction of the previous cost. Although they still adhere to mother organizations, they are becoming autonomous in branding, tailoring their programs, and avoiding bureaucratic delays. On-the-job training is more valued than seminary training (Dart 2010, 21-23). Worship services are contemporary with creative worship styles. Some megachurches are designed like shopping malls to attract and accommodate large crowds. A critique of megachurches indicates that this rationale is anthropologically rather than theologically based (Warner 2010, 26).

Another striking observation about megachurches is that they are like therapeutic, spiritual pharmacies for individuals. Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly-Meyerdirk's 2014 study of twelve megachurches in the US from the perspective of ritual theory shows that megachurches produce positive emotional energy. Membership symbols are charged with emotional significance, feelings of morality, and a heightened sense of spirituality. Contrary to the criticism that megachurches are "superficial sources of entertainment that do not produce the significant feeling of belonging, moral responsibility, or spirituality," megachurches are perceived as good drugs that provide spiritual prescriptions for the betterment of life (Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly-Meyerdirk 2014).

Ethnographic observations and interviews among members of megachurches in the US study done by Snow *et al.* show that megachurches attract and appeal to the masses for two reasons: at the personal level, megachurches provide a fine-tuning of a wide array of emotional problems and issues. At the organizational level, megachurches are major players in a self-help market economy (Snow *et al.* 2010, 165).

Filipino individuals attending megachurches today also find them sacred public spaces that enhance individual quality of life and happiness. Megachurches in the Philippines contribute rapidly to improving individuals' belief systems and boosting public morale. The establishment of megachurches like Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF), Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF), and other Pentecostal megachurches in Metro Manila demonstrates the new face of Christianity emerging in the Philippine religious landscape. The critiques of social scientists and marketing theoreticians also confirm that the megachurch phenomenon successfully markets its witness, power, and influence in the business centers.

Joy Chin writes that megachurches like City Harvest Church in Singapore "display a striking similarity in their rationalization of production and consumption to those mass-production corporations of

which McDonalds' is the epitome" (Chin 2007, 1). Drawing from Ritzer (1993) and Cook (2002), Chin further argues that through this McDonaldization of megachurches, they "grow in size in a short period of time and acquire their unique identities and influences in the society" (Chin 2007, 2; Ritzer 1993; Cook 2002). Daniels and Ruhr, who critique megachurches from an economic perspective, argue that megachurches are attractive and successful because megachurches are "asserting their ability as consumers of religious products to engage in religious switching." That is to say that megachurches attract religious refugees because they "provide low cost and low commitment at the start, but the moment the attendees perceive a good fit in the church, they increase expectations and commitments" (Daniels and Ruhr 2012, 2).

Similarly, megachurches can create bonding and bridging capital that connects to their influence in the public sphere and transnational networks. Chong, an astute sociologist in Singapore, observes that the rise of megachurches in Asia was due to the influx of Protestant churches that detached themselves from the control of mother organizations for greater freedom of innovating and branding their worship style (Chong 2018, 407). He observes that the theology of the prosperity gospel and openness to charismata are associated with megachurches because of the upward mobility lifestyle of the middle classes. In addition, megachurches teach the integration of "sacred" and "secular" as a social space of Christian witness to encourage members to become change agents in society (Chong, 408). Chong also points out that the development of megachurches in Asia is a by-product of a growing "transnational" relationship with their Western counterparts. Although he acknowledges that some megachurches have an indigenous origin, the influence of international cooperation and globalization has opened an immense network between these megachurches. They share information, knowledge, resources, and leadership models to maintain their religious status as megachurches (Chong, 411; Rene Mendoza 1999, 1).

In the studies of Cornelio and Sapidula on the sociology of religion in the Philippines, three essential observations emerged as to why Christian religiosity in the Philippines is steadily vibrant, regardless of the decline of attendance at Catholic churches. First, the "missionizing zeal of Evangelical churches" promotes a "communal and highly experiential mode of spirituality available to other Christian churches." This attracts the Catholic youth to transfer their religious affiliation. Second, religious vibrancy is fueled by charismatic renewal movements in Catholic and Evangelical churches as they open up religious spaces for Filipinos to find personal meaning that affects spiritual discipline and the betterment of life (Cornelio and Sapidula 2014, 2, 3). Third, Cornelio and Sapidula observe that megachurches have begun to showcase their

successes and religious sites as a “grand global appeal” to demonstrate the gravitational shift of Christian mission from the West to the Global South. A case in point is the establishment of El Shaddai’s International House of Prayer in Parañaque (Cornelio and Sapitula 2014; Cornelio 2018, 1).

A study by Cartledge *et al.* on megachurches in London in 2017 shows a variety of activities of social engagement. These include work with children and youth, older people, the homeless, families, couples, people with physical and health needs, the widowed and bereaved, and community development such as educational projects and social campaigning against human trafficking (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 1). According to this study, megachurches are galvanizing civic engagement that positively impacts the lives of the city and its citizens and is working for real change in the communities they seek to serve (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 1). Some essential findings from this study resonate with policymakers and social innovators to encourage collaboration between religious groups and civil society. While megachurch pastors, leaders, and congregants value beliefs, rituals, and values, the principal reason for their social engagement is their inherent personal and vibrant relationship with God. Megachurch members engage in social concerns because a relationship with God is the heart of their motivation (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 2). The social engagement of megachurches is not primarily motivated by an agenda of proselytization and evangelism. Still, it is a product of a solid interpersonal relationship within the faith community and with other partners (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 3). As a result, church social engagement provides a substantial deposit of spiritual and social capital to their members and the broader networks of the community (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 5). According to this study, the diversity of forms of social engagement in these megachurches is based on each church’s distinctive calling and conviction. There is no uniformity of social engagement but rather a diversity of expressions of Christian faith in the public sphere (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 5, 6).

Cornelio’s study of the Jesus Is Lord Church (JIL) headed by Eddie Villanueva shows that megachurches like JIL are prime players at the forefront of indigenizing Christianity and have “political leverage” in Philippine society. Although they experienced political harassment and an assassination attempt initially, JIL stood as a megachurch with a strong political voice in the Philippines (Cornelio 2018, 130-138). Cornelio admits this is not always the case for megachurches in the Philippines. His recent study reveals that some megachurches are branded as “apolitical” for failing to stand on what is morally right. According to this study, megachurches acknowledge that, although they have an important voice in the social space, they have failed to take a

position on crucial political and moral issues. A case in point is President Duterte's "war on drugs," where they failed "to recognize the structural causes and consequences of substance abuse in the country" (Cornelio and Marañon 2019, 224, 227).

### **A Case Study: Christ's Commission Fellowship, Ortigas, Pasig City** Sources of Spiritual Capital: Spiritual Leadership

Peter Tan-Chi, the founding pastor of CCF, came to know Christ through his father, who encouraged him to transfer to a Christian school that invites people to speak about the Bible. In his reflection on how he came to faith, he recalls:

Someone told my father to transfer me to another school. In that school, they teach the Bible. One day we had a speaker, and he came and shared the gospel. So, finally, I understood that I needed Jesus. That day I gave my life to Jesus, my life began to change. Then one day, I was hospitalized, and the Lord spoke to me. He said, "Do you really want to be serious with me? What do you want to do with your life?" And that is when the Lord said in my heart, Start a Bible-believing church. And slowly and surely, the Lord told me and taught us. New Testament Church simply means, "keep it simple, focus on evangelism, focus on discipleship, teach people how to share the gospel," and that is what we did. That was thirty-two years ago. By the grace of God, we are what we are today. It is all because of him. (Tan-Chi 2016, at 0.32-1.11).

Tan-Chi started as a self-supporting pastor and businessman. He is the founder and chairman of AXEIA Group of Companies, one of the leading mass housing and subdivision developers. He also founded The Master's Academy—the first home school program accredited by the Department of Education in the Philippines in 2014. In addition, Tan-Chi, who holds a doctorate in ministry, is involved in various organizations such as the Asian Theological Seminary, International Graduate School of Leadership, and the Far East Broadcasting Company Philippines, all located in Manila. The University of the Philippines recognized him as a Distinguished Alumnus of the UP College of Business Administration. He was given the UPAA Distinguished Award in Entrepreneurship and Employment Creation.

Deonna, his wife, is a Caucasian American educated at the University of South Florida, majoring in Psychology and Sociology. Deonna is the founder of homeschooling in the Philippines and is known

by her family and friends as a conference speaker, mentor, discipler, and counselor for women. Peter and Deonna have five children and ten grandchildren.

In 1972, his father's company was sequestered by the government during the martial law period (1972-81). Peter, the vice president then, was removed and became jobless. In 1992, while he and his wife held Bible studies in Makati, gangsters ransacked his house and raped his 15-year-old daughter. Despite these two painful experiences, Tan-Chi and his family forgave the perpetrators (Mendoza, 2015, 17, 47, 106). In his interview with the 700 Club in the Philippines, Peter and Deonna recalled their response:

I do not understand. I do not see any good coming out of this. But I will trust you. I pray you will help me understand. I saw evil that night. I cannot believe how people can go to your house, abuse people, steal things. I felt our rights were so violated. It is hard to explain. I think that is one of the worst tragedies a father can experience. I have never cried more in my life. I said, 'Is it worth it serving Him?' Who is in charge? Perhaps God is not in charge? Perhaps the truth about the sovereignty of God is not true ... certain things are beyond Him? ... And the amazing thing is how God moves in our hearts. Where will I turn to? I do not know what good will come out of this ... BUT ... I claim Your promise ... something good will come out, and I said, 'Please, Lord, show me' (Tan-Chi *et al.*, 2014, 1:17 – 5:50).

Similarly, Deonna recalled: "If I turn away from God, where would I go? He is my life. He is my love. He is my everything. God loves Joy more than I love her. I said, 'Okay, God, I am going to trust you. I will hold You to your promise, and I won't let You go until I see the good that You promise me now at this tragedy'" (Tan-Chi *et al.*, 2014, 2:03).

These challenges of megachurch pastors like Tan-Chi have motivated them to innovate and model successful parenting that establishes respect, credibility, and integrity in the family before their people (Tan-Chi, 2014, 29). The family's ability to forgive and ask forgiveness from others has become a hallmark. Tan-Chi once recalled his own experience with his son:

A few years ago, my eldest son, Peter Jr., and I were riding in the car together. In my mind, everything was all right between us, but I casually asked him, "Son, how can I improve as a parent? Have I ever hurt you in any way?" To my surprise, he replied and opened his heart. "Yes, Dad, when I was in high



school, I felt bad that you did not allow me to play basketball with my friends on Tuesday nights at school.” That hurt me. I did not realize that he had carried this in his heart for years. I told him that I was sorry, and I did not realize how it had affected him. We talked some more, and I apologized, and asked him to please forgive me. He graciously did forgive me. And our relationship now is even closer. I still ask him now and then how I am doing and how I can improve (Tan-Chi, 2014, 75).

Tan-Chi has crafted essential materials to empower families and small groups at CCF. (Tan-Chi, 2014, 3). As a father and pastor, Tan-Chi leads by example and modeling. Joy Tan-Chi Mendoza, the third among the children of Peter and Deonna, describes her parents this way:

The greatest modeling our parents have provided in our home was their intimacy with the Lord. This was the secret to their Spirit-filled testimonies. I knew with absolute certainty that my parents loved God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. And that is why they loved us too. My siblings and I made many mistakes while growing up, but my parents always affirmed we were loved and accepted. We did not have to earn their love. They pursued us relationally and often communicated and demonstrated that we were their priority and that we were special to them (Tan-Chi, 2017, 25).

### **History of CCF**

CCF was among eleven megachurches planted in one of the business hubs of Metro Manila. A staggering membership of 110,000 is housed at the 10-story building in Frontera Verde in Pasig City. Pasig City is ranked as the eighth most significant city in the Philippines, with a population of 755,300. With three couples in 1982, Pastor Peter and Deonna Tan-Chi started a Bible Study fellowship in Brookside Subdivision in Cainta Rizal. As they grew, the Bible study was moved from the garage of Loreto Carbonel at Cainta Rizal to San Juan, Metro Manila. This Bible Study became a core group of 40 people comprised of business people and professionals with their families. They began their first Sunday worship at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) and formed the Christ's Commission Fellowship in 1984. Transferring from one theatre to another bigger theatre in 1987 because of increased attendance, CCF occupied the 4,500 seats of the Philippines International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City in 1988. Then they moved to

the Country Club of Valle Verde in Pasig City until CCF found its new home in St. Francis Hall in Ortigas Center in 1997. CCF steadily grew as an influential megachurch in Metro Manila during this period.

CCF Parañaque was established as the first satellite congregation in 1994 with the influx of worshipers from south of Metro Manila. With the dawn of the new millennium in 2000, newly established satellite congregations of CCF began to emerge in Metro Manila and other provinces of Pampanga, Cebu, Bukidnon, and Davao. Concurrently, CCF congregations were established in Alabang, Pasig in Ever Gotesco, Malolos Bulacan, and Marikina. These spread CCF's influence in other major cities. In 2006, CCF established its first overseas congregation in Singapore.

For two decades, Tan-Chi and the leadership team had dreamed of a mega worship hall. In 2008 they held a groundbreaking ceremony to build a 10,000-seat auditorium in a ten-story permanent worship hall in Pasig City. They moved in five years later. They also started live-streaming worship services online. As a result, many CCF satellite churches were born in Metro Manila and other provinces. In 2012 CCF expanded its influence and aggressively planted satellite churches overseas in Auckland, New Zealand, Canada, and Los Angeles, California.

Celebrating its 36th anniversary in 2020, they revealed that CCF is regularly seen in 183 countries worldwide through TV broadcasts and social media networks with sixty satellite congregations in the Philippines. CCF also claims over 800 small groups and 118 campus missionaries. However, during the pandemic, they organized themselves into 3,000 small groups, adding another six local congregations in the country and overseas. Today, from its humble beginning, CCF has seventy-five satellite congregations and over 10,000 small groups, expanding its reach with forty satellite and over 33,000 house churches in over thirty countries worldwide. CCF patterned itself after the first-century church with indigenous leadership and ministries without foreign affiliations and financial support. It stands as a rising megachurch in the Philippines and Southeast Asia (CCF, 2020: 0.22-0.36).

### **Leadership, Governance, and Beliefs**

The CCF leadership team comprises diverse leadership giftings. Leaders serve as full-time or bi-vocational pastors. The senior pastor and his children, their sons and daughters-in-law, are bi-vocational preachers and Christian workers at CCF, active in ministry and the corporate world. Ricky Sarthou, a former vice-president of an insurance company in

Makati, is the executive pastor of CCF and co-preaches with Tan-Chi in their morning services. He serves on the organization management committee of CCF. He and his wife lead the discipleship groups (D-Groups). JP Masakayan, from Georgetown University, is the central management director, chief of staff, and Management Committee member. Pastor Rito Bong Saquing, a former Bread of Life pastor, leads the Tagalog service on Sunday afternoon.

The church is governed by the board of elders and served by different pastors in the main church. However, CCF is organized by regional and satellite pastors in the Philippines and overseas. With a passion to disciple the whole world, CCF has a mission "to honor God and make Christ-committed followers who will make Christ-committed followers." CCF envisions "a movement of millions of committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ meeting in small groups, transforming lives, families, communities, and all nationalities, all for God's glory." The church's mission and vision statements are based on the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 (Tan-Chi 2015, 4-7). Tan-Chi challenged his members during the 32nd anniversary of CCF:

Christians ought to be like Jesus. Without discipleship, this will not happen. Without discipleship, Christians fail to be the salt and light of the world. An even greater tragedy is that their lives may turn off those who need Jesus. Without discipleship, the foundations of the family will not be rock solid, and children will not grow to follow Jesus and survive the temptations and deceptions of the world. The sad reality is that Christians who are not properly disciplined can harm the cause of Christ (Tan-Chi, 2015, 5).

Core values define CCF's identity and the relationships around it. As committed Christ-followers, they are called to replicate the same values in other believers. The principle of servant leadership guides them. For CCF members, the word *servant* stands for sacrificial love for God and others, evangelism and equipping, reliance on the Holy Spirit and prayer, volunteer lay leadership, the authority of the Scriptures and leaders, nurturing of family relationships, truthfulness and integrity, and small group discipleship (Tan-Chi 2015, 8-9).

The church subscribes strictly to conservative evangelical doctrines, upholding the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and the Trinitarian theology of the Godhead. Salvation is received only through Jesus Christ, who can freely offer forgiveness of sins. The church is composed of Christians who confess Jesus as Lord all over the globe, particularly as local believers in a specific locality. They take the mission of the church

seriously, including the command of Jesus to evangelize and disciple people who respond to the Good News. As to marriage and gender, CCF believes that marriage is the union of a biological male and female. Human life is sacred because people were created after the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27) (CCF 2023).

### **Global Leadership Center**

According to Campilan and Fong, at the heart of CCF is a passion to bring the good news of Jesus to the lost. Thus, CCF is motivated to equip and enable every member to become a witness of Jesus Christ, whose transforming power repairs broken lives and relationships (Campilan and Fong 2015, 10). Furthermore, CCF believes in training its members to become volunteer workers who will actualize the mission of CCF.

The CCF Global Leadership Center (GLC) was organized to make every member a servant leader. Through lessons from eight books, members are led from a small group into a Discipleship Group (D-Group). At the basic level, four modular classes train prospective leaders in character formation, biblical knowledge, and skills development. This program is intended to educate members to bridge the divide between sacred and secular so that everyone becomes a witness in the marketplace (Campilan and Fong, 10). Each member is required to complete two Essentials, contained in eight workbooks. The GLC 1 Essentials, a four-volume set, provides “foundational knowledge on salvation and church membership to help believers grow in a Discipleship Group” (D-Group). The GLC 2 Essentials, comprised of books 5 to 8, “builds on the top of core essentials of the faith” and helps members exercise spiritual discipline as they progress from a small group to a D-Group.

Then the new disciples progress to a GLC Upgrade (GLC 3 & 4). This modular training aims to give disciples further life training and skills development to become disciple-makers. This supplemental training continues to develop members in spiritual growth and multiplication. The fourth activity level is the GLC Catalyst, which deals with personal development, biblical stewardship, stress management, and other topics. While the GCL program provides this vital training for its members, GCL continues to “provide discipleship conferences that fuel that vision and passion for disciples and disciple-makers alike” (Campilan and Fong, 11).

## The D-Group

The church leaders believe that they have to start small to grow big. According to Asuncion and Fong, this conviction is rooted in the model of Jesus. Jesus began his ministry with twelve disciples and then intended to disciple them so that they could make disciples (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15). Patterned after the model of Jesus, CCF organizes the Discipleship Group (D-group) to transfer this legacy of Jesus to CCF members. A D-Group, according to Asuncion and Fong, “provides accountability and support to its members. Character is built through interpersonal relationships both inside and outside the groups. Moreover, in the D-Groups, the vision for creating more Christ-committed followers is communicated and followed through more consistently” (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15).

How does CCF implement D-Groups for successful disciple-making? Members of a D-Group go to different stages of development. Asuncion and Fong say, “A person must hear the gospel of Christ first (Engage-Connect). When this person chooses to believe (Evangelize-Believe), then the D-Group will bring this person to spiritual growth through spiritual feeding” (Edify-Grow). This person now needs a mentor in the D-Group to bring them to regular accountability meetings in foundational Bible Study and modeling Christ-like behavior (Equip-Mentor). After this process, the D-Group leaders cast a vision of sharing Jesus with the next generation of believers in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Once the D-Group member is trained, they too “begin to mentor other new believers to be Christ Committed followers while still being discipled by their leader” (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15). A sign that a D-Group leader reaches the multiple stages (Empower-Multiply) is when members of the D-Group start their D-Group. The D-Group attains its goal as a D12 group when each member mentors the disciples of their group.

Through these stages and processes of discipleship at CCF, according to Asuncion and Fong, “CCF sustains exponential growth and manages a healthy balance between quantity and quality spiritual growth in a small group” (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15). Paolo Sanchez, one of the D-Group leaders, firmly believes that CCF small group discipleship is “like an incubator for believers in Christ. It is where we grow spiritually to undertake the greater work God has prepared for us. It is where our fears and failures go head-to-head with raw, unadulterated faith—not blind, unthinking faith, but faith that poses questions and pushes boundaries to grasp and live out God’s truth” (Sanchez 2015, 16).

As for the procedure by which D-Group leaders assign members to their respective groups, Giannina Mendoza Tan says: “It was simple and

fast. First, people register with their basic information: age, interests, and group preference (single or married). Then the system assigns newcomers to a group that fits their demographics and preferences” (Tan 2015, 17).

### **Worship Services**

Worship services are tailored and branded to attract and meet the members’ various needs. With an astounding number of worshippers coming on Sundays, the worship services are a collective work effort of the dedicated and efficient CCF staff. The phases and sequences of worship services are patterned after Evangelical and Pentecostal worship services. All staff, volunteers, and pastors are assigned particular ministries. Three services are held on Sundays at 9:00–11:00 a.m., 12:00–3:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m.

Minute attention is paid to detail, with the first volunteers and staff arriving as early as 5:00 a.m. to go about their duties. The second phase, at 8:45–9:00, is the prayer time for groups, teams, and warriors. Appointed pastors, leaders, and prayer warriors take this moment reverently. All prayer requests are posted on the big screen so everyone can see them. A third phase at 8:45–9:30 is devoted concurrently to prayer and praise. Live production and music team members take their respective posts onstage, backstage, and around the worship hall. The prayer team covers the church in prayer for the duration of the service.

At 9:00 a.m., the worship service begins. Backstage, live production team members keep an eye on the technical side of each segment and adjust the lights and sounds. CCF differs in its style of giving compared to other megachurches. CCF has no announcement or public information during a specified portion of the service. There is no time to pray for the giving or any biblical reference, acknowledgment, or mini-sermon. There are drop-off boxes with posted labels and instructions for anyone to put their offering. The only way for newcomers to know how to give is if they ask at the information desk or spot these areas in the lobbies.

The final phase of the service is the proclamation of the Word (the message) by the senior pastor or assigned speaker. Before preaching, Tan-Chi calls a celebrity, prominent person, or CCF member to testify. These few minutes of sharing their testimony by reading or speaking set the context of the preaching. Messages are combinations of expository, textual, and topical sermons. Sometimes messages are an application of the text to particular issues in society. During the sermon, Music Team members “huddle and practice some lines, then proceed backstage to prepare for the closing of the service. Welcome Center volunteers gather for prayer, reminders, and instructions.” From 10:45 to 11:00 a.m., volunteers and staff of different ministries prepare to assist people

exiting the worship hall. Parents pick up their children from NextGen; members bring first-time guests to the Welcome Center; seekers inquire and sign up at the different booths or attend GLC classes (Jingo and Tuazon 2015, 12). These sequences of worship services are followed at all services every Sunday.

### **Music Ministry**

The Music Ministry comprises trained professionals who draw the crowd to worship God Sunday after Sunday. According to Clarice Fong, Exalt Music Ministry is comprised of “volunteers, worship leaders, the band, the choir, all the way to the choir conductor. CCF music ministry consists of eight bands on rotation, and five choirs of twenty members each which serve on rotation throughout the year” (Fong 2015, 72). All services every Sunday are performed by only one team. Songs are selected by the assigned worship leader for the week and approved by the Exalt Ministry Pastor. Groups practice on Saturdays before they are assigned to their designated worship service. Songs are sent to the volunteers to rehearse independently and with a vocal coach on Saturdays, focusing on harmonies and tuning of voices.

A coach trains worship leaders while the choir is rehearsing. Band leaders work with the worship leaders in setting the tone and pace of the praise and worship time. After separate sub-team rehearsals where each group rehearses its parts, the worship team practices together (Fong 2015, 72).

CCF has three band rooms with instruments and sound equipment where the music team rehearses every Saturday. Band members undergo a panel evaluation before joining the ministry through the Musical Director. Choir members go through two auditions before they can serve. After the first audition, vocalists undergo five weeks of vocal training before the second screening. Choir members can be assigned to a worship team. Prompters or backup vocals go through another round of auditions. While leaders encourage musicians to play and sing skillfully, they emphasize the heart and the desire to worship God humbly. Exalt Music Ministry recruits new members in semi-annual auditions (Fong 2015, 72).

### **Facilities**

The CCF building has a modern architectural design, and its facilities are top-of-the-line. Parking areas and security personnel meet vehicles with metal detectors and K9 units. The main entrance is guarded by security, with three more K9 groups who may roam the lobby. Its doors have X-ray machines for baggage and for human congregants. The

lobby is welcoming to congregants. They also have a bookstore, a sports complex, and a mall-type food court. Attendees enjoy well-functioning air conditioning systems, top-tier comfort rooms, and water fountains. There are elevators and escalators for persons with disabilities, the young, and the elderly. Three huge screens are visible to every attendee. As the church preaches discipleship, assigned seating in designated areas caters to new attendees and new converts' discipleship. They have Sunday School classrooms for children from K1 to K12. Nursing mothers are offered privacy in a secluded area where they can listen and participate in the service.

Traffic volunteers are essential to maintaining a safe, secure, and orderly facility. The CCF Traffic Ministry facilitates the orderly flow of 2000 vehicles every Sunday. Traffic volunteers arrive an hour before the worship service. Though they are responsible for logistic and practical matters, traffic volunteers are trained to manage their emotions and encouraged to demonstrate Christian leadership and character as they serve. Starting with three volunteers in 2013, this ministry has grown to six teams of ten to twelve volunteers per team. Each shift is planned around the worship schedules (Coloma and Fong 2015, 73).

### **Public Theology & Civic Engagement**

Megachurches like CCF address issues of broad public concern outside the church community through various means.

### **Social Media Network**

As a megachurch, CCF maximizes the power and potential of technology and social media in expanding its influence and mission locally and globally. Sermons, teaching materials, live-streamed services, and promotional videos are posted on its website, with podcasts, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter posts every week. CCF local satellite churches with their addresses, maps, and phone numbers are promoted on the website. Weekly and monthly activities, communications, and announcements are sent to congregants via websites and social media. D-Group meetings are announced in videos to attract and encourage congregants to participate actively, depending on which group they fit into. CCF enables its members to communicate through the website, emails, or phone calls.

While CCF does not collect offerings during their worship services, members are encouraged to donate and give to the church through PayPal, credit cards, and bank transfers. The church provides seven bank accounts and indicates local and international channels to receive money.



With social media and wireless connectivity, the world has become a global village with convenient communication. In 2007, CCF started a CCF Internet Church and Skypleship to extend its global mission. The goal of the Internet church is to promote evangelism in places where physical presence is difficult and to provide an avenue of discipleship to those who struggle to meet with a regular D-group because of time and location constraints. Because of the CCF Internet Church, the Skypleship program was born. It crosses borders and time zones to connect around the globe. By 2015, there were thirty Skypleship leaders and 204 members in thirty-one countries.

### **Family Ministries**

Modern families today can be more connected than ever because of social media availability. Yet according to Young and Galarpe, families still deal with broken marriages, financial stress, jobs, unemployment, and absentee parents (Young and Galarpe 2015, 21). With these growing challenges, CCF Family was started in 2014 by Edric and Joy Mendoza. This ministry addresses three crucial issues within the family: marriage, parenting, and stewardship. It is rooted in the biblical teaching of Deuteronomy 6:5-7 to bring families closer to God and each other. CCF Family organizes SaturDATES to provide up-to-date transformational Bible study workshops about building a stable marriage and developing excellent parenting skills. As a result of this series of workshops, many families have formed D-groups (Young and Galarpe, 2015:21).

The largest demographic within the CCF is young single professionals. Their ministry, Be One with God (BIG), organizes conferences, retreats, and other events to reach their peers. BIG holds Bible studies for single professionals in strategic centers in Metro Manila and other cities. With creativity and innovation, they offer special interest groups for single professionals, organizing sports, fellowships, and conferences to encourage cross-pollination and collaboration across Metro Manila (Fong 2015, 68-69).

“Kool Solo Parents” serves a growing number of single parents. This vital ministry aims “to provide a supportive environment for single parents facing the challenges of raising the children alone.” Embracing members and non-members, KSP allows single parents to share their struggles, triumphs, and concerns within the group without being judged by their past. Through this ministry, single parents learn to rebuild their families through their relationship with Jesus Christ (Villa 2015, 22).

In 2009, the Shepherds Staff Ministry was organized for senior citizens “to see a movement of committed senior adults united in faith and knowledge of the Lord and to share the Word of God and disciple others for the building of the Body of Christ.” This service ministry is

based on the principle that Christians must become the practical expression of Jesus in word and works. The seniors conduct medical missions, prayer, counseling, and a feeding program at Smokey Mountain. This ministry of CCF has expanded to various cities in Metro Manila (Gutierrez 2015, 23).

Seniors have an important place and ministry in the church. Young and Dyquiango say the elderly are in their “prime years of wit, grace, and love” (Young and Dyquiango 2015, 24). This beautiful attitude toward the elderly, based on Psalm 92:14, says that elderly people can still yield fruit at their age. With creative and innovative programs designed by their assigned pastors, the number of active seniors is growing. They make significant contributions as prayer warriors and volunteer staff at the Welcome Center of CCF (Young and Dyquiango 2015, 24, 25). Ester Pe-Bico, 78 years old, a retired dentist from the University of the Philippines, says, “No one will notice you, it is hard work, but I experience the joy of the Lord” (Jingco and Tuazon 2015, 25).

### **Education**

One of the educational advocacies of CCF is an innovative school to transform Filipino children and youth from the inside out. Pastor Tan-Chi is passionate about education. His wife started Life Academy in 2014. The Department of Education approved a pre-nursery, nursery, elementary, and high school to provide learners with a holistic education. The goal is to create innovative and transformational leaders. With large and spacious facilities, Life Academy offers innovative programs for youngsters to discover, explore, and develop their talents and skills. Students engage in academic and curricular activities that enhance their gifts and physical, spiritual, and intellectual competencies. At the heart of this program is students' character development (Gutierrez 2015, 28).

Another avenue of the CCF engagement in education is through Elevate, their aggressive evangelization and discipleship program on campuses. Elevate stands for Experiencing a Life Empowered through Values, Excellence, and Leadership. CCF takes seriously the degeneration of moral values of the young generation manifested in unplanned pregnancies, minor crimes, and identity crises. At home, young people face parental problems, broken marriages, single parenting, and peer pressure. Young people are bombarded with promiscuous lifestyles advocated by the media. Elevate emphasizes a life-changing relationship with Jesus and life values grounded in Scripture (de Ocampo and Sollorano 2015, 29-31). According to de Ocampo and Sollorano, campus ministry “drives students to pursue excellence in every area of their lives. It contributes toward nation-building by mentoring and

empowering the youth to become campus leaders and catalysts. It also allows students to see beyond their immediate spheres and encourages them to extend their influence into the nation, and even into the rest of the world” (de Ocampo and Sollorano 2015, 31). CCF has appointed missionaries to sixty campuses nationwide to make disciples by holding weekly worship services within schools and colleges. Clarice Fong writes of one missionary:

Reynaldo Morante never met his biological father. As a child, Rey grew up with anger and stubbornness, often disobeying authority. He spent his days in his uncle's house in Bulacan. On Christmas Eve 2008, his uncle shared the gospel with Rey. However, the gospel did not take root, and Rey lived a life filled with hatred, self-will, and sexual immorality. In 2011, Rey began to attend CCF Elevate. God gradually transformed Rey into a faithful follower of Christ Jesus (Fong 2015, 32).

Rey's spiritual journey did not end there. Six months later, Rey felt the Lord asking him to lead a D-group for men. The excuses came, but God continued to remind Rey of His all-sufficient grace. God has entrusted Rey with twenty-two high school and college students to disciple (Fong, 2015, 32).

### **Government**

With a strong deposit of spiritual and social capital, CCF values its moral responsibility to influence public servants in the government so that a nation will be transformed. With 60 percent of the people in government in the AFP, PNP, and DepEd, CCF believes that mobilizing its members/volunteers to bring the values of the Kingdom of God into these government agencies can impact government agencies to change. Therefore, the Government Movers Enlightening the Nation (GMEN) was organized in 2005 through a Purpose Driven Life program conducted in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). It spread to the Philippine National Police (PNP) in 2007 and to the Department of Education teachers in 2011. It aims to bring spiritual and moral transformation to government agencies. The GMEN program serves as a bridge to conduct values formation programs for these three powerful government agencies. Its holistic modules equip government officials, addressing moral and character formation, parenting, stress management, financial management, and pursuing excellence in the workplace.

GMEN also designed a Mentoring Leadership Module, training Christians working in government to teach the PNP and the AFP. All seminars are Bible-based. As a result, hundreds of people in the

government have experienced personal transformation. The goal of GMEN is to see the nation transformed for God's glory. Mariluna Mendoza, a former activist and now a member of GMEN, says, "If you want to have a good government, you want to make sure that the people governing over you know Christ" (Del Rosario 2015, 40).

### **Business and Marketplace Ministry**

CCF believes that all Christians are God's witnesses. There is no divide between sacred and secular. All Christians are called to be witnesses wherever they are working. Pastor Bong Saquing believes that "the business world has its unique language and therefore the church must creatively bring the church to them" (Yang-Uy, 2015, 43). In 2010, CCF members, comprised of corporate professionals, organized the Workplace Winners to establish a community of worshippers within Philippine companies. This ministry seeks to bring the values of the Kingdom of God into the marketplace through value formation and team building. Planted, grown, and multiplying over the years, this marketplace ministry has established Bible study groups within companies. Their vision is transforming the business sector for God's glory in the Philippines (Yang-Uy, 2015, 43).

CCF organized the Lord's Attorneys at Work (LAW) to create a just and loving society. This group of legal practitioners, law students, paralegals, and others in the legal profession provide legal services, using their legal expertise and the Bible to ensure sound understanding and wisdom. This ministry offers legal counseling and consultation weekly and participates in various bridging events and legal forums to educate people on common issues. They also serve inmates in different jails with legal and mediation assistance, and in doing so, they share the gospel with the inmates (Co-Degras, 2015, 44). Christian legal practitioners aim to break the negative image of lawyers by displaying Christ as an advocate for those in need.

Another expression of Christian witness that combines the secular and the sacred is the Bronze Staff, an organization of medical doctors and practitioners. They offer medical services to the poorest and far-flung communities. Bronze Staff is engaged locally, regionally, and internationally (Fong 2015, 45). It was designed for two purposes: to bring the gospel message to poor communities and to disciple recipients of the medical mission to become followers of Jesus Christ.

### **Addressing Urban Poverty**

More than half of Metro Manila's population cannot climb the economic ladder because of a lack of primary education, unemployment,

and the crowded population of Metro Manila. CCF, via UPLIFT Foundation, engages its Christian witness to the urban poor by helping students from low-income families complete their high school studies. CCF partners with the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program of the Department of Education. Jake Sanchez, one of the scholars of the CCF foundation, acknowledges, "Education is a way for me to attain my dreams. If I have sufficient education, I will have an easier time getting a job. A good education is a solution to raise my family from poverty" (Reyes, 2015, 49). In partnership with the ALS program, the CCF Uplift Foundation provides spiritual and moral transformation through a personal relationship with Jesus, boosting students from physical poverty and addressing their spiritual condition. In addition, the CCF Uplift Foundation engages scholars in various CCF activities to instill the importance of the holistic development that the gospel can bring to students (Reyes, 2015, 49).

Another form of civic engagement among the poor is the ministry of restorative justice, which visits the inmates in various jail centers in Metro Manila. The BIYAHE (*Binigyang Laya ni Hesus*) Jail Ministry means "Toward Freedom in Christ" for criminals and offenders. For the past ten years, this has brought 1,000 inmates to experience personal transformation. BIYAHE volunteers visit three to four jails every week. They conduct centralized and Bible-centered worship services followed by breakout sessions that train Christian inmates to evangelize and disciple their fellow inmates (Jingco and Tuazon 2015, 50). This ministry also helps inmates leaving prison to readjust and reintegrate themselves into society. Follow-up activities train former inmates to find acceptance and become productive citizens.

CCF expresses its social concern among the street kids of Metro Manila through the Backstreet Kids Ministry (BSK), which started in 1998. They feed hundreds of children in various cities of Metro Manila. In 2007 they began *Gabay sa Landas* Foundation (GALA, Guidance for the Path). BSK and GALA cater to the growing number of underprivileged children, using a curriculum that develops long-term contact between volunteers and the kids. This ministry is expanding and extending to the families and communities of these children at risk in Metro Manila and other cities (Dyquiengco, Magpayo, Fong, Tamase, 2015, 51, 54). Gie Fernandez, the head of this ministry, says, "These marginalized children and families are the members of our society who are at the bottom of the [social] pyramid" (Dyquiengco *et al.*, 51). They have a major impact on the economy and are influential in electing the nation's leaders. BSK and GALA, like two legs of a charitable organization, collaborate and partner with CCF satellite churches in

Metro Manila to serve and bring transformation to the poor children in Metro Manila.

Another notable expression of social engagement in urban poverty is the CCF Calamity Response (CCF CaRes), which responds to communities stricken by typhoons and floods. CaRes team has designed a disaster risk response that activates CCF ministries during calamities. This program is three-fold: Relief (providing immediate needs like food, hygiene kits, and clothing); Rebuild (getting people back into their homes); and Restore (assisting people to rebuild their lives). As a Christian organization, CaRes offers spiritual, physical, and economic forms of Christian witness to Christian and non-Christian families (Uy and Magno 2015, 52).

### **Wholistic Healing and Rehabilitation Ministries**

CCF feels called to become a signpost of hope and a healing community to those in society who are battling addictions, alcohol, and gambling. CCF believes that these groups of people should not be disenfranchised. Instead, they were embraced and given a second chance to experience the gospel's transforming power.

At a Bible study in 1998 at the rehabilitation center, CCF volunteers started the Glorious Hope Ministry (GHM) to help drug dependents and alcoholics by equipping them to discover and address deep-seated hurts and hang-ups. Because drug dependents and alcoholics tend to show compulsive behaviors that affect the relationship, the GHM of CCF adopted a 12-step program. The program runs from April to October, helping clients identify the root causes of addictions. It provides survival training that reintegrates people into productive community citizens. This process includes group counseling sessions, debriefings, and other therapeutic activities. GHM maintains anonymity and confidentiality in counseling and study group sessions (Guerra 2015, 60).

Over the years, GHM has consistently ministered to hundreds of participants who receive therapeutic healing, forgiveness, and transformation. To further the ministry of transformation among drug addicts, Penuel Home was built and established through the initiative of Dodo Reyes. Its purpose is to bring drug addicts to a deeper transformation so that broken people are changed by God and have a new identity. Penuel Home provides worship services, small group meetings, retreats, and conferences for residents and their families. GHM and Penuel Home partner to bring healing and transformation to those victims of destructive vices (Acosta and Apostol 2015, 62-63).

The Living Free Ministry takes the issues of gay lifestyles seriously. In 2004, it was founded and led by Ronnie G. Aquino Jr., a former

homosexual freed from that lifestyle through Bible study and small group ministry. This educational arm of CCF exists to “educate the gay community with scriptural and non-scriptural truths of effeminate lifestyles.” In addition, the church aims to equip former homosexuals who have become Christians to disciple people with gender issues and problems about identity and sexuality. With the multiple and varied needs of CCF members and families, CCF demonstrates pastoral care through child education, pre-marital counseling, weddings, funeral services, home and office dedications, hospital and home visitation, and prayer and deliverance ministries. Started in 2003, the pastoral care ministry comprises lay volunteers who impart biblical understanding for people to grow. This ministry has expanded to CCF satellite churches. It allows the gospel to be preached through acts of service.

### **CCF Doctrine of Success and Prosperity**

Just like Jesus, who increasingly grew in wisdom and stature with God and people, Tan-Chi's doctrine of success is multi-faceted and holistic. Success is multidimensional. In his preaching and teaching series on success, Tan-Chi encourages his members to balance life in the family, workplace, business, and finances. Success for Tan-Chi, is “becoming all that God wants you to be, and doing all that he wants you to do, and hearing him say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master’” (Tan-Chi, 2018, 2:59-3:14)

Success comes from God, but you have to work it out. Work for CCF is not a curse but to “advance the work of the Kingdom of God.” Money should help a person become what God wants him to be. Successful people should be happy people. Leaving a godly legacy for children is better than leaving them plenty of money. Success is missional and also involves character formation. Personal success involves personal development. Success is becoming what God wants one to become and reaching their highest potential” (Tan-Chi, 2018, 5:24-35).

### **CCF Response to COVID-19**

CCF believes that the first response to a global pandemic is prayer. In the middle of the national quarantine ordered by the President of the Philippines, CCF called its members to commit to prayer. They believe that the church must arise to be the hands and the feet of Jesus. During COVID-19, CCF opened its CCF Gym Center to accommodate frontliners from nearby hospitals. They helped supply frontliners with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and purchased food packs for distribution through various local government units.

CCF pastors contextually addressed issues by preaching messages of hope to their congregants and the Filipino people (Tan-Chi, 2020, 1:54). Tan-Chi's response to COVID-19 was twofold: from a spiritual point of view, he encouraged members of CCF to surrender their fear to God and trust him in their difficult circumstances, and he encouraged his people to use the global health crisis as an opportunity to spread the Good News and share the gospel of Jesus to people who were afraid to die.

### **Conclusion**

In studying spiritual capital and how it best functions, we cannot overlook the significant contributions of megachurches. Megachurches are centers of spiritual capital. They provide a variety of platforms within their ministry activities for their people to acquire and share spiritual capital. They boost and empower their members to find meaning and purpose and enable them to behave wisely in their daily lives. CCF serves as a model of a megachurch that uses its power and influence to generate spiritual capital for its adherents. Their platform of individual empowerment consequently brings unprecedented growth to the organization and dramatically influences their nation. CCF carefully innovates and crafts its Christian witness as a megachurch to bring spiritual revolution among its members so that they become change agents in their spheres of influence. Platforms such as worship services, fellowship meetings, training for leaders, and D-group meetings are instrumental in accruing spiritual capital that shapes and molds good citizens. Members of CCF are attracted to the church because of the many good things that empower them to acquire spiritual capital. In the complex area of Christian witness in the public sphere, CCF is creatively applying this acquired spiritual capital in their civic engagement in the marketplace, education, government, and the difficult circumstances of everyday life.

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