

Couples for Christ (Sposi per Cristo)

A Presentation to the World Meeting of Ecclesial Movements, June 19, 2018, Rome, Italy

“I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale”

(Youth, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment)

INTRODUCTION

Couples for Christ (CFC) was founded in 1981 in Manila, Philippines with the primary goals of family renewal, evangelization and mission, and work with poor. CFC was given official recognition in the year 2000 by the then Pontifical Council for the Laity as a Private International Association of the Lay Faithful. Currently, CFC is present in 128 countries in six continents and has an active membership of 700,178 globally.

In 1993, **Couples for Christ** established its **Family Ministries**, a "womb-to-tomb" renewal ministry for all members of the family, where persons are evangelized at the youngest age and sustained as they grow through the different stages and states of life.

- A. Kids for Christ** - aims to serve children from ages 4 – 12, anchored on four F's: **Fun, Friendship, Faith and Freedom**. Its programs include **Parents Forum, Family Ties Camp, Mother & Daughter and Father & Son Camps and Family Household**
- B. Youth for Christ** - is CFC's ministry for young people aged 13 – 21 with the vision of *“Young People Being and Bringing Christ Wherever They Are.”* Some of its programs: **Parents Honoring Night, Best Weekend, Family Enrichment Retreat**
- C. Singles for Christ** - caters to the needs of single men and women 21 to 40 years of age. The pastoral care offered by the ministry, is not limited to those who are called for marriage, but includes those who may be considering either single blessedness or religious vocation as a state of life. Among its programs: **Christian Character Weekend, God's Masterpiece and Singles Engagement Retreat**
- D. Handmaids of the Lord** – provides pastoral support to mature women, ages 41 and above, who are single, widows, divorced or separated or whose husbands live away from home. Among its programs are **Tribute to Mothers, Widows Retreat, Marian Conferences, Retreat for Solo Parents and Retreat for Wives of Overseas Workers**.
- E. Servants of the Lord** – is similar to the Handmaids of the Lord but for men and the ministry revolves around the spirit of brotherhood offering pastoral formation programs that mold its members to become **“True Men of God”**.

COUPLES FOR CHRIST MINISTERS TO THE YOUNG

Couples for Christ ministers to the young thru its 3 ministries mentioned above: **Kids for Christ, Youth for Christ and Singles for Christ**. In these ministries, the young members are taught and guided by the young leaders themselves.

For example, the members of **Youth for Christ** serve as facilitators and service team for the Kids for Christ activities. This initial engagement of the Youth for Christ in Kids for Christ activities has been institutionalized and made part of the Youth for Christ program. This service was a way of instilling in the youth the concept of service to others.

CFC Family Ministries also provides **“Family appreciation activities”** that give significance to family formation. **CFC Kids for Christ** has provided numerous activities thru their **Family Enrichment Camps, Family Conferences and Parents Forum**, attended by hundreds and thousands every activity, are open to families who maybe non-CFC members, single parents and their children and parents who may be living together without the benefit of marriage. **Kids for Christ**

has also released a supplemental material for the family called the “**Family Household Manual**”, which any family can use as reference material and guidance in nurturing younger children. The manual is filled with weekly family-oriented topics aligned with the Church Liturgical calendar. It has launched Cycles A and B, Cycle C will be launched this year.

CFC Youth for Christ stands by the Church in its fight for **human dignity, freedom, and chastity**. Creating programs, such as “**Formation Sessions About Chastity**” from St. John Paul II’s Theology of the body, talks about love, sex and relationship, which has been conducted to over 100 schools since 2017. “**A Love Like This**”, an effort to journey the youth to what love really is thru music jams in public restaurants and bar and “**100% Free Party**”, a good, clean, fun party in malls or other public establishments that celebrates true freedom.

With the young being formed at an early age and is provided a venue to learn, experience and express what true love is, this gives them a greater appreciation of what family is for them to pursue and look forward to in the future.

Marriage preparation - “Matrimonial Catechumenate”

Singles for Christ takes its foot forward in preparing engaged singles for marriage **SFC Singles Engagement Retreat (SER)** is the ministry’s response to the call of St. John Paul II apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio, "More than ever necessary in our times is preparation of young people for marriage and family life" (FC 66). The program is designed to prepare the sacramental and as a divine institutional life of the couple towards building a family beyond cultural differences beholding Christian values. Sessions about Christian Marriage, Christian Couple, Communication in Marriage, Christian Family and Keys to Successful Marriage and Family Life are part of the program. Every year 500 engaged couples all over the world, SFC members, attend the Singles Engagement Retreat.

Accompanying Young Couples in Early Years of Marriage

The CFC Young Couples Program aims to:

1. Assist and form young couples throughout their adjustment period as husband and wife and as parents by creating an environment where they can be easily supported and receive formation
2. Effectively transition SFCs who get married to become Couples for Christ
3. Preserve the CFC culture and Christian values in young families to make them inspiring examples to other families

CFC has also recently launched its “**Family is a Gift**” campaign which aims to celebrate and uphold the giftedness of families through living out its purpose and value as designed by God. Its goal is to inspire other families to strengthen, nourish, and build their own families. The campaign, thru “**Families Helping Other Families**”, aims to reach-out to families, exchanging ideas and sharing insights on how to raise their children, and encouraging one another in building marital love and make homes a piece of heaven on earth.

Care for the “Permanent formation” of Spouses and of the Entire Family

1. CFC’s **Christian Life Program** is the foremost formation program and an entry point in CFC where we offer a support group in growing the family by first forming individuals and couples by teaching the basic truths about Christianity, and how to live an authentic Christian life through the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Couples for Christ is grouped by small cell-groups called **Household** who meet regularly every week for teaching, personal sharing and mutual support in the Christian life. This is the basic unit in the pastoral structure of CFC which assures ongoing formation of everyone.
3. **Marriage Enrichment Retreats** are offered as part of the permanent formation of couples where some important areas of Christian marriage and family life are discussed.

4. Annual **Retreats for Couples** are conducted anchored on a specific scripture verse where various aspects of the CFC way of life is discussed including marriage and family life, service to God through the church, and reaching-out to the poor in the peripheries.

Amoris Laetitia – To Live the Truth in Love

In response to Amoris Laetitia, Couples for Christ has developed a “**Pastoral Accompaniment Center**” which aims to respond to the call of the church to provide “accompaniment” not only to couples, but to all family members since all individuals belong to a family. The Center has the following objectives:

1. Provide accompaniment services in the form of individual and family counseling, referral for individual or family therapy, spiritual direction and volunteer-peer companions.
2. Organize a pool of like-minded “companions” who are Licensed/Trained Counselors, Licensed Psychotherapists, Trained Spiritual Directors, Volunteer couples and individuals.
3. Provide a secure and pleasant environment where families are assured of confidentiality, feel welcome, and feel they are not alone in their struggle.
4. Foster an environment that is conducive to openness on the part of the “client” to be sincere and open to the workings of the Holy Spirit in his/her life through any combination of the services offered by the center.
5. Provide accompaniment to the young, especially those having difficulty with their gender identity.

One with the Catholic Church (CFC Uno con la Chiesa Cattolica)

Couples for Christ and the Family Ministries are active members and deeply involved in the life and mission of the parishes and dioceses to which they belong. Some examples:

- A. Kids for Christ - members actively serve in the parishes as altar servers, choir members and readers
- B. Youth for Christ – is a member of the **Catholic Organizations of Youth in Asia (COYA)** under the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, Office of Laity and Family (FABC-OLF) Youth Desk
- C. Singles for Christ - is part of the 21-member **Federation of National Youth Organizations (FNYO)** established by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines under the **Episcopal Commission on Youth (ECY)**. Along with the other CFC ministries, SFC participates in the annual **Walk for Life (Philippines)** and **March for Life (USA & Canada)**, as initiated by various parishes.
- D. Couples for Christ- recognized as a Private International Association of the Lay Faithful under the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

Religious and Priestly Vocations

Because of the active participation in parish activities and linkages, several members of the **Youth for Christ and Singles for Christ** ministry, including unmarried CFC missionaries, have been called to a life of religious vocations. Several of them are now ordained ministers of the Church.

One of the **Singles for Christ**'s activities, the Discovery Weekend, has proven to be turning points or defining moments for many in the ministry, with some finding their calling was for neither marriage nor single blessedness but religious life. Both Youth for Christ and Singles for Christ now has become the source of an upsurge in religious vocations. CFC Family Ministries continue to advocate religious vocations among its members.

To-date, Couples for Christ and its Family Ministries globally has raised a total of **1 bishop, 19 priests** belonging to religious congregations, **31 diocesan priests, 8 religious brothers** and **7 religious sisters**. In addition, still currently undergoing studies are **40 seminarians** and **9 religious sisters**.