It hurts, doesn’t it?
We have all come to this country for the green pasture, did we not?
Like the Jews crossing the Jordan River, wasn’t what we all were hoping for was “A land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing…” (Deuteronomy 8:7-9)

But where we are really, is certainly not a bed of roses, is it?
By the sheer greed of this nation’s financial moguls, we are now more like in some Gehenna, the smoky mountain of biblical times. Did you ever wonder why there’s constant smoke in dumps like that? Because rotten matter emits methane gas and when the sun’s heat meets it, ignition occurs and where there is smoke there is fire.

So now we are burning and it is painful - Real estate prices and 401Ks evaporating right before our eyes; people losing jobs and inflation eating up our access to food and goods. Sure cost of gasoline by the gallon has decreased but not the consumption of our six and eight cylinder chariots.

In aggravation, the President of the United States, the Senate Majority Floor Leader and the Speaker of the House of Representatives have in the past 100 days of the new administration proposed for legislation a $3.6 trillion budget blueprint that would result in a $9 trillion deficit, thus spending more than all previous presidents combined.

So a lot of you are asking - Is this the “change” America voted for? What kind of future will my children and grandchildren have in this country? Often we hear about many family problems raising them as Americans. We already left the traditions of our old country, and now must the strain compromise their pocketbooks too?

As Christians, however, we seek solution in Holy Scriptures.
“Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the LORD your God disciplines you.” (Deut 8:1-5).

In CFCFFL, we all feel for one another. That is why we put everything on its proper perspective - God’s. In community, we are taught that our life on earth is not about us. It is all about God. Yet God is the first thing we throw out of the window of our lives whenever hardship comes, don’t we? But look the Bible is quick to remind us: “the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.” (Deut 9:7)

Remember in CFCFFL, we teach that stewardship as not about the need of your community, but your need to give as Christ gave himself up for you.
Then again, God’s promise is alive in those who are faithful. So stop brooding and come refresh yourself as we celebrate our 15th anniversary this year from July 3 to 5 in Maryland knowing that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Rom 8:28).

So heads up, and let’s trust in Jesus, only Jesus, always Jesus.
Regional Briefs

Gift of Giving in Louisiana

A one day covenant recollection was held last March 14 at Lake Charles, Louisiana, some 3 hours from Houston. During the talk on Financial Stewardship, Jun Villamayor mentioned that our Full Time Workers are living on a hand-to-mouth existence and we could have done more mission work if only our brethren will help financially. Two of the 12 participants were so touched, one cut a $1,000 check and another wrote for $200. Indeed sometimes all it takes for us to ask, and we will receive!

Going Vietnamese in Missouri

A Christian Life Seminar for English-speaking Vietnamese at the Holy Martyrs Church located at The Paseo in Kansas City is underway. The Vietnamese pastor said that this maiden batch will later pass on the charism to their people in their native tongue. The CLS is a result of an inquiry from a deacon from the Diocese of Kansas that connected us to Thinh Nguyen. This is his testimony: “I am a simple parishioner. I read the documents Br. Sinh gave me and those Br. Vui sent from Vietnam, I have been impressed about the works of Holy Spirit through CFC in Vietnam and around the world. I have seen the struggles and the needs of the Vietnamese couples in KC, especially young families including my very own. We need more for our faith to grow. I see that the answer in CFC.”

Marriage Enrichment in Oklahoma

The Diocese of Tulsa recognized CFCFFL last year. What could be a more fitting way to assert that than with two Marriage Enrichments Retreats (Levels I and II) at the Portion Little Hermitage of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity located at Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The battery of speakers came from Dallas.

Going Diocesan in Laredo, Texas

We participated in the Annual Diocesan Conference held in Texas A & M International University, Laredo, Texas presenting the evangelistic mission of CFCFFL in family renewal; and the defense of life. CFCFFL is recognized by the Diocese of Laredo as a community of the lay faithful.

Recognition Status

CFC Dallas was originally recognized in 1996 but some changes in the requirements in 2007 required our revalidation. Finally, after several months of waiting, CFCFFL was recognized by the Diocese of Dallas as an association of the lay faithful last month. CFC Houston was recognized since 1999. Recognition was temporarily lifted last year due to the CFC split. This notwithstanding, we still use the Archdiocesan facilities like churches and retreat centers. CFCFFL (Rio Grand Valley) is also recognized by the Diocese of Brownsville this year.

Ecstasy to sail again!

By popular request, the MER Ecstasy cruise is back. The cruise with the Carnival Ecstasy ship will leave the Port of Galveston at 4 pm on December 7 and be back by 8 am on December 12. The Port of calls will be Cozumel and Progreso, both in Mexico. The talks are given while the ship is sailing and everybody is able to go ashore. The fee is $398/person and we still have some slots available. If we have brethren in other areas interested to join, please e-mail Jun Villamayor at couplesforchrist@aol.com.

In December of 2007 we had the MER Cruise with the National Council members as speakers.

Mustard Seed found in SoCal Parish

The SoCal Orange County Unit with only 12 couples is witnessing the unfolding of the biblical “Mustard Seed”. After silently working with St. Philip Benizi parish on “Marriage and Baptismal” preparation ministry for a year, the Pastor endorses 220 couples to attend CFC-FFL evangelization program. Preparation for a mega CLS is now underway. Not satisfied with only the 220 couples, the pastor gave the full list of more than 5,000 parishioners for us to work on.

Getting to Phoenix on time!

To beef up the four Phoenix households, Edwin and Nila Andrews teamed up with Manny Hermano for a new CLS with two Sri Lankan couples among the participants. They also joined the local fraternal leaders in a welcome dinner for Mike Phelan, diocesan in-charge of evangelization and pro-life ministries, who came with his wife Sharon and their five, yes five, children.

North Central ablaze

"I came to set the world on fire, and I wish it were ablaze already" (Luke 12:49) This is the signal made during North Central evangelization rally following the formation of the new CFC Illinois-Indiana Governance Team to respond to the expanding work of CFC FFL in the two states. Then immediately following its Valentine’s Party raising funds for the youth and singles conference, a mission team composed of handmaids and servants braved the weather and embarked on a mission trip to Nebraska.

March was another trailblazing month - a youth camp was launched in Marytown Retreat center, in Libertyville, Illinois; a missionary training course for four full-time workers was conducted in Scherevillie, Indiana by a team headed by Joseph Tesoro from the Philippines and Ray and Mary Grace Pinggoy and CFCFFL also partnered with the Archdiocese of Chicago for ProLife Conference.

April saw a spirit filled Nehemiah weekend retreat held in St Lambert Parish, Skokie, Il conducted by a team dedicated brethren from Dallas, TX who traveled 15 hrs the night before.

CFC Illinois celebrated its 15th anniversary on May 2, 2009 held at St Hyacinth Parish, Chicago with spirit filled and fun activities culminating with a mass celebrated by its spiritual director Fr. Rog. Further this month, a pre-con is scheduled in Chesterton, Indiana on May 16, a mission trip will also be dispatched to Michigan, and a Marriage Enrichment Retreat flies on May 23-24. This month, CFCUSA will also participated in the prayer
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vigil and rally in Notre Dame University protesting the invitation of pro-abortion on demand president Obama to deliver the commencement address in the Catholic university.

Illinois

Several CLSs, CRs and CLS and evangelization training were conducted by the different chapters and by HOLD ministry. The west chapter operates and demonstrate as a true parish base CFC FFL chapter in Illinois participating and relied upon by the parish in its activities; recognized as one of the organizations in the parish.

Indiana and Minnesota

After a long dry spell, Indiana organized two CLSs and one youth camp graduating eleven couples, one single and 2 handmaids and 12 youth, doubling the number of couples and establishing a youth ministry. Continue to grow by leaps and bounds, our very vibrant group in Minnesota had an evangelization rally in February and conducted three Christian Life Seminars so far this year; a Marriage Enrichment Retreat, Level II in March. CFCFFL Minnesota has seven Caucasian couples as members, the most in the region.

Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky

A small group but with very vibrant youth who will serve as the music ministry for the pre-con in Michigan. A Covenant Recollection is in the works, definitely a move in the right direction. Cleveland has scheduled a fundraising event in summer for CFC FFL missionaries Cincinnati, on the other hand, is still a mission area but also has also become a mission center as it now oversees Kentucky. A Marriage Enrichment Retreat is also scheduled for June.

Wisconsin, Iowa and Nebraska

A Covenant Recollection continues to stabilize our presence in Wisconsin. Iowa is a small mission area with few members. A recent CLS also harvested three handmaids in Nebraska.

Northeast winds blowing

For starters, the New York Area Council was installed by Frank Padilla in January as approved by the CFC USA National Council.

It is with vigor pursuing our core values in CFCFFL that we find ourselves on a pilgrimage to the Divine Mercy Shrine in Stockbridge, Massachusetts in three busloads to celebrate Mercy Sunday. The same spirit enabled us to observe a joyful Mothers Day with all clusters and ministries coming together with the New Jersey Area Council members serenading them and performing a lively dance in their honor.

The same joy permeates as we participate in a diocesan-sponsored retreat for men and women or watch our brothers and sisters in Rhode Island get excited and passionate in conducting their own first CLS with fruitful results or support our members who have been affected by the economic downturn continues with material, emotional and spiritual generosity.

As July draws near, there has been a tremendous response to the fundraising for the youth as an area-wide Pre-
Our journey between conferences is always an interesting story year after year. It is roughly about eight months of waiting in between with personal milestones such as birthdays, celebration of scholastic and athletic achievements, job promotions and once in a few years family gatherings scattered along the route through what could seemingly be a long bridge to cross.

Aren’t we there yet? Sounds like your younger siblings asking, isn’t it? Let’s go back to where it all started beginning with our joyride in Houston (Kids), Seattle (Youth) and New York (Singles). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we went back to our schools and work places ready for more camps and CLSes. Thus the journey began. From feedback across the nation, virtually all areas have achieved great strides in building our Young Ministries.

One event that we would like to showcase was the recent Discovery Camp in NorCal. The best way to tell a story is from first hand accounts of those who were there to cherish and relish.

Karen Ang shared: “Discovery camp surpassed my expectations BIG TIME. A lot of us needed a slap in the face or a wake-up call from God. This camp showed me the reality behind our service and our faith. It made me realize that keeping my life Christ-centered will give me pure happiness… I realized that as my faith grows stronger, and the closer I get to God, my trust in Him will get tested even more.”

Kathleen Bautista’s testimony goes:

I thank the Lord for His work and uniting us. When we counted all including our parent coordinators, we were past 200 from Las Vegas (NV), San Diego & LA (Socal), and Bayside & Central Valley (Norcal). It just proves that God has granted us brothers and sisters who believe and go through the same things we experience in our on personal lives. As a sister, I have never felt so loved by not just one, but many brothers. This is how I knew God’s love is real.”

We note Karen’s use of the phrase, “a wake up call from God”. That is the point in our journey where we hit the spiritual detour and makes our eyes grow large. A spiritual GPS comes in handy at this point. The joy of unity despite some challenges along the way and experiencing the respect and Christian love among brothers and sisters was high on Kathleen’s thoughts about the camp. For our youth in the Southwest region, the camp definitely meant more than a change in scenery.

The end of the bridge is in sight. Precon is in the air and flyers about the conferences in Baltimore and Chicago begin to once again appear on the billboards. And as we venture forward let us be reminded of the words of Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, as he addressed the 24th World Youth Day:

“...You young people, who are in search of a firm hope, I address the very words that St. Paul wrote to the persecuted Christians in Rome at that time: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).”

Fasten your seatbelts! Baltimore (Kids), here we come. Chicago (Singles and Youth), next stop!!

**Behold the Handmaids!**

CFCFFL HOLD USA is about 1200 strong. This year we have so far added 62 new members to our national number. One CFC-wife exclaimed “Our CLS has never been more exciting. The Handmaids give life to the CLS. We are in awe of their energy!”

We see the fire of the Spirit in our sisters – the Handmaids comprise a good percentage of the attendance in teachings, rallies, recollection and prayer assemblies. In several areas, like NJ, NY, IL they have initiated and led Lenten pilgrimages, Divine Mercy devotion, 1000 Hail Marys, Mother’s Day celebration and the like.

Congratulations to our HOLD-NY for having been presented with a Certificate of Recognition from the Holy Rosary Church for its active participation in the life of the Catholic Church. Our NY sisters serves in the parish choir every week, participates in the Feed the Poor program, hosted the novena for the “Birth of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel” and took on the Coronation activities of the Blessed Mother this month. Here is a great example of parish engagement worth emulating.

In mission, the Handmaids are all fired up too! Our Illinois sisters saw the re-opening of Nebraska that we lost 3 years ago. Despite a ten-hour drive through heavy snow, they came home victorious with a harvest of three new HOLD members. And in Washington, our Handmaids have geared up to help establish CFC in all its counties by assigning each of our units to cover parishes within the state.

We are Pro-Life! They have been the ever-present faces in the different pro-life activities organized by the different areas – March/Walk for Life, 40 Days for Life, Pro-Life Forums/ conferences. Together with our singles, our sisters in HOLD are not afraid to pray in front of the abortion clinic even during the unholy hours of 12:00am to 5:00am – we’ve had some courageous souls who made that great a sacrifice, just to cover the time slot.

We are Pro-Poor! Our Handmaids in Illinois started a campaign for our Work with the Poor called TROOP (Towels Reach Out Overseas Program), the School house project (books & school supplies and canned goods) for the Philippines. In New York, we have used clothes and toys drive for indigents and our California sisters participate in their parish Loaves & Fishes program.

We continue to have great examples of holiness from among our sisters although some of them who have deeply touched our lives have gone before us. Our sisters, Nora Guarin - NorCal; Mameng Montoro - WI; Nicole Almocera, Connie Mloock, Elaria Meozzi - IL; Zony Toledo, NJ are now our prayer warriors in heaven who continues to intercede for our community.

We can see God’s fingerprints in all the work our Handmaids do throughout the country. In God, they find their strength and sustenance amidst challenges in service, such as lack of transportation, tight work schedules, financial difficulties and illness, many of us are “getting there”.

As one sister said, “Our utmost desire is Holiness. If you seek the same, come join the CFCFFL Handmaids!”

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