

## Francis and Anna-Liza Lopez Successful Tribal Messiahs in the Philippines

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At present, members throughout the Philippines, Thailand, Nepal and Cambodia -- a gradually increasing number of countries -- are succeeding in bringing many new couples to participate in the Interfaith Blessing Festivals. In our church media, we are used to seeing these Blessing Ceremonies, which draw sometimes a few hundred couples, sometimes more than ten thousand, with colorful decorations and a joyful atmosphere as couples rededicate their marriages, resolving to remain faithful and to build good families.

Yet, what happens after the couples receive the blessing (and perhaps complete all the ensuing ceremonies)? How can we educate these many families? How can they become genuine members of our movement?

Tribal messiahs in this part of the world are addressing these issues with both thought and action. I will focus this brief article on the main church center in the city of Marikina, in the Manila metropolitan area.

The main Marikina Family Federation center is in the Concepcion Barangay, a district of the city with several thousand residents. At present, they are developing thirteen tribal messiah areas, which means they are working to witness to more than five thousand couples, most of whom have already completed the course of the blessing, including willingly separating for forty days before recommencing their marital relations.

### Active couples

Dedicated members based in Marikina include Romeo and Joann Dela Paz. He recently returned from a construction job in Saudi Arabia so that he and his wife could devote all their spare time to finding and raising a tribe of four hundred and thirty families. "The instruction to find these couples is not for our sake," he said, testifying at a recent Sunday service in Marikina. "It is for the people, who need to be saved. It is therefore also to comfort our Heavenly Parent and True Parents."

In 2014, True Mother honored the Concepcion center leaders Francis and Anna-Liza Lopez as one of the first two couples in the world to bring four hundred and thirty couples to the Blessing Ceremony. The Lopez's have not taken any time to bask in that glory, however; they are fully engaged in helping other members expand their tribes. They also do follow-up, caring for and inspiring thousands of couples to live by the Principle and grow spiritually.

"So many couples are receiving the blessing," said Anna-Liza. "My husband and I do not have enough

time to educate them all by ourselves. We need an educational pattern and plan in order to guide and educate them in the Principle."

Francis and Anna-Liza have already raised core assistants from among their own couples. "While we continued to go block to block, house to house, we could see the Abel-type people who would more easily accept the Principle, our teachings.... We chose the most active couples to be our coordinators."



### **Work done by coordinators**

Coordinators are usually couples who received the blessing within the past year or two (in many cases mainly the wife), and who have embraced the principles of Unificationism, if not yet all the traditions. They work to support the tribal messiah couple by visiting other families on behalf of the couple. Sometimes they may receive a small stipend for their continued effort from a fund established through donations. This funding allows the coordinator to devote more time to the work.

Anna-Liza tries to inspire her coordinators to each find a further three sub-coordinators. Thus, among those blessed, a core group, having received Divine Principle education, are on the way to becoming members as they visit and care for others under the guidance of the church leader. They are gradually adopting church traditions, including attending Sunday service and Hoon Dok Hae.

"At the same time as sub-coordinators are raising the existing couples they are looking for new couples, so that the tree keeps growing," she says. "Each tribe will have twelve coordinators; they will become the twelve disciples in that tribe."

### **Uplifting society**

In Marikina, the many impoverished families deeply appreciate even small efforts made to support them with encouragement, prayer or practical guidance. Anna-Liza has even helped some of the poorest develop financial stability. "I would sometimes give a little seed money, so they can begin a small business. I made one condition: If they succeeded in earning money, they should give small donations for the support of our activities. Seven couples have already established small businesses in this way. One couple sells salt; another sells vegetables. Two couples are selling fish; one has a shoe store. They began these businesses with very small amounts of money."

There are testimonies to the good influence receiving the blessing has had on families -- of how husbands who drank or were abusive have changed. The families have received a baptism of the spirit and their faith is the condition for God to touch their lives. However, for most families, it is expected that permanent elevation of their quality of life will come through their spiritual parents or tribal messiahs patiently teaching, serving and offering practical help. If that investment is made, there is a lot to be gained.

"Through continuing and fulfilling this work you can complete your own heart and move closer to being one with God," Marikina tribal messiah Nellybeth Javier testified at a recent service. "Through tribal messiah work you can embrace not just individuals, not just couples, but whole families -- bringing these families under God."



Anna-Liza Lopez sees the possibility for progress. "We have to help them understand the purpose and the vision of the blessing. Then they can more easily do well themselves, and in their families -- and set an example for all the other families in their neighborhood."

Can one imagine tribal messiah work leading to entire communities uplifted by the grace of the blessing and devoted tribal messiah efforts? Romeo and Joann Dela Paz expressed their vision that tribal messiah work is "not for our own happiness, but for saving people and ultimately creating a base for restoring the nation." If benefits to families become visible, it is natural to believe in the scope of those benefits expanding.

The grace of the blessing is certainly touching the hearts of pure-hearted people and it is clear that among the thousands, many are spiritually well prepared. True Parents' extraordinary gift of the Principle transforms our perspective of the human potential and our understanding of the human condition and helps us solve life's most challenging problems. We surely need to develop systems, or models, by which God's principles can be more firmly implanted in society, possibly through school education or by civic organizations. Here in the bustling city of Marikina, in a developing country full of warm-hearted people, the model these tribal messiahs are creating surely deserves careful consideration as a basis upon which many new members can be born.