

Joy is 'an invaluable sign of being Catholic,' Couples for Christ members hear

Their children lead them to Couples for Christ.

Joel and Jo Ong's children joined a CFC youth group at their local parish in Regina. Now the Ongs themselves have joined – and, in fact, lead – their local chapter of Couples for Christ, a worldwide association focused on charity and strengthening Christian families.

"They have a good program for kids ... and the Church teachings help us to grow as a couple," said Joel Ong, noting that the Regina chapter of CFC has grown to 98 couples from two in 2009.

Couples for Christ advocates traditional marriage and family values, believing that strong marriages lead to strong families which – in turn – build a strong Catholic Church and society.

CFC originated in Manila, Philippines, and today is a lay ecclesial community of than a million members in 122 groups worldwide. In Canada, CFC has 14,000 members, most of whom have a Filipino background.

"An invaluable sign of being Catholic is the joy" said Michael Ariola, the global president of CFC who was in Regina for a three-day regional conference July 13-15 designed to "recharge the batteries."

"We are hoping that the fire of the faith, the fire of the Holy Spirit within the couples is a reminder that in your marriage, God has a plan for it; God will use it," said Ariola, who is based in Manila.

"We hope and pray they will share that with others."

The regional conferences are structured like retreats with Couples for Christ sessional speakers followed by testimonials and theme workshops. The focus, organizers say, is centred on the family.

"We value family and faith in God so much," said Chelo Ravasco, who credits her children for leading her – and husband Greg – to Couples for Christ nine years ago.

"It's also personal development and at the same time get the view of what is our mission and our training towards evangelizing. And, opening our minds towards our neighbours," Greg added.

CFC's charity organization, ANCOP (Answering the Call of the Poor), raises

funds for community development and humanitarian relief programs for local and foreign projects, in support of the poor.

Regina Archbishop Donald Bolen added: "God's love is no more powerfully revealed than in families."

CFC is a Catholic organization but is open to validly married couples of other Christian denominations.

"It's all about enriching your relationship with Christ," said Charles Balcaen from Winnipeg.

Balcaen met his wife through the Couples for Christ youth group, Youth for Christ. Their belief in CFC was so strong, that the Balcaens are now CFC co-ordinators in their local community.

-Frank Flegel is a freelance writer based in Regina. He was a reporter for the Prairie Messenger from 1997 until the newspaper's closure this year.