

Seek and You Will Find: Understanding a Trans-Parochial Charismatic Community

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Abstract: *This paper is a study on a trans-parochial community (TCC) in order to obtain an accurate and holistic picture of its practices and beliefs. It attempts to answer one main question: What is it doing and why? In light of the absence of scholarly research on the trans-parochial dimension of charismatic communities, it provides an insider's perspective of how the inner domains of parish life are experienced and understood by the members of one highly popular local TCC. These domains are 1) community, 2) worship, 3) leadership, 4) formation, and 5) stewardship. Using ethnographically informed sources and methods to gather data, it is found that the TCC in this study embodies an alternative style of worship and programming: contextualized, experiential, multi-sensory, and participative. Inside an unconventional space, it allows members to experience the spiritual and psychosocial goods that they seek and desire. The parishes may hold this TCC as a mirror of what they want to achieve and what it can and must do to reinforce the quality of pastoral attention that their parishioners receive.*

Keywords: *Trans-parochial community, Charismatic community, Psycho-social and spiritual needs, Domains of parish life*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, in preparation for the 500th anniversary of the coming of the Christian faith to the Philippines, chose the theme for 2017, *The Parish as a Communion of Communities*. Because it considers the parish as the most important type of pastoral centers “caring for the soul” of its estimated 80 million members, it decided to focus on the structures of governance of its some 2,703 parishes as well as the quality of religious belonging as experienced by their 22,869 members per parish (CBCP: NPCCR 2001:107-109). Given that the parishes in the Philippines have evidently an excessively high population of

Catholics, Church leaders had an uneasy feeling on the quality of pastoral attention that their parishioners receive or the lack of it. In addition, there are between 40-50 parish churches that do not have their own parish priests.

But beyond the numbers, one may also wonder and ask: "What exactly are the "religious goods" which the traditional parish structures seemed to be failing to provide its parishioners?" This failure may be related to the drastic decline in weekly church attendance of adult Filipino Catholics, from 64 percent in 1991 to 37% in 2017 as well as to why one out of 11 Catholics has sometimes thought of disaffiliating from the church (Mangahas 2013). Although the majority of Filipinos still self-affiliate with the Catholic Church, the Social Weather Stations has also documented a slight decline in membership from 81% in 1991 to 79% in 2017 (Mangahas 2017). This suggests that there are members who had moved outside the Church to join other organized religions or emerging sects in the open religious market. As Arbuckle in his book, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* noted that they are prey to all kinds of sect and cult movements within and outside the Church—all offering a quick identity to fit their particular need for meaning (Arbuckle 2003). In turn, new religious groups tend to flourish in a society, as observers noted, where traditional religions can no longer provide the adequate religious goods for their members (Glock and Stark 1987 as quoted in Lanuza: 445)

Thus, here in the Philippines, it appears that the "questionable quality of pastoral service Catholics receives" may be tied to the emergence of the so-called "trans-parochial charismatic communities" (henceforth TCCs). Due to the lack of church's pastoral care in their lives and the poverty of preaching at Masses, Catholics are impelled to form less-structured support and worshipping networks such as house-churches that across time grow and develop as TCCs (Arbuckle:94). In the Archdiocese of Manila, there are at least 35 members of the Federation of TCCs as "an organization of charismatic communities and prayer groups with the aim of advancing the renewal movements in the Philippines." Most of these TCCs have branches or smaller cells in other parts of the country, like a diocese to a parish church. The earliest use of the term was attributed to the often-quoted sociologist-priest Andrew Greely (1996) who coined it to understand growth and change

in formal organizations like the Catholic Church. For Greely, the post-secular refers to the neo-gemeinschaft Catholic communities that were emerging within the larger organized church, and were characterized as "small, sub-parochial, or trans-parochial fellowship of believers." Arbuckle calls them "intentional communities" that rise from below such as prayer groups, house churches, refounding religious communities, basic Christian communities as counter-cultural reactions to the depersonalized and clericalized structures of parishes (Arbuckle:93-94).

To contribute a socio-psychological perspective of trans-parochial charismatic communities, this study set out to answer one main question: What is the LOJF as a TCC doing and why? Understanding them from the standpoint of their growing number of adherents will help to reveal their practices and underlying beliefs. In the absence of scholarly research on the trans-parochial dimension of charismatic communities, it provides an insider's perspective of how the inner domains of parish life, namely, communion, worship, leadership, formation, and stewardship, are experienced and understood by the members of one highly popular local TCC.

The Research Site

Meycauayan, (a term that literally means "there are bamboos"), is a city in the province of Bulacan located 20 km North of Manila and 26 km south of Malolos City, the provincial capital. The reason why I chose this city is that my family and I have lived in this once largely agricultural town since I was 12 years old. Representing 1.17 percent of the total land area of the province and subdivided into 26 smaller villages, Meycauayan is classified as a first-class and a highly urbanized city with a population of some 210,000 people as of 2016. As an ecclesiastical territory, it is part of the southern district of the Malolos Diocese (CBCP: Catholic Directory 2012-2013). It has 106 parishes, as of 2012-2013, serving some 2,990,985 Catholics (85%). Meycauayan has 10 parishes serving an estimated 170,000 Catholics (81%), or an average of 16,934 parishioners per parish.



[Figure 1] The map of Bulacan highlighting Meycauayan as the research location

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Participants

I purposively chose the Light of Jesus Family (LOJF) for this ethnographically informed study (Fetterman 2006). It is evidently one of the most popular and fastest-growing TCC today at least in terms of geographical presence and observed number of adherents. More importantly, I chose LOJF among similarly situated religious groups because of its ecclesiastical situation as a TCC within the Roman Catholic institution.

2.2 Data Collection

The broad description of the LOJF that follows is based on multiple sources and methods of collecting data. Firstly, I read their literature both in print and online and even listened to their kind of music to see and hear more clearly who they are and what they do on a regular basis. Secondly, I attended and took part in their weekly services for six months from October 2016 to March 2017. Thus for six months, I was an example of an attendee type of a member discretely attending and participating in their weekly services. Thirdly, I conducted face-to-face interviews with 17 members of the LOJF, of which 11 are males, and six are females; 10 are single and seven are married, eight are servant-leaders and 9 are attendees.

2.3 Treatment of Data

After the data-gathering phase using multiple sources and methods was completed, I applied the normative steps to process and analyze qualitative data: (1) read the transcript carefully and repeatedly while keeping an open mind and do subjective audit to keep my biases in check as much as possible; (2) labeled the relevant words, phrases to the research questions; (3) selected the most salient patterns and created categories by bringing several codes together; and finally (4) created and labeled the categories/themes, described the connections between them, and drew a logical cohesive patterns of meanings and values (Bryman 2012).

3. FINDINGS

The LOJF Meycauayan gathers every Saturday at the Supima Savemore, Malhacan Village, Meycauayan City. Their weekly service starts at 6:30 p.m. and lasts before 9:00 p.m. attended by a sizeable number of participants.



[Figure 2] The Supima Square where the LOJF stage their weekly events

The first hour is spent for physical arrangements, music practice and informal conversations among the early birds. They call their weekly meetings, The Feast, and their leader, a Feast-builder. For the most part, the LOJF is organized and led by a core group, following a regulated series of biblical and practical themes of the week or of the month in all of the Feast events. The Feast regularly opens with a lively and loud singing of worship songs and at times popular secular songs. Some 15 youth members lead the dancing while the attendees voluntarily sing, dance and clap with them. Their feel-good opening theme song is "May Magandang Mangyayari sa 'Yo" (Something Beautiful will happen to you). After the initial round of loud singing and spirited dancing, the Feast builders would welcome the attendees to "the happiest place on earth, the place where God is."



[Figure 3] The typical Feast's opening song and dance number

According to their founder and chief Feast-builder Eugenio Sanchez, Jr. or Bro. Bo, as his members love to call him, the Feast Meycauayan is only one of the 285 similar events that their LOJF conducts all over the world. They have gone a long way since the first house prayer group held in their garage with only ten people in attendance. He said that they hope to have at least 1,000 Feasts spread in the five continents where they claim to be already present. According to Diana, Bro. Bo encourages members not only to commit

themselves more wholeheartedly to LOJF communities but to build small cells of Feast within their own local areas.

I learned from Andrea, one of the servant-leaders, the Feast Meycauayan started almost five years ago with some 70-80 attendees. The attendees are not counted as they only come and go depending on their free time, one member of the Warm Committee told me. Indeed, in the course of my participation with them, there were attendees whom I only saw once. Aside from the local and smaller Feasts, there is also what is called as "Grand Feasts" which they hold twice a year- during the Easter and Christmas seasons as "Thanksgiving for the blessings." They also provide series of coordinated programs and training courses for members who would like to become servant-leaders.

The group spends 10-11 thousand pesos a week to keep its weekly Feast going. They pay five thousand pesos for the place; 1,500 pesos for the music team and other operational expenses. She admitted that there were not a few numbers of times that they have to dig from their own pockets if only to maintain the event. "It is God's work and He will provide," Loretta firmly said. The main event of the Feast is the preaching which is basically founded on the belief that "God desires to bless and love everyone to every area of life- spiritual, physical, family, financial." Thus, there are series of weekly talks to make this theme meaningful and practicable to their members.

Based on their narratives, the interviewees told me about what they do and why they do them as members of the LOJF. A careful review of the interview data and information allowed the following themes to emerge that are descriptive of their practice and beliefs.

3.1 It is different - This theme points to what majority of my interviewees just kept saying about their LOJF community: "It is different." One regular Feaster described it to me as offering service that is "not like the Catholic Sunday Mass." One member described it as "like being at a rock concert." I could not agree more. I felt that I entered a concert hall when I attended the Feast for the first time in October last year. The Feast-builder explains in Filipino that this is so that they need not go anywhere because, like Shoe Mart, a popular mall, "We've got it all for you," and so that, "We will not be so serious."

“The way they do it is different; the talks are relevant and effective,” said Paul, a member of the music team. “The good thing here is that the topics such as “Money Pakyaw”, “Blockbusters”, and “Shift to Success” are easily understood by ordinary people like me; they are clear, Bible-based and practical,” he said in Filipino. There were also times when some of them were given the time on stage to share their “blessing stories” from attending the Feast event. These stories are broadly about healings and lifestyle change.

- What they teach here is very practical, unlike the priests who are very spiritual. It is happy here, it's different the style of worship is different. That is why they easily gain our attention, especially we, the young people.
- In the church, it is very solemn, it is more on prayer, meditation, and you are a passive listener. I do not even pay attention to the sermon of the priest. Here I am able to express myself, relate with other people and learn how to cooperate and gain new friends. Now I have new friends who through the grace of the Lord I am able to love and forgive.
- It is the companionship and sense of belonging that makes the Feast different. I gained new and more friend. I learned how to love people. It gave me the opportunity to use my musical talent and improved on it.



[Figure 4] The opening number during the joint Christmas celebration of the four

The leaders of the Feast are not the usual priests but are what is called in Catholic theology as laity, baptized members of the church who are neither priests nor religious. The members of the Feast have plenty of positive things to say about their regular lay preacher who often times mightily try to be “info-taining” and experiential/personal in his narrative style of preaching:

- I joined the group because of Bo Sanchez. I love the teachings and holistic approach of Bro. Bo. In turn, his teachings about healthy living, financial managements, and tithing are handed down to the preachers.
- Every time I attend the Feast, I feel like I have a one-on-one conversation with the preacher. It is as if he is talking to me directly, straight to my heart. The series is so wonderful, the way they talk and the way they are delivered touches me directly. I am happy with the talk because they are very practical and life-changing.
- The words that were spoken by Bro. Paul drive me to make my life happy. They empower me to move on with my life, give me forward positive outlook. The aura, the environment is beautiful, the people are very welcoming. God is always the topic, my spiritual life grew.

One of the expressed objectives of this movement is to attract the “unchurched” or the non-practicing Catholics. However, I was quite surprised to find that most of the members of Feast Meycauayan think of themselves as practicing Catholics in their own parishes. One of them is Bea, 43, married, with 3 children and a servant-leader in the Warm Ministry, the group in charge of welcoming attendees. According to her, she has been a member of the Feast for 15 years, although she has also served in their parish church since she was 14. The same is also true with Kevin, who is an attendee, reported that he is a regular churchgoer, and attends mass five times a week! He proudly said to me in Filipino, “The truth is I go to church five times in a week.” He also reported that in the past he attended other denominations in search of something or someone he believes will make him happy.

3.2 It works - This theme points to the influence that the LOJF played on how the members view and live their lives since they joined it. One of the constant themes in the Feast service is about the good things that can expect to happen once they join it. Judging from the answers of my interviewees, LOJF has made good on its promise to satisfy the shared needs and values of its members. It makes them feel good about themselves and their fellow members. There is mutual trust that enables them to share personal problems and challenges with one another.

They also are convinced that it has deepened their faith and personal relationship with God, made them feel loved by God and his presence among them. To the servant leaders who have felt a calling to a greater role in the group, it also enabled them to freely share their time, talents, and treasure, readily volunteer when help is needed. When I asked them about this, the answer that was given by John, a servant-leader, is most typical.

- My faith deepened. I believe God has saved me from harm. He took care of me. My life got rearranged. My life when I was not yet with the Feast has no direction. I was just out of job. Now, I gained new hope for a better and brighter future, gratefully in my heart.

The change in lifestyle is more pronounced among the servant-leaders of the group. Jose, the one who takes care of the physical arrangements, said:

- Here there are many things in my life that I was able to avoid or stop. Before I used to go out and have good times. But now, as an officer, I am focused on attending and serving here at the Feast. There are many changes that may not have happened if not for the Feast.

3.3 We are family -This refers to the sense of community and belonging, emotional connection which the members said they have experienced in the group. Being a member of this community has become part of their self-identity. Almost all of the interviewees reported that this is what sets their groups apart from their experiences in their own parish churches. There is a strong sense of

community with the other members of the LOJF.

- Here I really witnessed true fellowship, brotherhood and my whole family attends. We bond by eating outside. Unlike in other churches, they hardly know each other. In the Catholic Church, there are no personal relations.
- I get to know more people, give me hope in life although there are many challenges. I can overcome them because I trust in God.
- I gain new friends although I am not a Catholic. We have good relations here at the Feast, we feel close like brothers and sisters, like a family.

According to Francesca and Jaime, husband and wife, the group has around 70-80 members, neither too big nor small for a group that wants to establish a community. "If we're too many, we will no longer know each other," they said in Filipino. They can easily recognize the members of the community. According to them, this is also what Bro. Bo wants. They keep membership to a minimum because the aim is not to increase members. They believe that if they become too big, the personal relationship among them will suffer.

- Here we care for each other, we gained new friends, and there is a mutual help. You can feel that they are your true friends. They are there to help you in times of trouble.
- We have very good relations here; we're like brothers and sisters. We feel good when we see each other every Saturday as one family. I can feel a sense of solidarity with members facing problems.

During much of the interviews, the interviewees showed genuine enthusiasm in narrating their lived experience and a firm conviction that their participation and involvement in the LOJF are worth their time, talents, and treasures. I have closely observed their deep and sincere sense of appreciation and gratitude for becoming one of its members. There were a number of times that I cannot help but admire their joyful commitment to their group even without any material benefit to themselves.

4. DISCUSSIONS

This section is an attempt to provide my own perspectives on the deeper meanings of the themes derived from the narratives of the members of the LOJF. Drawing upon the five internally-oriented domains of parish life, namely, community, worship, leadership, formation, and stewardship, I will answer the main question on what are the LOJF doing and why in the hope that it will contribute to the discourse that seeks to explain and understand its phenomenal appeal and growth as a trans-parochial movement.

4.1 Communion- It refers to the sense of community and belonging within the LOJF and how they welcome attendees in a friendly, warm, inclusive, and non-judgmental way. This domain also includes the desire to reach out and attract non-practicing and unchurched Catholics. Like the other subsequent four domains of parish life, it has an internal focus.

A strong sense of hospitality and of warm welcome undergirds LOJF's basic strategy to attract potential members and retain regular attendees. As both a religious and social resource, the LOJF not unintentionally would make their members experience acceptance and warm welcome that, they said, they rarely, if ever, experience in their parishes. There is a deliberate desire to project a culture of familiarity and friendship within the group. Attendees are asked to register and provide personal data such as their address and cell phone number. The servant-leaders go around the room to greet and shake hands to make them feel very much welcomed and appreciated. Throughout the lively and multi-sensory style of worship, everyone is encouraged to participate and interact both in words and in bodily gestures such as the clapping of hands, greeting the other, and singing and dancing to the ambient music being played. During special occasions, members are asked to bring and contribute food and drinks which they share and partake after the religious service. In a culture known for its people's sense of hospitality and sense of kinship even with a perfect stranger, the LOJF has tapped a well of goodwill and camaraderie waiting to be found from among its members.

The immediate effect to the would-be-members is a sense of self-importance and acceptance for what and who they are. The lasting impact is a strong sense of belonging and solidarity among

themselves. As social animals, humans have a powerful urge to belong, to feel attracted to others in enduring close relationships (Myers 2003:374-376). Moreover, they also claimed that they more easily have seen God's presence in their fellow believers. The sense of belonging and camaraderie enabled them to experience God between and among themselves. They also felt more empowered to love their fellow men, more able to forgive those who wronged them in the past. Thus, LOJF members believe that their group is not a mere social club but is also a faith-based group.

Such approach, according to Villote (1987:57), serves not only as a theological but also a sociological solution to the so-called problem of anonymity in the contemporary Western church. Putnam (1995) calls it social capital or social networks that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. B.R. Wilson argues that religion can only flourish in local communities or fellowship (B.R. Wilson 1976). Among the five domains of parish life considered in this study, it is evident that communion serves as the primary domain of the LOJF's practices and self-understanding. All the other four domains are oriented towards the desire of building communion among its members.

4.2 Worship- The axiom, "the new belongs elsewhere," applies squarely to the LOJF. What makes LOJF not only different but also "marketable" is the "colonization of profane spaces" as a significant part of its "marketing strategies" (Lanuza 2003). The going out of the parish church as the conventional place of worship and programming is evidently an important aspect of contemporary religiosity, central to de-regulated religion in postmodern times (Lyon 2013). LOJF sharply contrasts with what Wuthnow called as "a spirituality of dwelling that emphasizes habitation where God occupies a definite place in the universe and creates a sacred space in which humans can dwell" (Wuthnow 1998). As Wuthnow (1998) once wrote, "The symbols of dwelling-oriented spirituality are too rigid, too constraining and too shallow to meet the spiritual needs of postmodern believers." He argued that the traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places has given way to a new spirituality of seeking. The quest culture has generated a marketplace of new alternative forms of worship inside smaller but a more *gemeinschaft* kind of human grouping (Roof 1999).

The utilization of space by so-called “emergent churches” in the form of permanent and less-permanent structures can be categorized and understood in terms of both functionality and design features that, at least for congregants, enable communal, and transcendent experiences (Gomes & Gilles 2014). Providing them with spiritual goods and services, members patronize these sites for their accessibility, visibility, and convenience. As Lyon puts it: “Sites where one expects to shop seem to spawn attraction” (Lyon 2013:6).

Like Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, it is also enthusiastic and emotionally-charged through “ambient music and video” as background (Aldridge 2003:94). It provides a “compelling and relevant religious experience through imitating or appropriating trends found in the larger culture and ultimately popularizing these into a form of pop-Christianity that is primarily oriented toward an individual spiritual experience” (Flory & Miller 2008). Thus, its style of worship and programming of events clearly reflects a shift away from traditional and regularized Catholic Masses in the parishes. Atkinson’s description of alternative worship as contextual, experience-based, multisensory, and participative, applies directly to LOJF (Atkinson 2006).

It is contextual because it produces a culture-specific worship that is friendly to individuals and cohorts who may no longer feel at home in a traditional form practiced by the parishes (Algiers 1997). There is a well-founded belief among sociologist of religion that the postmodern culture and conditions of today, triggered by communication technology and consumerism, may be related to the rise and appeal of alternative worship (Lyon 2013; Spinks 2012). They argued that times of uncertainty and change that characterize postmodernity are more conducive to a spirituality of seeking.

It is experiential in its approach to worship because it has taken a turn towards what Charles Taylor (1991) observed as “the personal, the interior and the experiential as the authentic if not the final source of meaning and self-identity.” In an experience-based approach to religion, the personal and particular takes precedence over the communal and universal. Accordingly, some of its members are asked to prepare and contribute stories of blessings and favors received to show that one’s experienced-based narratives are important. The cathartic effect enables the narrators “to reinvent

their biographies and nourish their personal narratives” (Lanuza 2003: 443). It gives them “a chance of enhanced self-esteem which continued adherence to Catholicism does not necessarily do” (Hayne 1994 as quoted in Lanuza).

The experiential dimension of LOJF style of worship is partly expressed in its use of “new sounds in both art and popular music” that quite effectively helps them to reconnect with their deeper sense of faith and enable them to worship and communicate in a language that resonates more meaningfully with the members (Jones & Webster 2007). The sight and sound impel members to engage and interact, especially teenage members who are known to have a very short attention span. Like other so-called “alternative worship” movements, the LOJF has made itself more attractive to young believers by adopting elements of popular culture into its worship events (Collins-Mayo & Beaudoin 2003).

Not solely relying on the presiding officer, it is participatory in its approach to worship as it emphasizes the interactive over the ritualistic, form over substance and bodily movement over words. As Flory and Miller have noted: “The “individual believer finds refuge from the challenges of suburban life, where they can find a safe community of similar people within which to pursue their spiritual journey (Flory & Miller 2003). The commitment to participation clearly suggests a response to the regulated and traditional style of worship at the parish perceived as “old-fashioned, dull, and distant from everyday life” (Jones & Webster 2007:50-62).

4.3 Leadership- The domain of leadership refers to the authority and power of the servant leaders as a core team. The LOJF frames their organizational structure from one that is focused on an overly institutionalized group to one that is focused first on forming small and well-knitted communities. Their structure of governance is participative by which authority and power reside in the laity, both male and female. There is the widely-held belief among my interviewees who are members of the core group that their role is to facilitate the search for new meanings and values (Collins 2012). It has re-empowered members who thought that they had nothing to offer, or have nothing to offer that fits within the confines of the parish structures. Without immediate pecuniary benefits to them, they have invested considerable time and effort to create something for the use of the community. They speak their

language and communicate in a way that easily resonates with their daily life experience.

LOJF style of leadership reflects a shift from the traditional centralized and hierarchical models of leadership normally practiced in a parish organization (Spears 2013). It is a servant-led community. Thompson, in a study on a church-related college, found that the traditional leadership approaches are inadequate in meeting diverse and complex challenges. Robert K Greenleaf who coined the term servant-leadership said that the servant leader is a servant first and thus one who wants to serve (As quoted in Spears). Spears describes servant-leaders as those who seek to involve others in decision-making, are strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and enhances the growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of organizational life. As a church-based movement, servant leadership model fits LOJF's ethos as well as match its values of equality and mutual dependence.

4.4 Formation- This refers to the aspects of LOJF's life that involve the explanation, information, and formation of members mainly through preaching that is Bible/experience-based. Going beyond the doctrinal and moral teachings, the preaching, which usually takes a little less than one hour to deliver, is perceived and appreciated by the members as practical as and more intelligible than the sermons that they used to hear during Sunday Mass. The experiential approach to preaching makes practice more intelligible and believable for them (Salazar 2013). The members are one in saying that their affiliation and frequent attendance in the weekly service of the group enabled them to change for the better. There is a well-supported belief that active religious affiliation results into positive emotions such as happiness, social support, and hope (Myers 2010). These changes involve not only physical cure but also emotional healings from painful experiences in the past. They also felt more empowered to love their fellow men, more able to forgive those who wronged them in the past.

4.5 Stewardship- This involves challenging members to share their time, talent, and treasure with the group. Time and talent include any volunteering that members do either directly for the LOJF or in its related activities such as participation in their grand events. The treasure refers to the donations, whether in cash or kind, that the members contribute as "love offering" to support

the material and financial needs such for rent and stipends for the preachers and music ministry. Coupled with a credible lay leadership who regularly include in their preaching on the need and self-benefit of donating to the material needs of the group, the willingness and capacity to share to the overall well-being of the group are linked to the strong sense of belonging and social support which it provides to the members. Given that they have experienced their psychosocial needs being met more than the regular attendees, the servant leaders tend to share beyond the minimum expectation or requirement.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper presents an emic description and understanding of the practices and beliefs of LOJF as a TCC. There are three factors that account for its popular appeal and phenomenal growth in the local religious market: a lively and welcoming worshiping community, a strongly Bible-based view of their life, and a deeply-felt and personalized religious faith. First, due to their hospitable or sense of welcome to all, the LOJF offers and provides support to satisfy their members' basic psychosocial and spiritual needs. There is a deliberate attempt to make members feel good about themselves by giving them a sense of belonging and importance. Second, by way of a singularly biblical and experiential approach to religious faith, it effectively addresses their members felt-need for meaning and purpose in life that enables them to cope with its many vicissitudes and challenges. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it helps develop in their member a deeply-felt personal leveling up of their conventional-synthetic faith as Catholics (Fowler 1983). It has become individuative and reflective in the sense that it enabled them to find and make meaning of human life in the light of faith amidst its uncertainties and terrors.

Based on the insiders' narratives of the members, it is safe to conclude that, fueled by a lively and contemporary worship and Bible-based practical preaching by lay leaders, their members found in LOJF the religious and psychosocial goods they came looking for: a small welcoming community where they experience a sense of belonging, self-importance, and social capital. The LOJF may be considered not so much as a rejection of the traditional parish

structures but simply as an alternative way of being and doing church today. The parishes may hold this TCC as a mirror of what they want to achieve and what it can and must do to reinforce the quality of pastoral attention that their parishioners receive.

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