

Philippine Tribal Messiah Success

Interview of Anna-Liza Cocos-Lopez and Stephen Gabb
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Anna-Liza Cocos-Lopez

Question: Please introduce yourself to our readers.

I am Anna-Liza Cocos-Lopez. In the Philippines they call me Pops, because when I was young, I liked to eat popcorn. My husband is Francis Lopez. He is forty-three years old. I am forty-six.

We have two daughters, one born in 2001 and the other two years later. At that time, our mission was in the northern part of the Philippines, in Ilocos Norte, Laoag City, where we stayed for almost three years before going to Manila. They shuffled us to another place before we went to Antipolo when I was assigned to teach children in our school. I taught third grade pupils from 2007 to 2010. From the time I took on the tribal messiah mission, I decided to do some business so that I could control my time and at the same time do the mission.

When we received the direction to fulfill the mission of tribal messiahs, my husband wondered how we could do it, because we did not have the money. Ever since we became fulltime members, we have sometimes done business at the same time to support our mission. I always tell my husband to focus on just lecturing and I would work to raise funds in the morning, which keeps us going and is a way we can support our mission.

At that time, I had stopped teaching almost a year earlier, because through teaching we earned money but not enough, and I could not witness because I was confined in the classroom. Along with this, I could not pay my children's tuition fees. I had to do something to pay for our children's school needs.

My husband was continuously giving lectures. He was teaching in the International Peace Leadership College (IPLC). It is True Parents' school. After almost six months, I decided to ask him to stop teaching and help me in the tribal messiah area because I really need a lecturer. I am not a good lecturer. I am not a good at speaking in English, but I can do mobilization.



An event in the barangay hall: The support of the barangay captain and the response of the Marikina City residents were results of hard work to build close relationships.

My talent is to approach people in low-level areas. We chose a poor area. Nobody wanted to go there because the area always floods when hit by typhoons or other storms. Other tribal messiahs went to other places. When we received this direction to reach 430 families, I told myself to look for a place nobody else wanted to go. Two sisters had a foundation in that area, so I asked, Can I join you? We can make a trinity. We went there and agreed that we would start in the area where in the past the most people had received the holy wine during house-to-house visits. We wanted to follow up on those couples who had already had the holy wine. These two sisters, Aunty Bet and Aunty Joanne knew the place and that a long time ago, perhaps 2005, people responded to the house-to-house holy wine blessing.

So, "Yeah, maybe we should go there," though they had said that some part of the area often floods.

Question: How did you connect with community leaders in your witnessing area?

We wanted to meet the leaders; we often tried to meet them but the barangay captain, the village leader, was usually not there. We just began our work. After a few days, we were able to meet the barangay captain. He told us, "Oh you are now asking my permission, but you have already gone to the area without my knowledge."

I was sorry but I felt such great eagerness for witnessing in my heart, knowing that we had only until January; only a few months to reach the 13,000 needed to fill the Areneta Stadium for the Peace Blessing Ceremony. We had worked for a week.

Having a goal motivates me to bring candidates for the blessing. The national headquarters asked us to report every day. Of course, I reported our result, candidates for the Peace Blessing Ceremony. In that week, we had been able to reach more than 1,200.

When we had a meeting at the Antipolo mobilization headquarters, I saw that they had a chart monitoring the mobilization. We had the highest results. I hadn't known that someone had been writing our results on a bulletin board.

The national leader and the regional president were following our results. Then they sent us twelve people to multiply results in our area. They were from IPLC and were in a 120-day workshop. Part of their training was witnessing. We needed to accommodate them and because we already had people mobilizing in the area, I put them into the neighboring barangays. Because they sent us mobilizers, we had to add to our area. We added three neighboring barangays.

We divided the mobilizers into different teams under a leader from IPLC. We continuously went house to house. Sometimes people tell me, "House to house is too tiring." I saw mobilizers very tired in the evening reporting. You could see in on their faces. So I thought we need to reach out the leaders. We tried to contact the barangay leaders or the village leaders.

We made relationships first; we did not give the Divine Principle immediately. We have a team to make a relationship with the barangay captains. I assign team leaders to lead other mobilizers in the four barangays doing every street, block to block. On every block is a team leader to do the mobilization quickly, to saturate the area.

I make a good relationship with the village heads, serving them and their families.... We try to clean their houses. We make a relationship first. We do not give the Divine Principle or any other lectures.

If we make an appointment for lectures, we gather people in one place in the barangay and teach them the five principles of peace, to invite them to the blessing. [UPF's five principles of peace: We are one human family created by God. The highest achievements of men and women are rooted in spiritual and moral development. The family is the school of love and peace. We foster peace through dialogue and cooperation. Service is the foundation of reconciliation.]

After that, we introduce some part of the Divine Principle. We use a brochure introducing the Principle. A picture of True Parents is in the brochure. People look and ask who they are. We introduce our True Parents through the brochures that we use during the mobilization. Most of the people in the area are interested to hear about true love, about True Parents and about how True Parents formed a family, an ideal family. That helps us make relationships with families.

Sometimes we bring some food to a family, because the area is very poor. If you could see their homes—so shabby, and many children playing without toys... Every time we go there, we make sure we have at least candies to give.

I have my daughters and other mobilizers mobilize couples, especially wives, to be in the area for a lecture. After we gather people to receive a lecture, I call my husband. While my husband gives the lecture, we go to another block to prepare another set for lectures. That's how we reached the goal. On every block, before the lecturer comes, we prepare the area; gather most of the people there. We win the hearts of the wives; we become friends. We take good care of the children while their mothers are at the lecture. Then the parents are happy to see somebody taking care of their children. The children busy playing.

We teach them games. We teach them holy songs and other songs. We also give them free toys. We go to a store to ask for free toys just to give to the children, because in our area, we didn't have any support financially at first. I always think about how to get something to give. The owners of the toys stores also give. That really gives me happiness because, Oh my God, it is possible to do this!

The parents are very happy to see their children with toys and see somebody taking care of them. When we see children that are very dirty, we even give them a bath and later bring some clothes for them to wear. To people in the Philippines, if you give something, they are very happy especially in the poor area. That is our secret.

Question: Were the barangay captains aware that you were doing this for a religious purpose?

We also brought the barangay captains into the Blessing Ceremony. After the blessing, we've continuously been developing our relationships with them. They have their own schedules for meeting people. The barangay captains and leaders are very busy because they have their own projects, too. What I do and other mobilizers always do is to connect with the key people in the barangay. I always send Father's words to their cellphones and I make appointments to see them.

I am very close with the barangay captain in my area. He is a single man. I've often visited his office and shared. He also attended some seminars. He attended the ILC. After attending the ILC, I got his reflection. I always write to ask, Oh, what is your reflection? That captain is gay, actually, but he is a very supportive of my mission, and he is very smart. He is very good at managing time and managing people. Every time he calls people, people come. Oh!, I thought, this man is very good; I can use him in my witnessing.

So I made a very good relationship with him. I treat him as my son. He is a tall man, very tall. Every time I give a direction, even at the last minute... Oh captain, we have an activity, can you help me do the mobilization? Oh, he says, I have an appointment. Okay, I say, I'll go to another barangay. He says, Oh, no, no, no! I want my people to receive the blessing.

I always speak about the blessing, the blessing's fortune. If you have True Parents, you also have fortune. I always tell him that if you have the heart of living for the sake of others, you have fortune. So, he is afraid that the area will be left behind without the blessing. He wants the area to be blessed. That makes us very close. Even late at night, he calls, Where are you?

I say, Why? I am doing something. Can you come to my office tomorrow? A couple fighting and I cannot give internal guidance because I am single.

So the following day, I go to his office to explain and teach the couple to love each other -- because he is a single man. Now whenever that kind of problem arises in his barangay, he tells me "I am 'off' of this problem. I can manage many projects but not husbands and wives; that's all yours." That keeps me coming to his office.

Question: Does he have a particular feeling about the Unification philosophy, about True Parents?

Yeah! He received the Divine Principle. He attended the ILC during the Areneta Peace Blessing Ceremony. The Blessing was about to start at four o'clock. At three o'clock we were still bringing his people to the stadium while he was attending the seminar in the Manila Hotel. I called him: Captain Ziffred, we lack transportation. Oh don't worry I'll call all my *tanods* (these are assistant) all my assistants and will provide transportation. Just give me the gasoline fee he said. Until this time, I did not pay because he already understood the meaning of the blessing. That's my offering, he would said.

He was in the seminar and he was mobilizing over the telephone to help people go to the blessing. During the seminar, he was always saying, Oh, God created only man and woman. He began to realize that God only created a man and woman, but he is gay. He was realizing, Oh, my God! I am committing sin because I am a gay. So he started to reflect that God only created man and woman; nothing more.

I give him a one-hour English Divine Principle lecture booklet and I always follow up to see if he finished. "I only read half," he said, "The most important thing is that I read Chapter Two; it's very striking to me, Chapter Two. You know, Chapter One is very beautiful, it's very nice." He grew up in his grandmother's house.... He grew up and became a youth leader, and then he became a barangay captain.

What makes me love this person is he is amazing. Every time we have an activity, even if he has something else on his schedule, he always makes our activity a priority, especially in following up the couples that received the blessing. He is helping me. If he cannot come with us, he asks others, his assistant or the youth leaders, to help us in the area. I made a very clear relationship with him.



Front row, left to right: Stephen Gabb, Constance Gabb, Francis Gomez Lopez and Anna-Liza Cocos Lopez after testifying to students at Universal Peace Academy.

Question: He sounds like an amazing person. How do you deal with the various levels of faith among the 430 families? How do you help them to develop their faith so that they can begin to help others?

To begin with we introduce the Universal Peace Federation because that is the approach used in other barangays. Slowly as they attend some seminars, we start introducing the Family Federation and slowly they begin to learn the Divine Principle, but not all the Divine Principle details at first.

When Dr. Yong's younger brother came to speak to us about Hoon Dok groups, I had the idea that I had to form Hoon Dok groups by educating these Hoon Dok leaders. Because already 430 is too many couples to reach out to, we already have twelve leaders. At least, we can educate more these twelve to become the Hoon Dok leaders. Our plan is to make True Parents' village. Our goal is to have all the people in the village accept our True Parents by educating them well, by forming teams of twelve, team by team, with a Hoon Dok leader in every team. We are setting up a Divine Principle lecture schedule because we found that after completing their three-day ceremony a couple is ready to hear full chapters, chapters one to sixteen and to accept our True Parents.

Actually, in the very beginning, I had found only three wives that were active and they multiplied. Now we are thinking of how to multiply these leaders, which makes it easy to reach other couples. In the Philippines, it is easy to witness but we have inconsistency in following up. I saw in my country that if we do activities, we invite many people, but we don't follow up. I am very grateful that we were able to reach these 430 couples. In the very beginning, I never thought we could do it. "We will just do it!"

Many times, my husband and I were thinking that we cannot do it because of financial problems. At that time, the Gabbs came to our team. I am grateful for that. We always had the problem of transportation, bringing people to the Blessing Ceremony or bringing people to the headquarters. Whenever we had an activity, I always communicated to Mr. Gabb telling him what money I needed, and he gave it.

At that time, because they were helping us, I had to work hard also so that I could offer them spiritual children. Our heart is to help them to fulfill also the 430 in return for their support of us.

Partnerships of tribal messiahs are very important; their connections and relationships. I feel that I found a parent in my area because of this couple. It makes me more determined. I also became more determined because of Dr. Yong's follow up. "Pops, when will you finish the 430?" I said, "Oh Dr. Yong you are asking me to finish it. Just give me enough time!" "You are too slow!" He said something like that....

Interview of Stephen Gabb



Stephen Gabb

Question: Where did your idea to support a tribal messiah couple originate?

I began to see that we have two easily identifiable groups in our movement—some people have emphasized or have found fortune financially but are frustrated because they would like to have done witnessing. Another group wants to do this vital work but often feel their hands are tied because they don't have the financial means.

Accomplishing the tribal messiah mission is expensive even in the Philippines. They have to have money for all the three-day ceremony material, going to workshops, going to Divine Principle and in some cases, because they don't have a good home, these people had to go and rent rooms in one of the old headquarters in order to hold three-day ceremonies.

As Anna-Liza mentioned, they might be raising funds all morning just to make a bit of money to be able to exist and carry on witnessing in the afternoon. I felt there should be a way these two groups could cooperate and liberate one another in the process.

I had heard from Dr. Yong that at the Arenetta Peace Blessing, they needed financial support. I believe that he got authorization from True Parents to say that if there are any couples who wanted to offer money to help that campaign, they could receive a tribal messiah area with couples that have already gone to the Arenetta Peace Blessing. They needed people to follow these couples up because so many couples went to the blessing.

So my wife and I went there. In this process, I discovered that if a couple financially contributes to the work of another couple, one that is enthusiastic and powerful in the area of witnessing and teaching (as Francis and Anna-Liza are) we can all succeed more quickly and more efficiently. Francis was able to leave his job; they were both able to devote themselves full time.

Question: What tensions exist in doing this work in a Catholic country and what moved the barangay captains to support this work?

Anna-Liza talked about the key being to find a way to serve the area. We ask many questions to the barangay captains to find out what is needed. What we came up with recently, was that many of the couples in our area, though living as a

family, are not legally married. The reason is that it costs a lot of money. You have to get a birth certificate, which are very often lost in their frequent floods. They are difficult to get hold of and you have to pay for the marriage certificate and pay to have it officiated. To help the people, Francis recently became authorized to marry people. He got the qualification from another denomination.

I think it is important for people to know that this is not necessarily an easy an environment. Many groups are competing to become these peoples' religion. That's one reason that Anna-Liza and Francis don't emphasize the Divine Principle right away. They want to emphasize making a strong skin-to-skin relationship, a connection that moves the people. So that whether the couples are Catholic, whether they are Protestant, whatever they are in their externals, internally they are True Parents' blessed couples because they really wanted to receive this fortune from heaven.

That they have been able to emphasize that this is the Family Federation or UPF -- broader, bigger picture than just a new religion is important.

Question: Where do you go from here?

It's a big challenge. One particular denomination in the Philippines that has been successful very intensely follows up on their members. They have a strict rule that everybody has to tithe to be a member. Poor people would not go to church because they could not tithe. The minister or the elders of the church would visit and ask, What's going on? Why aren't you coming to church?

They said, We feel bad but they can't tithe; we can't offer anything to the church, because we can't find a job. This church now actually has a department that deals with placing their members of their congregation into employment. They help the couple; help the family. Of course, the family is grateful to the church. So of course, they are going to tithe to the church and are going to attend.

So we are searching now to reach the next stage. We want to find a way to bring prosperity to these couples, to these areas because they are extremely poor. These people often have a one-room house and are lucky if the roof doesn't leak and the house doesn't flood.

In most of this area, the flood will come up to the first floor and everything is soaking wet; everything has to be cleaned. They even put True Parents' picture on the ceiling so that it isn't damaged by the flood. We are hoping to develop some business project or get some land where we can start to operate a business that will help support these people and give them work. That's the next stage.