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FamilyWatch Podcast: Wielding digital channels to foster family life

Dads take the lead in this new family life podcast celebrating 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines.

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“The Internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.” - Pope Francis, World Communications Day 2014

I was driving home on October 13, 2020 when I saw a message prompt on my phone. It was from Rommel Lopez, a former colleague from the Catholic radio station, Radio Veritas, and now with the Media Office of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

“I am thinking of bringing to our Faith Watch Channel on YouTube your old program at Radio Veritas,” Rommel said. He was referring to the 2016-2017 parenting talk show that I co-hosted on Thursday evenings with popular Catholic speaker Ansel Beluso.

The Faith Watch Channel began in 2011 with a simple objective: To help the faithful deepen their faith and live it well day by day. The Channel was driven by videos of Masses, reflections and homilies by Archbishop Soc Villegas, Father Jerry Orbos, and other well-known clergy.

Rommel's team wanted to expand the content to include Church history, parenting, pro-life matters, apologetics, Marian shrines, devotions, and conversion stories. Fresh programming would help grow the 144,000 subscribers of the CBCP digital platform during the 500th year of Christianity in the Philippines. The proposed show would be called "FamilyWatch."

It felt good to be trusted and I wanted to say "yes", but doubts held me back: Could I come up with 50 thought-provoking topics for a year's worth of podcasts? Who could I count on for support? Would the podcast rake in sufficient views to make it worth the effort? What can set it apart from other podcasts with the same focus? Finally, would I have time given the demands of my family, business and advocacy work?

Considering that the CBCP Media Office wanted this podcast for the new evangelization, and considering that St. Josemaria taught us that “the only ambition, the only desire of Opus Dei and of each of its daughters and sons is to serve the Church as she wants to be served”, after many Hail Marys, I agreed to take on Rommel’s offer.

GROWING COLLABORATION

I consulted Atty. DM Marasigan, the president of Educhild Foundation, Inc. Educhild (Education for the Upbringing of Children) is a 40-year-old organization that lends couples a guiding hand on principles, techniques, attitudes and values for family life and the upbringing of children. DM and his wife Noemi agreed that this was a good project and suggested topics and resource persons.

Educhild officially became an institutional partner of the CBCP Media Office for the FamilyWatch weekly podcast. Our goal was to spread the message that “growth in the faith and renewal of society begin in and through the family.”

Retired corporate executive and long-time friend, Gil Gonzales, pitched in his ideas to broaden the scope of our programming. Lennon Ramirez, instructor at the University of Asia and the Pacific, designed our animated opening billboard. These two would later alternate as my co-hosts in the FamilyWatch podcast. Our daughter Carmella designed the logo. Family members would get involved in the technical set-up at home and in generating program titles.

On November 26, 2020, six weeks after that message from Rommel, FamilyWatch aired its first episode:

“How to Explain Death to Children”.
Why this maiden topic? We were at the tail end of the month devoted to our faithful departed.

Since then we have been doing one episode per week.

The more popular ones so far have been: “Planning a Church Wedding in a Pandemic”; “Your Happy Marriage” with book author Bonifacio Belen; and the series on “Parenting Challenges” with DM and Noemi Marasigan.

FAMILY MATTERS

FamilyWatch podcasts are delivered in “Taglish” (Tagalog-English) to reach more Filipino parents. The topics revolve around Parenting, Marriage, and Faith in the Family.

While preparing our St. Joseph special in March, we met Fr. James Cervantes MIC, a Davao-based Fil-Am

priest of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. We listened with awe at how his vocation was inspired by an encounter with Fr. Donald Calloway MIC, writer of the bestseller, *Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father*.

Fr. Cervantes echoed Fr. Calloway's call: *"In order to defend marriage and the family, elevate morals, recover lost ground and win souls for Jesus Christ, we need to bring St. Joseph onto the battlefield. He is the Terror of Demons!"*

We interviewed former national team player Patrick Fran for our episode, "Faith, Fatherhood and Basketball". Patrick is now assistant coach of Meralco. He shared how he tries to integrate faith into his multiple roles as husband, father and hard-court tactician. My friends commented that it shattered their widespread impression that all jocks

are “macho” guys bereft of spiritual life.

Patrick recounted his efforts to live family life online and to sustain his prayer life during the 2020 PBA Philippine Cup at the “bubble” in New Clark City. They were locked down there for months.

HOPE BEYOND CHALLENGES

My co-hosts and I have learned many things doing these shows. “These episodes challenge me to keep up-to-date with matters related to marriage and family,” said my co-host Gil. “It takes skill to finish interviews within the time allotted because of the rich inputs from our guests,” he added.

Gil has seven children and, like all of us, he does his podcasts in a corner of his home. “Since there are a number of us in the family logged in at the same time on one Internet

connection, there were times when I got cut off from the Zoom recording,” he narrated. “That would prompt a second take. Thank goodness that our program is not live!”

Sustaining a weekly show can get taxing, but it is not without its rewards.

It's been 6 months. I have witnessed how, deep down, people want to be successful spouses and good parents. They are hungry for trustworthy sources to help them in their mission. This is what motivates me to push further, do more research, find the best resource persons possible, and provide quality content for parents.

Last December, Pope Francis announced the celebration of the *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year that would run from March 19, 2021 to June 26, 2022. Our team decided then to conclude each FamilyWatch

episode by quoting appropriate passages from the Apostolic Exhortation. That gave a distinct flavor and character to our programming.

FaithWatch (<https://faithwatch.tv/faithwatchtv-podcast/>) is now available across social media platforms and Spotify. It has gathered 200,000 subscribers to date. There is plenty of room for growth. The FaithWatch app for Android is undergoing beta testing. Once formally launched, it will enhance accessibility of Catholic content among Filipinos here and abroad.

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