

**### Title:**

In re: Query of Mr. Roger C. Prioreshi Concerning Exemption from Legal and Filing Fees for The Good Shepherd Foundation, Inc.

**### Facts:**

Mr. Roger C. Prioreshi, acting as the administrator for The Good Shepherd Foundation, Inc., reached out to the Chief Justice of the Philippines with a request, via a letter dated May 22, 2009. In this letter, he expressed gratitude for the allowance to pay a nominal court fee with the balance contingent on the success of a collection action, and he noted how this arrangement enabled the Foundation's access to the judicial system. Prioreshi's concern stemmed from a previous denial due to the excessive front-end legal fees, specifically referencing OCA Circular No. 42-2005 and Rule 141 which cater mainly to "individual indigents" without expressly including Foundations or Associations working for indigent and underprivileged people. Given this predicament, Prioreshi sought clarification on whether the courts could extend the same exemption from legal and filing fees to Foundations like the Good Shepherd Foundation, Inc., which aids indigent and underprivileged individuals.

**### Issues:**

The legal issue hinges on whether the Good Shepherd Foundation, Inc., by virtue of its mission to assist indigent and underprivileged individuals, could be entitled to the indigent litigant exemption from paying court legal and filing fees—an exemption typically reserved for natural persons under the delineated rules.

**### Court's Decision:**

The Philippine Supreme Court, in its resolution, clarified that the exemption from legal and filing fees available to indigent litigants applies strictly to natural persons and cannot be extended to juridical entities, including Foundations such as The Good Shepherd Foundation, Inc. The Court emphasized the constitutional and regulatory framework supporting this stance, particularly highlighting the definitions and conditions under which an individual may qualify for indigent litigant status according to Section 21, Rule 3, and Section 19, Rule 141 of the Rules of Court. The Court noted that these provisions specifically define eligibility in terms of personal or family income and asset possession, criteria that cannot be logically applied to juridical entities. Furthermore, the Court expressed concerns over potential abuse and administrative burden if such exemptions were extended to juridical persons.

**### Doctrine:**

This resolution reaffirmed the doctrine that the exemption from legal and filing fees under the principle of free access to courts, as prescribed by the Constitution and the Rules of Court, applies exclusively to natural persons and cannot be extended to juridical entities, including non-profit organizations serving the indigent and underprivileged.

### Class Notes:

1. **Indigent Litigant Exemption**: Eligibility criteria include gross income and personal property assessments.
2. **Juridical vs. Natural Person**: The legal distinction determines eligibility for court fee exemptions, with the former (corporations, foundations, etc.) being ineligible.
3. **Provisions to Note**: (a) Sec. 11, Art. III of the 1987 Constitution - Free access to the courts; (b) Sec. 21, Rule 3, and Sec. 19, Rule 141 of the Rules of Court - Definitions and conditions for indigent litigants.
4. **Application in Context**: This case teaches that while foundations may serve indigent communities, their juridical person status disqualifies them from indigent litigant exemptions designed for natural persons.

### Historical Background:

This resolution sheds light on the judiciary's role in delineating the scope of constitutional and regulatory protections aimed at ensuring access to legal remedies. It highlights the judicial interpretation of laws and rules concerning fee exemptions, underscoring the precision required in legal definitions and the balance between enabling access to justice and preventing system abuse.