

MONITOR



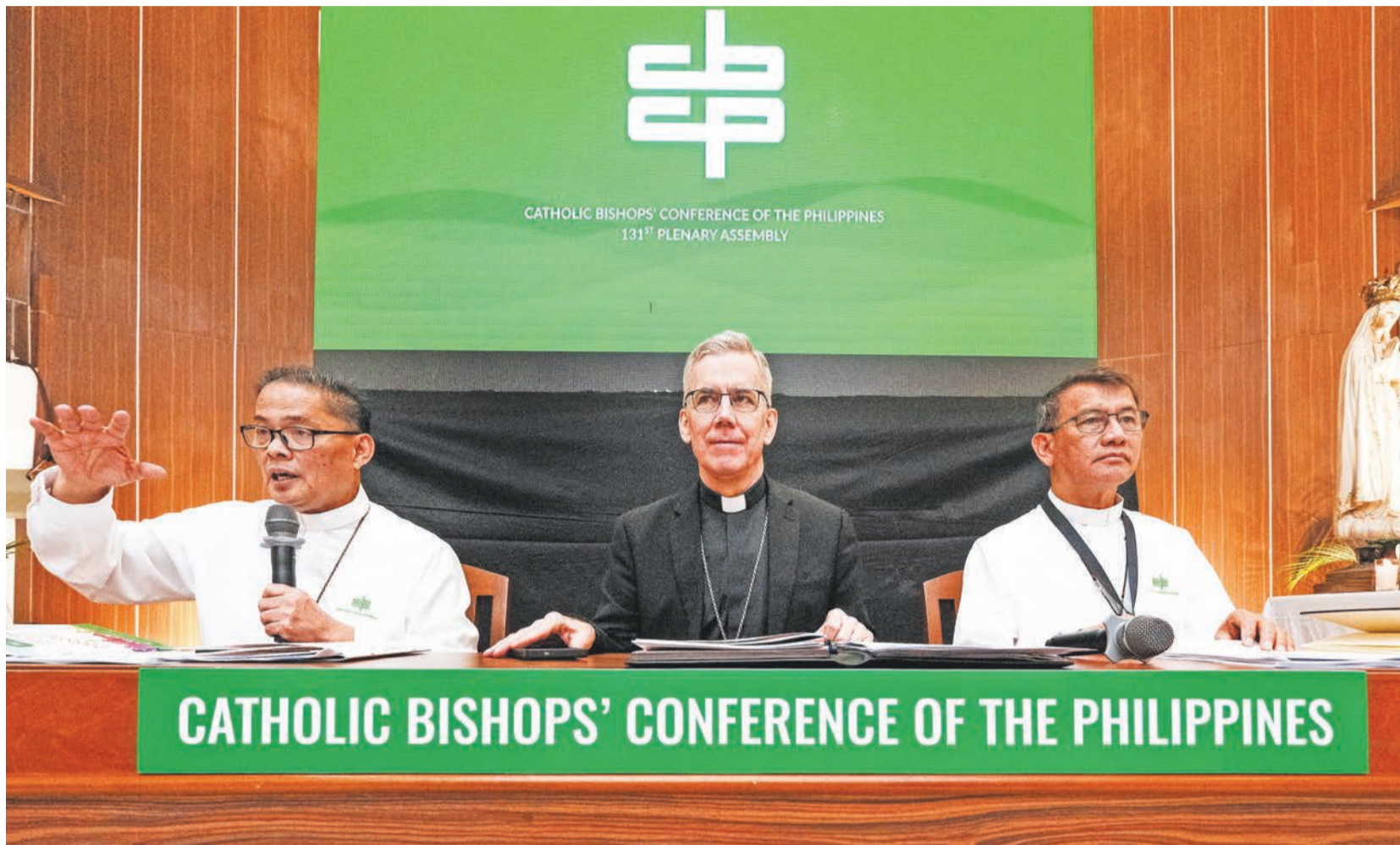
Pope urges Philippine bishops to strengthen church unity, care for migrant workers

POPE Leo XIV urged Philippine bishops to strengthen
MIGRANT WORKERS A6



CBCP head warns competition, ambition weaken unity in church movements

THE head of the Catholic bishops' leadership urged
CHURCH MOVEMENTS A7



Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, presides over the 131st CBCP plenary assembly at the Pope Pius XII Catholic Center in Manila on Jan. 24, 2026. Also in the photo are Archbishop Charles Brown, apostolic nuncio to the Philippines, and Archbishop Julius Tonel of Zamboanga, CBCP vice president. **ROY LAGARDE**

CBCP head sets agenda on care for bishops, coordination

By **ROY LAGARDE**

THE new head of the Catholic hierarchy on Saturday set a two-year agenda focused on caring for bishops, strengthening coordination, care, deepening synodality.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, outlined his priorities at the opening of the 131st CBCP plenary assembly in Manila.

As his first priority, he stressed support for bishops themselves.

"Before tending the flock, we must care for the shepherds," Garcera said, citing the need to care especially for retired bishops and guide newly ordained and "jubilee-year" bishops.

He also urged ongoing formation for bishops, especially on emerging concerns such as artificial intelligence and the defense of human dignity.

His second priority called for clearer roles for CBCP

commissions.

Garcera said CBCP commissions exist to assist bishops that "do not act independently," urging better communication and closer collaboration.

"In a truly synodal spirit, we seek clearer communication, shared direction, and closer collaboration, so that our programs genuinely respond to the pastoral needs of our dioceses," he said.

The third priority, Garcera said, is advancing synodality, which he described as "not an event but a

way of being Church."

The bi-annual assembly gathered more than 85, including newly ordained bishops Dave Capucao of Infanta, Edwin Panergo of Boac and Samuel Agcaracar of San Jose in Nueva Ecija, who are attending the three-day meeting for the first time.

The assembly was preceded by a three-day bishops' seminar on artificial intelligence, the implementation of synodality

AGENDA A6

Cardinal Tagle says bishop's office is mission, not promotion



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelization, delivers the homily during the episcopal ordination of Bishop Samuel Agcaracar at the Divine Word Seminary chapel in Tagaytay City on Jan. 17, 2026. **ROY LAGARDE**

THE episcopal office is not a promotion or reward for service, but a mission that continues the work of Jesus and his apostles, Rome-based Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle said Saturday.

Tagle, the pro-prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelization, delivered the message in his homily during the episcopal ordination of Bishop Samuel Agcaracar at the Divine Word Seminary chapel.

"It is a mission," he said. "And it is a mission that must endure until the end of time."

Agcaracar, 56, will be installed as the new shepherd of the Diocese of San Jose in Nueva Ecija on Feb. 6. The diocese covers parishes in the northern part of the province, a predominantly agricultural area that has seen growing urban migration in recent years.

Tagle said the role of a bishop should not be viewed as a rise in rank or a symbol of prestige, but as a continuation of the apostolic mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples.

TAGLE A7

Pope appoints Capiz priest as new Kalibo bishop



Bishop-elect Cyril Villareal of Kalibo. **ST. THOMAS OF VILLANOVA PARISH DAO CAPIZ**

POPE Leo XIV on Saturday, Jan. 24, appointed a priest from the Archdiocese of Capiz as the new bishop of Kalibo.

Fr. Cyril Villareal will succeed Bishop Jose Corazon Tala-oc, who retired in June 2025 after nearly 14 years of leading the diocese.

Villareal was born in March 1974. He studied philosophy at St. Pius X Seminary in Roxas City and theology at the UST Central Seminary in Manila.

He was ordained a priest on May 25, 2001.

Villareal holds a master's degree in higher religious studies and a licentiate in sacred theology from the University of Santo Tomas. He also earned a master's degree in theology

from the University of Vienna in Austria.

From 2005 to 2010, Villareal served as assistant chaplain of the Filipino Catholic Chaplaincy in the Archdiocese of Vienna. He also served as assistant priest at the Parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Vienna.

Earlier, he was assistant dean of theology at the Sancta Maria Mater et Regina Seminarium in Roxas City from 2000 to 2004.

Since July 2024, Villareal has served as parish priest of St. Thomas of Villanueva Parish in Dao, Capiz.

He previously served as vicar general of the archdiocese during the tenure of then-Archbishop Jose Advincula.

Villareal was later elected administrator of the archdiocese during the sede vacante following Advincula's transfer to the Archdiocese of Manila in June 2021.

He held the post until Archbishop Victor Bendico took possession of the archdiocese in May 2023.

Villareal has also served as rector of Colegio de la Purisima Concepcion in Roxas City. **(CBCP News)**

Bishops tackle ethical, human-centered use of AI in evangelization

CHURCH communicators must ensure that artificial intelligence serves human dignity and authentic encounter, not replace them, speakers said during a seminar on AI held at the sidelines of the 131st Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

The Jan. 20 seminar, organized by the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Communications (ECSC), brought together bishops and experts to reflect on the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence in evangelization, pastoral ministry, and media work.

Edwin Lopez, newly appointed executive secretary of the CBCP-ECSC, emphasized that the Church's approach to AI must still be rooted in human relationships.

"Technology serves. Communion saves," Lopez said, stressing that digital tools must never

replace genuine human encounter. "In a world of constant connectivity, quality relational presence is the rarest form of communication."

'People always come first'

In his presentation, Lopez warned against treating AI as a substitute for pastoral presence, noting that evangelization is inherently relational.

"God did not just send a message; He sent Himself," he said, pointing to the Incarnation as the Church's model for communication. "Evangelization must always lead people to encounter, not automation."

Drawing from Catholic social teaching and media ethics, Lopez underscored that AI tools should assist, not replace, human discernment.

He also cautioned against overreliance on so-called "agentic AI," asking whether machines could



Mr. Edwin Lopez, executive secretary of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Social Communications (ECSC).

ever provide the relational presence essential to Christian communication. "Can an agentic AI create communion?" he asked. "In evangelization, relational communications always precedes persuasive communications."

AI as a pastoral challenge

In his opening address, Caceres Archbishop Rex Andrew Alarcon, chair of the CBCP-ECSC, framed the seminar as part of the Church's response

to a rapidly changing technological landscape.

"It is not only a time of change, but a change of epoch," Alarcon said, echoing Pope Francis' description of the digital age.

He noted that artificial intelligence now affects nearly every aspect of daily life—from communication and transportation to ministry and evangelization—making it imperative for Church

EVANGELIZATION A7

Pope to young people: We are made for truth, not virtual connections

VATICAN, Jan. 10, 2026—Upon arriving in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, Pope Leo XIV was enthusiastically welcomed by the young people of the Diocese of Rome, who greeted him warmly and offered him a moving embrace.

The meeting, held this Saturday, January 10, just days after the conclusion of the Jubilee Year, brought together thousands of young people—accompanied by priests, religious, and educators—both inside and outside the Paul VI Hall.

Hidden loneliness in the virtual world

Pope Leo did not ignore the unease that many young people suffer: loneliness, disorientation, and boredom, even amid crowds and constant stimulation.

"When this grayness dulls the colors of life, we see that it is possible to be isolated even in the midst of many people," he said.

According to the Pope, loneliness shows its face when "one is not listened to, because one is immersed in the noise of opinions," and when "one looks at nothing, because one is dazzled by fragmented images."

A light that never goes out

Pope Leo also spoke of poetry, evoking verses by Salvatore Quasimodo that speak of human loneliness, but reinterpreted them in the light of faith. The "ray" that pierces the heart, he explained, is not a passing light: "it is not a flickering light that rises only to set again, but the Sun of justice, who is Christ." And he added: "He warms our hearts and sets them ablaze with his love."

From this encounter with Jesus, the Pope said, comes the strength to change one's own life and to transform society. "The light of the Gospel illuminates our relationships," spreading through everyday words and gestures, until

it turns "a gray and anonymous world into a welcoming place, shaped to the human person, precisely because it is inhabited by God."

Bearing witness without seeking applause

The Holy Father expressed joy at the authentic experiences young people live in parishes, oratories, and charities, but he warned them not to expect easy recognition. "Do not expect the world to welcome you with open arms," he said, recalling that "advertising, which needs to sell something to be consumed, attracts more attention than witness, which seeks to build sincere friendships."

Pope Leo therefore urged the young people to "act with joy and perseverance, knowing that to change society we must first change ourselves."

Prayer breaks the chains. (*Thulio Fonseca / Vatican News*)

Pope Leo XIV proclaims Franciscan Jubilee Year

ROME, January 12, 2026—Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed a "Special Year of St. Francis" to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the saint's death. During this time of grace, which will extend until January 2027, the faithful are granted the opportunity to obtain a plenary indulgence.

This Franciscan Jubilee Year, considered a gift for the entire Church and an occasion for authentic spiritual renewal, was inaugurated on Jan. 10 with a decree issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Holy See.

Until Jan. 10 of next year, the faithful can obtain this grace under the usual conditions—sacramental confession, Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the pope—by making a pilgrimage to any Franciscan conventual church or place of worship dedicated to St. Francis anywhere in the world.

Furthermore, the elderly, the sick, and those who, for serious reasons, cannot leave their homes can obtain the plenary indulgence by spiritually joining in the jubilee celebrations and offering their prayers, pains, or sufferings to God.

In a world where "the virtual takes over the real, disagreements and social violence are part of everyday life, and peace becomes more insecure and distant every day, this Year of St. Francis spurs all of us, each according to our possibilities, to imitate the



A 13th-century fresco of St. Francis of Assisi by the Florentine painter Cimabue, one of the earliest depictions of the saint, is located in the lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Assisi, Italy. JACOB STEIN/CRUX STATIONALIS VIA EWTN NEWS

poor man of Assisi, to form ourselves as far as possible on the model of Christ," the decree states.

For the Order of Friars Minor, this time is also an opportunity for the faithful to become "models of holiness of life and constant witnesses of peace." (*Almudena Martínez-Bordiú / EWTN News*)

Pope to Neocatechumenal Way: Be builders and witnesses of communion

ROME, January 19, 2026—POPE Leo XIV thanked the Neocatechumenal Way for their witness and work in spreading the Gospel around the world and encouraged them to promote unity and avoid rigidity and moralism, in a meeting with the leaders of the group at the Vatican on Monday, January 19, 2026.

"Strive forward in joy and humility, without closing yourselves off, as builders and witnesses of communion," he said. "The Church accompanies you, supports you, and is grateful for what you do."

The Neocatechumenal Way is an itinerary of Catholic formation founded in Spain in the 1960s by Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández. It is made up of small communities that follow an itinerary of rediscovery of our baptism and ongoing formation in the faith.

Today, it is present in 139 countries across the world, with over 20,000 communities. Hundreds of people were present at the meeting with the Pope in the Hall of Blessings—including bishops, priests, and other members and representatives of the Way, along with the international team that currently leads the group: Kiko Argüello, María Ascensión Romero, and Father Mario Pezzi.

Reawakening the joy of the faith

Pope Leo XIV began by highlighting the missionary charism that characterizes the Neocatechumenal Way, saying it is "a precious contribution to the life of the Church."

He thanked and encouraged especially the families of the Way who, "responding to the inner prompting of the Spirit, leave the security of ordinary life and set out on mission, even to distant and difficult territories, with the sole desire to proclaim the Gospel and be witnesses of God's love."

He emphasized how the "itinerant teams made up of families, catechists, and priests participate in the evangelizing mission of the whole Church."

They "contribute to 'awakening' the faith of 'non-Christians who have never heard of Jesus Christ,' but also of many baptized Christians who, despite being Christians, 'have forgotten' who Jesus Christ was," Pope Leo explained, citing Pope Francis' 2015 address to the group.

Be witnesses of unity

Pope Leo then also invited the members to practice "inner vigilance and a wise critical capacity, in order to discern certain risks that are always lurking in spiritual and ecclesial life."

He underlined that the sacrament of Baptism unites us

to Christ and "makes us living members of his body, his one people, his one family," and that "if the Spirit grants each one a particular manifestation," it is for the mission of the Church.

"Charisms must always be placed at the service of the kingdom of God and of the one Church of Christ, in which no gift of God is more important than others—except charity, which perfects and harmonizes them all—and no ministry should become a reason to feel superior to one's brothers and sisters and to exclude those who think differently," the Pope explained.

Avoid rigidity and moralism

"Your mission is unique, but not exclusive; your charism is specific, but it bears fruit in communion with the other gifts present in the life of the Church; you do much good, but its purpose is to enable people to know Christ, always respecting each person's life journey and conscience," the Pope said.

He urged them to live their spirituality without separating themselves from the rest of the ecclesial body and be a part "of the ordinary pastoral care of parishes and their various realities, in full communion with your brothers and sisters, and in particular with priests and bishops." (*Isabella H. de Carvalho / Vatican News*)

VATICAN BRIEFING

Pope Leo XIV to French Catholic media: Keep the heart of communication in an age of AI

Pope Leo XIV urged Catholic journalists to double down on truth, human connection, and the voices of the vulnerable as artificial intelligence reshapes the communications landscape. In a message signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin on the pope's behalf, Leo addressed the Fédération des Médias Catholiques ahead of its Saint François de Sales gathering in Lourdes, scheduled for Jan. 21–23. "To face this era marked — including in the world of communications — by the rise of artificial intelligence, we urgently need to return to what matters most: matters of the heart, the centrality of good relationships, and the ability to connect with others without excluding anyone," the pope's message said. That call, he added, is answered by "the service to truth that Catholic media can offer everyone, including those who do not believe." (*ACI Stampa*)

Pope Leo XIV urges faithful to rediscover the beauty of charity

In his message for the 34th World Day of the Sick, to be celebrated Feb. 11, Pope Leo XIV calls on Catholics to rediscover "the beauty of charity and the social dimension of compassion," insisting that authentic Christian love is concrete, personal, and directed toward those who suffer. "Love is not passive; it goes out to meet the other," the pope writes, reflecting on the Gospel parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). "Being a neighbor is not determined by physical or social proximity but by the decision to love." This year's principal observance is set to take place in Chiclayo, Peru, where Leo previously served as bishop. In the message—titled "The Compassion of the Samaritan: Loving by Bearing Another's Pain"—he presents the good Samaritan as a model for Christians living in a society marked by haste and indifference. (*EWTN News*)

Mexico's Cardinal Aguiar: Pope Leo XIV would like to visit Mexico 'soon'

The primatial archbishop of Mexico, Cardinal Carlos Aguiar Retes, has invited Pope Leo XIV to visit the country. The cardinal extended the invitation during their Jan. 14 meeting at the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, shortly before the Wednesday general audience. According to a statement released later by the Archdiocese of Mexico, during the audience Aguiar renewed the invitation he had first extended to the pope a few days after the conclave for him to travel to the country. "In response, the Holy Father expressed his gratitude and his desire and interest in visiting our country soon to entrust his pontificate to Our Lady of Guadalupe," the press release indicated. (*EWTN News*)

Pope Leo XIV condemns violence in Iran, Syria, and Ukraine

Pope Leo XIV on Sunday lamented escalating violence in Iran and Syria and renewed his appeal for peace in Ukraine, while also offering a special blessing for children receiving baptism and praying for those born into "difficult circumstances." Speaking after the Angelus on Jan. 11, the pope said: "My thoughts turn to the situation currently unfolding in the Middle East, especially in Iran and Syria, where ongoing tensions continue to claim many lives." He added: "I hope and pray that dialogue and peace may be patiently nurtured in pursuit of the common good of the whole of society." The pope's remarks came amid unrest in Tehran, where anti-government protests that began about two weeks ago have left more than 70 people dead, according to human rights organizations. (*EWTN News*)

Pope Leo condemns 'zeal for war,' weak multilateralism in speech to diplomats

Pope Leo XIV condemned the weakening of international multilateralism and the increased use of force in a speech to diplomats at the Vatican on Jan. 9. He also said states should respect fundamental human rights, such as religious freedom and freedom of speech, and comply with international humanitarian law in the lengthiest speech to date of his pontificate. "A diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force, by either individuals or groups of allies. War is back in vogue and a zeal for war is spreading," he told ambassadors and other diplomatic representatives to the Holy See in the Apostolic Palace. Currently, 184 states have diplomatic relations with the Holy See. (*EWTN News*)

Pope Leo XIV to hold next consistory in June, hopes for annual meetings with cardinals

Pope Leo XIV will be hosting a second consistory of cardinals at the end of June and wants to hold such meetings annually. The Vatican made the announcement Thursday evening at the conclusion of the Holy Father's first extraordinary consistory of cardinals that lasted two days. The next such meeting is expected to be held on June 27–28, the vigil of Sts. Peter and Paul. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said the pope would like to hold annual meetings lasting three to four days, allowing more time for discussion on various topics of importance and for free interventions by the members of the Sacred College of Cardinals. (*EWTN News*)

St. Carlo Acutis' parents helped develop new Vatican City State app

The parents of St. Carlo Acutis contributed to the development of a new official news application connected to the institutional website of the Vatican City State, www.vaticanstate.va, an initiative presented as part of an ongoing digital renewal and as a tribute to the young saint, often held up as a model for evangelizing through new technologies. After downloading the app, users can read a message of thanks from the Governorate of Vatican City State to Andrea and Antonia Acutis, Carlo's parents. "The Governorate of Vatican City State thanks Andrea and Antonia Acutis who, on the occasion of the canonization of their son Carlo, generously contributed to the creation and development of the News App of the official website www.vaticanstate.va," the message reads. The new application, officially launched over the recently, is dedicated to the Italian saint, who died of leukemia in 2006 at age 15 and is frequently remembered for his computer prowess. (*EWTN News*)

Pope urges service to poor in message for Fiesta Señor

POPE Leo XIV urged unity and service to the poor as Cebu Catholics gathered for the annual Fiesta Señor at the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño de Cebu.

In a message sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, the pope said the annual feast should inspire believers to live their baptism through service.

Parolin said the pope hopes that the celebration will inspire the devotees "a greater desire to embrace the baptismal call to live a grace-filled life in Christ."

He also urged the faithful to reach out to "those on the margins of society," so they may bear witness to Christ's call for unity and charity.

Pope Leo, an Augustinian, has visited Cebu several times before his election as pope. He greeted the Augustinian community at the basilica and assured his spiritual closeness to pilgrims and devotees in one of the Philippines' largest gatherings.

The Fiesta Señor, held every third Sunday of January, draws millions of devotees and centers on the centuries-old image of the Santo Niño image, the Philippines' oldest Christian icon.

Commending all those present to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pope Leo said he was imparting his apostolic blessing as "a sign of joy and hope in the Lord." **(CBCP News)**

Catholic bishops advance synod work with new strategic plan



Bishop Luisito Occiano of Virac, CBCP-CST chairman. CBCP NEWS

THE Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) held a pivotal seminar on synodal transformation on Jan. 22 at the Pope Pius XII Catholic Center in Manila, drawing bishops from across the country.

The CBCP Committee on Synodal Transformation (CST), chaired by Bishop Luisito Occiano, with Jessica Joy Candelario, Estela Padilla and Pablito Baybado, facilitated the half-day session that focused on refining national strategic directions for the Church's ongoing synodal journey toward 2028.

In his opening remarks, Occiano emphasized the need to move beyond consultation to concrete action and

program implementation, deepening synodality as a lived ecclesial reality.

Participants affirmed the importance of integrating the spirit of "listening, participation and mission" at every level of Church life.

Key outcomes of the seminar included:

- An affirmed synthesis of national reports that highlighted the Filipino Church's strengths in communal engagement, pastoral initiatives, and local synodal practices, while identifying challenges such as uneven implementation, formation gaps, and resource constraints.
- A clear inventory of gaps, needs, and priorities, identifying formation, accompaniment, and structural support as areas requiring immediate attention.
- Concrete recommendations for future CST programs and activities, including capacity-building workshops, formation modules.
- An updated CST strategic plan and timeline toward 2028, with phased milestones and benchmarks to ensure sustained progress and collaborative engagement across dioceses.

The seminar concluded with a commitment from CBCP members and CST collaborators to intensify synodal formation and pastoral initiatives at diocesan and parish levels, aiming to embed synodality firmly in the life and mission of the Church. **(CBCP News)**

Bishop warns synodality can lose 'soul' if it becomes mere process



Bishop Edwin Panergo of Boac presides over a Mass at the Chapel of the Most Blessed Sacrament at De La Salle University in Manila on Jan. 23, 2026, following a dialogue between bishops and major superiors. ROY LAGARDE

BISHOP Edwin Panergo said communion is the foundation of synodality, warning that the Church risks losing its "soul" if synodality becomes merely a program.

Speaking during a Mass after a dialogue between bishops and religious leaders, the bishop of Boac said the Gospel calls bishops to remember they are first invited, not self-appointed.

The Gospel shows the Church is founded on God's initiative, not human plans, he said.

"Jesus is the one who calls. Jesus is the one who invites," Panergo said in his homily at the Chapel of the Most Blessed Sacrament at De La Salle University in Manila on Jan. 23.

He said synodality must begin with prayer, listening and discernment, not with structures

or documents, adding that it is a response to a call, not something leaders invent or control.

"Synodality is not mainly about managing groups or processes. It is about walking with persons — day by day, face to face," said.

He said bishops and major superiors are entrusted not only with offices but with names, faces and stories.

The prelate, who was ordained to the episcopate in December 2025, said leaders must stay close to Christ, or synodality becomes empty activity.

"Before mission, there is presence. Before authority, there is relationship," Panergo said.

He also said the Church must accept diversity without forcing uniformity. "Unity in the Church does not come from uniformity," he said.

He noted the apostles came from different backgrounds and personalities and said synodality should hold differences in communion.

He urged bishops and the religious to return "back to the mountain" of prayer and discernment, and to renew the grace of their calling so the Church in the Philippines can truly become a synodal Church. **(CBCP News)**

Newly ordained bishop calls for protection of the unborn

By EARL JERALD ALPAY

A CATHOLIC bishop on Jan. 22 urged Filipinos to protect unborn children with compassion and support, warning that a modern "crisis of intimacy" fuels fear and painful decisions.

Speaking during Mass with fellow bishops at the National Shrine of St. Jude Thaddeus in Manila, Bishop Samuel Agcaracar called for a merciful defense of unborn children as the Church marked the Day of Prayer for the legal protection of unborn children.

"This day is not about arguing or condemning," said Agcaracar, who was just ordained bishop for the Diocese of San Jose in Nueva Ecija on Jan. 17. "It is about praying, listening, and allowing our hearts to be shaped

by compassion.

Citing St. John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae*, he said the Church must proclaim the sanctity of life "with love, mercy and hope," rather than judgment.

Agcaracar linked threats to unborn children to broken relationships and social isolation, saying technology and modern habits often replace real human encounter.

"One of the deep struggles of our time is a crisis of intimacy," he said, adding that when closeness is lost, "fear grows" and decisions become "even more detrimental."

He described unborn children as "the smallest and most vulnerable members of our human family," saying they



Bishop Samuel Agcaracar of San Jose, Nueva Ecija, celebrates Mass with members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) at the National Shrine of St. Jude Thaddeus in Manila, Jan. 22. ROY LAGARDE

"cannot speak for themselves, yet they are fully known and deeply loved by God."

Protecting life, he said, goes beyond laws and principles and requires real pastoral care.

"To defend life is not only to speak about laws or principles. It is a pastoral commitment," Agcaracar said. "It means walking with mothers and families, listening without judgment, and offering support where fear, loneliness and uncertainty are present."

Addressing devotees of St. Jude, known as the patron of hopeless causes, he said women facing crisis pregnancies

often feel abandoned and overwhelmed.

"What they need most is not condemnation, but presence—not rejection, but accompaniment," he said.

Agcaracar said the Church's mission to protect life is closely tied with synodality, or shared discernment, calling the rebuilding of trust and relationships a "missionary imperative" for the Church today.

"At the end of all this, there is one thing we can never compromise," he said. "And that is the creation of intimacies, communion and fraternity in our communities among us."

Bishop links social injustice to 'withered hands' in modern society



Bishop Dave Dean Capucac of the Prelature of Infanta presides over Mass with fellow bishops at the Cubao Cathedral on Jan. 21, 2026. CBCP NEWS

A CATHOLIC bishop on Jan. 21 delivered a sharp warning against corruption and social injustice, saying today's "withered hands" belong to those who steal from the public. Bishop Dave Dean Capucac of Infanta prelate said the Gospel story of Jesus healing a man's withered hand challenges Church leaders to confront systemic wrongdoing rather than hide behind tradition or institutional comfort.

"Many hands are withered today because stealing [of public funds] has become systemic," Capucac said during his homily during a Mass with fellow bishops at the Cubao Cathedral in Quezon City, on Jan. 21.

Referring directly to corruption, Capucac said stolen public funds leave deep moral and social wounds that demand repentance and healing, not silence or excuses from religious and civic leaders.

"I hope the hands of those who stole public money will wither," he said, adding that corruption damages both society and the moral character of those involved.

Capucac said healing, as shown in the Gospel, must address not only physical suffering but also the deeper social and spiritual causes that keep people trapped in poverty and exclusion.

"Healing the hand also means healing the heart," he said, stressing that injustice reflects a moral failure that requires conversion and concrete action.

The Mass concluded the second day of a three-day bishops' seminar at the Pope Pius XII Catholic Center in Manila, ahead of the bishops' 131st plenary assembly over the weekend.

The 59-year old prelate warned Church leaders against becoming detached administrators who focus on rules while ignoring suffering communities affected by hunger, inequality and abuse of power.

"Are we allowing fear of institutional norms to stifle the inherent call to radically love those in need?" Capucac asked, urging bishops to place compassion above rigid practice.

He also cautioned against relying on technology or systems to replace human responsibility, saying true leadership requires personal encounter and moral courage.

"AI can stimulate conversation. AI can stimulate intimacy, vulnerability, and empathy in language, but AI cannot be a shepherd with a heart," Capucac said, warning against leaders who act without genuine concern.

Capucac said the Church must actively confront injustice by standing with the marginalized, including indigenous peoples, whom he described as powerful witnesses to shared responsibility and moral clarity.

"Resources are not a privilege, but rather they should be shared as blessings meant for the sustenance of all," he said, calling on Church leaders to challenge corruption and inequality with decisive, compassionate action. **(Earl Jerald Alpay)**

Bishop urges humility, warns Church leaders against judging by appearances

A CATHOLIC bishop urged fellow Church leaders to practice humility and deeper discernment, warning against judging others by appearances.

Reflecting on the biblical story of David's anointing, Bishop Ronald Anthony Timoner of Pagadian said God's choices often surprise human expectations and challenge leaders to move beyond comfort and personal security.

"Outward appearances do not define people or determine their value in the Lord's plan of salvation," Timoner said in his homily, stressing that God looks beyond status, strength or reputation.

The Mass was held at the Minor Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in New Manila on Jan. 20, with bishops from across the country in attendance.

The liturgy marked the conclusion of the first day of a four-day bishops' seminar at the Pope Pius XII Catholic Center in Manila.

Timoner said the prophet Samuel initially relied on human standards when choosing among Jesse's sons, a mistake that revealed the limits of surface judgment.

"God does not judge by appearances but searches the innermost recesses of our hearts, and often the unlikely or ordinary to do the extraordinary things," he said, calling the lesson relevant to Church leadership today.

Timoner compared David's quiet life as a shepherd to the experience of bishops



Bishop Ronald Anthony Timoner of Pagadian and other bishops process to the altar during a Mass at the Minor Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in New Manila, Quezon City, on Jan. 20, 2026. ROY LAGARDE

suddenly called to greater responsibility, often without preparation or personal ambition.

"All of us will face the choice of whether to take the safe and comfortable route or trust the Lord and obey what He calls us to do," he said.

Addressing fellow bishops, Timoner said leaders lack the ability to fully see into a person's heart, making reliance on God's guidance even more necessary.

He urged leaders to seek the direction of the Holy Spirit rather than depend solely on visible skills, credentials or public image.

The bishop also challenged believers to focus on inner spiritual growth, saying God often works through ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes. **(Earl Jerald Alpay)**

IN THE FENCE OF HOPE

Mending the broken, together



BISHOP GERARDO A. ALMINAZA

AS the bishops of the Philippines gather once again in plenary assembly, we do so carrying the weight of a nation shaped by overlapping crises. Climate impacts continue to intensify. Many families work longer hours yet remain poor. Communities rebuild again and again, often under the same conditions that made them vulnerable in the first place. These realities are not new, but they press more urgently upon our discernment today.

Just days before this plenary session, from January 14 to 16, Caritas Philippines, together with faith-based and civic partners, convened the Hayuma Convergence: Mending the

Broken—Together, at the University of Santo Tomas.

Hayuma is a Visayan word that speaks of wonder and awe, but also of patient, communal work. It names what moves the heart and what sustains life. In this convergence, Hayuma became a shared language for integral ecology, human rights, the economy, and good governance—realities too often separated, yet deeply intertwined in the lived experience of our people.

The timing was not incidental. *Hayuma* unfolded as a space of listening, discernment, and commitment that now speaks directly to the questions before us as pastors.

Hayuma was not convened

to offer ready-made answers. It gathered workers, Church workers, civil society partners, and community representatives around a shared recognition: many of the wounds borne by our people have become familiar. Economic insecurity, ecological harm, and failures of governance persist not because they are unknown, but because they are often managed rather than confronted.

The convergence unfolded through three movements.

The first, *Tinig-Tawag*, centered on listening—listening to the voice of God and to the voice of the people, especially those who carry the heaviest burdens. Participants named the brokenness of our social

reality: worsening climate impacts, economic hardship, corruption, political division, and a culture of impunity. These were not treated as isolated problems, but as signs of deeper conditions that have been allowed to persist.

The second movement, *Tawid-Tanaw*, asked what kind of crossing is required if we are to move from these realities toward a more just and humane future. Hope emerged in the possibility of stronger unity across Church communities, labor groups, civil society, youth, and people's organizations, and in education and formation rooted in the common good. At the same

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CBCP MONITOR

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Editorial

Charting a synodal path for the church mission

THE first Extraordinary Consistory of Pope Leo XIV's pontificate held at the Vatican last January 7-8, 2026 may foretell, subtly as it may seem, of the unfolding ecclesial journey that Catholic Church prefer to thread amid the world's contemporary history.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at the World Economic Forum in Davos a few days ago calls the present order of things a "rupture" or "the end of a pleasant fiction and the beginning of a harsh reality, where geopolitics, where large, main power, geopolitics, is submitted to no limits, no constrains". That, of course, is disputable. But perhaps may just be a harsher way of defining present world realities.

In the Philippines where massive corruption, like there has never been in local history, has numbed both the governors

and the governed and things go as usual, with neither shame nor remorse. At the Quirino Grandstand in Manila on the occasion of the annual Traslacion of the Black Nazarene, Balanga Bishop Rufino Sescon in his homily criticized those who refuse to relinquish authority even when wrongdoing is exposed and the poor continue to suffer. "There are those today who refuse to step down even when they are wrong and exposed, even when the people suffer...Step down freely, out of mercy and love," he said.

Hereabouts, realities though successfully buried in the manipulated narratives of political dynasties may actually be as devastatingly violent as those in Gaza or Ukraine—or even the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of US President Donald Trump.

But then again nobody shudders because, looking around, all things seem very regular.

Back to Mark Carney. The world applauded when in the same forum he said, "I would like to tell you that other countries, especially intermediate powers like Canada, are not powerless. They have the capacity to build a new order that encompasses our values, such as respect for human rights, sustainable development, solidarity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the various states. The power of the less power starts with honesty."

Truth to tell, it is so close to the same values that Christians hold on to, even and especially so in the face of deserts and storms.

Cardinal Timothy Radcliff who rendered a meditation to the Cardinal earlier at the Consistory, spoke of times of "terrible storms" that are marked by "growing

violence, from armed crime of war," by the widening divide between the rich and poor, by progressive crumbling of the global order born after the Second World War, and the pervasive artificial intelligence whose effects the world seem very unprepared. In the face of these unfolding realities he says: "If we are not already uneasy, we should be," we cannot feel "alone, worn down, exhausted.. or shaken by the storms of sexual abuse and ideological divisions" but "we must not be afraid" because "Jesus watches over us and will draw nearer to us than ever... He calls us to sail through these storms and to face them with truth and courage, without timidly waiting on the shore. If we do this in this Consistory, we will see him coming towards us. If, on the other hand, we remain

hidden on the shore, we will not him."

One would like to think that it is in the midst of these realities that the Catholic Church is charting a synodal path for tomorrow—one that is characterized by synodality and mission, the overarching themes of the Extraordinary Consistory. Drawn from the wellsprings of the late Pope Francis, the Pope Leo XIV told the gathered 170 Cardinals his conviction that "synodality is the path God expects of the Church in the third millennium," which should be missionary that looks beyond itself especially in her primary work of proclaiming the Gospel.

Synodality and mission may not be as loud as the lexicon of technocrats, but it is one that runs along path of the Christian hope that does not disappoint as history of two thousand years will bear.*

AND THAT'S THE TRUTH

Kiko and Lean



TERESA R. TUNAY, OCDS

IN Philippines my Philippines, Congress is like a grand theater where microphones are plentiful but patience is scarce. The "plays" here can amuse you, annoy or delight you, make you feel stupid for watching, make you think the actors are stupid for acting—but they will not leave you untouched. And in this theater, two freshman congressmen have recently discovered what every rookie eventually learns: legislation is slow, but grandstanding is instant.

Enter Leandro "Lean" Leviste and Francisco "Kiko" Barzaga, both new to the chamber and, judging by the decibel level of their appearances, very eager to make sure the chamber—and the public—knows it.

Lean comes on like a well-rehearsed TED Talk in a barong—measured tone, earnest gaze, and the unmistakable air of someone who believes Congress is still primarily a college forum for ideas, an amphitheater for Davids to put down Goliaths. He first caught

the limelight when he exposed an attempted bribery (which of course he rejected), and the public was quick to hail him as a hero of sorts. It helped that he had that look of wide-eyed innocence about him, but his actions related to his second "expose"—the so-called Cabral files—have led many to question if he is at all that innocent. Otherwise, why is he acting as he's acting?

Kiko, on the other hand, favors a more kinetic approach. Why merely speak when you can perform? His style suggests that Congress is not just a legislative body but a live-action drama, where passion must be projected to the last row, and indignation is best served hot, loud, and spiced with a little pa-cutesie: meow-meowing to the camera to the delight of his fans. On the floor he's like a "kanto boy" in coat and tie; in social media he's just as "astig". He got suspended for 60 days for conduct unbecoming a public servant—dapat lang!

Let me digress a bit: five of

his colleagues objected to that suspension, saying it was too harsh a penalty for such light offenses. Obviously, those objectors are not future-oriented, unable to see the possible effect that Barzaga's "kabastusan" could create in young minds.

This reminds me of a practice in the Philippine countryside which illustrates the wisdom and the justice in considering the future when it comes to penalties. If you run over a hen, you don't just pay its owner the market value of that fowl—you are charged much more, because you must pay as well for the eggs she could have laid.

Public servants are supposed to embody a sense of propriety and delicadeza precisely because their behavior sets the tone for the community. When a lawmaker publicly behaves in ways that demean the dignity of the office, the damage is not merely personal—it is institutional and intergenerational. Does Kiko care at all for the

impressionable minds in his audience? If you go light on him today, expect to see countless Kiko clones tomorrow.

Back to Kiko and Lean. Both men—or boys—seem to believe that visibility equals velocity. They share the same rookie instinct: both don't want to wait to be noticed. They are congressmen but instead of focusing on lawmaking they're behaving like rabble rousers. Maybe they think that creating bills may take years, while press conferences and viral clips take minutes.

Okay, maybe they mean well, they may even be driven by youthful idealism, young as they are, but one can't help thinking these guys are grandstanding. To be fair, grandstanding is practically a rite of passage. Congress all over the world has always been a cross between a lawmaking body and an audition stage. The difference is that Lean and Kiko are auditioning

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PUBLIC THEOLOGY

Our dancing God: Sinulog beyond tourism



FR. DANIEL FRANKLIN E. PILARIO, C.M.

BEFORE Sinulog was transformed into a touristic event in the 1980s, as it is in Cebu today, it was a prayer dance practiced by young and old, women and men, children and adults. Not so much on streets for people to see, nor with costumes for the participants to win, but in churches for God to hear.

In my childhood, I have been dancing together with my Lola in the church and chapels just on drum beats during the feast of Santo Niño. That was also Sinulog, a prayer-dance.

I once asked her why do we have to dance in front of the child Jesus. Her answer was simple: *"Malipay baya ang bata kon imong sayawan; mao pod na kang Jesus."* (To make a child happy, you have to dance; it is the same with the child Jesus).

That was simple enough for my young mind to understand. When a child cries, the mother has to take him and dances him around. When a child is happy, she dances on her

own or at the prodding of her parents.

Our God is a happy God. Our God is a child God, a dancing God.

Dance is so much a part of our cultures. To celebrate, we need to sing, sway and dance. So with worship. We can only worship God with our bodies.

Name any community celebration in the Philippines—singing and dancing is always significant part: Karakol in Luzon, Ati-atihan in Panay, Kaamulan in Bukidnon, Pintaflores in Negros, Pantomina in Bikol. It is thus automatic for us to dance when we want to celebrate.

What you see in the touristic Sinulog is a show, a performance in front of an audience. In fact, it is a contest which winds up with a Mardi-Gras like celebration at the end of the day.

What is not shown, however, what is missing in the touristic event is the "Sinulog as prayer" which is danced in churches by ordinary people, by

all people, young and old alike. After the Saturday procession at the Basilica, people stay for sometime, and dance to the song Sinulog song. I have joined these prayer-dance many times in my life.

One is just immersed among dancing bodies, praying bodies. People shout: "Pit senior, kang Mama kini. Pit senior, kang Papa kini." As I danced, I can sense people crying as they shout their supplication. Dancing couples hold each other's hand in prayer. Young people hold their statues and dances with them. You can only imagine what their prayers are deep in their hearts. I can feel with them.

By the gate, old women sell their candles. Before lighting them for you, they ask you for your intentions, and pray-dance those desires in front of the Santo Niño. This does not just happen on the feast day. They are there every day during the significant occasions of your life. They wait for you when you want to

light a candle and say a prayer. They will dance it for you. Their prayer-dance is also called "Sinulog".

What you see in the Basilica is replicated in small chapels and churches in Cebu and elsewhere. I can still remember in my childhood when everyone dances to the distinctive drum beats (before the Sinulog song was composed and sound systems were not yet in place). It still continues until today. Either before the Mass or after the Mass, when the drums start, people start to dance and pray.

Some people want to prohibit the body and its movements within worship. Dancing should be prohibited in the churches, they say. But did not King David dance "with all his might while wearing a priestly garment" in front of the ark of Covenant? (2 Sam 6: 14-22).

For the "liturgical police" among us, let me quote a document on

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QUIET RESONANCE

Proficient with budget, deficient in accomplishment



FR. CYRAIN CABUEÑAS

THE new year in the Philippines is almost always welcomed with a bang: firecrackers, horns, karaoke that refuses to retire, and enough noise to convince us that something truly new has arrived. This year, the bang echoed not only in the streets but also in the halls of power. Barely had the confetti settled when President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed the 2026 national budget into law. Judging from the televised scenes, one might have thought Alex Eala had just won a tennis match or Gilas Pilipinas finally won a championship.

Earlier festivities at the House of Representatives and the Senate looked less like sober deliberations and more like victory parties. There were handshakes, smiles, congratulatory remarks, and the unmistakable glow of self-congratulation. Some lawmakers even declared it the cleanest and most transparent budget in recent memory also, not coincidentally, the largest in Philippine history. Watching from afar, Juan de la Cruz

could only sigh: "Sana all."

The President's own signing ceremony was more restrained, and to his credit, hesitated suspicion and skepticism from the Madlang Pipol. So he promised fiscal discipline. He assured taxpayers that their hard-earned money would not end up in corrupt pockets. He spoke of lessons learned, of past failures, of the need to ensure that every peso goes to the right projects and to the genuine needs of the people. He emphasized that the P6.79-trillion budget bars elected officials from directly handling aid and would not be used for political patronage.

All good. All proper. All too familiar. Because the past, unfortunately, fell short. It was not that long ago when flood-control projects, supposedly built to protect the poor, collapsed faster than campaign promises. What they exposed was not just shoddy engineering but a system where greedy contractors and approving officials worked in admirable harmony. Before the year even

ended, the Bureau of Internal Revenue found itself splashed across editorial pages, its credibility questioned, its integrity debated. Senators spoke openly of revenue officers and regional directors allegedly keeping lion's shares of collections, leaving crumbs for the national coffers. Apparently, even taxes have leakages.

If our officials read Scripture beyond ceremonial quotations, they might recall why Jesus was particularly sharp with tax collectors. It was not because they were bad at Math. It was because they were very good at making numbers work, for themselves.

Jesus once observed, with unsettling clarity, that "the children of this world are more prudent in their generation than the children of light." Few Gospel lines describe our political culture better. Our leaders are extraordinarily prudent when it comes to budgets, meticulous in proposing them, masterful in reallocating them, lightning-fast in identifying exactly

where to insert themselves. If only the same urgency applied to delivering classrooms, hospitals, irrigation systems, and roads that survive more than one rainy season.

Promises to constituents, however, seem stuck in traffic, somewhere between the groundbreaking ceremony and the ribbon-cutting. Both events, of course, are always well catered. I know this because, as a priest, I have attended some myself. The food is usually excellent. The speeches are longer than the roads being inaugurated. The tarpaulins are sturdier than the bridges. And the projects, like the lechon, are often gone long before the people actually enjoy them.

And so we repeat the ritual. Every budget season, every election cycle, we push the stone uphill, convinced once again that this time it will stay there. Like Sisyphus, we strain under the weight of dynasties, padded appropriations,

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VIVAT!

The Knights and Jubilee 2025 audience Pope Leo XIV



RENE V. SARMIENTO

OCTOBER 3-7, 2025 marked an important milestone in the life of centuries-old Knights of Columbus. Within full-packed four-day period, the Board of Directors of the organization led by Supreme Knight Patrick E. Kelly, accompanied by their spouses and several family members, undertook a Jubilee 2025 Pilgrimage of Rome to celebrate the timeless value and message of hope, forgiveness, and renewal. The Jubilee's theme "Pilgrims of Hope" emphasized the journey of faith and the role of hope that does not disappoint in facing life's challenges.

The Pilgrimage was punctuated with momentous activities which included guided tour to Churches and Basilicas, to catacombs, to a museum, and to a garden. Churches and Basilicas that were visited were the Basilica de Sant' Agostino, Basilica San Luigi dei Francesi,

Basilica Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Church of Gesu (with Mass), Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (with Mass), Papal Basilica of St. Peter (with Mass at the Altar of the Chair of St. Peter), Papal Archbasilica of St. John Lateran (with Mass), and Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major (with Mass). Likewise, visited were the San Sebastian Catacombs, the Vatican Museum, and the Vatican Gardens.

One treasured highlight of the Pilgrimage was the Audience with Pope Leo XIV at the Consistory Hall, Apostolic Palace, Vatican. In his Address, he welcomed all the members of the Board of Directors as well as their families, expressed gratitude to the Knights of Columbus for its generosity in the first comprehensive restoration of Bernini's 1634 Baldacchino, in the renewal of the Apse of the Basilica (Bernini's beautiful bronze

monument protecting the Cathedral of St. Peter), and in the support to the charitable work of the Roman Pontiff in various ways, including through the Vicarius Christi Fund, which allows him to be in solidarity with the poor and most vulnerable throughout the world.

Pope Leo XIV also expressed his appreciation to the initiatives undertaken by local Councils in order to bring compassion and love of the Lord into the local communities, including efforts to uphold the sanctity of human life in all of its stages, to assist victims of war and natural disasters, and to support priestly vocations.

Two words from the Pope's Address resonate with the Knights of Columbus—MISSION and HOPE. The theme of the 142nd Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus held at Quebec City, Canada in 2024

was "ON MISSION" and the theme of the 143rd Supreme Convention held at Washington, D.C. in 2025 was "HERALDS OF HOPE". The themes reflect the missionary dimension of Christian discipleship, guided by the prophetic vision of our founder Blessed Michael McGivney, and urge each knight to look for signs of hope in the world and to work for peace and justice.

To Filipino Knights, the Address of Pope Leo XIV is both an encouragement and a challenge to help and to assist the broken and beaten, the overwhelmed and overpowered by life's painful realities, all Knights equipped with the body and blood of Jesus Christ received in the Holy Mass. In the 3rd century, St. Augustine said, "If you receive the Eucharist well, you are what you eat ... we become what we receive."*

FAITH AND JUSTICE

Why nations fail



FR. EMMANUEL ALFONSO, SJ

THAT is the title of a classic book written by economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson. It goes with a subtitle: "The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty." The book has become a required textbook in politics and economics in many universities such as the Ateneo de Manila University. Acemoglu was professor at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, while Robinson taught at the equally famous Harvard University. They would end up winning the Nobel Peace Prize for Economic Sciences in 2024. Their magnum opus comes to mind with all the talk going around the intellectual circles of Manila that given the massive corruption in the country, the Philippines would soon be a "failed state."

In particular, viral is a piece supposedly written by Captain Med Velasco, with the intriguing title, "The Philippines: soon a failed-state?" In this, he argues that corruption seems to have

been accepted already by the majority. He names what he calls six wounds of the Filipino psyche in the face of the pervasive, persistent and pernicious corruption in government and society. It starts with the lowering of expectations for public service and ends with the normalizing of corruption in society. He ends by challenging his readers not to resign or give in to this societal malaise. What is needed, he says, is a "psychological revolution."

Although the piece is quite inspiring, it doesn't give much, however, in terms of an in-depth analysis of the origins or roots of the country's corruption, as well as, what can be done, moving forward. Certainly, the problem and its solution lie beyond Filipino psychology. More to the point, they have everything to do with structures or institutions, and the powers or vested interests that prop these up. We must therefore consult our two academicians who

were among the first ones who popularized the discussion on why or how nations fail.

In "Why Nations Fail," Acemoglu and Robinson first addressed the common thinking surrounding this problem that they would debunk. The first one is geography which purports that nations develop or fail to develop depending on their physical location, which includes the climate they enjoy. There is a common observation for example that temperate countries like those in North America and Europe achieve economic progress more than their counterparts in tropical regions like Asia or Africa. But Acemoglu and Robinson would disprove this theory offering neighboring countries with similar natural conditions but go in opposite directions in terms of economic development, like North Korea and South Korea or North America and South America.

A second misguided theory is culture. Progress and development

are about the values systems, traditions, customs, belief, and world view of countries. It is for example put forward again and again that the Philippines may be poor and corrupt because of the predominance of the Catholic faith in the country. Our scholars once again debunk this argument using as proof countries with very similar cultures but very different in their economic situations, like, again, North Korea and South Korea.

Finally, there is the argument that nations simply fail because of ignorance, that is, they just don't have the technical know-how for economic success. And the examples that readily come to mind are countries in Africa and Latin America that have long been mired in centuries of poverty and underdevelopment. But again, Acemoglu and Robinson write that it is not for lack of enlightened and educated leaders that these

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AGENDA from A1

and a follow-up discussion on transparency and accountability.

On Jan. 22, an onboarding seminar for chairmen and executive secretaries of the CBCP's various commissions, committees and offices was also held.

Garcera, who was elected CBCP president in July 2025, said he accepted the responsibility amid national challenges and growing demands on Church leadership.

The archbishop recalled surviving a severe COVID-19 illness and said his election felt like a renewed gift of life and service.

"With gratitude to the Good Shepherd, I accept this mandate

to serve," Garcera said, referring to both his archdiocese and the bishops' conference.

He thanked fellow bishops for their trust and praised his predecessor, Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, for "courageous and faithful leadership."

Looking ahead to the 2028 ecclesial assembly in Rome and the Philippine presidential election the same year, Garcera said the Church must exercise "pastoral vigilance and moral clarity."

"The presidency of the CBCP is not about one person, but about walking together in mission," he said.*

MIGRANT WORKERS from A1



Pope Leo XIV greets visitors and pilgrims from the popemobile as he rides around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience July 30, 2025. GOI VILLEGAS

church unity and care for overseas Filipino workers during their 131st plenary assembly.

In a message sent to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, the pope prayed that the Holy Spirit guide their discussions.

The message was read to the bishops at the opening of their meeting Saturday morning, Jan. 24, by Archbishop Charles Brown, apostolic nuncio to the Philippines.

The bishops are meeting in Manila until Jan. 26 to discuss church structure, synodal reforms, and pastoral programs for millions of Filipinos working abroad.

The pope said he trusts their talks will help "promote a unity among the faithful" across dioceses and communities.

He added that this unity should

reflect "the inner life of love of the Holy Trinity" in church life.

The message highlighted overseas Filipinos, saying believers should "take care of one another" and share gifts to serve the wider church.

The greetings were delivered by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, on behalf of the pope.

The pope also entrusted the bishops and their people to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

Parolin said the apostolic blessing is offered as "a pledge of communion and peace in the Lord."

Millions of Filipinos work overseas, making the church's call for unity and care a key concern for families nationwide and parishes worldwide today. (CBCP News)

PUBLIC THEOLOGY from A5

Catholic liturgy:

"Among some peoples, singing is instinctively accompanied by hand-clapping, rhythmic swaying and dance movements on the part of the participants. Such forms of external expression can have a place in the liturgical actions of these peoples on condition that they are always the expression of true communal prayer of adoration, praise, offering and supplication, and not

simply a performance." (Instruction: Inculturation of the Roman Liturgy, No. 42).

Our God is a happy God, a God of joy. Our God is a child God. Our God is a dancing God.

I think some Christians have become too much of an "adult" that they could no longer smile and cry, wave and sway, dance and pray at the same time.

Pit Senyor, sa mga "tigulang" kini!*

QUIET RESONANCE from A5

recycled platforms, and speeches that sound fresh only because the microphone is new. And every time, the stone rolls back down flattening trust, crushing hope, and reminding ordinary Filipinos that gravity, much like politics, tends to favor those only on top.

As a Filipino priest and occasional journalist, I cannot pretend surprise. I have seen this drama before. I have watched communities wait years for projects completed on paper, in record time. I have blessed chapels beside roads that never quite made it past the proposal stage. Experience, as they say, is an excellent teacher. Unfortunately, it also enjoys repeating the lesson.

And where is the Church in all this? It would be unfair to say we have been entirely silent. We remember Cardinal Sin, who believed that faith had public consequences. We remember the so-called Magnificent Seven bishops: Claver, Escaler, Labayan, Fortich, Varela, Perez, and Quevedo, men who understood that shepherds are sometimes called not only to comfort sheep but also to confront wolves.

There are still priests and bishops today who carry that fire, who insist that social concern is not an optional appendix to the Gospel. But it is also true that many of us have grown quieter. Some out of fear. Some out of exhaustion. Some out of convenience. After all, it is easier to bless inaugurations than to question allocations. Easier to sprinkle holy water than to ask where the water system went. Easier to pray over banquets than to ask who paid for them.

And yet, hope stubbornly refuses to die. Hope, as Alexander Pope once wrote, "springs eternal." It is not naive optimism. It is not pretending everything is fine. It is the stubborn decision to believe that accountability is not outdated, that truth still matters, and that Filipinos deserve more than well-crafted budgets and well-rehearsed excuses.

In a country where prudence is often used for self-preservation, perhaps the real challenge for the children of light is to be just as clever, but this time, for the common good.

Less applause. Fewer fireworks. More engagement.*

AND THAT'S THE TRUTH from A4

not just for their colleagues, but for algorithms. I imagine them rehearsing their lines, with their staff hovering nearby, hissing, "Sir, that line will trend!"

Their styles and approach to grandstanding may be worlds apart but they seem to have something in common: ambition. (Yes, I'm being "judgmental". But I'm only judging the image they're projecting, not their person. They're exposing themselves in media, they'll be judged through the lenses of media). Congress has always attracted ambition; what is unusual today is not ambition itself, but how early it now introduces itself—fully dressed, mic'd up, and ready for prime time.

Both Kiko and Lean are highly visible, and both are apparently convinced that the first order of business is not quiet mastery of the legislative process but early brand definition.

Lean presents himself as the thoughtful reformist-in-training: often articulate, composed, and sounding like the reasonable adult in the room—as long as no one ruffles his feathers. His interventions feel less like legislative participation and more like positioning statements—carefully crafted to signal national leadership qualities rather than district-level concerns. I get the impression that each appearance is auditioning not only for colleagues, but for some future

debate stage with a much larger audience. (After all, didn't Digong once flatter him by referring to him as a future president? The seed of ambition, planted).

Kiko's approach suggests that leadership is best established through intensity—strong words, strong emotions, "masa" appeal, and the urgency of someone determined not to be overlooked. He'll say what he wants to say, when and how to say it, bully whom he fancies, and never mind about GMRC (good manners and right conduct). He has also revealed his plan to file an impeachment complaint against the President. This to me sounds more like strategy—such a bold move by a newbie congressman confers instant national visibility, regardless of whether the case proceeds. When a newcomer leaps immediately to the highest possible confrontation, it is often read not as courage alone, but as pre-mature self-positioning—a signal that the future being imagined is larger than the office currently held.

Where Lean projects "presidential calm," Kiko projects "presidential fire." Different styles, same subtext: "Notice me now, remember me later." What unites them is not ideology, but timing. This early in their congressional careers, both appear less focused on the slow, unglamorous work of legislation and more on keeping a high profile. Committee diligence

does not trend. Amendments do not go viral. But a well-timed speech—especially one that flatters public frustration—travels fast and ages well for future campaign reels.

To seasoned observers, their behavior reads less like youthful enthusiasm and more like pre-positioning. The House floor becomes a rehearsal space, each appearance a subtle reminder that these young men are thinking far beyond their current mandates. District representation becomes secondary to national recognizability; governance, a backdrop to ambition.

Is ambition a sin in politics? Of course, no! The concern arises when ambition outruns responsibility—when the performance of leadership substitutes for the practice of it. The danger is not that these freshmen dream big, but that they may skip the necessary apprenticeship that turns aspiration into competence.

Perhaps, with time, Lean will loosen his tie, and Kiko will lower his volume, and both greenhorns will allow Congress to shape them more than they shape their image. Perhaps both will learn that the dull art of compromise is where actual change happens. Until then, the House floor remains well-lit, the microphones are on, and the freshmen, determined not to waste their moment, make sure the cameras are rolling. And that's the truth.*

IN THE FENCE OF HOPE from A4

time, there was honesty about limits: entrenched mentalities, fear of change, fragmented commitments, spiritual blind spots, and persistent corruption. Discernment here was neither naïve nor cynical. It recognized that transformation requires respect and patience for processes to enable both structural change and interior conversion.

Within this movement, I reflected on *Dilexi Te*, the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Leo XIV on Love for the Poor (October 4, 2025) returning to love as the place where faith begins and the measure of its credibility. Love cannot remain abstract or sentimental. It resists becoming familiar with suffering and injustice. It refuses indifference. It does not stop at compassion, but presses toward transformation and systemic change. Love becomes credible when it organizes itself into communities of resistance and hope and refuses to accept injustice as normal.

The third movement, *Tapak-Tindig at Tipan*, moved decisively toward practice. Participants named concrete directions across ecology, economy, governance, and synodality: advancing policies that protect life and creation; strengthening formation inspired by Laudato Si'; promoting just wages and dignified work; deepening people's participation

in governance; and challenging structures that perpetuate inequality and exclusion. Synodality was understood not as a concept, but as a way of acting—expanding the tent, sustaining collaboration across sectors, and grounding joint efforts in accountability, justice, and solidarity.

This practical orientation resonates with the wider journey of ecological conversion in the Philippine Church. Over the years, pastoral teaching has been translated into concrete mechanisms: ecology desks in dioceses and parishes, their growth into integral ecology ministries, and coordinated initiatives under the Laudato Si' Convergence within the church and civil society. These reflect a desire to embed care for our common home within the Church's structures, not to treat it as a peripheral concern.

At the same time, there was candor about unfinished work. Gaps remain between commitments and consistent implementation. Questions of coherence persist, including how moral teaching is reflected in financial practice and institutional priorities. The need for stronger accountability and sustained accompaniment was clearly named.

In this light, *Hayuma* becomes

more than an event. It becomes a hinge. It gathers the Church's ecological and social journey, tests it against the lived realities of workers and communities, and insists that ecology, economy, and governance must be held together if the Church is to accompany the poor with credibility. Labor was not treated as an audience, but recognized as a partner. This widening of the tent is not ornamental; it is a sign of a Church choosing participation and shared responsibility.

Hayuma culminated in a shared *Tipan*, a covenant named by the participants themselves: daring to love, resisting tolerated evils, and weaving collective action. This is not a slogan, but a direction of travel.

As we discern the path forward in the CBCP plenary assembly, the invitation is clear: Ecological conversion cannot remain at the level of concern. Accompaniment of the poor cannot remain reactive. Hope is found in the patient work of mending what has been broken together—through listening that becomes discernment, discernment that becomes commitment, and commitment that becomes sustained action.

May we continue to become a Church that dares to love, resists tolerated evils, and patiently mends what has been broken, together.*

FAITH AND JUSTICE from A5

countries are poor. In fact, this may even be the reason why these countries are actually poor, and so, we come to the exciting part.

Wealthy countries, according to Acemoglu and Robinson, have achieved their success simply because of inclusive economic structures and institutions. When people are allowed or encouraged to participate in the economy through incentives and a levelled playing field, there is more economic activity and innovation, and therefore development, for the country. The opposite of this is having extractive structures and institutions which "extract" or squeeze the countries resources for only a few. It can be for the enrichment of the King or a small wealthy class. This then is the formula for economic growth. But why then is this not happening to many countries like the Philippines? Politics is the answer, plain and simple. Inclusive economic structures, according to Acemoglu

and Robinson, depend on inclusive political structures and institutions, as opposed to extractive political structures and institutions that only prop up extractive economic structures and institutions. And this is the real story behind the poverty and inequality in the world today. The poor countries or failed nations of today would show of a long history where political power has been in the hands of a few who rule not in favor of the many but their own interest. There were the Colonial rulers during the 18th and 19th centuries that exploited nations including ours. Then after independence, power became the monopoly of local dictators. Now, it is a small elite class that controls the power in many of these underdeveloped countries. It is they that have been the obstacle to real equitable and inclusive economic development. It is they that must suffer the blame and brunt of these country's economic underdevelopment.

Following this in-depth

analysis of these Nobel Peace Prize winners, it is clear what our country needs to do. More than psyching ourselves up for the fight against corruption, we must pursue the setting up of the needed economic and political structures that would wrest away this country's fate from a few families. An anti-political dynasty law would certainly be in the purview of the minds of Acemoglu and Robinson. A final point. The two also wrote about "critical junctures" in the history of countries that can trigger "creative destructions," that is, events that can lead to real progress in behalf of the many, if the many seize these once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Independence from colonial rulers in African countries or the death of the dictator Mao in China provided such junctures. We could have missed the juncture that was EDSA in 1986. But the corruption crisis we now face may be providing us another creative opportunity.*



Devotees try to get close to the glass-encased image of Jesus Nazareno during the annual Traslacion in Manila Jan. 9, 2026. **EARL JERALD ALPAY**

Albay missionary priests urge officials to fix unsafe roads, water shortages



A 2025 file photo shows a muddy road in Brgy. Caracaran on Batan Island in Rapu-Rapu, Albay. **DZGB VIA BANTAY PROJECT ALBAY**

CATHOLIC missionary priests serving island parishes in Albay urged officials to act on landslides, water shortages and unsafe roads hurting daily life.

In a statement, priests from the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity (SOLT) serving parishes in Rapu-Rapu, Cagraray, Batan and San Miguel, including Bonga and Badian, said unfinished road projects worsened flooding, access and safety.

"Development should have provided ease in life but instead contributed to their misery and difficulties," they said, adding that much of the suffering is "rooted not in nature alone but in the unmitigated greed of a few."

They said development brought

hardship, blaming poor planning and greed that left low villages exposed to floods and neglected.

Priests said they see parents carrying children, families buying water, farmers losing produce, and students risking injury on bad roads.

"What was once a manageable daily routine has now become a painful struggle," the statement said.

The priests asked for clear project updates, quick repairs, safe completion, water source repair, and honest talks with communities.

They said their call is moral, not political, and urged leaders to act fast.

"Our communities deserve roads that connect, not endanger; infrastructures that uplifts, not burdens; and leadership that acts with urgency, integrity, and genuine concern for the people," the priests said.

They pledged to continue accompanying their parishioners but said the situation now demands decisive action.

"Their cry for safety, dignity and relief must be heard clearly and acted upon without hesitation," the statement said. **(Natalie Quimlat / CBCP News)**

Dumaguete bishop urges action after deadly Negros Oriental shooting

BISHOP Julito Cortes of Dumaguete called on local authorities to take "decisive steps" against bar establishments he said degrade "human values" following a shooting that killed four people in Negros Oriental.

Cortes issued the statement Tuesday after a shooting in Sibulan town on Jan. 9 that killed a female bar worker and three police officers. The suspect, also a police officer, is in custody.

He said the "painful event" was a stark reminder of the dangers posed by such establishments to "the dignity of persons and the moral fabric of communities."

The bishop said the establishments contribute to the "degradation of human values and the objectification of persons."

He urged authorities to promote

"wholesome and upright forms of recreation and livelihood."

The bishop expressed his deep condolences to the victims' families, offering prayers for the bereaved.

"With profound sorrow, we in the Diocese of Dumaguete mourn the tragic loss of four invaluable lives in this violent shooting," Cortes said, as he expressed condolences to the victims' families and offered prayers for the bereaved.

Cortes also called on authorities to ensure justice, prayed for the perpetrator, and urged appropriate psychological and mental health support for law enforcers and public servants so they may "serve with moral clarity." **(Ryan Christopher J. Sorote / CBCP News)**

authority in the Church is not meant to replace Christ's authority but to amplify it.

"We are servants... not called to supplant the authority of Jesus, but to make the authority of Jesus shine," he said, warning that a bishop who cannot empathize with the weak risks usurping Christ's authority.

Tagle urged the new bishop to embrace weakness as a source of strength, echoing St. Paul's message that where he is weak, Christ's power rests on him.

He also emphasized the universal nature of the Church's mission, noting that the Gospel is meant for all nations, not for a preferred tribe or social class.

"So, the bishop works with all the clergy, the laity, the religious, the poor, the neglected, the despised, sinners, people of all ranks and all nations," he said. **(CBCP News)**

Quiapo Church to evaluate 'Traslacion' after record breaking procession

QUIAPO Church officials will conduct an immediate evaluation of the annual procession of the image of Jesus Nazareno, with possible changes eyed to improve safety and crowd control.

Fr. Robert Arellano, spokesman for Traslacion 2026, said organizers are recording lessons from this year's longest and biggest procession in the feast's history to help plan future events.

"We will conduct an immediate evaluation. Each year is a new experience, and what we learn now will guide future Traslacion celebrations," Arellano said.

He said any changes would follow careful study, not quick decisions, because of the size and complexity of the religious event.

Arellano said it is too early to name specific changes, but organizers may review the design and handling of the andas or carriage of the revered icon of cross-bearing Jesus Christ,

"Personally, there may be changes to the andas, but we really need to have a deep study regarding this," he said, citing its impact on crowd movement.

He said changes to the andas could help crowd movement, a long-standing concern during the massive procession through Manila streets.

Organizers are considering whether to shorten the Traslacion route, though Arellano said this would require strong data.

"Any major change like the route

must be supported by relevant data and information," he said, calling it a serious decision.

He said the Quiapo Church works with local government, police and other agencies to decide changes and protect public safety.

The andas arrived at Quiapo Church at 10:50 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 10, nearly 31 hours after it left Quirino Grandstand at 4 a.m. Friday.

The 2026 Feast of Jesus Nazareno was historic for both the longest Traslacion and the largest crowd, drawing more than nine million devotees.

Authorities said the procession also left four people dead, with about 1,700 others needing medical care for injuries and exhaustion. **(CBCP News)**

Cebu archdiocese offers Masses for landfill tragedy victims

ALL Masses in the Archdiocese of Cebu on Jan. 16 were offered for victims of a deadly landfill collapse.

Cebu Archbishop Alberto Uy urged the faithful to continue praying for those affected by the tragedy, including the injured and those once reported missing.

"Let us unite in prayer for our brothers and sisters affected by the landslide," Uy said. "May the Lord grant eternal rest to those who have died and comfort to those who mourn."

The Cebu City government declared Jan. 16 a Day of Mourning following the collapse at the Prime Waste Solutions Cebu landfill in Barangay Binaliw on Jan. 8.

Authorities said all workers initially reported missing were later accounted for. The body of the last missing worker was retrieved Sunday, Jan. 18, bringing the death toll to 36.



Archbishop Alberto Uy, with Cebu Caritas Inc., visits the landfill landslide site in Barangay Binaliw, Cebu City, on Jan. 15, 2026, and offers a Mass for the eternal repose of those who died in the tragedy. **ARCHDIOCESE OF CEBU**

Uy visited the landfill site on Jan. 15, where he offered a Mass for the eternal repose of those who died.

He also prayed for strength, comfort and hope for grieving families and others affected by the disaster.

After the Mass, the archbishop led the distribution of relief goods to survivors, expressing the Church's solidarity with them during their time of mourning. **(CBCP News)**

EVANGELIZATION from A1



Archbishop Rex Andrew Alarcon of Caceres, ECSC chairman

leaders to understand its implications.

"We have already reached the moon and beyond. Boundaries have collapsed. Covid, while it has challenged science, pushed us into the digital world. And we face a vast new mission territory," Alarcon said.

He said bishops need to be equipped with both technical awareness and ethical grounding, particularly

in light of the Vatican document *Antiqua et Nova*, which examines the relationship between artificial and human intelligence.

Human dignity at the center

Alarcon warned that technological progress without moral reflection risked undermining human dignity, recalling earlier debates on bioethics and scientific advancement.

He also cited the growing concern among theologians and ethicists that AI may reshape human self-understanding if left unchecked.

Alarcon and Lopez stressed that evangelization in the digital age must remain grounded in personal encounter, empathy, and moral responsibility.

Lopez concluded by reminding participants that technology must never replace the Church's core mission.

"We do not need more technology," he said. "We need more humanity." **(Felipe Salvosa II / CBCP News)**

CHURCH MOVEMENTS from A1

a global lay movement to reject rivalry and ambition, warning that competition erodes unity found only in Jesus Christ.

Speaking during Mass for the Couples for Christ International Leaders Conference on Jan. 10, Archbishop Gilbert Garcera warned that disunity grows when leaders fall into comparison, competition or ambition.

"Let us stop comparing ourselves and boasting because we have more members. Let us avoid rivalry in our work and the ambition to rise in positions within CFC," Garcera said in his homily at the Jose Rizal Coliseum in Calamba City.

"These do not come from Christ. These are the things that quietly destroy the unity He has given us," he stressed.

Reflecting on the conference theme, "In the One, we are One," Garcera said unity does not come from structures, programs or history, but from Christ alone.

The archbishop reminded leaders their roles are entrusted gifts, saying, "CFC does not belong to us; it belongs to Christ."

"Our chapters, ministries, households, and even our leadership roles are not personal possessions or achievements. They are gifts entrusted to us for a time," Garcera said.



More than 9,500 participants in the Couples for Christ International Leaders Conference attend a Mass presided over by Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa, CBCP president, at the Jose Rizal Coliseum in Calamba City, Jan. 10, 2026. **CFC MEDIA**

True unity, he added, is preserved through humility and gratitude, especially when others grow or succeed in ministry. Insecurity and resentment, he warned, quietly weaken communities and distract leaders from serving families and the wider Church.

"Unity is not uniformity," Garcera said. "Unity is shared joy in Christ, it increases."

Allowing Christ to grow in marriages and families, he added,

naturally diminishes ego and heals divisions within communities.

After the Mass, conference sessions were led by International Council member Lawrence Quintero and CFC Chairman and President Arnel Santos.

The gathering brought together more than 9,500 members from around the world to help set the direction for CFC as it embraces the year's theme and prepares for the organization's 50th anniversary in 2031. **(Charm Villegas / CBCP News)**

TAGLE from A1

He cited the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee and sends them out to "make disciples of all nations."

The apostles were chosen not because they were exceptional, Tagle said, but because Jesus chose them "to be sent."

The cardinal described the tension between staying close to Christ and being sent to serve.

"Every disciple must be an apostle," Tagle said. "You remain by going, and you go while still remaining with Jesus."

He pointed out that Galilee was not a place of honor but was associated with Gentiles and considered impure by some. Yet Jesus chose it as the place to meet and send his followers.

This underscores, according to him, that the mission of the Church is not limited to the elite or the comfortable.

Tagle also stressed that

People

Filipino priest elected abbot of South Carolina's Mepkin Abbey



Dom Gerard Jonas Palmare, the new abbot of Our Lady of Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina. **OCSS**

A FILIPINO priest has been elected the new leader of Mepkin Abbey, a community of Catholic monks in the United States.

Dom Gerard Jonas Palmare will serve a six-year term as abbot of Our Lady of Mepkin Abbey in Moncks Corner, a town in South Carolina.

Before joining the monastic community, Palmare was a member of the presbyterium of the Archdiocese of Lipa.

Born in Lipa City, he was ordained a priest by Cardinal Ricardo Vidal on Nov. 20 1991. From 1998 to 2009, he served as secretary to the archbishop and chancellor of the archdiocese.

Palmare, 61, entered Mepkin Abbey in 2010 and made his solemn profession on Dec. 3, 2016.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa called on the faithful to pray for Palmare as he begins his new ministry.

"I ask all the faithful of our archdiocese to remember him in their prayers, that the Lord may grant him the grace needed to shepherd his community faithfully, to deepen the monastery's witness of contemplative life, and to serve the wider Church with generosity and peace," Garcera said.

Mepkin Abbey was established in 1949 on the site of the historic Mepkin Plantation along the Cooper River north of Charleston.

Founded by monks from the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, the community belongs to the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, commonly known as Trappists.

Following the Rule of St. Benedict, the monks at Mepkin Abbey devote their lives to prayer, spiritual study, work and hospitality. **(CBCP News)**

Benedictines mark 100 years of Abbey Church in Manila

BENEDICTINE monks and the faithful gathered on Jan. 13 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Abbey Church in Manila.

The solemn Mass marked a century since the neo-Gothic church along Mendiola was dedicated in January 1926.

"For a century, this sacred place has served as a house of prayer, a refuge of peace," said Abbot Austin Cadiz, head of the Benedictine community in Manila.

"It has been a source of quiet strength in the midst of the city of Manila," he said.

He said generations have come to the abbey "to seek God, to find solace and to rest in his presence."

Addressing the monastic community, he urged the monks to continue offering the church as a place of refuge and prayer.

"We entrust the future of this Abbey Church to God's loving providence," Cadiz said, as he also invoked "the intercession of our mother, Our Lady of Montserrat," for the church and its mission.

The Mass also marked the first celebration at the abbey church by Abbot president Ignasi Fossas of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation.

"Christian churches have both a

practical and a symbolic dimension," Fossas said in his homily.

From a practical standpoint, he said, churches gather communities to celebrate liturgy, pray, hear Scripture and receive God's Word.

"Symbolically, Christian churches remind us that the foundation of the disciples' lives is Christ, Jesus Christ, and only Christ," he said.

Fossas said believers are part of "a long chain" of disciples, neither the first nor the last.

"For this reason, today we thank the Lord for those who 100 years ago preceded us in faith," he said.

The Abbey Church was built by Spanish Benedictine monks who arrived in the Philippines in the late 19th century and founded San Beda College in 1901.

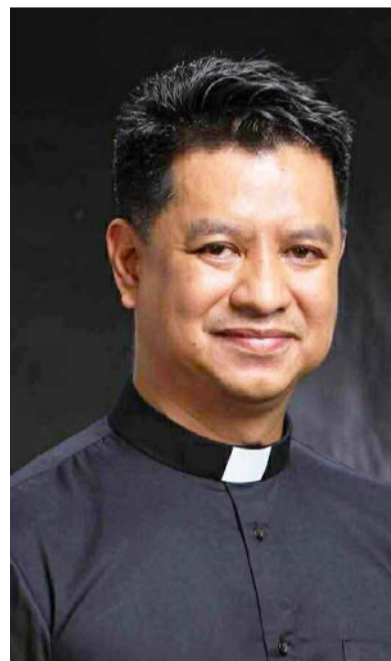
Designed in a neo-Gothic style by Swedish architect George Asp, the church has undergone several renovations while remaining a center of worship.

The monks said the centennial underscores the church's enduring role as a place of prayer, memory and communion across generations. **(CBCP News)**



Abbot Ignasi Fossas, OSB, Abbot President of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation, celebrates Mass marking 100 years of the dedication of the Abbey Church in Manila on Jan. 13, 2026. **BENEDICTINE ABBEY MEDIA TEAM**

Priest named interim head of Ilagan diocese



Father Edmundo Castañeda Jr. **DIOCESE OF ILAGAN**

FATHER Edmundo Castañeda Jr. has been chosen to temporarily lead the Diocese of Ilagan in Isabela province.

During a Jan. 19 meeting, the diocesan consultors elected Castañeda to serve as

administrator until a new bishop is appointed and installed.

The diocese is currently "sede vacante" following the installation of Archbishop William David Antonio as head of the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia on Jan. 14.

Before his election, the 57-year old priest served as vicar general of the diocese.

Castañeda studied philosophy at San Pablo Major Seminary in Baguio City and theology at the Loyola School of Theology in Quezon City, where he also earned a master's degree.

He was ordained to the priesthood on April 17, 1993.

The priest also holds a master's degree and a doctorate in philosophy from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium.

Castañeda currently serves as administrator of the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Visitation in Guibang, a village in the town of Gamu, and as president of St. Ferdinand College. **(CBCP News)**

Priest elected to temporarily lead Masbate diocese



Msgr. Claro Caluya III, diocesan administrator of Masbate. **DIOCESE OF MASBATE**

A SENIOR Catholic priest has been chosen to temporarily govern the Diocese of Masbate.

Monsignor Claro Caluya III was elected diocesan administrator by the College of Consultors on Dec. 19, days after the death of Bishop Jose Bantolo.

The diocese announced Caluya's election during Bantolo's funeral Mass on Dec. 30 at Masbate Cathedral.

"We pray that the Lord, in His goodness, will send someone again to shepherd us—hopefully not for long," Caluya said.

The diocesan administrator serves in a caretaker role, ensuring

the basic administration of the diocese until a new bishop is appointed.

Under canon law, the College of Consultors—a group of priests that advises the diocesan bishop—must elect an administrator within eight days after the diocese becomes vacant.

Caluya was ordained to the priesthood in 1972 and has served the diocese in various administrative roles for decades, including as vicar general.

He is currently the parish priest of St. Patrick Parish in Sitio Cagba, Barangay Tugbo, Masbate City. **(CBCP News)**

At least 10 priests, religious brother pass 2025 Bar exams

AT least 10 Catholic priests and a religious brother were among those who passed the 2025 Bar Examinations, based on publicly available information.

CBCP News compiled the names solely from congratulatory posts shared by dioceses and religious communities on their official online platforms.

Those identified include Fr. Mcwellroe Bringas of Tagum, Fr. Marcelo Operiano Jr. of Tagbilaran, and Fr. Danilo Dela Bajan of Masbate.

Also named were Fr. Eric Marigondon of Legazpi, Fr. Gerald Lacson of Antique, and Fr. Joel Pepito Oriesga of the Archdiocese of Cebu.

Two chaplains from the Military Ordinariate were included: Fr. Rommel

Kiamko of the Philippine Air Force and Fr. Gil Rochar Dulay of the Bureau of Fire Protection.

Religious priests who passed include Augustinian Fr. Generous Gonesto and Fr. Florante Moren of the Alagad ni Maria religious institute.

Joining them is Br. Dominador Valdez Jr., a member of the Franciscan Friars of the Philippines, Province of

San Pedro Bautista.

The Supreme Court on Jan. 7 said 5,594 examinees passed the 2025 Bar Examinations out of 11,420 who completed the three-day tests nationwide.

The examinations were held Sept. 7, 10 and 14 in 14 testing centers, from 13,193 applicants who initially registered. **(CBCP News)**

Missionary Families of Christ founder Frank Padilla dies at 79



Bro. Francisco "Frank" Padilla, founder of the Missionary Families of Christ. **FRANK PADILLA/FACEBOOK**

THE international Catholic organization Missionary Families of Christ (MFC) announced the death of its founder, Bro. Francisco "Frank" Padilla, who died on Dec. 24, 2025. He was 79.

"On December 24, a day before the birth of our Lord, Frank Padilla, father, missionary, and servant, has passed," the group said on social media.

MFC said Padilla "lived a long and storied life," which included founding MFC, where he served as its first servant general, as well as

the Live Christ Share Christ Mission.

"Despite being a quiet and reserved man, he was called by God to proclaim loudly the Good News, and ever since he said yes there was no turning back," the group said.

"This was because he believed, in his heart, that there could be no greater mission than to live a life for Christ," it added.

MFC, formerly known as Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life (CFC FFL), thanked Padilla for his love for Jesus, saying it "set our hearts on fire as well."

Padilla was a founding member of Couples for Christ (CFC), established in 1981.

An internal leadership crisis in 2007 led to a separation within the movement and the formation of a new community, the CFC FFL, which Padilla founded.

In 2019, the CFC FFL changed its name to Missionary Families of Christ to better reflect its mission of family renewal and evangelization.

Padilla is survived by his wife, Geraldine, and their five children. **(CBCP News)**

Pastoral Concerns



PHOTO BY GOI VILLEGAS / CBCPNEWS

The dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* reminds us:

God speaks to us

Pope Leo XIV at General Audience on 14 January 2026

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

We have started the cycle of catechesis on Vatican Council II. Today we will begin to look more closely at the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, on the divine Revelation. It is one of the most beautiful and important of the Council and, to introduce it, it may be helpful to recall the words of Jesus: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15). This is a fundamental point of Christian faith, which *Dei Verbum* reminds us of: Jesus Christ radically transforms man’s relationship with God, which is henceforth a relationship of friendship. Therefore, the only condition of the new covenant is love.

Saint Augustine, commenting on this passage of the Fourth Gospel, insists on the perspective of grace, which alone can make us friends of God in his Son (Commentary on the Gospel of John, Homily 86). Indeed, an ancient motto stated: “*Amicitia aut pares invenit, aut facit*”, “friendship is born between equals, or makes them so”. We are not equal to God, but God himself makes us similar to Him in his Son.

For this reason, as we can see in all the Scripture, in the Covenant there is a first moment of distance, in which the pact between God and mankind always remains asymmetrical: God is God and we are creatures. However, with the coming of the Son in human flesh, the Covenant opens up to its

final purpose: in Jesus, God makes us sons and daughters, and calls us to become like Him, albeit in our fragile humanity. Our resemblance to God, then, is not reached through transgression and sin, as the serpent suggests to Eve (cf. Gen 3:5), but in our relationship with the Son made man.

The words of the Lord Jesus that we have recalled—“I have called you friends”—are reprised in the Constitution *Dei Verbum*, which affirms: “Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself” (no. 2). The God of Genesis already conversed with our first parents, engaging in dialogue with them (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 3); and when this dialogue was interrupted by sin, the Creator did not cease to seek an encounter with his creatures and to establish a covenant with them. In the Christian Revelation, that is, when God became man in his Son in order to seek us out, the dialogue that had been interrupted is restored in a definitive manner: the Covenant is new and eternal, nothing can separate us from his love. The Revelation of God, then, has the dialogical nature of friendship and, as in the experience of human friendship, it does not tolerate silence, but is nurtured by the exchange of true words.

The Constitution *Dei Verbum* also reminds us of this: God speaks to us. It is important to recognize the difference between words and chatter: this latter stops at

the surface and does not achieve communion between people, whereas in authentic relationships, the word serves not only to exchange information and news, but to reveal who we are. The word possesses a revelatory dimension that creates a relationship with the other. In this way, by speaking to us, God reveals himself to us as an Ally who invites us into friendship with Him.

From this perspective, the first attitude to cultivate is listening, so that the divine Word may penetrate our minds and our hearts; at the same time, we are required to speak with God, not to communicate to him what He already knows, but to reveal ourselves to ourselves.

Hence the need for prayer, in which we are called to live and to cultivate friendship with the Lord. This is achieved first of all in liturgical and community prayer, in which we do not decide what to hear from the Word of God, but it is He Himself who speaks to us through the Church; it is then achieved in personal prayer, which takes place in the interiority of the heart and mind. Time dedicated to prayer, meditation and reflection cannot be lacking in the Christian’s day and week. Only when we speak with God can we also speak about Him.

Our experience tells us that friendships can come to an end through a dramatic gesture of rupture, or because of a series of daily acts of neglect that erode the relationship until it is lost. If Jesus calls us to be friends, let us not leave this call unheeded. Let us welcome it, let us take care of this relationship, and we will discover that friendship with God is our salvation.

Catholic Education

(Part I)

By FR. JAIME ACHACOSO

“28 October 2025 marks the 60th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, on the extreme importance and current relevance of education in human life. With that text, the *Second Vatican Council* reminded the Church that education is not an ancillary activity, but forms the very fabric of evangelization: it is the concrete way in which the Gospel becomes an educational gesture, a relationship, a culture. Today, in the face of rapid change and disorienting uncertainties, that legacy is showing surprising resilience. Where educational communities allow themselves to be guided by the word of Christ, they do not retreat but are revitalized; they do not build walls, but bridges. They respond with creativity, opening new possibilities for the transmission of knowledge and meaning in schools, universities, professional and civic training, school and youth ministry, and research, because the Gospel does not grow old but makes ‘all things new’ (Rev 21:5).” These words from the Preamble of one of Pope Leo’s initial Apostolic Letters—on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration on Christian education—form a fitting introduction to this initial article of the continuation of a decades-old column in the *CBCP Monitor*, dedicated to matters of Canon Law.

The Canonical Safeguarding of the Doctrine of the Faith

“Guarding the deposit of the faith is the mission which the Lord entrusted to his Church, and which she fulfills in every age” (John Paul II, *Apost. Const. Fidei Depositum*, 11.X.1992).

This is part of the teaching office of the Church. However, the *munus docendi*—as the above-recounted incidents would illustrate—would be seriously hampered were the juridical system to lack the mechanisms to enforce the propagation of the correct doctrine and to proscribe erroneous ones. Canon Law indeed contains the adequate juridic safeguards for the authenticity of the Gospel message and its propagation. This



A Catholic nun from the Franciscan Apostolic Sisters greets indigenous Aeta students at a mission school in a remote area of Santa Ana, Cagayan province, northern Philippines, on Aug. 19, 2025. PHOTO FROM CEAP

safeguarding is anchored on three institutions, which have enjoyed re-formulation in recent years.

a. The *Professio fidei*

Historically, the requisite of a **public profession of faith** in specific circumstances finds its origin in the first centuries of the Christian era—e.g., for the catechumens before baptism, and for priests and bishops before their ordination. This public profession of faith implied a formal manifestation of the Christian faith before the ecclesiastical authority and according to the dispositions of Canon Law.

The present **Code of Canon Law** stipulates that the following persons are obliged to make a profession of faith personally in accord with the formula approved by the *Apostolic See* (c.833):

- 1° all persons who take part with either a deliberative or consultative vote in an ecumenical or particular council, in a synod of bishops, or in a diocesan synod;
- 2° those promoted to the sacred college of cardinals;
- 3° all persons promoted to the episcopacy and those equivalent to a diocesan bishop;
- 4° the diocesan consultor;
- 5° vicars general, episcopal vicars and vicars judicial;
- 6° pastors, the rector of the seminary, the professors of theology and philosophy in seminaries, those to be promoted to the order of deacons;
- 7° the rector of an ecclesiastical

or Catholic university at the beginning of his term of office, and **teachers in any university who teach disciplines which deal with faith or morals** (italics added for emphasis);

8° the superiors in clerical religious institutes and societies of apostolic life, in accord with the norms of the constitutions.

The **Code** was of course alluding to the *Professio Fidei* extant at that time—promulgated by the then Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (now Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) in 1967. +

b. Canonical Definition of Assent and Penalization of Unlawful Dissent.

On 9 January 1989, the S.C. for the Doctrine of the Faith published new formulas for the *Professio Fidei* and the *Iusiurandum fidelitatis in suscipiendo officio nomine Ecclesiae exercendo*, which were approved by the Roman Pontiff in a special Rescript dated 19 September of that same year. The *Professio Fidei* enumerates three specific kinds of propositions that the Magisterium teaches and to which the believer is obliged to adhere.

1st Category of truths: De fide credenda. The formula states: *With firm faith, I also believe everything contained in the Word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church either by a solemn judgment of by the ordinary and universal*

Magisterium sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed. These are truths **definitively** proposed by the **Universal Magisterium** (either **solemn** or **ordinary**) to be believed as **formally revealed**—i.e., contained in the sources of Revelation. The faithful are duty-bound to adhere to them with an act of faith in Revelation itself. This paragraph appropriately confirms and is provided for in c.752 of the **Code of Canon Law**.

2nd Category of truths: De fide tenenda. The formula further states: *I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.* This refers to teachings **also definitively proposed** by the Magisterium, **but not as formally revealed**—i.e., not as specifically contained in the sources of Revelation. The faithful are obliged to give accept and hold these truths—not insofar as these belong to Revelation, but insofar as they are being definitively proposed by the Church. It was for the safeguarding of this category of truths that a §2 was added to c.750 of the **CIC 83** through the **Motu Proprio Ad Tuendam** of 1998. Thus, c.750 of the **Code of Canon Law** now consists of two paragraphs:

§1. *Those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the word of God as it has been written or handed down by tradition, that is, in the single deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and which are at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its ordinary and universal Magisterium, which in fact is manifested by the common adherence of Christ’s faithful under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium. All are therefore bound to avoid any contrary doctrines.*

§2. *Furthermore, each and everything set forth definitively by the Magisterium of the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals must be firmly accepted and held, namely those things required for the holy keeping and faithful exposition of the deposit of faith; therefore, anyone who rejects propositions which are to be held definitively sets himself against the teaching of the Catholic Church.*

3rd Category of truths: Finally,

the formula states: *Moreover I adhere with submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act.* This paragraph has its corresponding legislative expression in c.752 of the **Code of Canon Law**: *A religious respect of intellect and will, even if not the assent of faith, is to be paid to the teaching which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops enunciate on faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium even if they do not intend to proclaim it with a definitive act; therefore the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid whatever is not in harmony with that teaching.*

Since these teachings are not proposed definitively, they do not enjoy the note of infallibility. It is this datum that has caused a number of misconceptions, which we should clarify with the following observations:

a) **“Not infallible” is not equivalent to “fallible”.** The note of infallibility is a precise phenomenon—juridically determined—which has to do with the manner in which a teaching is proposed, and not directly about the intrinsic truthfulness or certainty of the teaching.

b) **“Not infallible” is not equivalent to “questionable”.** Faced with a teaching that does not enjoy the note of infallibility, there is no reason for a Catholic to adopt a posture of doubt or criticism, but rather one of positive acceptance, with the assurance that in this way he is serving the Church.

c) **The contrary behavior is typified as a delict**—as pointed out earlier (cf. c.1371, 1°). Aside from an intellectual assent to the doctrine, an assent of the will is required, manifested by an external actuation in accord with it.

d) **The distinction between “infallible” and “simply authentic” Magisterium** should not be confused with the distinction between *solemn* (extraordinary) and *ordinary* Magisterium. This is the kind of formalistic error that tends to reduce infallibility to formal solemnity without regard to the more important (substantial) note of definitiveness. *(To be continued)*

Seminarians, deacons and collars

By FR. EDWARD MCNAMARA

Q: It has been my understanding that the «collar» is a sign of the one in the clerical state. Why then are seminarians, who have yet to be admitted to the clerical state by ordination to the diaconate, allowed to wear the collar? As a corollary, those ordained to the clerical state as permanent deacons are restricted from wearing the «collar.» The complementary norms for the U.S. regarding clerical garb states, «The Code of Canon Law does not oblige permanent deacons to wear an ecclesiastical garb (Canon 284). Further, because they are more prominent and active in secular professions and society, the U.S. bishops’ conference specifies that permanent deacons should resemble the lay faithful in dress and matters of lifestyle. Each diocesan bishop should, however, determine and promulgate any exceptions to this law, as well as specify the appropriate clerical attire. Why do we allow such diversity, which leads to confusion? — D.L., Athens, Alabama

A: This question is more of a pastoral and canonical nature than liturgical. Liturgically speaking, the

deacon, permanent or transitional, may wear all the liturgical vestments proper to his state and the rite he is celebrating. These are principally the alb, cincture, and the deacon’s stole. The alb and cincture may be substituted by the cassock and surplice in most celebrations but not for Mass. During Mass, and when accompanying the priest for such ceremonies as the Divine Office, Eucharistic Benediction and processions, he may wear the dalmatic. As a general rule, the dalmatic is only used when accompanying the priest and only when vested with the alb. When officiating alone in such rites as weddings, baptisms, funerals, the Divine Office, Eucharistic benediction and other solemn blessings, the deacon may also use a cope of the corresponding liturgical color. Outside the liturgy, which is the scope of our reader’s question, the rules vary from place to place in accordance with what the bishops consider the most adequate pastoral situation. In the first place, while our correspondent is correct in saying that the clerical collar is generally a sign of the clerical state, this is not a universal rule.

Many vowed religious wear the clerical collar after their profession



as a sign of their consecration. This can be true even for those congregations of brothers who will never be ordained. In some places, such as in Rome, diocesan seminarians usually wear clerical garb once they have undertaken the commitments attached to the rite of Admission to Candidacy for Ordination as Deacons and Priests. With this rite they express their commitment to proceed to ordination, and the diocese ratifies this decision through the bishop’s acceptance. In this way, the clerical vesture is an outward sign of this commitment. In Rome, the visible presence of young men being formed for the priesthood is considered as a positive witness for the many pilgrims visiting the Eternal City. This rule, however, is not universal. In some Latin American countries, for example, seminarians are not permitted to wear clerical vesture until ordination. The principal reason is

to avoid confusion as the faithful sometimes ask for confession with anyone they see wearing clerical clothes; the seminarian would have to be continually explaining why he is unable to attend the petition. In some parts of Mexico and Central America, seminarians during their pastoral training wear a cassock with a blue or red sash around the waist that clearly distinguishes them from the priest.

As mentioned by our reader, the U.S. bishops have considered that it is more opportune that permanent deacons do not habitually wear clerical garb outside of their liturgical functions. The reasons given are because many, if not most, such deacons are active in secular activities not directly connected to their ministry. This is the principal reason for exempting permanent deacons from the obligation of clerical attire. This is also logically extended to other exemptions granted to permanent

deacons such as engaging in certain professions and political activity that are forbidden to other clerics. Such exemptions are mentioned in the Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons issued by the Dicastery for the Clergy in 1998:

12. The professional activity of deacons assumes a significance which distinguishes it from that of the lay faithful. Thus, the secular work of permanent deacons is in some sense linked with their ministry. They should be mindful that the lay members of the faithful, in virtue of their own specific mission, are ‘particularly called to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth.’ «Derogating from what is prescribed for other clerics, the present discipline of the Church does not prohibit to permanent deacons professions which involve the exercise of civil authority or the administration of temporal goods or accountable secular offices. Particular law, however, may determine otherwise, should such derogation prove inopportune.

«In those commercial and business activities permitted under particular law, deacons should exhibit honesty and ethical rectitude. They should be careful to fulfil their obligations to civil law where it is not contrary to the natural law, to the Magisterium or

Done with Extraordinary Consistory

By CARDINAL PABLO VIRGILIO DAVID

THE Consistory began with the celebration of the Mass for the Feast of the Lord's Epiphany, presided over by Pope Leo, on Tuesday, January 6, which also marked the closing of the Jubilee Year of Hope. Unlike in the Philippines—where Epiphany is celebrated on the first Sunday after the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God—in Rome the feast is still observed on its traditional fixed date of January 6, a date especially cherished by Catholics of the Eastern rites.

On Wednesday, January 7, the cardinals began arriving at the Paul VI Hall to collect our badges and kits containing notes meant to guide our conversations in the Spirit. After coffee, we gathered with Pope Leo in the auditorium for the formal opening of the Consistory. Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe offered a brief meditation to set the tone of the consultation, after which Pope Leo delivered his opening address.

Pope Leo XIV grounded his address in the prophet Isaiah's vision of light shining in the midst of darkness and explicitly linked it to the opening vision of the Second Vatican Council: Christ as the Light of the Nations, reflected in the life and mission of the Church. What Isaiah had announced symbolically, Vatican II recognized fully in Christ, whose light shines on the face of the Church so that all peoples may walk toward unity in him.

He situated the post-conciliar papacy within this vision. The pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II were presented as expressions of evangelization understood as the radiant overflow of Christ's saving

mystery. Benedict XVI and Francis later summarized this conciliar vision with a single word: attraction. The Church, he recalled, does not grow by proselytism but by the attractive power of Christ's love.

At the heart of this attraction, the Pope explained, is *charis/agape*—the love of God made flesh in Jesus Christ and poured into the Church by the Holy Spirit. It is not the Church herself who attracts, but Christ acting through her whenever authentic charity flows through her life and actions. Only love is credible; only love attracts. Unity draws people together, while division disperses.

He emphasized that authentic missionary witness begins with obedience to Jesus' sole commandment after the washing of the feet: "Love one another as I have loved you." Citing Saint Augustine, he recalled that Christ loved believers so that they might love one another and thus be bound together as one Body under a single Head.

From this theological foundation, Pope Leo XIV turned to the purpose of the Consistory. He invited the cardinals to begin their collegial journey rooted in mutual love, dialogue, and attentive listening. Acknowledging their diversity of cultures, ecclesial traditions, pastoral experiences, and personal temperaments, he called them to grow in communion so as to offer a credible model of collegiality in service of the universal Church.

The Consistory was intended to engage communal reflection on four themes: *Evangelii Gaudium* (the Church's mission in today's world), *Praedicate Evangelium* (the service of the Holy See, especially

to the particular Churches), synodality as a style and instrument of collaboration, and the liturgy as the source and summit of Christian life. For reasons of time and to ensure genuine depth, only two of these themes were to be discussed in detail, with particular attention given to the contributions of cardinals serving in local Churches.

The Pope stressed that the gathering was not aimed at producing texts, but at sustaining a listening conversation that would assist him in his Petrine ministry and serve the mission of the whole Church. He highlighted listening as the synodal practice par excellence—listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, speaking briefly and substantively (*non multa, sed multum*).

He described the day spent together as a prefiguration of a shared future journey, rooted in fraternity, trust, and sincere friendship. He concluded by expressing gratitude for the presence and contributions of the cardinals and entrusted the path ahead to Mary, Mother of the Church, asking for her constant intercession.

After another break, we divided into language groups and proceeded to our assigned tables in the Paul VI Hall. The round-table setup itself already hinted at Pope Leo's desire to conduct the consultation in a genuinely synodal way.

Given that we had only three major sessions, our table conversations focused on two of the four priority themes. There was a clear consensus to concentrate on *Evangelii Gaudium* and synodality.

On Thursday, January 8, we began the day early with a 7:30 a.m. Mass inside St. Peter's Basilica. It was



Pope Leo XIV addresses cardinals during an extraordinary consistory in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall on Jan. 7, 2026. VATICAN MEDIA

bitterly cold both outside and inside the Basilica. I was grateful once we vested. I was already wearing four layers—an undershirt, thermal shirt and trousers, a long-sleeved clerical shirt, and a black fillettata cassock—and I was still shivering. It was a real relief to add three more layers: the alb, amice, and chasuble.

Only after Mass, when I had to brave the cold again, did I realize what was missing from my winter outfit. One cardinal approached me and remarked that, for an Asian, I seemed unfazed by the freezing temperature. I replied that I was not used to it anymore—I had simply forgotten to bring a black winter overcoat. Thankfully, the temperature inside the Paul VI Hall was much more bearable.

After Mass, we were served an Italian breakfast.

Pope Leo remained with us throughout the rest of the day. He joined a round table himself and actively participated in the spiritual conversations. He took notes as he listened to the group reports and continued doing so during the free interventions.

In the afternoon, while we were waiting for the session to resume, he suddenly appeared behind me, casually conversing with several cardinals, including Cardinal Orly

Quevedo. I took a quick selfie—with the Pope and Cardinal Orly unintentionally photobombing.

He showed remarkable patience in engaging us through a final round of spiritual conversation, group reports, and free interventions. In his concluding remarks, Pope Leo thanked the cardinals for their work and emphasized once again that the shared journey itself had been as important as the conclusions reached. He stressed that their coming together as the College of Cardinals was not for themselves alone, but a witness offered to the Church and to the world of their willingness to listen together to what the Holy Spirit was asking of the Church today and in the future.

He spoke of his personal need to rely on the cardinals, recalling that it was they who had called him to this mission, and therefore discernment, responsibility, and decision-making must be carried out together. Returning to his Epiphany homily, he raised searching questions: whether there is life in the Church, whether there is room for what is being born, and whether the Church truly proclaims a God who sets people back on the journey. He insisted that the Church cannot

CONSISTORY B7



Archbishop David William Antonio speaks during his installation Mass at the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of the Assumption in Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur on Jan. 14, 2026.

Nueva Segovia archbishop Antonio calls for Church that serves the poor, defends life

By CBCP NEWS

ARCHBISHOP David William Antonio on Jan. 14 urged the faithful of Nueva Segovia to build a Church that actively serves the poor and defends life in all its forms.

"We need to remain a Church that proclaims fullness of life, that cannot turn away from hunger, injustice or exclusion," he said during his installation at the Minor Basilica of Our Lady of the Assumption in Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur.

Guided by the Lord's words, "that they may have life, they might have it abundantly," Antonio said the Church must engage with society, responding courageously to its needs.

"We must listen attentively, accompany our people patiently, and respond courageously and efficaciously," he added, urging priests, religious, and lay faithful to walk together as a synodal Church.

He noted Ilocos Sur's faith, resilience, and strong family values while acknowledging serious challenges: poverty, underemployment, migration,

youth uncertainty, and loneliness among the elderly.

The archbishop emphasized a Church that listens attentively to the poor, youth, families, women, and indigenous peoples, fostering dialogue, accompaniment, and shared responsibility.

Echoing Pope Francis, he said that synodality is not merely a program but a way of life, where priests, religious, and lay faithful walk together in mission and prayerful discernment.

"Our evangelization must be missionary, must be joyful, and compassionate," said Antonio, allowing people to encounter Christ in homes, workplaces, and daily responsibilities.

He highlighted the importance of care for families, saying they remain the first school of faith, and of youth, who are both the present and future of the Church.

Environmental stewardship is also crucial, Antonio said, urging protection of land, seas, rivers, and communities as part of safeguarding life for future generations.

The archbishop called for

Bishop Agcaracar ordained, says God 'widened the field' in call to San Jose diocese



Bishop Samuel Agcaracar of San Jose, Nueva Ecija imparts his blessing to the faithful after his episcopal ordination at the Dumaguete Cathedral on July 29, 2025. ROY LAGARDE

By ROY LAGARDE

BISHOP Samuel Agcaracar entered the episcopacy not with ambition, but with reluctance, prayer and a farmer's heart, calling his new mission a widening of fields rather than a loss.

Agcaracar, 56, was ordained bishop at the Divine Word Seminary chapel in Tagaytay City on Jan. 17, where he reflected on vocation, mission and unity before fellow missionaries, clergy and lay partners.

"Today I stand before you with a heart full of thanksgiving," he said, noting that his ordination coincided with the culmination of the 150th anniversary of his congregation, the Society of the Divine Word.

The timing, he said, reminded him that his personal calling is inseparable from the congregation's shared missionary journey,

symbolized by the mission lamp enthroned near the altar.

Agcaracar, a missiologist, spoke candidly about his struggle to accept the call after Pope Leo XIV entrusted him with episcopal ministry.

"The morning after, I could not do anything but pray," he said, recalling a quiet visit to the chapel of the Virgin of the Poor at the SVD Farm in Tagaytay.

Standing before the image of St. Arnold Janssen, the SVD founder, Agcaracar admitted voicing doubts and even complaints, saying 18 years felt "too short" to serve the congregation.

"It's hard to give up what has become my home and also my mission," he said, referring to community life, academic work and the "Laudato Si Farm" he founded in 2020.

Agcaracar said he imagined growing old "quietly as a farmer

priest," nurturing land and people in Tagaytay, rather than leading a diocese.

But in prayer, he said, St. Arnold's response came clearly, pointing him to the Diocese of San Jose, described as a major food basket of the Philippines.

"God was not taking something away but widening the field," Agcaracar said, describing how fear gave way to surrender without resentment.

Around 20 bishops attended the ordination, including Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, who served as principal consecrator.

Tagle was joined by papal nuncio Archbishop Charles Brown and Bishop Pablito Tagura of the Apostolic Vicariate of San Jose in Mindoro as co-consecrators.

The ordination took place nearly two months after Agcaracar was appointed bishop by Pope Leo XIV on Nov. 21, 2025.

He will fill a diocese left vacant since March 2025 following the transfer of Bishop Roberto Mallari to the Diocese of Tarlac.

The new bishop framed his ministry as building bridges, not walls, rooted in dialogue, intercultural life and communion born of God's love.

"I speak of communion where no one is neglected and no one is left behind," Agcaracar said.

He said this vision is summed up in his episcopal motto, "Fac Nos Omnes Unum in Eo" (Make us one in Him).

His installation as the fifth bishop of San Jose will be held during a Mass at the cathedral on Feb. 6.

Located in northern Nueva Ecija, the diocese comprises 21 parishes and four mission stations and serves a Catholic population of more than 600,000.*

NUEVA SEGOVIA B7

Feature

New pope, renewed hope: Amid transition, PH Church confronts corruption in 2025

By FELIPE SALVOSA II

THE Philippine Church entered 2025 amid deep uncertainty, carrying the banner of the Jubilee Year of Hope as it confronted political turmoil and massive corruption.

The year was marked by the death of Pope Francis, the election of Pope Leo XIV, historic Filipino participation in the Vatican conclave, and a leadership transition within the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

These developments unfolded alongside forceful pastoral calls for accountability and justice, and the recognition of modern-day martyrs.

Church leaders repeatedly urged the faithful to seek hope, uphold the truth and live the Gospel in solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged.

A Jubilee Year

The Church proclaimed 2025 the Jubilee Year of Hope as the world entered a new period of uncertainty. The ordinary jubilee came a decade after the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy and 25 years after the Great Jubilee of 2000.

In a pastoral letter, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines president Pablo Virgilio Cardinal David urged Filipinos not to be overcome by fear or despair, warning that hopelessness can paralyze or enslave people.

"We pray for courage, so that we may always freely stand up for truth, and uphold the good and the rule of law, as we protect democratic institutions and processes," David said. "Let us hold power to accountability... May we never tire of caring for the most vulnerable members of our society."

9 pastoral letters, statements

In 2025, the CBCP issued nine pastoral letters, calls, and statements addressing the country's intertwined moral, social, and governance crises.

Central to the messages were repeated appeals against corruption and calls for public accountability, including a condemnation of online gambling that culminated in a nationwide Day of Prayer and Accountability on Sept. 20.

Alongside concerns over massive theft of public funds, the bishops also advocated for nutrition and early childhood development, indigenous peoples' rights in Palawan, and an end to violence in Gaza.

"Beloved brothers and sisters, corruption is not just about stolen money—it is about stolen futures: flooded homes, poisoned lands, wasted opportunities for our children," David said.

In an October circular, he urged Filipinos to wear white to church on Sundays as a symbol of the call for transparency and accountability.

Lipa's Garcera is new CBCP president

Filipino bishops elected Archbishop Gilbert Garcera as CBCP president during their 130th plenary assembly in Anda, Bohol on July 5. Garcera, 66, succeeds Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, and will serve a two-year term beginning Dec. 1, 2025.

A former bishop of Daet and archbishop of Lipa since 2017, Garcera has held key leadership roles within the CBCP and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, including commissions on mission and the family.

Archbishop Julius Tonel, 68, was elected vice president, replacing Bishop Mylo Hubert Vergara. Tonel, a former bishop of Ipil and archbishop of Zamboanga since 2023, chairs the CBCP Committee on Bishops' Concerns.

Seven 'new martyrs'

The names of seven "new martyrs"—priests and lay Catholics killed for their faith and Gospel witness, most of them in conflict-affected areas in the southern Philippines—were submitted to the Vatican's Commission on New Martyrs for Jubilee Year.

The list includes Fr. Rhoel Gallardo, abducted and killed by Abu Sayyaf in Basilan in 2000; Fr. Marcelito "Tito" Paez, slain in Nueva Ecija in 2017 for his human rights advocacy; and Alberto Pinagawa, a lay leader murdered in 2009 for opposing illegal logging and mining.

Also included were four lay Catholics—Junrey Barbante, Janine



Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David presides over Mass during the "Trillion Peso March" at the People Power Monument in Quezon City on Sunday, Nov. 30. OUR LADY OF MIRACULOUS MEDAL PARISH - DIOCESE OF CUBAO

Arenas, Evangeline Aromin and Riza Daniel—who died in the 2023 bombing during Mass at Mindanao State University in Marawi.

Pope Francis had encouraged dioceses worldwide to remember modern martyrs and the "saints next door" who gave their lives for Christ.

Death of Pope Francis

Bells tolled on April 21, 2025 as news broke of the death of Pope Francis, whose apostolic voyage a decade ago to console typhoon victims and stirring tribute to Filipinos as "smugglers of faith" and bearers of "joy to the whole world" made a lasting impression on the Philippine Church.

Jose Cardinal Advincula, the archbishop of Manila and one of three Filipino cardinals created by Pope Francis throughout his 12-year pontificate, led the tribute to the beloved "Lolo Kiko" of Filipinos.

Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates Villegas, in a message titled "Message of Sorrow and Hope," recalled the late pope's assurances to him amid persecution during the Duterte administration's bloody war on drugs.

Cardinal David said the pope's

vision for a more welcoming and listening Church must be sustained.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences expressed "profound sorrow and a deep sense of loss" over the death of Pope Francis, hailing his life as one dedicated to "spreading the Gospel, championing the cause of the poor and of the marginalized, and calling the world to embrace compassion, justice and care for creation."

3 Filipinos in conclave

On May 6, Filipino clergy in Rome sent off the three Filipino cardinals eligible to vote in the papal conclave. Cardinals Luis Antonio Tagle, Jose Advincula and Pablo Virgilio David concelebrated Mass at the Pontificio Collegio Filipino on the eve of the conclave.

The 2025 conclave saw the largest number of Filipino cardinal electors in history, underscoring the Philippines' growing influence in the universal Church. Previous conclaves had included only one or two Filipino electors.

Pope Leo XIV, first US-born, Augustinian pontiff

The new pope, Robert Francis

Prevoist, is an American cleric from the Augustinian order.

The election of Prevoist, 69, the first pope from the United States, was announced by the Cardinal Proto-Deacon, Dominique Mamberti, on May 8 at past 7 p.m. Rome time, about an hour after white smoke rose from the Sistine Chapel chimney.

A native of Chicago and a naturalized citizen of Peru, where he spent years as a missionary, Prevoist took the name Leo XIV, a signal that he would take off from the legacy of Leo XIII, under whose long reign from 1878 to 1903 promulgated the Church's social doctrine with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

A former superior general of the Augustinians from 2001 to 2013, Prevoist appeared to signal a recalibration in Church leadership.

Inaugural Mass

Pope Leo XIV called for a Church united in Christ's love as a model for global reconciliation and peace during his inaugural Mass on May 18.

The 267th pope formally began his Petrine ministry before an estimated 150,000 people in St. Peter's Square, alongside religious and political leaders. Millions more watched worldwide.

"Brothers and sisters, I would like that our first great desire be for a united Church, a sign of unity and communion, which becomes a leaven for a reconciled world," he said, according to the official English translation of his homily.

"In this our time, we still see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth's resources and marginalizes the poorest," he said.

Pope Leo referenced the motto on his papal coat of arms: "In the one Christ, we are one," a phrase drawn from a homily by St. Augustine and reflective of his vocation as an Augustinian missionary. *



From left, Cardinals Luis Antonio Tagle, Pablo Virgilio David and Jose Advincula concelebrate Mass for "Collegio Day" at the Pontificio Collegio Filipino chapel in Rome on May 4, 2025. ROY LAGARDE

Key episcopal appointments shape 2025 for Philippine Church



Catholic bishops gather before Mass at Holy Infant Parish in Anda, Bohol, during their 130th plenary assembly July 6, 2025. ROY LAGARDE

By ROY LAGARDE

EPISCOPAL leadership in the Philippines saw significant changes in 2025, with six new bishops and four archbishops appointed under Popes Francis and Leo XIV.

At least two new bishops were appointed by Pope Francis before his death on April 21.

On March 4, Francis named Rogationist missionary Herman Abcede bishop of the Diocese of Daet, filling a

vacant see since Archbishop Rex Andrew Alarcon's transfer to Caceres in 2019. Abcede was ordained and installed May 1.

This was followed by the April 2 appointment of Daet priest Ronald Anthony Timoner as bishop of Pagadian, vacant since the death of Bishop Ronald Lunas in January 2024. His episcopal ordination and installation were held Aug. 13.

Glenn Corsiga of Ipil was the last Filipino bishop appointed by Francis, a week before the

pope's death. A priest of the Diocese of Dumaguete, Corsiga was ordained July 29 and installed Aug. 14.

The Diocese of Ipil had been "sede vacante" following the transfer of Archbishop Julius Tonel to Zamboanga in August 2023.

Pope Leo made his first Philippine episcopal appointment May 16, naming Dave Capucio of the Prelature of Infanta to succeed retired Bishop Bernardino Cortez.

Capucio was ordained and installed Sept. 5, coinciding with the prelature's 75th founding anniversary.

Pope Leo on Oct. 4 also appointed Edwin Panergo bishop of Boac, succeeding Bishop Marcelino Antonio Maralit Jr., who was transferred to the Diocese of San Pablo in 2024.

Panergo, a priest of the Diocese of Lucena, was ordained to the episcopate Dec. 1 and installed Dec. 2.

On Nov. 21, the pontiff named Divine Word missionary Samuel Agcaracar bishop of San Jose in Nueva Ecija. He is scheduled for episcopal ordination Jan. 17 and installation Feb. 6.

Agcaracar will succeed Bishop Roberto Mallari, who now leads the Diocese of Tarlac.

New archbishops

Several bishops were also elevated to

archbishops during the year, reflecting wider leadership realignments.

Midyphil Billones, then auxiliary bishop of Cebu, was appointed archbishop of Jaro on Feb. 2 under Pope Francis and installed April 2. He succeeded retired Archbishop Jose Romeo Lazo.

Under Leo XIV, Alberto Uy, then bishop of Tagbilaran, was appointed archbishop of Cebu on July 16 and installed Sept. 30, succeeding retired Archbishop Jose Palma.

Charlie Inzon, then apostolic vicar of Jolo, was named archbishop of Cotabato on Sept. 8 and installed Dec. 8, replacing retired Archbishop Angelito Lampon.

David William Antonio, outgoing bishop of Ilagan, was appointed archbishop of Nueva Segovia on Nov. 4, following the retirement of Archbishop Marlo Peralta. His installation is scheduled Jan. 14, 2026.

Vatican, diplomatic, U.S. Church appointments

Outside the Philippines, Archbishop Bernardito Auza was appointed by Pope Francis as apostolic nuncio to the European Union on March 22, after more than five years as nuncio to Spain and Andorra.

In Rome, Pope Leo on May 24 gave Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect

of the Dicastery for Evangelization, the title of cardinal of Albano.

The move was seen as a sign of trust, as Albano was Leo's titular see before his election as pope May 8.

Cardinals are symbolically attached to Roman churches or dioceses as a sign of their connection to the Vatican and the pope. Members of the Order of Cardinal Bishops traditionally receive one of the seven "suburbicarian" dioceses surrounding Rome.

The pope also named Laoag native Andres Ligot auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of San Jose, California, on Aug. 29. Ligot was ordained Nov. 3, becoming the sixth bishop of Filipino descent serving in the United States.

Necrology

The Philippine Church also mourned the deaths of three prelates in 2025: Bishop Jose Bontolo of Masbate, and retired bishops Warlito Cajandig of Calapan and Nestor Cariño of Legazpi.

Bontolo died Dec. 13, leaving Masbate without a diocesan bishop. Cajandig died Oct. 21, while Cariño passed away May 24.

As the year ends, at least six ecclesiastical territories remain without bishops: the dioceses of Tagbilaran, Kalibo, Ilagan and Masbate, and the apostolic vicariates of Tabuk and Jolo.*

Coal, conscience and the cost paid by communities

A Pastoral Statement



Caritas Philippines president Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos. CBCP NEWS

AS the government reviews the coal operating contract on Semirara Island ahead of its 2027 expiration, our country stands before a moral reckoning—one that demands discernment rooted in truth, justice, and care for life.

This decision is not merely technical or neutral. It will reveal whose lives matter, whose voices count, and what kind of future we are willing to accept.

On Semirara, a seaweed farmer once watched black coal particles settle on his growing lines, knowing that months of labor and his family's only income were being quietly erased. Repeated across the island in many forms, this experience tells us more about coal than any balance sheet ever will. His story is not an exception. It is a pattern.

Semirara has paid the price for decades

Semirara hosts the largest open-pit coal mine in the Philippines. It is also an island of extraordinary life, being home to nearly all known mangrove species in the country, and once sustained by fishing, seaweed farming, and healthy coastal ecosystems.

Coal mining reorganized the island around extraction, with land, sea, and labor placed at the service of profit. Decisions about Semirara were made far from the community—by institutions and boardrooms that would never breathe its air, drink its water, or raise children on its shores.

Yes, employment was offered, but what cost. Traditional livelihoods were weakened. Ecosystems were degraded. Dependency replaced self-determination.

After decades of extraction and billions in profit, many families remain poor, exposed to risk, and uncertain about tomorrow. This is not development. This is dispossession managed over time. When livelihoods are destroyed, poverty is manufactured.

The experience of Semirara's seaweed farmers exposes how this system works.

In the 1980s, seaweed farming supported nearly a third of the island's population with positive benefits of improving food security, keeping children in school, and encouraging communities to protect coral reefs from destructive fishing.

When coal operations intensified, pollution followed. Coal particulates and wastewater damaged aquaculture areas. Farms collapsed. Families lost their income overnight. Others were forced to relocate at great personal cost. Coastal spaces were privatized, and access to the sea was taken from those who had depended on it for generations.

Poverty did not arrive by chance: It was produced by policy choices treating community livelihoods as expendable. These outcomes were not unforeseen; they were tolerated. Coal's defenders speak of necessity; people live the consequences.

Coal is repeatedly justified as essential to national development and energy security. Yet the reality tells a different story.

The Philippines remains heavily dependent on imported coal while electricity prices remain high. Market volatility thus determines household bills, not coal taxes. Corporations pass costs on to consumers while protecting their profits, even in years

of record production.

Energy security that depends on imported coal is neither secure nor just. In truth, what is defended as necessity is convenience for those who do not bear the cost.

Who are the poor, the common home, and the next generation?

When we speak of the poor, we speak of fisherfolk whose waters are polluted, farmers whose land is degraded, workers exposed to danger, families displaced from coastal spaces, and communities excluded from decisions that shape their lives.

Poverty here is not only lack of income. It is lack of power.

When we speak of the common home, we speak of mangroves that shield coastlines, seas that feed families, coral reefs and marine life that sustain biodiversity. These are not commodities. They are shared goods.

To destroy them for private gain is to rob the many for the benefit of the few.

When we speak of the next generation, we speak of children who inherit poisoned waters, unstable livelihoods, and an economy built on exhaustion rather than care.

To wound one is to betray them all.

A clear and uncompromising call

We therefore speak plainly. Do not extend the coal operating contract on Semirara. Do not reissue it under another corporate name. Do not disguise continuation as reform.

Any extension, reissuance, or rebranding violates the spirit of ecological responsibility and the rights of affected communities. Ending coal is not extreme.

Continuing it is reckless.

We call for a decisive coal phaseout, beginning now, rooted in policies that defend human dignity, ecological integrity, and the common good.

A just transition cannot mean temporary assistance while destruction continues. It must restore livelihoods, compensate losses, protect land and sea, and invest in renewable energy that serves communities, not merely replaces one form of extraction with another.

A just transition must be real—measurable, time-bound, community-led, and publicly accountable.

Justice, spoken with urgency

We do not condemn workers who depend on mining. We condemn a system that forces people to choose between survival and destruction.

The Church cannot bless an economy that survives by wounding the poor and exhausting creation.

We cannot keep calling sacrifice "progress." We cannot keep calling exploitation "development." We cannot keep postponing justice while harm accumulates.

Semirara exposes a truth we must no longer avoid: a society that tolerates the suffering of the poor, the destruction of the land, and the theft of the future has lost its moral direction.

The time to end coal in the Philippines is now. To delay is to choose harm. To act is to choose life.

MOST REV. GERARDO A. ALMINAZA, D.D.
Bishop of San Carlos
President, Caritas Philippines
January 18, 2026

Pasimbalo: Preparing our hearts for the centenary

Pastoral Message of Archbishop Socrates B Villegas
January 1, 2026
Archdiocese of Lingayen Dagupan

MY dear People of God in the Archdiocese of Lingayen Dagupan:

Today, we stand at the threshold of 2026. As the world celebrates a new calendar year, we as a local Church stand at a significant crossroads. We are now exactly two years away from the great centenary of the Diocese of Lingayen in 2028. This milestone is not merely a look backward at our history, but a clarion call to look forward. To prepare our hearts for this hundred-year jubilee, our theme for this year is *pasimbalo*—a Pangasinan word for renewal that literally means making things new again in Christ.

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is the perfect lens through which to view this renewal. In the Gospel, we see Mary pondering all things in her heart. She does not simply let life happen to her; she allows the grace of God to renew her understanding and her purpose. If we are to undergo a true *pasimbalo* in our archdiocese, we must use five specific tools for renewal.

Our primary tool is prayer. Real change starts on our knees. To pray is to allow God's breath to enter the stagnant areas of our lives. As we look toward our centenary, we must ask: Is our prayer life a routine, or is it a relationship? True *pasimbalo* happens when we move from talking about God to talking with God. Mary treasured all these in her heart.

The second tool is our courageous protest against sin. We often think of protest as something done in the

streets, but the most radical protest happens in the soul. To protest against sin is to refuse to be comfortable with "the way things have always been" if those things are contrary to God's law. Mary stood at the foot of the cross.

We must specifically protest against the culture of corruption that "poisons a country's soul". Corruption is not just a political issue; it is a "sin against God and the poor". Let us resolve this year to "make corruption shameful again" by refusing to participate in bribery or vote-selling.

If *pasimbalo* is to last, we must pressure ourselves for sustained conversion. Renewal is rarely a lightning bolt; it is a steady drip of water that eventually carves through stone. We must apply a "holy pressure" upon ourselves to ensure our conversion is not a New Year's resolution that fades by February. Mary stayed with the apostles in prayer.

We must pressure ourselves to stand against the culture of killing. We cannot celebrate the "Mother of Life" while remaining silent about summary executions or the disregard for human dignity. Sustained conversion means choosing to protect life from conception to natural death, every single day of 2026.

Pasimbalo demands that we prune all that is inconsistent with the Gospel. In any garden, growth requires cutting back. To experience *pasimbalo*, we must look at our habits and ask: "What is taking up space but bearing no fruit?"

We must prune the culture of vulgarity and lies that has increasingly stained our public and online discourse. Vulgarity is not a sign of "authenticity"; it is an offense against the dignity of the person. This year, let us prune our tongues of "bashes," online bullying, and obscenity, replacing them with words that build up rather than tear down.

Pasimbalo calls us to plant seeds of hope through vigilance. Renewal calls us to be "watchmen of the morning." Vigilance means staying awake to the needs of the "defenseless and silent poor" who are often the primary victims of both corruption and violence. We plant hope when we demand accountability from those in power and refuse to be swayed by "false prophets" who exploit public anger for political gain.

Mary is our ultimate model for this journey. She was the first to experience the "renewal" of humanity through the Incarnation. She did not fear the "pruning" of her own plans, and she remained "vigilant" at the foot of the Cross.

As we begin 2026, let us entrust this Year of *Pasimbalo* to her maternal care. Let us use these two years leading to our centenary to transform the Archdiocese of Lingayen Dagupan into a vibrant, living witness of the Gospel—a church that rejects the "reign of murder and vulgarity" and embraces the reign of Christ.

May the spirit of *pasimbalo* burn brightly in our hearts! Happy new year!*

Statement of Solidarity with Communities Defending Land and Life in Dupax Del Norte



WE stand in firm and prayerful solidarity with the people of Dupax Del Norte, Nueva Vizcaya, who continue to defend their land, livelihood, and dignity amid mounting pressure to give way to the entry of Woggle Corporation.

In moments such as this, we return to a foundational truth of our faith, expressed in *Dilexi Te*: faith begins not with power or privilege, but with love. "I have loved you," the Lord says to a people with little protection and little voice. The families guarding the barricade in Bitnong stand in that place today. Their struggle must be heard—not silenced.

The people's barricade is not an act of disorder. It is the response of communities excluded from decisions that shape their lives, born from the absence of genuine consultation, and from the painful experience of having their land and future treated as expendable.

When development is evoked, we must ask: Who is missing at the table?

In Dupax Del Norte, three seats remain empty.

The first belongs to the Poor - peasant families and rural communities whose voices were sidelined and who now face intimidation, force, and legal pressure in defense of their livelihoods that have been subordinated to corporate interests.

The second belongs to Our Common Home—where trees were uprooted without permission, and land and water face irreversible harm, treated as resources to be extracted rather than gifts to be protected.

The third belongs to the Next Generation—those bound to the long-term consequences of decisions made today for short-term gains. Children today and those yet unborn will eventually bear the cost of this environmental

damage and social disruption.

Any decision that excludes these three is not merely incomplete; it is unjust.

We are deeply troubled by credible reports of harassment, arrests, and violent dispersal of residents engaged in peaceful resistance. The deployment of armed personnel to enforce corporate entry raises grave moral questions. Laws that protect profit while endangering communities may be legal, but they cannot claim moral legitimacy.

Dupax Del Norte reveals a familiar pattern: rural communities bear the cost of development they did not choose. When power is used to silence the dissent rather than protect life, development loses human meaning.

As Church, we are called to stand where life is threatened. Silence in the face of such suffering is not neutrality; it is complicity.

We therefore support and echo the call of the Diocese of Bayombong for an immediate halt to Woggle Corporation's exploration activities and for the issuance of a cease-and-desist order to prevent further harm and escalation of conflict.

We call on the national government to cancel Woggle Corporation's permits and to review policies that repeatedly place communities in harm's way. Development that displaces, divides, and destroys is not authentic development.

This further deepens inequality and normalizes injustice.

To the people of Dupax Del Norte, we say: you are not alone. They may dismantle barricades, but your rights remain. Though you may be few, your moral strength is great. Justice does not begin with permits, but with people.

We urge the faithful, civil society, and all people of goodwill to remain vigilant and in solidarity.

This is a shared moral responsibility.

May the God who says, "I have loved you," strengthen all who defend life, land, and dignity. And may we never again make decisions without first ensuring that the Poor, Our Common Home, and the Next Generation are given their rightful place at the table.

MOST REV. GERARDO A. ALMINAZA, D.D.
Bishop of San Carlos
President, Caritas Philippines

Reflections

Thoughts to live by

Reflections on the Feast of Sto, Niño (Mk 18:1-5, 10)
January 18, 2026

By **CARDINAL ORLANDO B. QUEVEDO**

SOME Notes from the ORDO: Today, we remember the Pontifical Work of the Holy Childhood. Children are told to pray, do good works, and offer sacrifices for the Missions. They are asked to recite one Our Father, Hail Mary, with the invocation, "St. Francis Xavier, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, pray for us and for all the children of the world." Mass collections are sent to the Holy Father for the children of the world.

Some Notes on the Feast of Sto. Niño. On every 3rd Sunday of January, we celebrate the Christ Child, whose most popular images in the Philippines are the Sto. Niño de Cebu and the Sto. Niño de Praga. The celebration is both a religious and cultural event. It draws thousands of the faithful to Cebu for prayer and for the grand procession and colorful parade, replete with grand native costumes and dances. It is a celebration of faith, love, and unity.

Along with Magellan's Cross, the Señor Sto. Niño de Cebu is the oldest Christian artifact in the Philippines.

On April 7, 1521, the Spanish expedition of Ferdinand Magellan landed on Limasawa, southern Leyte. He met the local ruler, Rajah Kolambu, who introduced him to Rajah Humabon, ruler of Cebu island. Fr. Pedro de Valderrama, Magellan's chaplain, converted and baptized Humabon, Humamay and Kolambu. Humabon was named Carlos, after the Spanish King Charles I. Humamay was given the name Juana, after Joanna of Castille. And Kolambu was named Juan. Together with them, about 540 were also baptized. Magellan gave Humabon and Humamay a bust of Christ as the "Ecce Homo," an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Santo Niño.

On behalf of Rajah Humabon, Magellan attacked Mactan Island. But in the battle with Lapu-Lapu on April 27, Magellan was killed. The expedition returned to Spain.

In 1565, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's expedition arrived to establish a colony to trade spices. But the Cebuanos resisted, the Spaniards. On April 27, 1565, Lopez opened fire on Cebu, and burnt the town. The next day, April 28, Juan Camus, found the image of the Sto. Niño in a pine box in the ruins.

The Spaniards considered the survival of the statue as a miracle.

A church made of bamboo and nipa palm was built to house the Sto. Niño on the spot where it was found.

The present Basilica Minore del Santo Niño stands on the same spot. In 1921, as part of the 400th commemoration of Christianity in the Philippines, the icon of the Sto. Niño was canonically crowned. 100 years later, in 2021, the Basilica was declared a National Cultural Treasure on the Philippines.

In 1989, the practice of "Traslacion" began. This is how it takes place. On the 9th day of novena Masses, a dawn procession is held. The image of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Cebu is brought to the Basilica Menor. It then travels with the Sto. Niño to the National Shrine of St. Joseph in Mandaue City, thus "reuniting" the Holy Family.

On the morning of the "Visperas" (Eve), the images of the Sto. Niño and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe are returned to Cebu in a fluvial parade that ends with a reenactment of the 1st Mass, wedding and Baptism in the nation at Cebu's Pilgrim Center. A grand yet solemn procession in the afternoon follows, ending with Holy Mass.

The Grand Sinulog is held the next day, Sunday, the Feast of the Sto. Niño. The Festival ends on Friday and is marked with the traditional "Hubò" (undress) rite. The Sto. Niño's vestments and regalia are reverently removed and then dressed in a plainer set of robes with the regalia, while the priest intones a prayer. This leads to the singing of the refrain, "Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat." The Philippine Navy honored the image as "Lord Admiral of the Sea," acknowledging Christ's lordship over seafarers, mariners, and marine ecology.

The image of the Sto. Niño is a dark wood statue, approximately 12 inches tall. It depicts the Child Jesus, with a serene countenance, dressed as a Spanish monarch, bearing an imperial regalia, a

THOUGHTS TO LIVE BY B7

Leaving the nets to encounter Christ on the margins

Reflections on the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mk 4:12-23)
January 25, 2026

By **FR. CYRAIN CABUEÑAS**

The Word of God today opens with a powerful image from the prophet Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." This light dawns not in Jerusalem, not in the centers of power, but in Galilee, a place considered ordinary, even insignificant. Right away, this already tells us something essential about God: He chooses the margins. He begins salvation where people least expect it.

Matthew's Gospel is very intentional. Jesus begins His public ministry in Galilee, and His first proclamation is both urgent and hopeful: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Repentance here is not merely moral regret; it is a radical reorientation of life. It is turning away from false centers and turning toward the true one, Christ Himself. Where Jesus is, there the Kingdom is present.

In his spiritual masterpiece, Confessions, this truth was expressed elegantly by St. Augustine: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Augustine knew from experience that wealth, pleasure, success, and ambition cannot quiet the human heart. Only God can. Repentance, then, is allowing our restless hearts, often restless because we want too many things, to finally rest in the Lord.

Immediately after proclaiming the Kingdom, Jesus calls disciples. He does not recruit from religious elites. He calls fishermen at work. And He does something striking: He asks them to leave their nets. The nets are not sinful. They are necessary. They represent livelihood, security, identity. Yet Jesus shows that even good things can become obstacles if they prevent us from following Him fully.

In our Philippine context, this image becomes even more concrete. The fishermen leave one boat and one set of nets. Today, however, the dream is often not to leave the boat but to acquire more boats, maybe even a whole fleet. One job is not enough. One house is not enough. One title is not enough. There is nothing wrong with hard work or improvement, but the Gospel challenges us to ask: At what point do our nets begin to trap us? When does the desire to have more prevent us from hearing the call of Christ?

Jesus' call continues with sharp clarity in the second reading. St. Paul addresses a divided community and asks a question that still stings: "Is Christ divided?" Loyalty to personalities, parties, and personal interests had begun to fracture the Church. This is not far from our reality. In today's Philippines, divisions: political, social, even digital, have become normal. Sometimes Catholics fight harder in comment sections than they pray in churches. The net of pride, the net of ideological loyalty, and the net of always wanting to be right can be harder to drop than fishing nets.

Here, the words of the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer speak with prophetic force in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer was not speaking of physical death alone, but of dying to self, dying to ego, comfort, and false security. Following Jesus always costs something. Cheap grace, Bonhoeffer warned, asks for nothing and changes nothing.

This is the continuing challenge of Jesus

MARGINS B7



ARCHDIOCESE OF CEBU

The God-Child

Reflection on the Feast of Santo Niño
Isaiah 9:1-6; Ephesians 1:3-18; Matthew 18:1-10
January 18, 2026

By **CARDINAL PABLO DAVID**

THE Feast of the Santo Niño is unique—found only in the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church in the Philippines. Of course, in countries where there are many Filipinos, devotion to the Santo Niño has also taken root.

This feast brings us back to the very beginnings of our faith as Filipino Christians. Before we came to know Jesus as teacher, prophet, or the Nazarene who was crucified, we first encountered him as a child. The very first image of Christ introduced to our ancestors was not the preaching Jesus or the one who challenged the powerful, but the Child Jesus—the Santo Niño that Magellan gave as a gift to the queen, the wife of King Humabon, in Cebu.

This was not an accident of history. It says something about how God chose to reveal himself to us Filipinos.

In the first reading, we hear the prophet Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light... For a child is born to us, a son is given to us." What is this oracle telling us? God's power would come to us not as a warrior, but in the form of a child. He would not rule through strength and violence, but through smallness and vulnerability. The one called the "Prince of Peace" is a baby.

This is the God we worship in the Santo Niño—a God who does not intimidate, but humbles himself; a God who does not dominate, but softens hearts. Have you noticed how the heart of an elderly person melts when smiled at by a baby being carried by a mother standing in front of him or her?

In the Gospel, the disciples are arguing about who among them is the greatest. That is a typical preoccupation of grown-ups—greatness. But Jesus' response is not an explanation. Instead, he takes a child, places the child in their midst, and says: "Unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Their question was about greatness. Jesus' answer was conversion of heart. To be a disciple is not about mastering more knowledge as we grow older, but about slowly becoming childlike in heart and spirit—able to trust, able to be humble, able to rely on God.

Many seasoned professors have said that devotion to the Santo Niño keeps Filipino believers in a childlike state. But perhaps the problem is that they stop at the first glance. It is true that growth in faith passes through questioning, critical thinking, and searching for answers to life's many questions. But it does not end there. Truly mature faith learns how to return to humility—not as weakness, but as freedom.

This is what Saint Thérèse called the "little way"—the path of smallness, the way of spiritual childhood. It is not about ignorance or being childish, but about humility. Like a child who trusts even when tossed up into the air, because he knows he

will be caught. He even laughs as he falls back into his father's arms.

Perhaps this is why devotion to the Santo Niño has such deep roots in Filipino culture. We welcome children as blessings, not as burdens. We do not regard them as "just another mouth to feed," but as gifts from God—even when they come with great sacrifice.

Did you know that in some cities around the world there is a tradition of electing a child mayor, even if only for a week? It may seem playful, but it serves as a reminder that leadership is not for personal power, but for the future of children.

One sign that a society is becoming truly humane is when it prioritizes the welfare of children and the weak. That is why, in the Gospels, there are moments when Jesus expresses anger when children are abused or oppressed. And that is why it is clear: a Church that drives children away has no future.

I was delighted last Christmas to receive a Kapampangan translation of my favorite book, *The Little Prince*. It offers many gentle lessons for adults who have become too busy with getting rich, seeking fame, accumulating possessions, and rushing through life—forgetting what truly matters. The little prince says, "What is essential is invisible to the eye." Is that not also what the Santo Niño teaches us? An image of a God who made himself very small, whom we can hold in our hands, yet who remains great in his smallness—great enough to hold the whole world in one hand.

In the second reading, Saint Paul reminds us that we have been chosen, adopted, and blessed by God in Christ—not because we are strong or capable, but because we are loved. Before we became achievers, we were already regarded as children. Before we learned to strive to be useful, we were already loved.

In the Sinulog of the Cebuanos, the cry is *Pit Señor!* Perhaps we can also cry out, *Peace, Señor! Peace, Lord!* A peace that is not the fruit of arrogance, but of humility. A peace attained not through displays of power, but through care for the disadvantaged and the small—the children, the weak, the defenseless.

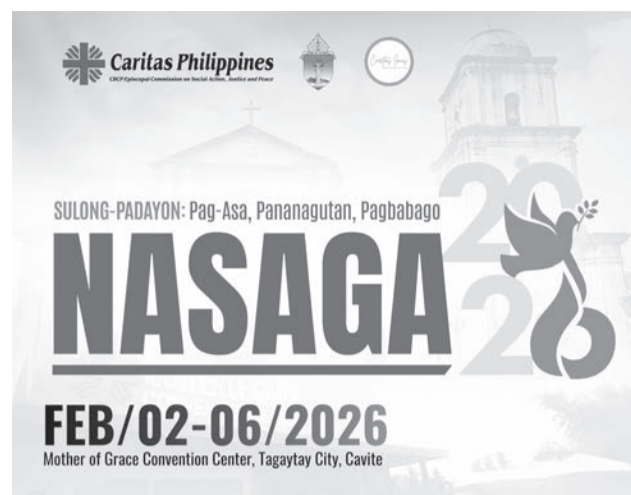
If we desire peace for our families, for the Church, and for our nation, we must learn once more the path of smallness taught by Saint Thérèse, the path she herself learned from the Lord.

The Santo Niño is not an escape from our responsibilities. He is God's invitation to conversion—an invitation to let go of arrogance, to renounce cruelty, and to rediscover who we truly are in God's eyes: his children—humble, trusting, compassionate, and courageous enough to love.

This is why we love the Santo Niño. This is why he remains at the heart of Filipino faith.

God has already shown us the way—the path of childhood.*

NASAGA 2026



January 19, 2026—Caritas Philippines, the social action arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), will hold its National Social Action General Assembly (NASAGA) 2026 from February 2–6, 2026, at the Mother of Grace Convention Center in Tagaytay City.

With the theme “Sulong-Padayon: Pag-asa, Pananagutan, Pagbabago”, the biennial assembly will gather bishops, clergy, religious, and social action workers from dioceses nationwide to reflect on the Church’s mission for social justice, peace, and transformative action amid current social challenges.

NASAGA 2026 will be hosted by the Diocese of Imus through its Diocesan Social Action Center, Caritas Imus, and will feature plenary discussions, workshops, and communal discernment on key social concerns affecting Filipino communities.

One Negros Sub-regional cluster meets for Typhoon Tino response



January 19, 2026—The One Negros Sub-Regional Cluster for Humanitarian Response successfully conducted a face-to-face inception meeting for the project “Emergency Response to Communities Affected by Typhoon Tino in Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental, Philippines,” implemented through Caritas Philippines under the Convenio for Emergency of AECID/Caritas Spain.

The activity aimed to align partners on project objectives, strategies, and coordinated actions to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance to affected communities.

Through this initiative, participating Diocesan Social Action Centers reaffirmed their collaboration in delivering responsive, people-centered, and faith-driven humanitarian support to the most vulnerable sectors impacted by Typhoon Tino.

CRS typhoon response

AS of January 9, a total of 1,243 households across Albay, Camarines Sur, and

Catanduanes have received emergency assistance through CRS’ ongoing Typhoon Uwan response.

From the distribution in Caramoan, to supporting farflung families in Garchitorena, and extending assistance across the region, CRS continues to deliver timely, dignified, and needsbased humanitarian support.

As part of our Super Typhoon Uwan Emergency Response, CRS Philippines—in partnership with Caritas Philippines, @Caritas Virac Justice and Peace, Inc., @Caritas

Caceres, and SAC Legazpi, and funded by the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration—remains committed to helping communities in Albay, Camarines Sur, and Catanduanes, along with families in Aurora and Isabela recover and build resilience after Typhoon Uwan.

Consultative meetings in calamity areas



January 12, 2026—In Cebu, a consultative visit was conducted in areas affected by the 6.2 magnitude earthquake. Three months after the disaster, several families are still living

in tents, and critical gaps remain. Some damaged infrastructures, including cracked roads, have yet to be repaired. Together with Caritas Internationalis and Cebu Caritas Inc. discussions were held to review project updates, assess remaining

needs, and identify next steps moving forward.

In partnership with UNHCR Philippines and Caritas Philippines facilitated a Training/Orientation on Protection Mainstreaming for 11 Local Government Units (LGUs) in Cebu Province. The activity was participated in by Municipal Social Welfare Officers and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) focal persons. The objectives of the training were to strengthen the understanding of protection

principles, integrate protection in the humanitarian response, and enhance the capacity of LGUs to identify, prevent, and respond to protection risks in the emergency contexts. The activity was co-facilitated by ACCORD.

In Aurora and Isabela, initial response activities were undertaken, including coordination with LGUs, beneficiary profiling, market assessment, and response planning. The team also visited the municipality of Dinapigue,

a remote area where the extent of Super Typhoon Uwan remains evident. The response intervention will be implemented in partnership with CRS Philippines and the US Government, in coordination with the Prelature of Infanta and Social Action of Isabela.

In the coming days, more activities are in the pipeline and are being implemented simultaneously with various partners across different areas.

CONSISTORY from B3

close in on itself or simply repeat what has always been done.

Reflecting on the Gospel, he contrasted Herod’s fear and manipulation with the liberating joy of the Gospel, which fosters courage, creativity, and openness to new paths. This, he said, illustrated how genuine renewal in the Church becomes possible when trust is placed in the living presence of the Holy Spirit. Using the image of being together in the same boat, he acknowledged fears and uncertainties, yet affirmed that much could be accomplished when trust in the Lord prevails.

He welcomed the clear

convergence that had emerged from the group discussions, noting that the chosen direction enjoyed broad support and that the various themes could not be separated from one another. He emphasized that the Church must not be self-referential but missionary, oriented toward proclaiming the Gospel rather than serving internal interests. Synod and synodality, he explained, are concrete expressions of the Church’s effort to be missionary in today’s world, with Christ at the center of evangelization.

He concluded by thanking the cardinals for their service, explaining that

their work would guide the following day’s sessions, and assuring them that dialogue and discernment would continue through further communication. He ended simply, with gratitude and encouragement to move forward together.

We concluded the Consistory with the singing of the Te Deum and a final blessing. I stayed behind afterward to join a panel of three cardinals for a press conference scheduled for 8:00 p.m., which eventually began closer to 9:00.

It was already past 10:00 p.m. when I returned to the Collegio Filipino—physically tired, a bit hungry, but spiritually full.*

NUEVA SEGOVIA from B3

collaboration with civil authorities, educators, civic leaders, and all people of goodwill, noting that the Church must speak with moral clarity and defend the voiceless.

Reflecting on his episcopal motto, “Ut Vitam Habeant,” which is Latin for “That they may have life”, he said that it is neither his project or that

of the archdiocese but is “God’s promise.”

“Our task is simply to cooperate with His grace and to allow ourselves to become instruments that others may have life and have it in its fullness,” he said.

Antonio was installed as the eighth archbishop of Nueva Segovia by Archbishop Charles Brown,

apostolic nuncio to the Philippines, in the presence of dozens of bishops.

Also attending were Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, who served as homilist; Cardinal Jose Advincula of Manila; and Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, archbishop emeritus of Cotabato.

THOUGHTS TO LIVE BY from B6

golden crown, a cross-bearing orb (“globus cruciger”) a royal sceptre. Thus, the Child Jesus is depicted as Universal King and “Salvator Mundi” (Savior of the World). It is the only canonically crowned image of Jesus Christ in the Philippines. He is the official Patron of the Church in the Philippines. Viva Pit Senyor!

Prayer—Almighty God, your only Son, begotten from all ages, humbled himself as a

child in Nazareth and became subject to Mary and Joseph. Grant that we may learn from his example to embrace your will in all things and, holding fast to the dignity of all, serve our lowly brothers and sisters with open hands and gentle heart. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

SEMINARIANS from B2

to the canons of the Church and to her freedom.

«The aforementioned derogation is not applicable to permanent deacons who are incardinated into institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life.

«Permanent deacons must make prudent judgments, and they should seek the advice of their bishops in more complex instances. Some professions, while of undoubted benefit to the community, can, when exercised by a permanent deacon, in certain circumstances, become incompatible with the pastoral responsibilities of his ministry. The competent authority, bearing in mind the requirements of ecclesial communion and of the fruitfulness of pastoral ministry, shall evaluate individual cases as they arise, including a change of profession after ordination to the permanent Diaconate.

«Where there is conflict of conscience, deacons must act in conformity with the doctrine and discipline of the Church, even if this should require of them great sacrifices. «13. As sacred ministers, deacons are required to give complete priority to their ministry and to pastoral charity and ‘do their utmost to foster among people peace and harmony based on justice.’ Active involvement in political parties or trades unions, in accordance with the dispositions of the

Episcopal Conference, may be permitted in particular circumstances ‘for the defense of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good.’ Deacons are strictly prohibited from all involvement with political parties or trade(s) union movements which are founded on ideologies, policies or associations incompatible with Church doctrine.»

Hence, the principal reason why permanent deacons are generally exempt from habitually wearing clerical dress, or are even excluded from doing so, is rooted in this concrete situation which makes their daily lives different from other clerics. However, the norms grant the local bishop a wide scope for exceptions if pastoral demands recommend it. This could be habitual or for specific ministries. One example could be a deacon who habitually brings Communion to the elderly or the sick in multidominational situations and for whom wearing the clerical collar makes him clearly identifiable as a Catholic minister.

Other deacons may be retired from their secular profession but work full time for the diocesan curia where it is better for them to be easily recognized as clergy. The examples could be multiplied which is why the matter is left to the discernment of the local bishop.*

MARGINS from B6

in today’s Gospel. “Come after me.” Not “come when convenient,” not “come when life is stable,” not “come after acquiring all the boats first.” The call of Christ confronts a culture obsessed with accumulation and reminds us that salvation is not found in expansion but in surrender. The Kingdom grows not by holding on, but by letting go.

And yet, this challenge is not meant to burden us. It is meant to free us. Jesus does not take away the nets to leave His disciples empty-handed. He transforms them into “fishers of people.” What they

surrender, He redeems. What they release, He replaces with mission and meaning.

The same Jesus still walks along our shores today, along flooded barangays, crowded classrooms, hospital corridors, congested airports, endless queue of job applicants and lengthier line of ayuda beneficiaries. He continues to call ordinary people with complicated lives. The question is no longer whether He is calling, but whether we are willing to loosen our grip on the nets we cling to so tightly.*



Maestro Mario Mariani performs during a concert commemorating the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi at the Santuario de San Antonio Church in Makati City on Jan. 19, 2026. **CBCP NEWS**

Pilgrim image of Our Lady of Guadalupe to visit Philippines this 2026

By ANTHONY PEREZ
JESCOM

IN 2026, Filipinos will welcome a visitor whose presence has shaped centuries of faith, culture, and national devotion: the Pilgrim Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Set to arrive later this June, the pilgrimage marks a major spiritual moment for the Church in the Philippines as it joins a global journey leading to the 500th anniversary of the Marian apparitions at Tepeyac in 1531.

The pilgrimage forms part of the Novena Intercontinental Guadalupana (2025–2031), a worldwide devotional initiative uniting churches across continents in prayer and preparation for the jubilee year. The image's international journey recently brought it to the Archdiocese of Chicago, beginning August 27, 2025—the first stop in the United States—where prayer services and cultural events were held at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Des Plaines and in key parishes across the archdiocese.

The global pilgrimage was envisioned by Martín Achirica Ramos, who created a unique veneration experience featuring two digital reproductions of the original tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe, an image of St. Juan Diego, and a hyper-realistic, life-size sculpture of the Virgin, crafted by renowned Mexican artist Jorge Ismael Rodríguez. All elements were blessed by the Rector of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, Msgr. Efraín Hernández Díaz. The experience is accompanied by original music and narrated reflections recounting the apparitions—engaging sight, sound, and prayer to foster unity, peace, and renewal of faith.

In June 2025, Achirica Ramos personally wrote to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., expressing the hope that the pilgrim image might visit



The pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe from Mexico is seen at a shrine dedicated to her in the Archdiocese of Chicago on Aug. 27, 2025, during a pilgrimage across the United States last year. **SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE -- ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO/FACEBOOK**

the Philippines—a nation long under the Virgin's maternal care. That hope has since taken concrete shape.

Overseeing the Philippine leg of the pilgrimage is the Guadalupe Pilgrimage Committee, chaired by Mr. Ernest Escaler, a prominent Filipino businessman, with Most Rev. Jose Colin M. Bagaforo, D.D., Bishop of Kidapawan, serving as spiritual director. The pilgrimage is a CBCP-supported and guided initiative, formally incorporated into the Church's national pastoral program through the office of Msgr. Bernardo Pantin, CBCP Secretary-General. The committee is working closely with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) through the Association of Catholic Shrines and Pilgrimages (ACSP). As a Church-led religious undertaking, the visit will be carried out in collaboration with bishops nationwide, religious communities, and lay organizations, all contributing their time and

expertise in service of this historic pilgrimage.

The pilgrim image's June 13th arrival in Manila will formally launch the journey to more than 40 cathedrals and shrines nationwide, including a visit to the 132nd CBCP Plenary in Ozamiz City. These include long-established centers of Guadalupan devotion in Pagsanjan, Cebu, Makati, Zambales, and Bohol, before the image reaches its final destination: a permanent home at the iconic Manila Cathedral.

For Filipinos, the visit carries deep historical and spiritual meaning. Introduced to the Philippines in the late 16th century, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe quickly took root. In 1935, Pope Pius XI declared her Celestial Patroness of the Philippine Islands, and in 2001, her feast on December 12 was established as an Obligatory Memorial. Her image has even accompanied the nation through moments of trial and hope, including the peaceful struggle of the People Power Revolution.*

Piano concert in Manila marks 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi's death

A PIANO concert marking the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi was held Monday at Santuario de San Antonio Church in Makati City.

The concert, titled *Frate Sole* or *Brother Sun*, featured Italian pianist Mario Mariani and was organized by the Italian Embassy in Manila and Inter-Franciscan Ministries Conference in the Philippines.

The event honored St. Francis, the patron saint of Italy, who is remembered worldwide for his message of peace, humility and care for creation. St. Francis died on Oct. 3, 1226.

The concert featured live piano accompaniment inspired by *Frate Sole*, a 1918 Italian silent film about the life of St. Francis.

Mariani, an Italian pianist and composer, performed

in Manila for the first time, blending music, film and contemplation.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, said the concert was more than an artistic event.

"This concert is not simply an artistic presentation; it is a spiritual offering," Garcera said in a message read during the program.

He said St. Francis continues to speak clearly to the modern world, even eight centuries after his death.

"Through piano music, we are invited to rediscover his profound intuition: that creation is not something to dominate, but to embrace as brother and sister, as a gift entrusted to our care," Garcera said.

He said the message remains urgent amid climate change, poverty and social divisions, echoing Pope Francis' calls for care for the earth and the poor.

Italian Ambassador Davide Giglio said St. Francis remains "a timeless and guiding light" whose legacy still speaks to the world.

"Francis proved a life of simplicity and humility can be powerful to transform society," Giglio said.

He said the Franciscan message offers an alternative to "selfishness, materialism and conflict," especially in difficult times.

Pope Leo XIV earlier declared a special jubilee to honor St. Francis, encouraging the faithful to reflect on his life of poverty, charity and devotion. **(CBCP News)**

Antipolo diocese opens yearlong jubilee, designates 25 pilgrimage churches

THE Diocese of Antipolo in Rizal province has formally opened a yearlong jubilee by designating 25 churches as official pilgrimage sites, marking 400 years of devotion to Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage.

Church officials said the jubilee also commemorates the 100th anniversary of the canonical coronation of the Marian image, also known as the Virgin of Antipolo.

"These are not simply anniversaries — they are milestones of faith... and reminders of how God has journeyed with us, through the guidance of our Mother, Virgin of Antipolo," Bishop Ruperto Santos said during a press conference Jan. 15.

For four centuries, pilgrims have journeyed to Antipolo seeking protection, healing and hope, Santos said, calling the devotion a living story of faith passed through generations.

"Our faith is a journey," Santos said, comparing it to the galleons that carried the Marian image across oceans and through history.

E m b a r k a t i o n, disembarkation and Jubilee Doors

Fr. Marc Ramos, director of the diocesan commission on worship and liturgy, said the pilgrimage follows two key moments: embarkation and disembarkation.

"Embarkation is the beginning," Ramos said. "It is the moment when the pilgrim chooses to walk, both spiritually and physically."

"Disembarkation refers to the arrival," he said. "The pilgrim returns renewed, transformed and sent forth with a mission."

Pilgrims pass through designated jubilee doors, which Ramos said clearly point to Jesus Christ as "the door that leads to the Father."

The jubilee door of Antipolo Cathedral was opened Jan. 14, while the doors at St. Raphael the Archangel Parish and Nativity of Our Lady Parish opened Jan. 10. The holy doors at St. Faustina Kowalska Parish and Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles Parish opened Jan.



Bishop Ruperto Santos opens the Diocesan Jubilee Door before Mass at Antipolo Cathedral on Jan. 14, 2026. **ANTIPOLO CATHEDRAL**

11. All ceremonies were led by Bishop Santos.

Pilgrim passports

Pilgrims carry a jubilee passport stamped at each pilgrimage church, guiding them through prayer, reflection and simple acts of faith.

"This is not just a journey of the feet, but a journey of the heart," said Fr. Glenn William Relucio, overall coordinator of the jubilee celebrations.

He added the four "roads" encourage Catholics to grow inward through prayer while moving outward in service to the poor and marginalized.

4 roads of pilgrimage

The jubilee is shaped as a spiritual journey along four paths—faith, peace, hope and love—leading pilgrims to Antipolo Cathedral, the final stop of each pilgrimage route.

Road of Faith: Starts at St. Raphael the Archangel Parish in Rodriguez, passing through the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aranzazu and Sto. Niño Parish in San Mateo; Holy Family Parish and the Minor Basilica and Diocesan Shrine Parish of St. Paul of the Cross in Marikina City; and St. Francis Xavier Parish in Antipolo.

Road of Peace: Begins at Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles Parish, passing through Sacred Heart Parish in Binangonan; Diocesan Shrine and Parish of St. Clement in Angono; Christ the King Parish and the Minor Basilica and Parish of St. John the Baptist in

Taytay; and the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of Our Lady of Light in Cainta.

Road of Hope: Begins at Nativity of Our Lady Parish and includes the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados, and the Immaculate Conception Parish in Concepcion Uno, all in Marikina; the National Shrine and Parish of St. Therese of the Child Jesus; the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of St. Pio of Pietrelcina; and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, all in Antipolo.

Road of Love: Starts at St. Faustina Kowalska Parish in Jalajala, continuing through San Diego de Alcalá Parish and the Diocesan Shrine and Parish of St. Mary Magdalene in Pililla; Diocesan Shrine of the Holy Face of Jesus of Manoppello in Tanay; Diocesan Shrine and Parish of St. Joseph in Baras; and Saint Rose of Lima Parish in Teresa.

Pilgrims receive simple tokens for completing each road, but Relucio stressed the true gift is spiritual renewal and the grace of plenary indulgence.

The jubilee also includes outreach programs, catechetical activities, historical exhibits and national pilgrimages that bring the devotion beyond Antipolo.

"We are now on mission," Relucio said. "What begins as pilgrimage becomes witness. What starts as a devotion becomes mission."

The jubilee will conclude on Nov. 28, 2026. **(CBCP News)**

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