



# How the Provincial Chapter Opening Unfolded

**CEBU CITY**—The Provincial Chapter officially starts February 13 at Talavera House of Prayer.

Preceding the official opening of the said chapter was a day of recollection to give the Capitulars the opportunity to reflect, pray and ask the guidance of the Holy Spirit for a successful and fruitful chapter. The spiritual preparation was held February 12 with Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan as the recollection master.

The recollection was also an opportunity for the brothers to spiritually and fraternally enjoy one another's company as they are given sacred space in preparation for the Revitalization of the province. They are expected during the chapter proper to share past experiences as religious in their particular apostolates and their hopes for a deeper and more meaningful religious life and mission in the future. Or to adopt the words of the Life and Mission Project of the Augustinian Recollects: "To live and proclaim the Gospel, bearing witness to a contemplative and fraternal life, at the service of the Kingdom and in a shared mission with lay people." And as one religious commented, "we have gathered praying for the courage and the freedom to dare the most challenging task of restructuring and revitalizing the Province."

In his homily, Bishop Soc led the Capitulars into reflection by challenging them with these three questions: Where is your heart? Where is your joy? Who really are you?

After the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the capitulars, together with Archbishop Soc as their recollection master, proceeded to St. Augustine Hall for the spiritual input. During the morning session, Archbishop Soc shared with the capitulars the connection between Pope Francis' reflection and the tria munera of Christ—the ministry of encounter with the priestly office, the ministry of accompaniment with the prophetic role, and the ministry of discernment with the kingly function of Christ. In the afternoon, Archbishop Soc reflected on vocation to the priestly and religious life as the Philippine Church celebrates this year as the Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Life.

Having shared the bread and wine of the Eucharist together and spiritually recharged by the talk of Bishop Soc, the brothers are ready to put out into the deep and cast our nets wide, with joy, faith, and hope.



Photo combo shows the capitulars praying the Lauds. Upper right photo shows Archbishop Socrates Villegas, D.D. praying with the delegates of the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter.

## 7<sup>TH</sup> PROVINCIAL CHAPTER COSAS NOTABLES

The 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter of St. Ezekiel Moreno is jam-packed with many innovations and note-worthy events that every Augustinian Recollect, both of the Province and of the whole Order, will appreciate and remember. Here are some of the novelties and historical events that the present Provincial Chapter is unique for:

### Presence of a Mother

For the first time in the history of the Province of St. Ezekiel Moreno, the "vicaria," or replica of the venerated image of Nuestra Señora de la Salud is present in the Provincial Chapter. Although it is not the original image of the La Salud, the replica was used during the caravan in OAR communities as part of the re-launching of the devotion in her honor. Her presence at the present Provincial Chapter is an assurance of her maternal protection and intercession for a fruitful and successful chapter.

### Official Theme Song

The song "Sharing our Vision" written by Fr. Ferdinand Hernando, MB, with Fray Leander Barrot, OAR, and arranged by Mr. Noel Diño Espenida, is the official theme song of the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter. A music video by Fray Reynaldo Jaranilla, OAR, was launched in the social media summarizing the pastoral vision of the Province as "creators of communion."

### Trilingual Publication and Communications

With the call to use the three official languages of the Order—English, Spanish, and Portuguese —the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter Secretarial Committee publishes its official newsletter, the Chapter Chronicle, in trilingual approach. Updates are also posted in the official website of the Province and in its other social media accounts. This will allow all the brothers, where ever they may be and whatever language they comprehend, be updated with the events occurring in the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter.

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# A Day of Recollection for the Recollect Capitulars

**CEBU CITY**—Before the official opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter, the delegates, with spiritual insights of Most Rev. Socrates Villegas, DD, prepared themselves spiritually. The Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan shared with the capitulars the reflections of Pope Francis as possible guide in their chapter deliberations. Archbishop Soc focused on these three words—Encounter, Accompaniment, and Discernment—and connected them to the triple functions of the Church, the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ.

## **Ministry of Encounter and the Priestly Office**

“God presented Himself as a great God, the Creator. And in the incarnation of God, he presented himself as a ‘small God,’ a baby,” Archbishop Soc reflected. Christmas, then, is a feast of defiance because God defied human hatred and sin. He continued to love us despite our rejection of him. He remembered one of his experiences during a Christmas activity in a home for the abandoned children in Marikina City. While giving gifts of candies and chocolates, he noticed that one of the children was not eating what he gave. Asking the child why, the boy just responded, “Kalungin mo ako.” (Please carry me). And Archbishop Soc obliged. God sent his only begotten Son as a small child so that man can easily embrace and carry him. This was an encounter, which is essentially defiant, that God has initiated because he is the one who searches for us.

The priestly office of Christ that the ordained ministers of God share with Him is not a mere ritualistic function. It is an avenue for the priests to have an encounter with his flock. Pope Francis says in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the shepherd should smell like his sheep. While

it is true that the shepherd should also smell like his sheep, the shepherd, too, should also contaminate the sheep with the fragrance of his anointing as a priest. The life of holiness of the priest should also be felt and lived by the people entrusted to his care. Priests should avoid the “swivel chair” type of shepherding the people of God; they should go and meet them, just as Jesus did, in the dusty places, in the marketplace, and in the peripheries.

## **Ministry of Accompaniment and the Prophetic Office**

To be with the last, the least, the lost, and the left alone in the society; those who experience inhumane treatment from their fellow human beings; and those who have fallen away are the focus of the ministry of accompaniment. According to Archbishop Soc, there are three steps in this ministry:

First, it is essentially confrontational. Accompaniment does not tolerate what is wrong; does not say yes to evil; and calls good as good, and evil as evil. This prophetic ministry of religious and priestly life leads the flock to the second step, conversion. After confronting evil, conversion should not lead people to despair, but to have hope in God. Archbishop Soc stresses to recognize

the goodness in each person even if we confront the evil we have done. The final step to accompaniment is contemplation. True accompaniment leads people to be contemplatives. Contemplative life should not be limited to the religious alone. The goals of the ministry of accompaniment are to confront and challenge; to convert and console; and to lead others to contemplation, which is silence. Archbishop Soc reminisces what he said to his students, “The language of God is not Latin, English, Spanish, nor Italian, but silence.”

## **Ministry of Discernment and the Kingly Office**

The kingly office of the Church is the one that serves God and his people, and this entails a lot of discernment. When the choice between good and evil, it is not discernment; it is a moral choice. Discernment is choosing between two good things.

To have a better understanding of what is discernment, in Ignatian spirituality; Archbishop Soc enumerated the following steps. First, he talked about humility. Humility is essential in our life, but we should not brag about it. The moment we talk about our humility, we lose it and do the opposite. He also shared with the capitulars this quote on humility, “Hearts like doors will open with ease. With very very little keys, but the two very important keys are these, thank you sir and would you please.” By increasing the quota of saying “please” and “thank you,” it helps man to be humble and accept his littleness.

Second is learning to let go. Allow little ones to teach the proud; let go of the biases and prejudices that hinder us to leave behind each one’s attachment; and discern with the hope of becoming a listening church.

Lastly, man should never forget that sense of wonder, that sense of mystery. Archbishop Soc challenged the capitulars to be men of



*Archbishop Socrates Villegas, D.D. sharing a light moment with the delegates during the recollection.*

mystery, and not to be mysterious men. That sense of mystery would also lead us to see and go beyond problems and achievements.

“Lord change me, even if I am not ready” was the mantra that Archbishop Soc used to

close his talk and to let the capitulars prepare themselves for the noble tasks of the provincial chapter. During deliberations, many things may happen. However, this recollection prior to the formal opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial

Chapter was a privileged time to pray, to reflect, and to discern the will of God for the Province of St. Ezekiel Moreno.

## Archbishop Soc Guides Capitulars to Reflection with Three Questions

**CEBU CITY** – Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, the main celebrant of the votive mass of the Holy Spirit for the 7th Provincial Chapter, challenged the delegates to ask themselves with all sincerity these three questions: Where is your heart? Where is your joy? Who really are you?



*Archbishop Socrates Villegas, D.D. being flanked by the Prior General and the Prior Provincial.*

He began by saying that for those who do not belong to the Augustinian family, the only Augustinian phrase they know is “Late have I loved you O beauty ever ancient, ever new... and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” He used this as the jumping board in asking the first of three questions.

Where is your heart? The heart that he was referring was not so much to the physiological heart but rather to our life. He reminded the Capitulars that on the day of their profession and ordination they had already given up their hearts to the Lord and to the Church. This donation of the heart to the Lord and to the Church should permeate every deliberation, decision, and resolution that would be done during the Chapter. That

they would be guided by what the heart of the Lord and the Church beats for because that will be the direction that they must take.

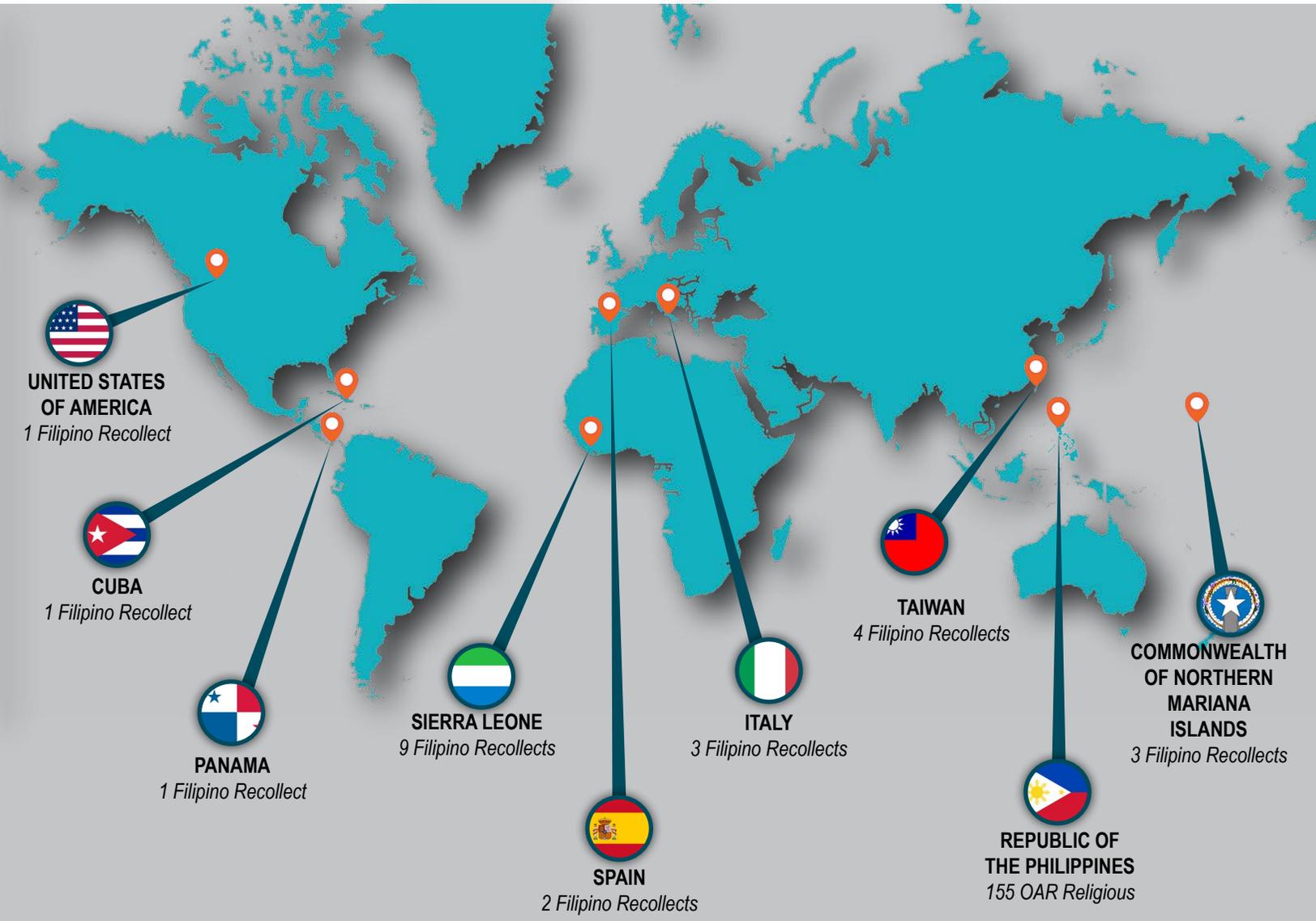
Archbishop Soc continued to challenge the Capitulars by asking the second question, “What makes you happy?” The source of their happiness must not merely lie in the strength of their numbers and the success of their ministries. Rather their joy and happiness and what eases their restlessness must be in the cross of the Lord because separated from it all happiness would be temporary. Perfect joy can only be found in the cross of the Lord.

The final question he gave was “Who really are you?” This former president of the CBCP (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines) added that in the Augustinian

Order, religious may be given titles such as Prior General, Prior Provincial, or President of a certain university. But before the Lord these titles do not matter anymore. “Before the Lord these titles do not exist because in the presence of the Lord man is only a sinner, but a sinner touched by God and now made beautiful” he clarified. Archbishop Soc used the motto in Pope Francis’ coat of arms “miserando atque eligendo” to explain further that man is miserable and yet chosen and called to a life of dignity, unworthy he may be.

Three questions put the Capitulars on the right track, right at the start of this historic Provincial Chapter.

## Global Presence of the Province of St. Ezekiel Moreno



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### 20-20 Vision

A normal and healthy human eye has a 20/20 visual acuity. It means a person's vision can see clearly what he should see at a distance of 20 feet. Coincidentally, the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter is held within the 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the foundation of the Province of St. Ezekiel Moreno (November 28, 1998) and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of Talavera House of Prayer-Recoletos (May 30, 1998) where the past and present Provincial Chapters are usually held. These anniversaries are good signs of God's providence that this Provincial Chapter will have a vision that is clear and long lasting.

With all the efforts to make the 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial Chapter a success, nothing will complete the realization of this endeavor except with the prayers and cooperation of all the brothers, as well as the good intentions and prayers of all our collaborators. There may be some innovations in the present chapter, but what remains is the desire to be in one mind and one heart in serving the Lord and His people.