

PRESS RELEASE

After the CBCP Plenary Assembly, July 6-8, 2013, Pope Pius XII Center, Manila

We, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, look forward to the semi-annual plenary meetings of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) as valued occasions to come together, to renew ourselves for our pastoral ministry and to share with each other about concerns for the people of God in the Philippines. This year, the midyear plenary assembly took place in the first week of July. It started with a spiritual retreat preached by Fr. Francis Moloney, SDB, a Bible scholar from Australia. He impressed on us bishops by his scholarly yet pastoral presentation the importance of the critical reading of the Bible in order that the Word of God may truly animate our task of growing in our spirituality and in the work of New Evangelization. The retreat took place in Betania Retreat House in Tagaytay from July 2-4. The following day, the various episcopal commissions and regional groupings of the bishops met.

The plenary assembly took place on July 6-8 at the plenary hall in Pius XII Catholic Center. The Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Giuseppe Pinto, who is the official representative of the Holy Father in the Philippines, opened the assembly by presiding at the opening Mass and by giving us his opening address on July 6. His presence is a reminder that we belong to one world-wide community, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

This year's midyear assembly elected the officials of the CBCP for the next two years. The new president of the CBCP from December 2013 to November 2015 will be Archbishop Socrates Villegas, the Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan, and the new vice-president will be Archbishop Romulo Valles, the Archbishop of Davao. New chairmen of various commissions were also elected.

The CBCP commissions made their reports to the body during the assembly. Some reports touched on the organization and management of the CBCP as an organization, others on the apostolates of the Church such as the mass media, vocations, the coming World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, the liturgy and others. The following pastoral concerns particularly challenged our collective attention on the pressing need for integral faith formation:

1. The preparations for the International Eucharistic Congress which will be held in Cebu in 2016. This is an international event that is celebrated by the entire Catholic Church every 4 years, so it has to be well prepared. The last one was done in Dublin, Ireland in 2012.
2. The on-going national consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary which is being done every first Saturday of the month in all dioceses in the country. It started last

month and will end in November, which also closes the Year of Faith. We are entrusting ourselves as a “Pueblo Amante de Maria” to the maternal care of the Blessed Mother in these troubled times of ours.

3. The forthcoming hearing of the Supreme Court on the constitutionality of the RH Law. The bishops were updated about the issues involved and prayers and a show of support were solicited from all. We are resolved to do our best to preserve life and the family in our country.
4. An evaluation of the May elections was done. We, bishops are very concerned that the safeguards of the Automated Election Law were not sufficiently carried out, that there are many problems on the transmissions of the ERs, that the Comelec is stonewalling on the complaints from many quarters on the conduct of the election, and that many voters were disenfranchised due to confusing voters’ lists. After one experience of the automated election this year’s election should have been better, but it was not. We call for accountability from Comelec officials and demand that the law be followed.
5. We bishops are dismayed at the massive vote buying and vote selling that is experienced everywhere. The deepening hold of political dynasties is lamentable, although some political families have lost their hold in a number of provinces and cities. We should see how the principles of common good and stewardship are to be better imparted to our people in the political education given to them.
6. The issues of APECO in Casiguran and the COCONUT LEVY were also presented to the bishops for our better understanding. We bishops are concerned about these issues because they are matters of justice which deeply touch the lives of the poor.
7. In the commission reports, other concerns were mentioned – such as the continuation of the peace process in Mindanao, the speedy implementation of the agrarian reform program, and the constant protection of the environment.

We are thankful for the participation and the interest of the bishops during the plenary assembly. We go back to our individual dioceses strengthened by the experience of brotherhood but at the same time challenged all the more in our ministry to be effective bearers and proclaimers of truth, justice, peace and love under the leadership of Pope Francis. We hope and pray, under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to work for the growth of our own faith and that of God’s people whom we shepherd in this second half of the Year of Faith under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.