

Villar lauds outgoing Archbishop Oscar Cruz

NACIONALISTA Party President Senator Manny Villar is saddened by the retirement of Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Oscar Cruz from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines or CBCP but expresses confidence in newly named replacement Bishop Socrates Villegas.

"As many of us are well aware of, Archbishop Cruz is undoubtedly the most outspoken leaders of the CBCP. He is very vigilant in standing up against graft and corruption, human rights abuse, bad governance, social injustice, and other ills of the government and the society in general," said Villar.

As early as two years ago, Archbishop Cruz has asked the Vatican for early retirement but it was just recently accepted by the Pope. The former CBCP president will turn 75, the mandatory retirement age, on November 17. Archbishop Cruz's retirement and the appointment of Bishop Villegas as successor were announced yesterday (Sept. 8) in Vatican 12 noon (6 p.m. local time).

"I witnessed first-hand the unwavering dedication and firm stance against corruption of Archbishop Cruz when as chair of the Senate Committee on Public Order, we worked together during the jueteng (illegal numbers game) investigation. He was untiring in his efforts in protecting the witnesses and seeking for the truth," said Villar.

Born in 1934, Archbishop Cruz was ordained priest at the age of 27 on February 10, 1962. He was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Manila on March 4, 1976 and as archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan on July 5, 1991. He also served as CBCP president from 1995 to 1999.

According to the CBCP, the archbishop will be succeeded by Balanga Bishop Socrates Villegas, former auxiliary bishop to the charismatic Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin. At 48, Bishop Villegas will become the country's youngest archbishop.

Villar also extends his best wishes for Bishop Villegas, who like Cruz, was considered as a protégé of the late Cardinal Sin. In a media statement, Cruz

said he is "very happy with my forthcoming successor, Archbishop Socrates Villegas, whom I know to be a man of integrity and competence."

Along with Archbishop Cruz last year, Bishop Villegas was among the five bishops who declared that "that the time for a new government is now." They strongly condemned corruption

in government that they said had become "endemic, massive, systemic and rampant in our politics." The others who called for radical reforms were CBCP president and Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, Masbate Bishop Joel Baylon and Legazpi Bishop-Emeritus Jose Sorra.

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