

Bishop writes to his priest

Dear Father,

Peace be with you! Today I join the bishops of the World in thanking the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, for declaring June 19, 2009 to June 19, 2010 as YEAR FOR PRIESTS. As we begin the year-long celebration today, the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I am writing to express to you my personal thanks and appreciation for who and what you are—a PRIEST of and for the Diocese of Kidapawan and the whole Church. I am sure that my sentiments echo those of the lay people and the religious Sisters and Brothers here in the Diocese. With this letter I am requesting them to pray for you and your fellow priests.

How wonderful it must be for you and the priests of the world to feel and know that you are loved and appreciated. It is not everyday that you get affirmations or receive encouragements from the people you serve, perhaps much less from your bishop. During this whole year and onwards, would that I be more expressive of my love, affirmation and appreciation to you, dear Father.

What can the shepherd that I am, really do without you? You celebrate the daily and Sunday Masses for your parishioners, and they are nourished. You baptize, you bless, you officiate at weddings, you hear confessions and anoint the sick, and they are nurtured. You visit homes, offices, hospitals and schools, and people feel God himself visiting them. You spend hours in prayer and study preparing your homilies and lectures, and people are grateful that you make the Word of God and church teachings beneficial to their lives.

Thank you, Father, for these and many more that you do every single hour of the day. Thank you for your sacrifices, for your love for your people. I say you many times tired and exhausted yet still able to smile and make me feel welcome in your convento (Parish Rectory). I am sure that you would like to have the spirit of St. John May Vianney, Patron Saint of Priests in whose honor this year is dedicated in commemoration of his 150th Death Anniversary. The Pope said that the Cure d' Ars is "a true example of a pastor at the service of Christ's flock." I wish to entrust you, Father, to his intercession and protection and encourage you to ever imitate his pastoral zeal as much as you can.

In announcing the Year for Priests, the Holy Father points out very clearly your need to "strive for spiritual perfection on which the effectiveness of your ministry depends." He recalls that the bishop's imposition of hands and the consecratory prayer at your ordination made you a new man. He wishes that your important "role and mission in the Church and in society" be ever more clearly perceived by the people.

Without knowing that his year will be declared a Year for Priests, I decided with you and other priests at our Presbyterium meeting on August 11, 2008 that it was high time that we opened our College Seminary in the Diocese. We felt then that so much had been expended in the Diocese for the "empowerment of the laity." Indeed, the Diocese has been blessed to have many very active and participative BECs (Basic Ecclesial

Communities) or GKKs (Gagmayng Kristohanong Katilingban) which celebrate the World of God every Sunday and receive communion from well-trained Kaabags (Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion). We have good lay leaders but we also need priests and more priests for Kidapawan Diocese (we have only 26 to boast of after 33 years as a local church!).

How timely our decision is! The Holy Father reminds us that “The centrality of Christ brings with it the correct appreciation of the ministerial priesthood without which there would be neither the Eucharist, nor even the mission nor the Church herself.” Here I wish to say that if our BECs or GKKs are really strong as we claim them to be, then let more vocations to the Priesthood and the Religious Life sprout, be born from them. We thank the Lord that on June 3 this year our diocesan college seminary opened with 25 young men enthusiastically responding to the Lord’s call with the help of two formators.

Yes, Father, I join the Pope in reminding you again that for formation of the candidate for the ministry needs your collaboration “by cultivating truly fatherly human relations and by taking an interest in their continuing formation, especially from the doctrinal and spiritual viewpoints.” We need more priests but we also need you, Father, to help us nurture the seminarians who made their initial response to Christ’s call. Help us to care and pray for our 13 theology seminarians, 21 college seminarians in Davao and in Cotabato, 25 here in Balindog, Kidapawan, and 14 on pastoral or guided regency.

Please encourage them, especially those from your parish, to strive to persevere and become holy, zealous and good shepherds like Jesus and St. John Mary Vianney. Make them feel that they are needed by the people, by the Diocese, by the Church.

Finally, I ask you and your people to pray in the home or in the Church the Prayer for Priests and Anima Christi. The Prayer for Priests is a wish of the Church for you. Anima Christi may well be your own desire to be filled by Christ, the Good Shepherd, so that, as He was faithful to the Father and fulfilled His mission to the end, you may also be faithful to Christ and the Priesthood forever.

May God bless you, Father. Do take care of your health. Eat and drink with moderation. Exercise and pray regularly. Remember, if I may borrow the late Jaime Cardinal Sin’s endearing words, I love you very dearly.

Sincerely your bishop,

+ROMULO T. DE LA CRUZ, DD
Bishop of Kidapawan