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## When God writes your love story

Christine from Cebu shares how years of prayer and a series of providential events led her to marry Evrard, a London-based Congolese supernumerary of Opus Dei. For them, marriage is not just a personal calling: it's a shared mission.

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I never thought I could love a man unconditionally. I believed in *unconditional love*... but only in the way God loves humanity.

Marriage always seemed distant. But in January 2016, during the 51st International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu, a family's testimony touched me so deeply that it opened my heart to the possibility of marriage.

That day, I consecrated my future husband to the Eucharist, surrendering all my desires to God. I trusted Him to shape me into the woman He willed. In moments of longing and doubt, I would find peace in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

Eight years of waiting prepared me to recognize and treasure Evrard when he finally came. Had he arrived sooner, I might not have grasped the depth of the blessing.

### **A dream venue**

In August 2016, I dreamt of being married in a Spanish-style church. It felt like a message of hope, like the

angel appearing to Saint Joseph in a dream. Two months later, I visited the Archdiocesan Shrine of Sta. Teresa de Avila in Talisay, Cebu. This was the place I saw in my dream! Something about that church made me return again and again. I felt it was part of my story.

Years later, when Evrard and I got engaged, I shared the memory with him. Without hesitation, he chose that very church for our wedding. His gesture was quiet but profound. It affirmed that God truly knew my heart.

### **Family first: a new mission**

There was a time when I believed that my corporate career would complete me. But even at its peak, something was missing. My heart longed for more — for family, for faith, for a deeper purpose.

I discerned a new mission: to help bring our family closer together. My parents had lived in different places since 2008 due to life's circumstances, though they remained lovingly committed. I realized then that my physical presence — not just my financial support — was essential. God was leading me away from career ambitions and toward something greater.

In early 2022, I received a scholarship to pursue a Master's degree in Marriage and Family at the John Paul II Institute in Bacolod. At around that same time, my parents bond deepened — an unexpected grace. God's plan was far more beautiful than anything I could have imagined.

By February 2023, our family was reunited in Bacolod. We even organized a renewal of vows for our

parents, a dream my mother had long held.

## **Our Lady's hand**

On my 33rd birthday in Iloilo, a taxi driver suggested that I make a wish to Our Lady of Candles, whose image was at the entrance of the Cathedral. I prayed for a husband.

Three months later, in July 2023, I met Evrard.

I was at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Metro Manila, waiting for my flight to Dubai outside a crowded restaurant and writing in my journal. It was a special time — I was preparing to volunteer for World Youth Day in Lisbon.

A tall, well-dressed man with a gentle face and kind demeanor called my attention. He had just exited the elevator and seemed to be asking

people around him for a place to eat. I continued writing in my journal.

After some time, he was there asking if he could share my table. The way he approached and looked at me kind of convinced me that he was someone I could trust. Evrard, a British national of Congolese-French descent, had been living in London for over 20 years. A friend had invited him to visit the Philippines.

I'm used to chatting with strangers, and we ended up talking... for six hours.

It was only later that I realized that even the café where we met (Mary Grace) was a quiet nod from heaven. It bore the name of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

### **God's timing, God's grace**

We both shared a love for mission. I have served the Archdiocese of Cebu

since 2012. Evrard, a supernumerary of Opus Dei, had spent over a decade providing Christian formation to youth.

When I was pickpocketed during a post-World Youth Day trip in Spain, Evrard's generous support from afar showed me the strength of his character. That incident, more than any words he spoke, made me trust him deeply. He accompanied me throughout my volunteer journey. It was a beautiful way to begin our friendship.

As our wedding approached, I had moments of doubt. I felt unworthy of such a gift. But God reminded me of his faithfulness. Evrard's love brought peace, clarity, and confidence — exactly what I needed to say “yes.”

**A new beginning with Opus Dei**

Marriage was the beginning of a new chapter.

In 2024, we completed our Pre-Marriage Course and returned to Our Lady of Candles in Iloilo to give thanks.

On December 3, I attended my first Opus Dei recollection at Ayala Central Bloc Chapel, the same place where, years ago, I had helped launch a group for young professionals.

Before the wedding, I went to confession and received spiritual direction at an Opus Dei center in Cebu. On December 24, I made the decision to become a cooperator of Opus Dei. It was my birthday gift to Jesus at the dawn of the Jubilee Year.

**The mission of marriage**

At first, I thought marrying Evrard was the destination. But I've come to see that it is only the beginning.

Marriage is not just a *personal* vocation — it is a *shared* mission. I am called to love and serve through my husband, and together, we are called to bring Christ into the world.

Our story is a testament to God's perfect timing. The wait was long, but every step was necessary to lead us to this point. Through surrender, faith, and grace, God brought us together ...at his time, in his place, for his mission.

Christine Villatura-Loembe

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