

The Prelate in Cebu, August 3-5, 2023

Msgr. Fernando Ocariz was in Cebu on August 3-5, at the latter part of his 12-day apostolic trip to the Philippines. In his less than 48 hours stay he visited various apostolic projects and met with many people.

08/06/2023

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AUGUST 3, Thursday

Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, the Prelate of Opus Dei, landed at the Mactan Cebu International Airport shortly before noon. “Bienvenido!” and “Welcome to Cebu, Padre” read the tarpaulin signs carried by the well-wishers. Some Cebu families with their children formally met him as he entered the private reception area. A boy dressed as Datu Humabon and a little girl dressed as Queen Juana gave him gifts. Humabon and Juana were the first converts to Christianity in 1521.

A good number from the various cities in the Visayas and Mindanao came to the airport. The last time the Prelate came to Cebu was in 1998 (at that time it was Bishop Javier Echevarría). The reception area was full of with people wanting to greet him personally. At the background, young women from Iloilo sang Spanish songs familiar to the Father,

providing a jovial family atmosphere.

The Father engaged one well-wisher after another with a constant smile. He listened to their little messages, thanked them for their gifts, and obliged every request for a photo, signature, and blessing. Those warm and familiar 20 minutes at the airportt reception area set the tone for the Father's stay in Cebu.

Lahug

Arriving at his residence these days in Lahug, the Father met more families. They shared their family stories; some gave him personally crafted gifts. Children had their small messages for him and some gave him drawings and sketches. He blessed the children's foreheads. He gladly acceded to their requests to sign their mementos and take photos with him.

During these days, the Father received guests in his residence at Lahug after lunch and dinner. They came from Iloilo, Bacolod, Cagayan de Oro, and Davao, sharing with him stories about the apostolic activities in their place.

PAREF Springdale

In the mid-afternoon, Msgr. Ocariz visited PAREF Springdale school. He was welcomed by members of the Board of Trustees for PAREF schools in Cebu, the Springdale management staff, teachers, and families.

Springdale is a private grade school and high school for boys.

He passed by the school quadrangle, which is presided by a bronze bas relief of the Holy Family designed by renowned Cebu artist, Celso Pepito. Ric, the school's director, pointed out that the child Jesus in the relief is dressed as the Santo Niño of Cebu.

Two boys entertained him with a violin number and a song.

Diocesan Priests

The Father proceeded upstairs to the Springdale auditorium, where about 25 priests were eagerly awaiting him. Among them was Bishop Isabolo Abarquez of Calbayog (Samar), who brought 5 of his priests. Also present were clergy from Cebu, Butuan, and Leyte.

The Prelate spoke to them about the dignity of the priestly ministry, telling them that priests are Christs on earth. He touched on the importance of diocesan priests living a deep fraternity among themselves, and the need to provide support to priests who at times may feel lonely in their ministry.

Responding to a member of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who asked "how to be good sons of

St. Josemaria,” his advice was to be very natural and not to be afraid to ask our Founder for things. And then to strive to be faithful to the spirit he has left us.

At the end of the get together, he asked for their blessing.

Santo Niño of Cebu

The *Santo Niño* (Holy Child) holds a special place in the hearts of Filipinos, particularly those from Cebu.

The Prelate of Opus Dei visited the *Basilica Minore del Santo Niño* in the late afternoon. He was welcomed by the *Hermano and Hermana Mayor*. Also there to try to meet the Father were families in their *Sinulog* attire and well-wishers from Davao, Cagayan de Oro, and West Visayas. The Father went out of his way to engage them before entering the Basilica.

While traversing the esplanade, some ladies asked him to bless an image of *Sto. Niño* to be placed in their Center in Davao. A group of ladies from Bacolod asked the Father to bless a seedling to be planted in their new Center. A young couple asked him to bless the mittens and booties of their first child to be born in December.

The Augustinians are the custodians of the basilica. The rector of the Basilica escorted the Prelate to pray before the *Santo Niño*, the one gifted to Queen Juana by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. He laid flowers at the base of the image.

AUGUST 4, Friday

Banilad Study Center and BCPD

First thing in the morning, the Prelate celebrated Mass in the oratory of the Banilad Study Center. There he met ladies from the

different centers in the Visayas and Mindanao. The patrons of the Dayao center for women in Davao City showed him the printed perspective of their definitive center in Davao, which the Father blessed. When he asked “Can I go there? Will you invite me there?” there was a millisecond of shocked silence, followed by a thunderous “Yes, Father!”

He walked to the adjacent Banilad Center for Professional Development (BCPD), a technical-vocational school that has played a pivotal role in promoting women empowerment and providing livelihood skills to vulnerable sectors of society like the Indigenous Peoples, the out-of-school youths, and persons with disabilities.

The BCPD students welcomed the Prelate with a popular Cebuano song “I Love Cebu,” the lyrics of which were changed into “We love Pader.” He was beaming with joy as he

listened and watched them dance. After the performance, the students approached him for the traditional “Mano Po” greeting (forehead on the hand of one’s parent).

Members of the Management Staff alternately explained to him the school’s various social programs, a number of which are supported by international agencies. The Prelate met and blessed some Badjao women who finished Bread and Pastry Production in BCPD. He asked them to pray for him and they agreed to do so.

They showed him the printed architect’s perspective of the BCPD “dream school” in Minglanilla, Cebu. He wrote on it: “With my blessings” and signed his name.

The school granted him a toque with the logo of BCPD and declared him as the “Master Chef of BCPD.” They also gifted him with a small backpack, an

invitation for him to come to Cebu for another visit.

The Prelate encouraged them to continue their work in the school so that more women, families, and communities benefit from their social programs. Before leaving, he posed for a final photo with the BCPD Patrons, Board members, faculty, staff, and mentors.

CITE Technical Institute

Msgr. Ocariz travelled north to Talamban, for a visit to CITE Technical Institute. This school for the skills training of young men as well as people already working in industry began in 1990 upon the impulse of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who was in Cebu in 1987.

The Prelate was welcomed by members of the Board of Trustees. At the entrance of the new Activities Center, the CITE choir sang “*Oh*

Kinabuhi" (Oh Life), a catchy Visayan tune. The Father paused to listen and thanked them for their greeting. He entered the main lobby and saw the marble bust of Blessed Alvaro bedecked with flowers. The Father went there and spent some moments praying.

He blessed the ongoing construction of the residence hall and proceeded to the upper floor. The Activities Center is a new facility for the ongoing human, spiritual, and professional formation of students, alumni, and industry workers. He blessed the recently-finished chapel of that facility in simple ceremonies.

Families, officers, benefactors, faculty members and others forming part of the CITE community greeted him along his way from the chapel to the living room. They introduced themselves, their children, and friends. He gladly posed for photos

with them. He blessed religious objects and autographed the items laid out on the living room table for him to sign.

The Wong family gave him an icon painting of an angel holding the seal of CITE, executed by a local painter. The King family gave him a model of a local sailboat cast in silver. Celso Pepito and his wife gave him an original painting with St. Josemaría, Blessed Alvaro, and Bishop Javier together.

PAREF Southdale and Southcrest

On his way back to Lahug, what was supposed to have been a simple drive-by at PAREF Southdale and Southcrest schools became a full visit.

He alighted at Southdale where preschool children in their uniforms were waving to welcome him on campus. He walked to Southcrest

school under a hot noon day sun. A Grade 2 student gave him a bouquet of flowers for him to place at the statue our Lady. The students and teachers accompanied him there praying a “Hail Mary.”

After passing by the school chapel to visit the Blessed Sacrament, the Father blessed the newly-painted statue of St. Josemaria in the promenade. He gamely tried the telescope that the school gifted to him, signed his name on a World Youth Day t-shirt designed by Southcrest students who participated in the WYD in Lisbon, and gave his blessing to everyone present.

He had no meeting or formal message but through his deeds and presence, he showed that he is a father to his daughters in the PAREF schools.

Oakridge Pavilion

The general get-together at 5:00 pm of Friday, August 4, was the highlight event of the Prelate's short stay in Cebu. The Prelate was welcomed to the venue by the Liu family, owners of the Oakridge Business Park in Mandaue City, who graciously offered to host the event. It was a lively and moving one hour family gathering that took place at the Oakridge Pavilion.

Read the highlights of the gathering here.

Hospital Visit

In the early evening, the Father visited Ben, the director of CITE Technical Institute, who has been ill for some weeks now at the University of Cebu Medical Center.

AUGUST 5, Saturday

Departure

After Mass and breakfast, the Father gave his final blessing and said goodbye to the people in Lahug Center. He left for the airport, but not before having a group photo at the main entrance, re-enacting a photo taken with Bishop Javier in the same place in 1998.

The Father was at the Mactan International Airport at 9:00 am for his flight to Indonesia. When he alighted from the car, he was greeted by a big group of well-wishers. He was momentarily detained by people who wanted to have their last photos with the Prelate. He signed the printed artworks used at the Oakridge gatherings, which the organizers requested.

The 50-meter walk from the car to the airport entrance was a joyous experience. Some walked together with the Father, while a group from Bacolod serenaded him with Bruno

Mars' "Count on Me" accompanied by ukuleles. Those lined up at the sides waved their goodbye's and the Father waved back. As he entered the airport building, a group shouted in chorus "We love you Father!" He turned back and waved good bye.

The Prelate's less than 48 hours stay in Cebu was short and intense, with many activities and encounters with his spiritual children, their families, and friends. In summary, what characterized it all was family warmth, as one commented "warmer than the sun in Cebu."
