

Philippine diocese to keep money out of church services

The Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan in the northern Philippines has decided to "choose the path of pastoral prudence" and rid parish operations of "any semblance of business and commerce." "It is a hard climb but we must be wise as serpents and innocent as doves," Archbishop Socrates Villegas said in a statement addressed to parishes under his jurisdiction.



"The church stands at risk as secularism gains ground," said Archbishop Villegas, noting that parishes operating stores for religious books and devotional articles are also selling items not related to the promotion of religious devotion and catechesis.

"This practice has left a mistaken impression among the Catholic faithful that the church is engaging in business and commerce beyond its spiritual mission," said Archbishop Villegas who is also president of the Philippine bishops' conference.

The prelate said his archdiocese will not open new religious stores and will close the ones that are in existence, unless these have gained business licenses from the government and records with the tax bureau. Archbishop Villegas had earlier asked priests to stop the practice of accepting payments for sacraments.

He has also ordered the removal of price tags in issuing church certificates. "This is in consonance with our collective vision to cleanse the church of any semblance of commercialism in the rendering of church services," he said, adding that the "obligatory policy" was agreed by priests and laymen of the archdiocese.

The policy, which came to effect after Archbishop Villegas met with clergy members on Jan. 8, will affect the issuance of baptismal certificates, confirmation certificates, marriage certificates, wedding banns, and other church documents. Archbishop Villegas said the clergy should only accept what the parishioners can offer and instead encourage the faithful to adapt the spirit of stewardship by donating generously regardless of the services they may need. "This is a proof of our maturity in the faith and devotion to our Mother Church.

We must be a community that gives because we love the church," said Archbishop Villegas. "We dream of a church renewed, truly close to the people and responsive to the needs of the flock. Let us make this vision come true," he added.

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