

## Archbishop Romulo Valles: President of Philippine Bishops Conference

Philippine bishops elect new conference president Duterte ally Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao to succeed critic of president as head of influential body Philippine bishops elect new conference president



Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao in Mindanao was elected president of the influential Philippine Catholic bishops' conference on July 8.

The country's church leaders followed tradition when they elected the Davao prelate, the current vice president of the collegial body, as their new leader.

The 66-year-old Archbishop Valles, a close friend of President Rodrigo Duterte, has served as vice president of the conference since December 2013.

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He will succeed Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, a vocal critic of Duterte's anti-narcotics war that has resulted in the killing of thousands of suspected drug users and dealers.

The presidential palace in Manila welcomed the election of Archbishop Valles, saying it "signals a new day of peace for a multi-cultural Philippines."

The palace said Archbishop Valles' familiarity with the southern Philippines "would augur well for the country as we promote interfaith dialogue and intercultural understanding."

Duterte spokesman Ernesto Abella expressed hope that the new head of the bishops' conference will see the church "have a more open dialogue and cooperation with the government."

In a 2016 interview, Archbishop Valles said, "a friendly sharing of ideas would be good" to engage the then newly-elected Duterte.

The prelate said he was "always hopeful" that the president, who condemned the Catholic Church as "the most hypocritical institution," will change.

In the past year, church leaders criticized Duterte's anti-narcotics war, and opposed the proposed revival of capital punishment and the lowering of the age of criminal liability for minors.

At 66, Archbishop Valles will be the 20th head of the 72-year-old collegial body of 83 active bishops, five diocesan administrators, and 43 honorary members of the conference.

Conference officials have a two-year tenure in office, or a total of four to include the second term. If tradition is to be followed, incumbent officials are re-elected for their second and last term.

Born in Maribojoc town in the province of Bohol, Archbishop Valles finished his studies at the Pontificio Ateneo Sant' Anselmo in Rome.

He has been a member of the clergy in Mindanao for the past 40 years and archbishop of Davao since May 2012.

He was bishop of Kidapawan in 1997 and archbishop of Zamboanga in 2007.

Joe Torres, Manila - UCA News