From Asia to serve the Holy Land: the Order's Lieutenancy for the Philippines

"I serve the Order of the Holy Sepulchre to honor the legacy of my parents. My mother, Consuelo Banzuela Castro, who joins me here today; and my father, David Malabanan Castro who passed away 15 years ago. He taught me how to pray and to have deep faith. He also showed me what resilience means and what courageousness entails, while encouraging me to stand up for my beliefs. He also gave me the confidence to understand that I needed to use the talents that God had given me to care for others," stated the new Lieutenant for the Philippines of the Order, Helen Castro Limcaoco, during her speech of assumption of office delivered on February 22, 2025 in front of the Grand Prior of the Lieutenancy, His Eminence Cardinal Jose Advincula, archbishop of Manila, as well as her predecessors in this office: Jose L. Cuisia and Jesus P. Tambunting.

Helen Castro Limcaoco is a successful entrepreneur who has founded and cofounded two companies in the gym sector. She was invested in 2015 and very soon afterwards she was asked to support the Lieutenancy through the Special Projects Committee whose goal was to open a Catholic Chaplaincy in Amman, Jordan. In July 2017, this goal came to fruition and the Chaplaincy was inaugurated by Cardinal Tagle to serve 22,000 Filipino migrants in and around Amman. She was then asked to join the Executive Council in 2020 and to head the Membership Committee that led the recruitment effort for new members as well as to review the Formation Program of the Lieutenancy.

"I'm not certain why I was the person selected to be the Lieutenant," confesses the Filipino Lieutenant, "but given that I am so today, then I am determined to carry on from where Ambassador Cuisia has left off. We are going to try to expand our membership further, continue to be more diverse by reaching out to more dioceses, and to build strong ties among all members so that more of them participate in our activities that aim to help their spiritual formation. We hope to transition to the practices mentioned in the General Regulations that we are still doing slightly differently, while trying to maintain our own local culture and traditions."

The Lieutenancy in the Philippines counts more than 100 Members. The most recent five joined the family of the Order at the same Investitures during which Helen Castro Limcaoco assumed the Lieutenant's office. Among them, there is Dame Marose Soberano who shares how it was a deep attraction and love for the Holy Land, although she is living so far away from it, that motivated her to join the Order. "In November 2019, I was invited to join a group of ladies for a seminar organized by Opus Dei at its Saxum Conference Center in Israel. The various seminar sessions and visits to the holy places of Jesus permitted us to have a deep appreciation of the Holy Land. Thus – she continues – when I received the invitation to join the Order in November 2022, which was exactly three years after my visit, we immediately accepted it with so much excitement." Dame Soberano concludes, "Living a meaningful and prayerful life; doing our own apostolate undertakings to share our knowledge and love for God to others; and now, this privilege to be a significant part of the activities of the Equestrian Order to help protect and support the Holy Land – this is how we want to live our lives."

Elena Dini

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