



January 6, 2026

**FOR: 1. MBG ARCHDIOCESAN/DIOCESAN/PRELATURE/APOSTOLIC VICARIATE/MOP COUNCILS
2. MBG PARSIHES IN DIOCESES NOT YET CONSTITUTED AS A COUNCIL
3. MBG SPECIAL UNITS
4. MBG REGIONAL COORDINATORS**

REF: NEW YEAR... NEW BEGINNINGS

My Beloved Mother Butlers,

The Peace of Christ.

How fast time flies. Now we are already in the first week of the new year. But at whatever time, everyday I thank God for all of you and implore him to keep all of you, HIS Mother Butlers, in the palm of his hand.

In one of his messages last December, Pope Leo XIV asked: "What do you seek?" It was also the question of Jesus to those who were looking for the Messiah and asking if he was the one. They also asked: "Lord, where are you staying?" In the context of the MBG, here we see it is important to know where you are staying so that we could help lead you to Jesus, the Servant-God we follow, obey and serve. Just as Andrew, when he saw where Jesus was staying and stayed with him for a while, immediately he ran to tell his brother Simon (Peter): I found the Lord, the Messiah."

Our new program/activity for 2026 is to find you... where you are staying. It is not really a new program since we have been trying to complete our MBG directory since last year. But this time your MBG National Executive Board is giving it a new approach...a new incentive. **I designated a Membership Empowering Team (MET) to carry out this new program we are calling THE MBG NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP RECORD PROGRAM.**

The MET is composed of...

- 1) Cynthia L. Cabrera – National Vice President for Spiritual Concerns
- 2) Estrellita (Lee) T. Santos – National Vice President for Pastoral Concerns
- 3) Emma A. Perez – Board Member (NEB)

The MET will be sending you a letter to explain further the mechanics of the Program and its accompanying incentives for compliance.

Related to the above Program, we are putting on pro-active mode our Regional Coordinators so that they can effectively and lovingly help the MBG dioceses in their respective areas of care to

really and more intimately know Jesus, to really and more intensely love Jesus so that the MBG anywhere and everywhere will manifest the face of Christ... and facilitate an encounter with HIM. **To actualize the important role of Regional Coordinators, I have created a new program for the Regional Coordinators' Emergence: RC ARISE.** There will be regular ZOOM Development Meetings for the Regional Coordinators with varied topics/themes for exposition and discussion organized by the MET. I shall also designate Deputy Regional Coordinators in regions that are too big for just one Regional Coordinator to handle. These ad hoc appointments will be announced within two weeks' time.

In the gospel for today – Mark 6:34-44, the multiplication of the loaves... Jesus was teaching the people many things, and it was getting late... the disciples worried since they were in a deserted place. They asked Jesus to let the people go so they could go to the nearby farms and villages and get something to eat. Jesus, in turn, told them to give the people something to eat themselves. But they replied that feeding thousands of people would cost too much and they didn't have the funds. Jesus asked them what they had. And I guess after asking around, they came up with 5 loaves and 2 fish (the *baon* of a boy in the crowd).

Why did Jesus ask so many questions when he knew all along it was late and there were no stores nearby... that the disciples didn't have the money to feed such a big crowd... that there among the people was a boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish? Jesus did not talk down to his disciples. He didn't make them feel he knew all the answers. Though he knew all along what he was going to do. He asked them simple questions. To make them think. To make them creative. To make them patient and generous. To make them go around and talk to the crowd. To make all participate in his work... in his mission.

He gave his disciples, and us too, an example of how to serve like he did... get people together to hear the good news, to do good things together (communion)... to invite them to share in the work, not lording it over them but working together with them (participation)... to make learning, working, sharing together the fruits of our work a habit... a mission towards a blessed life.

Allow me to make *kuwento* to you an incident during my season in Rome. When President Ramos appointed me as ambassador to the Vatican, I knew nothing about diplomatic policies nor how to conduct foreign affairs. To familiarize myself about the Vatican and the work of the embassies accredited to the Holy See, I thought of visiting all the ambassadors and the different dicasteries (departments) of the Roman Curia. I braced myself to visit first the most difficult. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was perceived as most challenging since it was headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who was reputed to be very intelligent, the equivalent of 8 theologians. So sharp in attacking heresies and fiercely defending the faith that some called him the German Rottweiler (a fierce dog of German breed). So, I prepared myself for the visit to him. I bought all the books I could find that he authored (English version)... I even bought one in Italian so I could quote him in that language. At least I had to sound intelligent for the Philippines.

My appointment for my visit to Cardinal Ratzinger was at 11:30 AM. His bishop-secretary made it very clear to our embassy secretary that my courtesy call would be for 15 minutes because the Cardinal was very busy. The office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Sant'Ufficio) was just across our embassy. At 11:10 AM, I told our embassy driver to drive me to Sant'Ufficio.

Our driver was startled... he said walking cross the street would be faster. But I insisted on using the car because I was so nervous that walking in my high heels on the cobbled stones of the street I would certainly fall. So, he drove me across and it was 11:15 AM... I sat in the car waiting because it was not according to protocol to arrive too early or late. The Swiss guards at the gate must have thought this new Filipina ambassador must be batty, using the car to cross the street then waiting sitting in the car. At 11:25 AM I went to the elevator... at 11:28 AM I was at the door of the Congregation. The bishop-secretary welcomed me and brought me to the Cardinal's receiving room, gently specifying again that my visit was for 15 minutes. At exactly 11:30 AM, Cardinal Ratzinger came in. He was not a tall man. In my high heels we were almost eye-contact level. He had a very kind smile. There was a certain shyness about him that lessened my nervousness.

I had it all timed: 7 minutes for my questions/comments about his books... 8 minutes for his answers. So, I started rattling off what I rehearsed after reading his books. Being the intellectual that he was, he must have known outright my "put-on" knowledge. But he gave no hint of this. Instead, he answered my questions in a simple manner... never talking down or in a condescending way. In fact, it was so relaxing ... like an enjoyable catechism lesson. Then he even told me about his Bavarian hometown where he grew up. The clock struck 11:45 AM, but Cardinal Ratzinger was in no hurry. He asked how I was... about my family... if I was enjoying Rome. Such kindness... such patience... such generosity. When the clock struck 12Noon, his bishop-secretary came in: "Your Eminence, there are other visitors waiting." I immediately stood up and apologetically thanked him for taking so much of his time. Cardinal Ratzinger even walked me to the elevator and said: "You must visit me again. Remember Henrietta, that faith is not a set of doctrines or volumes of books. Faith is a Person... the Person of Christ. And when you facilitate an encounter with him, you are making the Kingdom happen."

That day Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who later on became Pope Benedict XVI, made the Kingdom happen for me. My meeting with him was like a meeting with Christ. Christ who is kind... who is patient... who is love.

May people meeting each of you... all of you, my cherished Mother Butlers, be like meeting Christ. That's what all our MBG new beginnings this new year are all about.

Hugging you in my prayers and in my heart.

Sincerely,



Amb. HENRIETTA T. DE VILLA
National President

To know Jesus and make him known. To love Jesus and make him loved.