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A volunteer member of River Warriors cleans up trash on the banks of the heavily polluted Pa

A volunteer member of River Warriors cleans up trash on the banks of the heavily polluted Pasig River in Manila, Philippines. Bishop Noel Pedregosa, new leader of the Malaybalay Diocese in southern Philippines, said he plans to emphasize environment-focused ministry. (CNS photo/Eloisa Lopez, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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A newly installed Catholic bishop in the Philippines has vowed to center his ministry on the environment and urged Catholics in his diocese to care for the Earth as outlined by Pope Francis in an encyclical.

Bishop Noel Pedregosa, 56, issued the call during a Sept. 14 ceremony in which he was installed as the fifth bishop of the Malaybalay Diocese in Bukidnon province in southern Philippines, ucanews.com reported.

"I pray that God will bless me to be a good shepherd, a shepherding of listening, dialogue, love, gentle correction and appreciation, a shepherding of humility and openness, a shepherding of intimate friendships and holiness," Pedregosa said in his homily.

"My mission extends to the environment, as seen in my coat of arms as bishop of Malaybalay. One can see a tree rooted in greenery at the bottom of my coat of arms.

It represents the strong ecological thrust of the entire church, particularly in the context of Bukidnon, whose pastoral care was entrusted to me as bishop," he said.

Bukidnon province is considered the food basket of the region, as most residents are farmers growing rice and corn. The province also produces pineapples, bananas and sugarcane.

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The new bishop said the church has "always been found on the front line of social and environmental issues such as open-pit mining, land grabbing, unjust and abusive land use and illegal logging."

"The agricultural motif likewise links my farming background and the role of San Isidro Labrador, the diocesan patron saint. I want to make the environment one of the central issues of my advocacy as bishop," he said.

"Charity can bring authentic healing and unity among ourselves, with nurturing Mother Earth and with the Holy Triune God the author of everything," the new bishop said.

Pedregosa served as administrator of the Malaybalay Diocese after his predecessor, Archbishop José Araneta Cabantan, was transferred to the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro by Pope Francis in 2020.

Archbishop Charles John Brown, papal nuncio to the Philippines, joined the ceremony. Cabantan was the principal consecrator. Attendance at the ceremony was limited because of restrictions imposed during the coronavirus pandemic.

Pedregosa admitted his appointment came as a surprise.

"This gift of episcopacy was a grace and a mystery. It cannot be fathomed by human understanding because of my unworthiness, weakness and sinfulness," he said in his homily.

"Please continue to pray for us, your priests, bishops, for our Holy Father Pope Francis and especially for me, that the Holy Triune God may grant me the grace of care and nurturing."

The new prelate also said he wanted Catholics to remember him as a bishop who promoted dialogue and communication in the Catholic Church.