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Visitors pray inside the Ephesus House, a replica of the House of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus, Turkey, at Alfonso town, Cavite province, Philippines on July 16, 2026.
(AP/Aaron Favila)

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Alfonso, Philippines — July 26, 2026

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The [House of the Virgin Mary](#) is a shrine located in Ephesus, Turkey, where the mother of Jesus is believed to have spent her final years. Thousands of miles away, nestled in a field outside Manila, a replica in the Philippines welcomes devotees in Asia's biggest Catholic nation.

"The idea began as a place of refuge," said Fr. Dennis Paez, the priest who led the Ephesus House project. "This is a place where no questions (are) asked."

The replica was inaugurated in 2024 in Alfonso, a town in Cavite province about 70 kilometers (45 miles) south of the capital. Since opening, it has hosted Catholic pilgrimages, including celebrations for the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in mid-July. The 67-square-meter (720-square-foot) structure mirrors the exact dimensions, shape and look of every stone at the original site.



The Ephesus House, a replica of the House of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus, Turkey, now stands at Alfonso town, Cavite province, Philippines on July 16, 2026. (AP/Aaron Favila)

According to Catholic tradition, the house in Ephesus is where Mary spent much of her life after Jesus' crucifixion and before her assumption into heaven. The apostle John is said to have brought her to the region to escape persecution in Jerusalem.

Paez said the replica took about 10 months to complete. Workers of different faiths took part in the construction, something Paez viewed as the Virgin Mary bringing all of her children together.

"The apostolate of this place is to accept people with unconditional positive regard," added Paez, who is also a psychologist specializing in supporting youth. "There is no therapy here. The therapist is our Mother."

Marian devotion shapes Filipino faith

In the country of about 113 million people, nearly 80% identify as Catholic.



Catholics touch one of the images of Mary inside the Ephesus House, a replica of the House of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus, Turkey, at Alfonso town, Cavite province, Philippines on July 16, 2026. (AP/Aaron Favila)

Philippine faithful often refer to the Virgin Mary as the Blessed Mother. Processions honoring her are held regularly throughout the country.

"We are a long-suffering people," Paez said. "Our wealth is really our faith and our faith is such like that because of the Blessed Mother."

Religious historian Michael Delos Reyes said that Filipino devotion to the Virgin Mary dates to the time Spanish colonizers introduced Christianity in the 16th century. However, that devotion has also found expression in more recent moments of the country's history.

Delos Reyes said that some attributed the 1986 People Power Revolution that led to the ouster of then-President Ferdinand Marcos to the Virgin's intercession. And in 2013, when the Typhoon Haiyan ravaged Tacloban, devotees looked to the Blessed

Mother for hope.

Filipinos turn to Mary for comfort

The phrase "To Jesus through Mary" reflects the central place Mary holds in Filipino Catholic life.

"Her maternal dimension is what Filipinos find meaningful, as well as her power to intercede on believers' behalf," said Deirdre de la Cruz, a professor of history and Southeast Asian studies at the University of Michigan.



Fr. Dennis Paez places a scapular necklace on pilgrims during their visit at the Ephesus House, a replica of the House of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus, Turkey, at Alfonso town, Cavite province, Philippines on July 16, 2026. (AP/Aaron Favila)

Marian iconography and rosaries frequently adorn Filipino cars, public transportation, individual altars and shrines both in urban and rural landscapes, De la Cruz added.

"As someone who is known to provide comfort, Mary is a very familiar figure and someone to whom one can appeal in difficult times," she said.

Daphne Oseña Paez, who recently visited the replica, said that despite being raised Catholic her devotion was not as strong as it became in adulthood. It began with a trip to Mexico, where she saw the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and it deepened years later after enduring a difficult pregnancy that made her seek refuge in her faith.

"We don't pray to Mary herself, but Mary intercedes for us," Oseña Paez said. "In my times of trouble, and I've had a lot, I really clung on to the love and comfort of her as a mother."

A pilgrimage closer to home

Donated Marian icons line the walls inside the replica. At the center stands a statue of Mary modeled after the one in Turkey, alongside a relic said to be from her veil.

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Most of the displayed images were donated by art collector and Philippine culture advocate Maritess Pineda. She said her devotion to Mary led her to start a collection that has finally found a home.

Other Filipinos felt drawn to contribute in their own way. Rupert Suarez and his wife had visited the House of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus years earlier. When he learned about plans to build a replica in the Philippines, he joined the project.

"I usually pray to the Mother," Suarez said. "It's so very blessed that we already have this replica built."

The site has received little public promotion since its inauguration. Yet Paez said pilgrims have visited.

"I don't at all think that it is me bringing them," Paez said. "It's The Blessed Mother asking them, inviting them to come."