

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

July 21, 2009 at 1:01pm

Priest ends ministry to run for presidency

by Catholic News Service

MANILA, Philippines -- A Catholic priest who serves as governor of the Philippine province of Pampanga has declared he is running for president of the country in the May 2010 election.

"I have every intention to file my candidacy," Father Eddie Panlilio told reporters at a weekly forum organized in Manila by Catholic media groups July 21, according to the Asian church news agency UCA News.

The priest turned politician, who is currently on leave from his religious ministry, also announced his plan to apply for a dispensation from the priesthood before filing his certificate of candidacy prior to the Nov. 30 deadline.

"I'm ready for all the consequences," Panlilio said. "This priesthood that I love so much I'm willing to give up for a greater love and that's love for the country," said the 55-year-old priest of the San Fernando archdiocese in Pampanga.

"I'm doing this not for me, not for myself," he explained. "I felt God wanted me to go on a higher service.

"For me the heart of priesthood is accepting the love of God and working for other people, especially the poor," he added.

A dispensation will release him from priestly obligations, including obedience to the bishop, according to Archbishop Oscar V. Cruz of Lingayen-Dagupan, head of the dispensation desk of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. Once dispensed, Panlilio would no longer be allowed to celebrate Masses or administer the sacraments.

Archbishop Cruz and other prelates had urged Panlilio to run as a layman.

Panlilio said that as president he would address problems such as people's livelihoods, malnutrition, corruption and insurgencies in the country.

"I call on all supporters of good governance and ethical leadership in the country to support this candidacy and campaign," the priest-governor said.

He called particularly on his fellow citizens of Pampanga "and all those who believe in me and in this campaign" for their support.

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"Let's work together because this is for you," he said.

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