The Vatican has elevated a Marian parish church in Bataan province to the coveted privilege of minor basilica. The title was granted by special decree approved by Pope Francis following a series of processes.

Although the Vatican approved the petition to grant the Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Orani town the dignity of a minor basilica on Sept. 5, it was publicly announced on Sept. 23.

The decree was signed by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on behalf of the pontiff. Bishop Ruperto Santos of Balanga said the minor basilica status for the Orani church is a “blessing” from God to the diocese.

“An immense grace from God. We glorify Him,” Santos said. “We are very much grateful to His Holiness, Pope Francis.” The parish church also received the “precious gift” as its parishioners are preparing for the feast of their patroness on Oct. 13.

In a canonical sense, the Orani church joins a group of around 1,800 pre-eminent churches worldwide, including 15 others from the Philippines. Reflecting their close bond with the pope, minor basilicas are obligated to encourage the study and divulgation of documents issued by the Vatican, particularly those pertaining to the liturgy.

Basilicas are also called to celebrate “with particular care” the feasts of the Chair of St. Peter on Feb. 22, the Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul on June 29, and the anniversary of the election or inauguration of the Supreme Pontiff’s Petrine ministry. With its new status, the church is also entitled the use of the papal symbols such as the crossed keys, the basilica canopy (umbraculum) and bell (tintinnabulum). The Balanga diocese has yet to announce the celebration to formally declare the Orani church as a minor basilica. (CBCP News)