

The Diocese of Balanga was established in 1975. It comprises the entire civil province of Bataan, the smallest among the provinces of Central Luzon. The province is a peninsula jutting out to sea, with Manila Bay to the east, China Sea to the west, and the province of Zambales to the north.

Bataan was one part of Pampanga until it was made a separate province in 1754. It is divided from north to south by two mountain ridges, the eastern part forming the valley towns of Hermosa, Orani, Samal, Abucay, Pilar, Orion and Limay; to the western section belong the fertile hills and valleys cradling the towns of Morong, Bagac and Mariveles.

The topography of the province has made most of the inhabitants farmers or fishermen, with a sprinkling of merchants, factory workers and professionals. Recent years, however, have seen the development of manufacturing industries in the province, particularly the Free Zone in Mariveles, which has brought an influx of workers from other provinces and improved living conditions of its own workers.

Historically Bataan is most remembered, along with the island of Corregidor, as the main scene of action in the Philippines during the Second World War. These places are strategic in guarding the entrance to Manila Bay. The surrender of Filipino and American soldiers to overwhelming Japanese forces marked the Fall of Bataan in 1942. A war memorial, Dambana ng Kagitingan, now stands to honor the men who fought and died in that last stand.

Twenty years since its creation in 1975, the Diocese of Balanga now has jurisdiction over 21 parishes, served by 34 diocesan priests and five deacons who are scheduled for ordination at the end of 1995. Some of these priests also head the various diocesan commissions, or are directors of Catholic schools.

Except for one order of contemplative nuns, that of the Poor Clares, religious sisters are active in education and catechesis, among them the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the Daughters of Charity. The Missionary Catechists of St. Therese are in charge of the catechetical program of the entire diocese, working in close collaboration with the Diocesan Commission on Education Formation. The Sisters of the Divine Shepherd run the Munting Tahanan, an orphanage for street children, and the Buhay Puso, a

safehouse for the abandoned and the elderly, in collaboration with Caritas Bataan.

The Diocese of Balanga celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year, 1995. This diocesan celebration is made more meaningful by seminars in all levels of the parishes and vicariates. There are also the week-long visitations of the patron saints of the diocese, St. Joseph, and those of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary to every parish in the province during which prayer vigils and renewal seminars are held. For members of the clergy, study and reflection sessions on the Second Plenary Council documents are scheduled. All these will climax in a big Diocesan Day, a celebration highlighted with liturgical and pastoral exhibits, and cultural presentations tracing the history of the diocese.

After twenty years of journeying in the faith, the Diocese of Balanga, with proper formation and the zeal and dedication of its clergy, feels confident that the Catholic faithful of the diocese are on their way to becoming more evangelically aware of what it means to be a Christian.