



Blessed Mary Mother of the Poor, Inc.

D E C L A R A T I O N

February 16, 2010

Fr. Fernando Suarez has a very special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary since his youth. This devotion inspired him to form the Foundation of Mary Mother of the Poor. Besides his Ministry for the Poor, he also has a vision to build a Shrine for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Four years ago he decided to make the Philippines his home base so that he can share his gift of healing and minister to the needs of the poor. He met Congressman Dodo Mandanas, who offered to donate a 5 hectare parcel of land in Batangas City. Fr. Fernando was awed by the beauty of the place in the mountains of Pagkilatan, Batangas City called Matuco Point. He conceived a plan to build a tall Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is now called MonteMaria. In December 2006, this plan was presented to Archbishop Ramon C. Arguelles of the Archdiocese of Lipa. The blessing and inauguration of the location was held on Jan. 7, 2007. Donations and pledges for the building of the Shrine started to come in from around the world.

Noted master planners, architects and engineers volunteered and were commissioned to finalize the plans for the Shrine of Mary Mother of the Poor. Meanwhile, temporary structures were built to facilitate Holy Masses and vigils. In the last three years, much work has been done in completing the development plans and preparing the site for construction. On January 18, 2010 the Sto. Nino chapel, donated by the family of Andrew and Elvie Garcia, was blessed by His Excellency Archbishop Ramon C. Arguelles.

Despite its remote location and difficulty of transportation, thousands of sick and poor devotees went up the mountain to participate in communal prayers and religious observances. As the increasing numbers of the faithful pour into MonteMaria, the master planners realize the need of a bigger area to accommodate the increasing demand for space. Thus Fr. Fernando requested the donor Cong. Mandanas to donate or sell more land for the requirements of the Shrine. The option for an additional lot for donation was not available, while the purchase of additional land was under negotiation. In November 2009, however, the discussion for the purchase of additional land failed. As well the promised 5 hectares donation has not been delivered to the Mary Mother of the Poor Foundation.

In December 2009, the donor changed his donation and included some conditions. This led to a meeting with the Archbishop of Lipa, the donors, and Fr. Fernando together with the board members of Mary Mother of the Poor Foundation on Feb. 1, 2010. The following points were presented:

- The 5 hectares will now be donated to the Archdiocese of Lipa instead of the Mary Mother of the Poor Foundation;
- The 33 storey statue of the Blessed Virgin must now be built on the donated property as a condition for the donation to be consummated;
- The Archbishop of Lipa mentioned that he will only accept the donation if Fr. Fernando and the Foundation promised to build the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary;
- Fr. Fernando was unable to accept this condition as the major donors and the Board of Directors of the MonteMaria project had decided to pull out of building in the area due to the perceived greed and commercialization of the land around the intended Shrine.

While all these events were occurring in MonteMaria, an incredible gift of land 20 times bigger in the vicinity of Tagaytay City was being offered to Fr. Fernando. In light of these circumstances, after intensive prayers and due consultation with the donors and Fr. Francis Donnelly the local superior of the Companions of the Cross, the Board of Directors unanimously decided to relocate the Shrine to this more accessible place. Here public transportation is readily available and affordable; resources such as seminaries and religious houses for provision of priestly ministries abound; and accommodations for pilgrims are already abundant. The entire proposed project is welcomed by the local Bishop of the Diocese of Imus, Most Reverend Luis Antonio Tagle with great enthusiasm. The Foundation has practically finalized the transfer of the property with the donor. With God's providence and the protection of Mother Mary, we expect to begin our ministries at this new site by March 13, 2010. **Meanwhile, all directed donations for the Shrine are currently intact and will continue to be handled with the greatest transparency and accountability.**

There is much pain in this decision, MonteMaria having been our beacon and common aspiration for the last three years. However, the preferential will of God seems clear, and we must allow the Holy Spirit to lead. We have all been blessed in this journey, the Archdiocese of Lipa, led by His Excellency, Archbishop Ramon Arguelles, has extended to us every assistance and support; to them our heartfelt thanks and appreciation. We thank our donors for their generous offer and efforts in favor of MonteMaria. We also thank the government of Batangas City for their support and assistance in initiating the first construction. Our gratitude also extends to the leaders and the people of Brgy. Pagkilatan who welcomed us with open arms.

Many thanks also to all our supporters and volunteers.

Together let us persevere to make the Project for Mama Mary a reality.