

Priest-governor says he will not run for president of Philippines

MANILA, Philippines - Father Eddie Panlilio, who has served as governor of the Philippines' Pampanga province since 2007, said he will not run for president in 2010 and will instead throw his support behind Sen. Benigno Aquino III.

"After much prayer, contemplation and consultations, we have decided to respond to the call for love of country, sacrifice and unity initiated by Sen. Mar Roxas," Father Panlilio told the media Sept. 4 at the Club Filipino in San Juan, northeast of Manila. His remarks were reported by the Asian church news agency UCA News.

"We have decided not to pursue our plan to run for president in the upcoming elections," Father Panlilio said, reading from a joint statement with Isabela Gov. Grace Padaca, with whom the priest had forged a political partnership.

Father Panlilio announced in July that he was ready to seek a dispensation from his priestly duties to run for president. He has not exercised his ministry since 2007.

Asked about his next move, Father Panlilio said he might resume his ministry or run for a second term as governor of Pampanga. He also said he is considering running for other government posts.

During the press conference, he urged other opposition and reformist presidential hopefuls to stand aside for Aquino, son of the late President Corazon Aquino.

The senator, on a retreat given by Carmelite nuns in the southern Philippines at the time of the press conference, has not yet announced his decision on running for president, UCA News reported.

Church leaders welcomed Father Panlilio's decision to abandon presidential plans.

"I am happy that Gov. Ed Panlilio has decided to withdraw from the presidential race," the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Archbishop Angel Lagdameo of Jaro, told Manila reporters.

Auxiliary Bishop Pablo David of San Fernando, in Pampanga, said he hoped Father Panlilio would return to the active ministry.