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Cesar E.A. Virata

December 12, 1930 – October 2, 2026



UCMPFI Chairman

August 2020 – October 2026

A Paragon Gone Too Soon

Emmy Huang and Gayla Carreon

When former Prime Minister Cesar E.A. Virata was invited to be Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Union Church of Manila Philippines Foundation, Inc. (UCMPFI), he was reluctant at first. Not because he lacked the credentials. Having served as Prime Minister of the Philippines from 1981 to 1986 and Finance Minister from 1970 to 1986, stewarding a non-profit with a handful of members would have been painless for him. He was, perhaps, more concerned about the demands on his time and effort that another position, added to the many that he was still holding, would impose. But we believe that he heard the call not from any of us but from the Lord, that “whatever you do for one of the least of these sisters and brothers of mine, you do for Me” (Matthew 25:40).

From the very first meeting of the Board of Trustees under his chairmanship in August 2020, we saw the qualities that had made him, in one business person’s words, the “gold standard” for responsible professionalism. He applied to the workings of the Foundation the same rigorous attention to precision, consistency, sustainability, and operational effectiveness that he had given to national and corporate financial systems. And he did this, not with sternness and severity, but with gentleness, kindness, and touches of humor.



These are two things I vividly remember about our beloved Chairman Cesar EA Virata:

First meeting of the Working Committee (WC) with the Chairman. We all introduced ourselves to him and, when my turn came, I took his hand to make mano (a traditional Filipino greeting and gesture of respect where a younger person presses an elder’s hand to their forehead to ask for a blessing). He also took my hand and made mano, and we all had a good laugh. To me, this manifested his humility and sense of humor.

Another Working Committee meeting attended by the Chairman. As we were reviewing the Financial Report, he asked a question about a particular item that was taken up at the previous meeting. No one among the WC members remembered it. Then he mentioned it and we stared at each other, amazed at his brilliant memory in his 90+ years. No wonder he was recognized as a finance genius not only in the Philippines but also in the international arena.

Lily Torrente, Trustee



He was a stickler for punctuality and was almost always on time for meetings. In Board, Working Committee, as well as General Membership meetings, he prepared beforehand and commented on agenda matters, especially financial statements, meticulously. Meetings were conducted in precise parliamentary order, and each participant took careful note of assignments knowing that they would be inquired into at subsequent meetings.



At times, the Trustees felt like his students when he taught and served as Dean at the University of the Philippines College of Business Administration in the 1960s—nervously anticipating the questions he would ask. But he always ended discussions with a pleasant quip or two. After every meeting, the Trustees felt accomplished because of Chairman Virata's assessment of what had been done.

Chairman Virata was particularly interested in the Foundation's Child Education and Nutrition Enhancement Program (CENEP). As a lifelong educator, he was a strong advocate for providing education and proper nutrition to little children. He considered CENEP the cornerstone of our existence as a Foundation, believing that early childhood training and physical development was the starting point toward a progressive community and nation. In the six years that he was Chairman, the Foundation was able to add a CENEP site in Pakil, Laguna, adding to the CENEP facilities in Mandaluyong, Marikina, and Cainta.

My first memory of Cesar Virata is when my husband, Rogelio, and I sat at the same table as the Chairman during a UCM fund raising dinner. Rogelio recognized him first and they started talking very easily. Somehow the conversation led to the Chairman's service under the Marcos administration. He said he served the country and not a particular leader, as evidenced by the fact that he did not gain personal profit from his years in the echelons of government. He pointed out that he and his wife live only in a simple condo.

From the many WC and BoT meetings I attended with Chairman at the helm, I recall his strong endorsement of the CENEP program and how he kept trying to promote it to be a template for other organizations to take up for the benefit of impoverished children. He wanted to put up a strong prevention against both physical and mental stunting.

We have lost a brilliant mind, a bright light, a hard worker, and a good servant.

Nadine Sarreal, Trustee



He also took very seriously the accreditation of the Foundation by the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC). During the PCNC evaluation for re-accreditation in 2025, Chairman Virata attended all the sessions requiring his presence. The evaluators were star-struck. Why wouldn't they be? They were in the presence of one who practically kept the Philippine economy going through one of the most difficult periods in the country's history and who had instituted major policies in public finance, fiscal accounting, and tax administration. Suffice it to say, seeing who was at the helm of the Foundation was enough to convince the PCNC evaluators that UCMFPI met the standards of good governance, management, and accountability.

Though he has dealt with heads of state, business tycoons, lettered academics, and cultural icons, Chairman Virata made every person in the Foundation—the CENEP child, the scholar, the Project Coordinator and Assistant, the volunteer, the Working Committee member, the Trustee—feel significant because of his warmth and openness. He conversed and he listened to all with equal attentiveness.

The Foundation received a bonus upon his acceptance of the Chairmanship. His wife, Joy, is the Artistic Director of Repertory Theater for Young Audiences. Over the years, Foundation scholars have had the blessed privilege of being able to attend Repertory plays compliments of the Viratas



The passing of Chairman Virata is a crushing loss for UCMPI. He showed the Trustees unimagined possibilities for service and sustenance. He kept committee members and volunteers on their toes to maintain standards of performance. The challenge now for all who serve the Foundation is to diligently maintain the work ethic and pursue the broader vision that Chairman Cesar E.A. Virata set in the short six years of his leadership..



We celebrate Chairman Cesar Virata's life and the incredible person he was and will strive to live with the same grace and dignity he showed us. His legacy of compassion and wisdom will continue to guide us, and his impact on our lives is everlasting and cherished.

Jim Murray, Vice Chairman and Linda Murray, Member

Do visit our website www.ucmphifoundation.org to know more about the Foundation's activities and to participate in continuing to provide a better life to these children and young people. For your inquiries, please call (63 2) 8812-6062 or 8812-5609 or email us at ucmpfi@gmail.com.