

INC picks Zamora in San Juan City, Belmonte in QC

Group's support a game changer, huge honor, say bets

Philippine Daily Inquirer · 10 May 2019 · A15 · By Matthew Reysio-Cruz @MatthewINQ —WITH A REPORT FROM MARIEJO S. RAMOS

With only days to go before the May 13 elections, the mayoral bids of Francis Zamora for San Juan City and Joy Belmonte for Quezon City have received a boost from the Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) as it endorsed their candidacies.

The religious group's support for Zamora on his second attempt to capture San Juan's highest post came as a surprise because in the previous election, it had endorsed his opponent, incumbent Mayor Guia Gomez.

Many assumed that the INC, which is known for bloc voting, would support her candidate, incumbent Vice Mayor Janella Ejercito Estrada.

'Very big role'

"This is the ultimate game changer in this fight," Zamora said in an interview on Thursday. "I'm very thankful that they have endorsed me. It [INC support] will really play a very big role."

Although San Juan is the smallest city in Metro Manila, it has played a large role in INC history. Before the establishment of the group's castle-like structure on Commonwealth Avenue in Quezon City, its administrative offices and main hall of worship were located in San Juan.

Its founder, Felix Manalo, is even buried at the site of the former INC central office there.

The group also backed Zamora's father, nine-termer Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, who is running against actor Edu Manzano for the city's lone congressional seat.

Tight race

The race between Zamora and Estrada could be one of the closest in Metro Manila, with both sides able to bank on their families' years of prominence in the city. However, no one outside the Ejercito-Estrada clan has held the mayoral post since 1969.

The INC's endorsement, Zamora said, coincided with what he felt was a "positive shift" toward him in the final days of the race.

“But it’s still about execution—ensuring our support on the ground will translate to votes,” he said. “I’ve learned my lessons from 2016. It’s not over ’til it’s over.”

In a statement on Thursday, Quezon City Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte, who is running for mayor, said she was informed earlier this week by the INC that it would back her and the candidates on her ticket under the Serbisyo sa Bayan Party.

The endorsement of the INC leadership is a “huge honor,” she added.

Shared vision

“We are overwhelmed by the support we have been receiving across all groups in Quezon City, and I think the INC shares our vision of wanting the city to keep developing to bring more progress down to the people,” she said.

Belmonte believes she got the INC’s endorsement for her “clean track record and successful programs.”

It also proves that Quezon City voters are “receptive to her platform despite the black propaganda being used against her” during the campaign period, she said.

“I personally will not take this for granted. If elected, I will make sure that my platform for inclusive development is felt by all,” she added.