

Bishop Rodríguez installs Annabelle Ocañas as new diocesan finance officer

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LUBBOCK -- Annabelle Ocañas, MBA, JD, the newly-installed Finance Officer and Executive Director of the Pastoral Center for the Diocese of Lubbock has long had her priorities straight: faith, family, and country. The challenge lay in balancing her life so that it genuinely reflected these values, of living a life that honored her faith, allowed time for her family, and utilized her professional skills and training so as to give glory to God.

With plenty of prayer and trust in God's perfect love, the delicate life balance she had long sought became a reality this summer when Ocañas was appointed to her new post at the Lubbock Diocese by Bishop Placido Rodriguez, CMF. She received her canonical appointment on August 27, 2008 and took her oath of office a week later during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Rodríguez in the Catholic Pastoral Center Chapel.

According to Deacon Leroy Behnke, diocesan director of communications, the appointment came after Bishop Rodríguez completed his formal consultations and recommended her to the College of Consultors for the Diocese of Lubbock. She replaced Theo Shierk, who moved with his wife to the Dallas area to help foster her career.

"Following diocesan protocols and the prescriptions in Canon Law, her appointment is for five years and includes renewable terms," said Deacon Behnke. "Annabelle's appointment was also announced to all the Bishops of Texas and is now made public to the faithful through our *South Plains Catholic*, the official publication for the Diocese of Lubbock."

Concerning her new position, Annabelle Ocañas, "I'm very happy to be here. I've found the union of all the elements in my life."

Her immediate goals in this new job are two: to do everything in her power to further the bishop's "Ten Dreams for the Future of the Diocese of Lubbock" - defined in his "Like a Mighty Wind" pastoral letter and widely distributed on the Silver Jubilee Prayer Card - and to help spread the Catholic way of life in our community.

It is no exaggeration to say that Ocañas is utterly delighted to be working at the Diocesan Pastoral Center and living on the South Plains. Beginning with her job interview at the diocesan office, she knew that things were going to be different here. As she says, "It was the first time I was ever in an interview where people prayed."

Today, as she and her husband and two children prepare to purchase a home in Levelland, Ocañas remarks, "I really believe the Lord is saying to me that this is where I

belong. I am completely at peace.” And not only is she at peace, but she is also tremendously hopeful, remarking, “I’m excited because I really, really think there is a bright horizon here for my family, myself, and the diocese.”

She happily admits that, “Every day I wake up thankful that I’m here and every evening I go to sleep thankful that I’m here. Every day the Lord brings amazing things.”

Annabelle Ocañas openly admits that she enjoys laughing and smiling and is particularly pleased that so many South Plains residents “love to smile back.”

Another of her passions is team building. Without hesitation, she declares that she is very much a team player who seeks to build up the team. Elaborating on what it means to her to be a team builder, she says, “I can bring all my skills together to help us reach a common goal as a team – together.” She has no doubt that she has been called to “be a bridge, a conduit, to help bring people together and to foster their communication with one another.”

Annabelle Ocañas has been equally at home being a budget manager and analyst for major state agencies in Austin and in mentoring disadvantaged youth in inner city Houston. With a bachelor’s degree in accounting, a Master of Business Administration degree in marketing, and a law degree, it comes as no surprise that Annabelle Ocañas has held positions in which her responsibility extended to 12,000 employees and where she managed annual budgets of \$2.6 billion dollars.

Just as important, though perhaps not so obvious, is her deep commitment to helping the “underdog,” to giving back to her community and parish, and to living her Catholic faith on a daily basis and in the midst of all of life’s challenges.

Earlier in her life, Ocañas says she was torn between a traditional corporate or legal career and her desire to work with non-profit organizations. For some years, she divided her energies between the two worlds of profit and non-profit organizations.

While employed as a lead accountant at a division of British Petroleum in Houston, her community volunteerism was encouraged by her employer. She enthusiastically became involved in projects ranging from volunteering as a bilingual teacher at an elementary school to participating in walks and fun runs to help raise funds for various community organizations; she even worked on a beach clean up.

But, as supportive as the company was for her community service projects, Ocañas still hungered for deeper levels of community involvement.

It was at this point that she became a founding partner of a Houston inner city non-profit organization that specialized in mentoring disadvantaged and minority students. As she writes of this time in her life, “working with these students required tenacity and the ability to motivate.” Ocañas and her associates in this endeavor obviously possessed both talents, for the organization was selected as the winner of the Most Outstanding Volunteer Organization by the Houston Independent School District in 1994 for its efforts in recruiting and placing disadvantaged minority students into Texas colleges and

universities.

Annabelle Ocañas grew up in Karnes City, in south central Texas, as one of five children. Her parents owned a grocery store and, although they only had elementary school educations themselves, powerfully encouraged their children to acquire advanced education. All five followed their parents' advice and have become successful and contributing members of society.

Ocañas and her husband, Santos, have two children, Carissa, age 7, and David, age 4.

Because Santos Ocañas grew up in West Texas, their children have family ties here, including cousins. Carissa and David could even be described as “Double Valentines,” for both were born, albeit three years apart, on Saint Valentine’s Day. This statistically improbable occurrence is by no means a “coincidence,” according to Annabelle Ocañas. In fact, she doesn’t believe in coincidences, for she sees God working in and through all circumstances.

The new diocesan finance officer also firmly believes in the power of prayer and that our prayers get answered in God’s perfect time. To illustrate this, she recalls that she prayed to work for a boss that was Christian, and remembers gently suggesting that “to work for a Catholic would be best of all.” “Now,” she gratefully declares, “I work for the bishop!”

As time goes on, more and more members of the Diocese of Lubbock will thank God for bringing to the South Plains and the Lubbock Diocese this lady of ready smiles, contagious optimism, impressive skills, and a true and humble heart for the Catholic faith.