**PRESS RELEASE**

**UST welcomes over 13,500 freshmen for Academic Year 2024-2025 onboarding season;**

**UST GenSan’s pioneering batch is warmly welcomed**

The 413-year-old University of Santo Tomas (UST) opened its gates to new Thomasians. Over 13,500 first-year students in the basic and higher education levels began their student life at UST by joining several onboarding activities, including an opening mass and lecture, the ROARientation, and the Thomasian Welcome Walk from August 2 to 5, 2024.

The Opening Exercises on August 2, 2024 highlighted the University-wide Mass of the Holy Spirit (*Misa de Apertura*) and the Inaugural Lecture (*Discurso de Apertura*). Both events were available for livestreaming on the official UST Facebook Page (/UST1611official) and the UST YouTube channel (/UST1611Manila).

The Bishop of Alaminos, His Excellency Most Rev. Napoleon B. Sipalay, Jr., O.P., D.D., served as the main presider of the *Misa de Apertura*, which was concelebrated with the Dominican priests at the Santísimo Rosario Parish Church (UST Chapel) at 9:00 AM.

The *Discurso de Apertura,* delivered by UST Faculty of Arts and Letters Dean Prof. Melanie D. Turingan, Ph.D., immediately followed the Mass of the Holy Spirit that formally opened the Academic Year 2024 to 2025.

The *Discurso* is an inaugural academic lecture that has been essential in the opening exercises of universities across Europe. UST adapted this practice to conform with the tradition of the Dominican houses of studies of starting every school year with a conference called *Lectio Prima*, or first lecture, based on the UST statutes drafted by Fr. Juan Amador, O.P., in 1785. For this year, Dean Turingan’s lecture was titled “Imbued with Unending Grace: A History and Legacy of the University of Santo Tomas".

Dean Turingan detailed the rich history of the University, from Archbishop Benavides bequeathing his books and a modest amount for the foundation of a seminary-college, the initial founding of the Colegio de Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario in 1611, the transfer to the Sulucan (now Sampaloc) campus, up to its deliberate expansion efforts at present in Santa Rosa City and General Santos City.

“In the first decade of the American regime, the Dominicans had to confront the problem of accommodating its students in the very small building constructed in 1619. Intramuros itself could no longer expand even one inch more. Sulucan was one of the 10 *barrios* that made up the *arrabal* of Sampaloc,” Dean Turingan introduced the impetus for the transfer.

Dean Turingan shared that in July 1911, a donation was given to the Dominican Fathers, a 220,000 square meter land located in the Sulucan Estate from Doña Francisca Bustamante Bayot. Rev. Fr. Buenaventura Garcia Paredes, O.P., was the Dominican Provincial, while Fr. José Naval, O.P. was the Rector at the time. By December 1911, the laying of the first cornerstone for the Main Building was made by University stakeholders and the Dominican Fathers, with the design and construction headed by the engineer-friar Fr. Roque Ruaño, O.P.

The Main Building would rise in 1927 as the first building at the heart of the Sampaloc campus–the oldest among almost 30 structures within the 21.5-hectare UST Manila today.

“The structures we once had, we currently have, and we will soon have are not just tangible cultures that we see and set foot in,” said the Dean, who added, “These edifices symbolize UST’s rich history, values, and aspirations.”

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The University has now leapt to different cities of the Philippines, with the Main Building in UST General Santos recently inaugurated in 2024, and the Ricardo S. Po Integrated Innovation and Research Laboratories soon to rise in the Mindanao campus. In Santa Rosa, The Tony Tan Caktiong Innovation Center was inaugurated in 2023, while the Dr. William T. Belo Interdisciplinary Research Institute broke ground in 2024.

On the same day, UST General Santos held its own Eucharistic Celebration with the UST Vice Rector for Finance Rev. Fr. Roberto L. Luanzon, Jr., O.P, as presider and homilist. The Dominican Fathers concelebrated the Mass at the Main Building of UST General Santos. The Thomasian Community in General Santos also participated virtually during the Declaration of the Opening of AY 2024-2025 and the *Discurso de Apertura* in UST Manila.

After the official opening of the academic year on August 2, the Virtual ROARientation on August 3, 2024 shared informative sessions that covered relevant University services on various topics, such as Health and Wellness, Spirituality, Academics and Research, Technology, Communication and Media, Student Comfort and Safety, Finances, and Student Life. These sessions aired via the students’ respective Canvas course sites.

Following the virtual sessions was the in-person ROARientation 2024 “Embracing the Thomasian Spirit: Roar Your Way In!” on August 5, which builds the Thomasian school spirit and identity among the freshmen through various activities like games, performances, and the introduction of school cheers. It was held at the arena of the Quadricentennial Pavilion at 8:00 AM, including a Welcome Mass presided by UST Rector Very Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., Ph.D. (morning batch) and UST Vice Rector Rev. Fr. Isaias Antonio D. Tiongco, O.P., JCD (afternoon batch).

Immediately following the in-person ROARientation was the traditional Thomasian Welcome Walk at 11:00 AM for the morning batch. Since 2002, hundreds of thousands of Thomasian freshmen have walked through the Arch of the Centuries at the start of each academic year. For the freshmen of 2024, their entry on August 5 begins the cycle that will end in a few years at their Baccalaureate Mass, when they will exit through the Arch. UST upholds its traditions involving the Arch of the Centuries because the Arch was the original gateway of the University back in its Intramuros campus. It was reassembled piece by piece in the Sampaloc campus after World War II and serves as a reminder of the University’s rich history. There was also an afternoon batch for the in-person ROARientation and Welcome Walk.

Other activities include the Thomasian Welcome Concert on August 6 at the Quadricentennial Pavilion, the Triduum Prayers and Mass in honor of St. Dominic de Guzman from August 5 to 7 at the UST Chapel, and the Onboarding Fair with various food stalls and game booths at the UST Practice Gym from August 5 to 9. Regular classes officially commenced on August 9, 2024.

**The Pioneers of UST General Santos**

The inaugural batch of first-year students from UST General Santos also went through their own Welcome Walk as a rite of passage on August 29, 2024.

One hundred and twenty-six new Thomasians walked through the front gates, accompanied by the school administrators led by Academician Professor Emeritus Maribel Nonato and the Dominican Fathers, including UST Secretary-General Rev. Fr. Louie Coronel, O.P. EHL, and the Associate Vice Rector for Religious Affairs Rev. Fr. Gerard Z. Zabala, O.P.

UST Rector Very Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., Ph.D. served as the main presider of the Eucharistic Celebration at the UST General Santos Main Building.

“We are very happy and honored to welcome you to the newly opened UST General Santos campus,” The Father Rector greeted the pioneering batch, adding that “[You] are setting the trend, and paving the way for future Thomasians in this institution. We strongly believe you will invigorate this campus with your brilliant ideas, ardent passions, and dynamic energies. There is no other way to go but up and there is no other direction but to move forward, and today marks your new beginning as freshly-minted college students. Our Mass and welcome rites serve as signposts indicating that you are empowered to make changes and take your life into an exciting new direction, so my dear students, do not be afraid to take the first steps.”

The 97th Rector also reaffirmed that “I believe this campus should be a more diverse campus. We are open for all, not just for Catholics… The 21st century is a time of diversity and openness. Let us take our cue from Pope Francis, who wrote ‘No one should be afraid that God has allowed there to be different religions in the world, but we should be frightened if we are not doing the work of fraternity, of walking together in life as brothers and sisters of one human family.’ While UST is Catholic, we respect and welcome people from other religions, most especially our Muslim brothers and sisters in Mindanao. It is not Christ-like to disregard someone just because he is different from the rest of us. In this campus, no one will be left behind.”

“As you step into this new chapter of your academic life, we encourage you to develop these three attitudes: Let resilience be your stronghold. Let faith be your beacon. Let humility be your safeguard,” Fr. Ang advised the young Thomasians in General Santos.

“My dear students, you are all now part of the UST story and you will be making history beginning today. The world is at your feet and the sky is the limit. Have a wonderful extraordinary journey ahead! God bless you all,” he concluded.

[IMGS5525.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yhhUwcLPBQXhK6jUYDbJU58ctBLKhg-7/view?usp=drive_link)AND[FromDeanTuringan's slide deck.png](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RgiEb3ppwaO0BVbsCvLAU2rgi0_6xFZm/view?usp=drive_link) *UST Faculty of Arts and Letters Dean Prof. Melanie D. Turingan, Ph.D., delivers the Discurso de Apertura, where she presented the history of UST, including its roots in Intramuros. Visible in her presentation is the Arch of the Centuries, back when it still functioned as the gateway of the first UST building in Intramuros.*

[IMG\_8994.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19baL5zB3ravqhrxAKjPaxeonAJCY3hg8/view?usp=drive_link) *The Bishop of Alaminos, His Excellency Most Rev. Napoleon B. Sipalay, Jr., O.P., D.D., presides over the Misa de Apertura in Manila.*

[AperturaGenSan.jpg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VSSXVUdKNrwSX1pz8IGHbjMHSQP5gnYv/view?usp=drive_link) *UST Vice Rector for Finance Rev. Fr. Roberto L. Luanzon, Jr., O.P. and Assistant to the Rector for UST General Santos Academician Professor Emeritus Maribel Nonato, with administrators, staff, and students at the Misa de Apertura in UST General Santos*

[DSC04950.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1b9iOw7j_jIIS73UX6WxAM1KAqq7GFxvT/view?usp=drive_link) *The Bishop of Alaminos, His Excellency Most Rev. Napoleon B. Sipalay, Jr., O.P., D.D., (center) with the Prior Provincial of the Dominican Province of the Philippines Very Rev. Fr. Filemon I. Dela Cruz, Jr. O.P., UST Rector Very Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., Ph.D., and the Thomasians at the Santísimo Rosario Parish Church (UST Chapel) during the Misa de Apertura*

[Mass at Gensan.jpg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o_Elr9c9wu4uIhzjShyBF4fRRp4Ytgpg/view?usp=drive_link)

*School of Health Sciences Chaplain Rev. Fr. Alfred Fernandez O.P., Ph.D., Associate Vice Rector for Religious Affairs Rev. Fr. Gerard Zabala, O.P., UST Rector Very Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., Ph.D., UST Secretary-General Rev. Fr. Louie R. Coronel, O.P., EHL, UST Farm Head Rev. Fr. Roman Santos, O.P., and Associate Vice Rector for Finance Rev. Fr. Edmund Nantes, O.P. at the Eucharistic Celebration to mark the Welcome Walk at UST General Santos*

[UST Gen San walk.jpg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C0lK1Zc_Wb70hvMI9Jk1074HG0owxR6F/view?usp=drive_link)

*Associate Vice Rector for Religious Affairs Rev. Fr. Gerard Z. Zabala, O.P. and UST Secretary-General Rev. Fr. Louie Coronel, O.P. EHL, (in Dominican habit) accompany the pioneer batch of UST GenSan in their Welcome Walk*

[GenSan.jpg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YHmkp-QkHfcIHNLtgO1QYK7CHvfEH-5O/view?usp=drive_link)

*Dean Prof. Leonardo Canoy, Jr., Ph.D. and students from the School of Business and Accountancy*

[457220023\_122143587242301886\_4778994640833140576\_n.jpg](https://drive.google.com/file/d/17qBJvGQVFKhG_HzLCpcBywdPzU6qcbJw/view?usp=drive_link) *UST Rector Very Rev. Fr. Richard G. Ang, O.P., Ph.D. delivers the homily at UST General Santos*

[IMG\_7885.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Wt5cbAUv-EBdO-ArBlR0PgR5Ba82mNkD/view?usp=drive_link) *+* [IMG\_9902.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oe-wTVytncHzYPeRC-9eOtncKE4JE35_/view?usp=drive_link) *Thomasians joyfully enter the Arch of the Centuries in Manila*

[IMG\_7819.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H6IR7LsEGzN7bzb_0IrMaZ2VCKhkcQOU/view?usp=drive_link) *The Salinggawi Dance Troupe performs during the ROARientation*

[IMG\_7430.JPG](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Pa4Y_OttVSdiKYjfb9uTwLBUz2KKjYJb/view?usp=drive_link) *Senior High School students present their dance performance during ALAB*