

## Filipino Priests' Assembly: 'A much awaited moment'



A time to celebrate their gifts, singing and dancing among them; to hear how they can contribute to the new evangelization in the United States; and to gather in a new organization.

“Historic” was the word used by Filipino priests to describe their First National Assembly held Nov. 8-11 in Los Angeles, which included an opening Mass followed by a day of workshops on spiritual growth and pastoral enrichment, a Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, a priests’ concert and the election of a new leadership council.

It was five years ago when Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Oscar Solis — the first Filipino bishop in the United States, and episcopal moderator for Filipino priests in the U.S. — had the idea to gather all the Filipino priests in the country to address common concerns, challenges and contributions they can make to the Catholic Church in America.

But it was not until 2008, Bishop Solis said, that 24 priests gathered in Orlando, Florida, and committed to start the process of identifying their fellow priests nationwide. That meeting led to the creation of a steering committee that since then has been working arduously, contacting each of the 900 Filipino priests working in the U.S. and the Virgin Islands.

“This is a dream come true,” Bishop Solis told *The Tidings*. “We’ve been trying to find a way which we can provide a venue for Filipino priests serving the local Church in the United States to gather. So this is a much awaited moment.”

As Archbishop José Gomez told the priests in his welcoming remarks, there could not be a better place to celebrate the assembly than Los Angeles, “the second largest Filipino city in the world, after Manila.”

The event was held in conjunction with the 10th anniversary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic

Bishops' pastoral statement, "Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith."

The goal is that this first gathering will lead to the creation of a national association of Filipino Priests, said Cecile Motus, interim director and coordinator of ethnic ministries for the USCCB.

"The end is to create a fraternal social network to help Filipino priests adjust to their mission in the U.S., especially the ones who have just arrived," she noted. "This network will bring a springtime into the Filipino ministry."

### **'A culture of worship and work'**



The assembly at the Westin Los

Angeles Airport Hotel was attended by 370 priests, who during an emotional opening Mass were urged by Bishop Randolph Calvo of Reno to celebrate their gifts, honoring the event's theme, "Celebrating Our Gifts." Concelebrants included Sacramento Bishop Jaime Soto, Tucson Bishop Gerald Kicanas, Santa Rosa Bishop Emeritus Daniel Walsh, San Francisco Auxiliary Bishop Robert McElroy, L.A. Auxiliary Bishops Edward Clark and Thomas Curry, and Bishop of Alaminos (Philippines) Marlo Peralta.

"We are ordained to serve Christ and God's people wherever we are," said Bishop Calvo, chairman of the USCCB's subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs, citing the Gospel in St. Luke. "It reminds us clearly of our roles as servants.

"It is our deed that when we serve people we are doing nothing more and nothing less than what we have been called to do. And yet what we have been called to do and the service we ought to give is immensely important for the life of the Church."

The church of the U.S. "is certainly blessed to have Filipino priests serving in this country as the Filipino people bring the vitality and spiritual devotion to renew many of our parishes," said Bishop Calvo, born in Guam of Filipino descent and raised in San Francisco.

In his remarks, Archbishop Gomez stressed the “beautiful diversity of our Catholic Church and our great country,” and he reminded the audience of the first arrival of Filipinos at Morro Bay in 1587, “bringing with them a culture of worship and work long before America had a name.

“The rich Catholic heritage of the Philippines is a beautiful part of our Catholic life here in Los Angeles,” he said, citing such Filipino traditions as the novena of Simbang Gabi, the Santacruzán pageant, devotion to Our Lady of Antipolo and Our Lady of Manaoag, the celebration of Santo Niño de Cebú, and the contribution to the Church of missionary and martyr San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila.

Archbishop Gomez urged the assembled priests to “promote a new Eucharistic catechesis,” in light of the implementation of the new Roman Missal.

“We become what we pray, my brothers,” he told them. “It is important that we use this moment of grace to help our people to pray the right words, to pray with reverence and to understand the words they are praying.”

The priests were also addressed by Cardinal Roger Mahony during a special mid-morning Nov. 10 Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, where he stressed the crucial role of the priests in the new evangelization in America in an extended homily-lecture.

Citing Pope John Paul II, the cardinal reminded the assembly — comprised primarily of Filipino priests, religious and parishioners from throughout Southern California — that “no believer in the Church can avoid this supreme duty of presenting Christ to all people.

“Many of our Catholic people, indeed some of the clergy, have some hesitation about the word evangelization. Many still think that it is a Protestant or Evangelical activity, something that Catholics should shy away from.”



**He asserted that evangelization:**

—entails allowing one's own heart to be seized and saturated by the Gospel, responding by the gifts of the Spirit;

—reaches out to others to proclaim in word and deed the reign of God;

—and demands that the values of the reign of God, be a reign of truth, holiness, justice, love and peace that permeates each and every culture transforming every sphere of life.

And citing the Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Mahony repeated several times a sentence that stresses the importance of being witnesses of Christ at home, at the job, in the neighborhood and the public square.

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses,” said the cardinal, who was accompanied at the altar by Santa Rosa Bishop Emeritus Walsh and Auxiliary Bishops Solis and Alexander Salazar.

“Every Catholic should convey a personal knowledge of God's love and salvation in the language of the Scriptures,” he asserted. “The new evangelization also means that each one of us who already has faith in Jesus Christ allows Christ to touch the unconverted corners of our lives.”

He said the new evangelization entails a “revitalization,” a “reawakening of the faith in Jesus Christ,” “bringing people to a deeper experiential knowledge of God's love in particular moments of their daily lives.”

When offering suggestions on how to evangelize, he recommended replacing the short prayer that usually precedes meetings with parish committees into a 15-minute reading of the Gospel followed by sharing and reflection.

“Take what you already know and give it a deeper and better meaning,” he told the assembly.

Citing Pope Benedict XVI, he explained the direct relation between migration and the new evangelization and to make of it “an important part of the daily work as disciples of Jesus.”

He urged the Filipino priests to discover new ways to outreach and stressed the importance of the laity.

Then he explained the importance of being careful with certain words used that could have a negative effect on the process of evangelization, such as relativism, culture death, atheism and the “umbrella term, secularism,” in order to promote a dialogue with non-Christian and non-religious people.

He urged the assembly to be less condemnatory of the secular mindset and instead to present Jesus Christ to people in a way that they can have an encounter themselves “with the help of the Holy Spirit.”

“Truth is not solely on a basis of authority,” he said. “We must speak in a way that persuades others of

the truth of the Gospel rather than appeal to our authority. The Gospel is rooted in persuasion, rather than force or fear.”

### ‘A lot of happiness’



The Filipino priests also celebrated a sold-out private concert entertaining the audience with dances and songs in Tagalog and several of the 82 dialects spoken in the Philippines.

In his closing remarks during the dinner-concert, Bishop Solis (who showed his pianist skills) expressed his gratitude for making the “dream possible,” and reminded the priests that “with the love of God and his loving Mother everything is reachable.”

“I just see a lot of happiness here,” said Lorraine de Jesus, a parishioner of Immaculate Heart of Mary in Hollywood and part of the group of volunteers who helped make the event possible. “This offers an opportunity for them to learn from each other’s challenges. It’s that brotherhood.”

The assembly closed with the installation of a National Leadership Council comprised of elected representatives of 12 regions.

For more information about the National Assembly of Filipino Priests visit [www.filipinopriestsusa.org](http://www.filipinopriestsusa.org) or email [NAFP.USA@gmail.com](mailto:NAFP.USA@gmail.com).

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