

Written by Bobby Reyes

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{xtypo_quote} There are about 700,000 Filipino parishioners in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles—Cardinal Mahony {/xtypo_quote}

Thus, Roger Cardinal Mahony told in 2007 Philippine Consul General Mary Jo Bernardo Aragon of the positive contributions of the Filipino-American community to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. It is the biggest—population-wise—Catholic diocese in the United States. The archdiocese was probably the first one to organize formally a “Filipino Ministry,” after it realized that Filipino immigrants to the County of Los Angeles were mainly of the Roman-Catholic faith. Now, there are several parishes that have a substantial number, if not a majority composed, of Filipino-American parishioners.

The current dilemma of Filipino-American Catholics in the Archdiocese of New York (ADNY) can perhaps be solved by applying in the Big Apple what their *kababayans* have done in the Golden State’s biggest Catholic diocese. More details of this predicament in New York can be found in this article,

[New York’s Filipino-American Catholics Appeal to Save the Chapel of San Lorenzo Ruiz](#)

As earlier mentioned, there is a Filipino Ministry in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) as it exists in the ADNY. A Filipino-American nun, Sister M. Christina O. Sevilla, RGS, heads currently the ADLA’s Filipino Ministry. She is its Director (*Punong Lingkod*).

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The ADLA boasts of having the first parish in the United States that carries “Filipino” in its official name. It established also what is considered the second “Filipino” parish in the country when it opened the “San Lorenzo de Ruiz Parish” in the City of Walnut in the late 1980s. It has also the distinction of having the first Filipino-American auxiliary bishop, the Most Rev. Oscar Solis, in the history of the Catholic Church of the United States.

The ADLA has included in the calendar of church activities Filipino fiestas such as those honoring San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila (the first Filipino saint), the Santo Niño of Cebu, the Lady of Peñafrancia Fiesta of the Bicolano Americans, the Simbang Gabi nine-day novena-masses, Santacruzans, Flores de Mayo, Filipino Parol (Christmas lantern) parades, cursillo events and other Filipino ethnic festivities such as the Comedia. More and more Filipino priests are also being named heads of parishes or assistant parish priests. Several parishes in the ADLA serve as hosts to visiting Filipino priests, whose visas are often converted into working permits for a year or two, as there is a severe shortage of priests not only in Southern California but also in the United States. Being bilingual or even trilingual (English, Spanish and a Filipino language) adds more clout to the Filipino priests and pastors. Some of these Filipino priests were lampooned in this article, [Why Did St. Peter's Chicken Cross the Road?](#) But one can read in the satire the achievements of some of the Filipino priests in the ADLA.

The first lesson that Filipino Americans in the ADLA can give to their brethren elsewhere in the United States is that pro-activism in the archdiocesan and parish affairs is a must in order to secure clout (read, Filipino nominees) in the church hierarchy. Latino Americans still dominate many parishes in sheer number, but many Filipino-American Catholics are not far behind (and in some instances, even dominate) their Hispanic (read, Mexican-American) brethren in church influence and appointments to parish positions.

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The second lesson is that influence comes through hard work (by devoting long hours of quality volunteer executive time) and more. Filipino Catholics—even Ilocano Americans—are some of the most-generous Christians in the ADLA. Yes, the best form of lobbying is done literally and figuratively through sweat, blood (as in the chalice during communion and/or during the regular church-sponsored blood-nation drives for the American Red Cross) and tears (often that of joy).

The third lesson is that church pro-activism often leads to political empowerment. The City of Walnut has a Filipino-American councilman, the Hon. Antonio Cartagena, who was born in Basilan Island, off the Sulu archipelago. Mr. Cartagena became the mayor of Walnut City in 2002 and 2007, as the position rotates among the five councilmembers. He is also one of the lay leaders of the San Lorenzo de Ruiz parish church.

The fourth lesson is that even among the aging White-American cardinals, archbishops, bishops and prelates, everybody knows that the future of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in the United States rests not only on the Irish, Italian, Polish and other European church members but now more importantly also on the support of Catholic immigrants and second-generation parishioners from South-and-Central America and the Catholic Philippines. The Latino and the Filipino congregations now form the absolute majority of many Catholic parishes and dioceses in California. It will only be a matter of the judicious use of clout, time and resources for Filipino-American Catholics to become some of the recognized leaders of the RCC in the United States.

The fifth lesson is that the clout of the Filipino-American Catholics in the ADLA can be used to help improve the status of Filipino-American Christians in the rest of the country. Cardinal Mahony is one of the more-influential leaders of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the United States. On the proper lobby, as may be led by Bishop Solis and Sister Christina, perhaps Cardinal Mahony may be able to persuade the ADNY to adopt the time-tested ways in which the ADLA has managed to energize and empower the Filipino-American Catholics that form now

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some of the Christian role models in the day-to-day functions of the RCC – insofar as the County of Los Angeles is concerned.

Here are some historical tidbits about the Filipino-American Catholic experience in the ADLA. The Saint Columban Filipino Parish Community is the first-ever Catholic parish in the United States that carried “Filipino” in its official name. It has become the spiritual-and-cultural center for Filipinos and Filipino Americans through out the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, especially since it is located in the Historic Filipinotown District, which is the only Filipino cultural enclave (so far) declared by any city in the United States. The Columban Fathers, a foreign mission society largely composed of Irish men of the cloth, were entrusted with the care in managing and running a mission parish for the Filipino people in the United States. In the early 1950s, the twin bells in the church belfry were donated by the parishioners of Antipolo City (then a town in the Province of Rizal) in the Philippines, which is home to the Virgin Lady of Antipolo. Most of the Columban priests who serve at the St. Columban Filipino Parish were former missionaries to the Philippines. Many of them are fluent in one or two Filipino languages. The parish is located at 125 S. Loma Drive, Los Angeles, California 90026. Its telephone number is (213) 250-8818. It can be reached by e-mail at stcolumbanla@gmail.com

The Cebu Brotherhood, Inc. (CBI) continues to hold its regular monthly meeting and its annual Sinulog Festival at the St. Columban Filipino Parish. The CBI was organized in 1930 by Cebuano settlers in Los Angeles but it was incorporated as a public-benefit corporation only in 1980.

Here are some related articles in this website about the Filipino-American activism in the ADLA:

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[Filipino Cursillos' Variety Show And Other Cursillo News](#)

[Roberto "Bobby" Reyes Dies \(Not the Bobby Reyes of the MabuhayRadio.com\)](#)

[The Sinulog Festival Can Become Los Angeles' Biggest Event in January by 2021](#)

[Today Is THE 2008 "Sinulog Festival" - Los Angeles](#)

[San Dionisio sa America to Hold Celebra 2008](#)

(To be continued . . .)

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