

JGL Eye Column

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – In the run-up of Dec. 16, the start of “Simbang Gabi” (evening mass) in Chicago and around the world, Father Alfredo Salera, Pastor of Transfiguration of Our Lord Parish in Chicago’s northside, sent out word that his parish was going to hold the *Simbang Gabi* at early dawn at 5:30 in the morning, which is the closest as it is observed in the Philippines.

In the Philippines, *Simbang Gabi* is held at 4:00 a.m. because of the tolerable weather.

The timing of the mass must have sent a chilling message to the

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parishioners, mostly Filipinos, because of the dip in temperature around the event in Chicago.

Feeling that there seems to be no takers to his plans, Father Salera, a native of Meycauyan, Bulacan in the Philippines, sent out another word that even if only one will attend the Dawn Mass, he would still hold a mass.

When his church parishioner and pianist, Amor Saenz, a native of Sorsogon City in the Philippines, told this reporter about this startling schedule at the *Simbang Gabi* community celebration in nearby St. Gregory the Great Church last Dec. 16, my first impression was that Miss Saenz must be joking.

So, at 5 in the morning on Sunday, Dec. 18, when radio newscast was telling me that the temperature was 29 degree Fahrenheit, I went to the Transfiguration of Our Lord Parish Church, at 2609 West Carmen in Chicago , some five miles away from my home in Jefferson Park in Chicago 's northside, just to satisfy my curiosity.

(For those in the Philippines, the freezing temperature is like the temperature inside the freezer of your refrigerator. At 33 degrees Fahrenheit when rain falls, it turns into snow. The 33-degree temperature stings when it is windy.)

So, when I got inside the church at about 5:40 a.m., the Dawn Mass presided over by Father Salera had started in earnest with Miss Saenz smiling at me while playing the piano.

It turned out there were not only one but about 30 parishioners, who braved the very cold weather just to attend the mass that they missed attending in the Philippines. They were the same number of parishioners, when the Dawn Mass started last Dec. 16.

One of the parishioners, Marc Aguja, told this reporter, "I used to sleep at 11 in the evening and got up at 5 in the morning. During these nine days until Christmas, I advanced my sleeping habit at 10 p.m., so I can get up at 4 a.m. just enough time for me to prepare and attend this 5:30 a.m. *Misa de Gallo* (Spanish for rooster's mass, when the roosters or cocks crow)."

SECOND CHURCH TO HOLD DAWN MASS OUTSIDE PH?

If Transfiguration of Our Lord Parish Church will be able to hold a 5:30 a.m. for the nine-day Novena, ushering the Christmas Day celebration, it is believed to be only the second church located in a cold-weather area outside the Philippines to hold a Dawn Mass anywhere in the world.

Editor's Note: A Catholic church in the City of Chino Hills (Southern California) celebrates the Simbang Gabi at dawn and the practice started in December 2008, although Southern California does not experience the real-cold weather of the Midwest . Please read this article, [Filipino Catholics in Chino Hills Organize a "Real" Simbang Gabi and Readings for the Advent Season](#)

All the 75 different Catholic churches under the Asian Archdiocese of Chicago are holding the *Simbang Gabi* daily from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at its 26th anniversary celebration this year.

“I hope to keep up this same Dawn Mass while I am the pastor of this parish,” Father Salera, 65, told this reporter. “I hope my successor will continue with what I have started and other churches will follow suit” as he looks toward his retirement in five years.

He said, “Rising early in the morning with children is a form of discipline to keep up with *Misa de Gallo* as festive as Christmas is celebrated the longest in the Philippines

. It still has penitential color in it, to reflect the life of Jesus to be like us, except for the sin, the sharing and His saving act. The act of all saints in Heaven, the sharing of our local food. The Filipino delicacies in the

Philippines

, where you buy them outside the church while some parishioners take the food with them in coming to church and partake of them in the basement of the church after the mass.”

When asked if he was going to pray for the 652 victims, who perished from the flash floods in Iligan and Cagayan de Oro cities in Mindanao during the last two days, the priest, who grew up in Cebu and Bohol, said he was not aware of it, saying he “doesn’t watch TV but I have not opened the news online. I will pray for them just as we have for so many intentions for many people.”

CARDINAL GEORGE TO CELEBRATE SIMBANG GABI

F ather Salera was pastor for seven years of St. Catherine

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Laboure in suburban Glenview, Illinois, where His Eminence, Francis Cardinal George, the Archbishop of Chicago, will be celebrating the *Simban*
g Gabi
at
6:30 p.m.
on Friday, Dec. 23. On Monday, Dec. 19, at
7:00 p.m.
, Chicago Bishop Francis Kane will be celebrating
Simbang Gabi
at Transfiguration of Our Lord church at
7:00 p.m.

Last Friday, Dec. 16, St. Gregory The Great Church in Chicago's northside was one of the 11
Chicago
churches which celebrated
Simbang Gabi
at
6:00 p.m.

Fr. Paul Wachdorf, pastor of St. Gregory The Great Church, celebrated the mass in front of majority members, relatives and friends of The Filipinos of St. Gregory, a lay and voluntary organization headed by Dr. Dona L. Hernandez of Sorsogon

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City
in the
Philippines
. St. Gregory The Great Church is one of the
Chicago
churches, which have been observing
Simbang Gabi
during the last 24 years.

In a note to her fellow parishioners, Dr. Hernandez explained that, the *Simbang Gabi* “masses refer to the practice of performing nine days of private or public devotion to obtain special graces.”

Like the rest of other churches celebrating *Simbang Gabi*, a light dinner for the parishioners follows after the mass. The nine-day Novena during Simbang Gabi culminates with the Midnight Mass on Dec. 24.

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Father Salera said there are 1,000 Filipino priests around the United States

headed by the first Filipino American bishop, Bishop Oscar A. Solis of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. There are 100 priests from Tagbilaran and

Bohol

; there are about 65 or 66 Filipino priests each in Los Angeles

,
San Francisco
and

New York

and less than 10 in

Chicago

. He urged parishioners to be generous in their donations and asked families to encourage their children to join priesthood. # #
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Editor's Note: To contact the author, please e-mail him at: (lariosa_jos@sbcglobal.net)

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