

JGL Eye

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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How Some Filipino Americans Celebrate Advent in Chicagoland. And Reminiscing Christmas Traditions in the Philippines

CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – My friends out west in the warmer climes of California would often tell me to get out of the wintry Windy City and come to the Golden State to become their neighbors. But I often tell them I may someday soon.

“Simbang Gabi,” a Timeless Tradition - MabuhayRadio

Written by

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And this feeling of dreaming a balmy weather becomes more acute during the Christmas season. Especially when I am reminded of the Dawn Mass (*Simbang Gabi*) that kicks off the 16-day wait to usher in the Christmas celebration in the Philippines

When I was young growing up in the Philippines, we would struggle to wake at 3 o'clock in the morning and prepare to go to church to attend the 4 a.m. mass called Dawn Mass.

The start of *Simbang Gabi* is also signal for us to make plans to round out our friends who could join us in singing Christmas carols, like kids doing it here in Chicago knocking from one house to another to get candies and goodies from house owners during Halloween.

{xtypo_quote} **Editor's Note:** Read the history of the 'Simbang Gabi' and other Filipino traditions during Advent in this article, [How Filipinos Reinvented Christmas](#) {/xtypo_quote}

The only difference between Christmas caroling and Halloween trick-or-treating is that, we sang Christmas carols, usually in Tagalog and in English. And we were rewarded with loose change given by house owners. We pooled the loose change to make a tidy sum and we would divide it

among us after our caroling is over for the night.

I surmised the practice must have started in Bethlehem when Joseph and Mary were looking for an Inn to deliver Jesus. Because they could not be accommodated in those houses, they might have been asking for donations so they would have some money to pay for the Inn

THE FIRST CAROLERS

That practice had taken off and caught on as a tradition of giving something to someone less fortunate during the Christmas season.

And a few days before Christmas, because there was no Internet and GPS at that time, we drew out our routes and planned ahead by sending word to our relatives that we would be visiting them on Christmas Day.

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Hardly did I hear that our relatives, who doubled as Santa Clauses, would be out of town. So, after attending the midnight Mass on Dec. 24, we hardly could sleep anymore as we anxiously waited for the dawn to break.

And from my experience, our relatives were already all ready waiting for us to give us their gifts on Christmas Day. The gifts usually came in small bills, which for us kids, were already big money.

At noon of Christmas Day, when we already covered our Christmas routes, we would count our collections and compare notes. And what do we do with our Christmas gifts? We would buy our favorite toys.

But here in the Windy City, kids normally get their Christmas gifts from their parents and close relatives during family Christmas parties. They cannot knock from house to house because of the prohibitively-cold weather.

And as to *Simbang Gabi*? Well, I will call the post *Simbang Gabi* as the "Community Christmas Party." This is one occasion during the Christmas season that friends and families get together to attend one big party.

SAINT GREGORY CHURCH KEEPS UP WITH TRADITION

Of course, I am referring to St. Gregory the Great Parish Church in Chicago, Illinois' north side, ministered by the Rev. Paul Wachdorf. He is keeping up the tradition first introduced by its Filipino parishioners in 1986. The St. Gregory Parish has been doing for the last 24 years the *Simbang Gabi* celebration during the Christmas season.

A community Christmas party is usually held in its cafeteria. In the past, the parish pastor would often lead the singing of the Christmas carols after the community had a sumptuous meal after the mass.

This year, they will be celebrating *Simbang Gabi* on a Friday, Dec. 17, the second day of the Evening Masses that end on Christmas Day. Different churches in the Chicagoland area hold the *Simbang Gabi* masses on different days leading to Christmas starting on Dec. 16.

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Last year, I attended a crowded *Simbang Gabi* celebrated by Chicago's Cardinal George in suburban Skokie, Illinois.

{xtypo_quote} **Editor's Notes:** To read Mr. Lariosa's accounts of the 2009 participation of Cardinal George please click on these links, [Cardinal George Celebrates Simbang Gabi](#) and [There Is Room in the Inn](#) {/xtypo_quote}

Like any other *Simbang Gabi* celebration, everybody is invited to a dinner party after the mass.

I think the spirit of sharing is really manifested during *Simbang Gabi* because those attending the Christmas dinner do not have to pay for a dinner ticket.

Everybody is welcome in the Inn.

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Merry Christmas to all!

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