

NOTRE DAME DES PHILIPPINES CATHOLIC MISSION

JOURNEY OF FAITH AND HOPE

As the Philippines , the cradle of Christianity in Asia, prepares to celebrate the 500 years of Christianity bequeathed to the Islands by the Spanish missionaries; the Filipino Catholic Mission of Montreal similarly, celebrates its thirtieth anniversary as bearer of Good News under the mantle of Mary, the Blessed Mother.

In the beginning, the concept of forming a Filipino mission was first proposed in 1971 as a pilot project of the Philippine Association of Montreal and Suburbs (FAMAS) presented to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal through Monsignor Mario Paquette, the late John MConell and Fr. Gagne, P.M.E., a veteran missionary in Davao, as observer.

For years, the office of cultural communities relentlessly pursued the Mission file for the appropriate time to relaunch the initiative. In 1980, the Federation of Filipino Canadian Associations of Quebec revived the concept of the pilot project by establishing contact with the archdiocese for regular updates.

The Federation, meanwhile , had represented the community at the Mass of All Nations at the Mary Queen of the World Cathedral and in some other related religious functions. It became the link with the archdiocese in its role as the voice of the Filipino community.

October 16, 1987 accelerated the initiative to create a Filipino Catholic Mission with the arrival of Father Carmelo Gosioco . He initiated the process of forming a Mission, an effort that caught the attention of Church authorities and eventually named Father Gosioco as the chaplain of the Filipino Mission on recommendation by the Philippine Episcopal Commission on Migrants.

INSTALLATION , SIGNIFICANCE AND MINISTRY

December 10, 1989 marked the beginning of the spiritual and religious transformation of the Catholic Mission when the late Paul Cardinal Grégoire; with the Apostolic Blessings of the late Pope St John Paul II, had canonically established the Filipino Catholic Mission as the spiritual home for Filipino Catholics in the archdiocese.

The installation ceremony at Notre Dame des Neiges Church was the crowning moment after decades of search and wait since 1971. This historical event was attended by church and civic dignitaries, representatives from Religious

Congregations for Men and Women, the Filipino community, friends and guests.

The distinction as the first non-territorial Filipino-owned Church in Canada underscored the challenge for the Mission to be at the forefront as the 'salt of the earth' and "light of the world". (Mt 5:13-14)

As "fishers of men", (Mt 4:19), the Mission shares the responsibility of evangelization; provide a path for sanctification and salvation as Jesus Christ had enjoined His followers "To be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

NOTRE DAME DES NEIGES CHURCH: 1987-1989 (FR. CARMELO GOSIOCO)

In 1987, Monsignor Mario Pacquette and Bishop Gilles Lussier of St Jerome, a former curate at the Church, had offered a place for the new mission to perform its ministry.

The motto "per aspera ad astra" (Through the hardships of the Cross with Mary: (To the stars to share the glory of the Lord) emblazoned in the Mission insignia designed by the late Mario Umali became the battlecry of the apostolate. It defined the hardships and challenges faced by the new Filipino Christian community.

Unfazed by challenges of low attendance, limited space and schedules, the Mission carried on its spiritual and religious activities rooted in traditions, customs, devotions and religious festivals; reminiscent of the Spanish religious heritage ingrained in the Islands.

The anniversary of the canonization of San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila, the first Filipino saint, was celebrated at Notre Dame des Neiges Church ; and also the blessing of the lifesize statue of Our Lady of the Philippines, the Mission patroness. San Lorenzo Ruiz was named the secondary patron of the Catholic Mission.

Father Gosioco's tenure ended in 1996 and is remembered for his pioneering efforts in establishing the Notre Dame des Philippine Catholic Mission; for building a solid foundation of the Mission and for leaving a schema for spiritual, and religious activities.

NOTRE DAME DES NEIGES CHURCH : 1996 (FR. FRANCISCO ALVAREZ, P.M.E.)

In the Fall of 1996, Father Alvarez arrived to continue the apostolic work of evangelization and has been the resident pastor since then.

His arrival at the Mission was providential, " the right man for the job" according to Monsignor Mario Paquette. Fr. Alvarez brought stability, some semblance of order and gave the devotees a sense of belonging and identity. One of his first

priorities was to find a permanent home for the growing Christian community from Notre Dame des Neiges to Saint Denis.

As a former diocesan priest, and later, as a member of the Society of Foreign Missions of Quebec, his parochial experiences and three years with Filipino migrants in Hong Kong, have served him well in meeting the challenges in a different setting of French Canadian milieu. Under his stewardship, the Mission has evolved as model witness to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

SAINT DENIS CHURCH: AUGUST 1999

In August 1999, the Mission relocated to St. Denis that had more space, facilities and room for flexibility for Masses, and religious activities. The prospect of purchasing the building was alluring, but not recommended by the archdiocese due to potential structural problems of the Church.

SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE CHURCH- LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: OCTOBER 21, 2006

Like the "manna" from heaven, the St. Thomas the Apostle Church became available on October 21, 2006 which Msgr. Michel Parent and Msgr. Pierre Blanchard were instrumental in the purchase of the church with the financial help from the archdiocese of Montreal.

On February 27, 2010, Cardinal Turcotte blessed and consecrated the former St Thomas the Apostle Church which has become the permanent place for worship for Filipinos of the Catholic faith.

The multipurpose venue enabled ministries to expand their reach for the apostolate; a far cry from the rented spaces at Notre Dame des Neiges and St. Denis Churches.

ORGANIZATION AND APOSTOLATE:

The organizational structure of the Mission is guided by the provisions of the Quebec Fabrique Act, in the Letters of Patents issued on March 24, 1988. At the helm of the administration is the pastor, working collaboratively with a duly elected administrators to oversee the spiritual and religious issues; the presbyteral team serves as a consultative body; the pastoral team carries out the ministries. The pastoral assistant is tasked with the logistics, operations and directions of the Mission.

The pastoral team and its satellite ministries are messengers of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as ambassadors of love and care."For I was hungry, and

you fed me; thirsty, and you gave me drink; stranger and you welcomed me; naked, and you clothed me; sick, and you cared for me; stranger, and you took me in; prisoner, and you visited me." (Mt 25:35)

The team is composed of different ministries: the Altar Guild, Martha, Eucharistic , Catechetical, Family Life, Knights of the Altar, Youth, Evangelization, Legion of Mary, Knights of Columbus, Franciscan, Choir, Special Projects and the Parish Renewal Experience (PREX).

The Mission Animated Action Club, (MAAC), for its part, provides some material help to the aboriginals in Davao City from proceeds of baked goods sales. The Family Life Ministry conducts pre-cana conference for would-be couples. The Knights of Columbus, guided by their four goals of Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism are devoted to serve God and country and to help others in need.

REVENUE AND FUND RAISING:

To make up for the shortfall of weekly collections, the Special Project Group organizes the King & Queen of Angels Contest, which has become the major source of revenue. Various groups undertake similar undertakings to help the financial concerns.

MASS, LITURGICAL SERVICES AND CHOIR

Masses are said three times a week; on Wednesdays and Fridays after the novenas to the Mother of Perpetual Help and to the Santo Niño, respectively. A sung Mass with the choir is celebrated on Sundays at 11:30 AM.

The melange of Tagalog and English is a major component of the repertoire and is the heart and soul of the liturgy. The choir enlivens the celebration and add solemnity to the occasion.

Various groups provide music for the Mass depending on the church liturgical calendar. The alternating groups are adult, youth, children, men's choir, and Kawang Panginoon prayer group.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is held every First and Third Friday of the month before the Mass. Baptisms are held on Saturdays. Marriages are preceded by a pre-cana and require submission of baptismal and confirmation certificates. For Anointing of the sick, the office needs to be notified as warranted.

The Mission performs a record number of baptisms, confirmations, weddings, first communions and a host of other religious and spiritual activities that have rocketed in the last 30 years.

Major feasts celebrated are Christmas, Easter, Santo Niño, San Lorenzo Ruiz, St Thomas the Apostle, San Pedro Calungsod, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Some traditions, like salubong at Easter; simbanggabi preceding Christmas, Flower offerings to our Blessed Mother in May, Our Lady of Manaog and Penafrancia have been the rallying attractions for the faithful to attend religious services at the Mission.

ROLE OF YOUTH AND CHILDREN:

Children and the youth are the gems of the ministry and the future of the community. The children are nurtured in the Christian faith by the catechetical ministers. Their participation at the recitation of the Lord's prayer is a brilliant move by making them active participants in the celebration of the liturgy. "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the Kingdom of God belong to such as these." (Mk 10:14-15)

The youth exposure as readers, membership of the altar guild, choir, leadership training are excellent preparations for their role as the future leaders. The Youth Summer Camp, conferences, and the religious activities are meant to enrich and enhance their experiences.

Faith in the help of the Divine Providence, and guidance by the Holy Spirit, is an assurance that the Filipino Catholic Mission will live as Jesus Christ had promised to be with His Church until the end of time. (Mat 28:20)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

December 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the Filipino Catholic Mission of Montreal as the spiritual home for Filipino Catholics; a tangible proof of what Filipinos can do when allowed to showcase their God-given talents. It is the time to celebrate and recognize the strength and resilience of Filipinos.

I have had the privilege of being involved from the start. Over the years, I watched the FCMM established its roots in the place where it is today. It started as a handful of people talking about the idea that has flourished to over 500 devotees on big events.

The Church cannot survive without members; let alone grow and expand. It goes without saying, how valuable and heroic are the works of the entire FCMM apparatus, the volunteers, the youth, the choir, the different ministries and administrators. They are the bedrock, the cornerstone of Nôtre Dame des Philippines Catholic Mission.

The celebration is an occasion to thank amighty God for the blessings; to pay tribute to the pillars of the Mission: Fathers Gosioco, Frank Alvarez; Monsignors Mario Paquette, Michel Parent, Pierre Blanchard, Andre Desroches, Bishop Gilles Lussier of St. Jerome, the late Paul Cardinal Gregoire, Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte and the archdiocese of Montreal for guidance and financial support; to the Church authorities of Notre Dame des Neiges and St Denis; to all the volunteers who through thick and thin, have rendered services solely for the greater honour and glory of God: "Ad majorem Dei gloriam".

A special thanks to the Society of Foreign Missions of Quebec "Société des prêtres des missions étrangères du Québec" for the excellent services of Father Francisco Alvarez ; to the priests of the Society, who had provided generous help in times of need and for their participation in the celebration of the liturgy.

An acknowledgement of thanks is also extended to all benefactors, sponsors and to all those, who in one way or another, have supported the Mission by their prayers, material and financial contributions to the evangelization ministry.

Gaudete et laetate; haec est dies quem fecit Dominus,"Be glad and rejoice; this is the day the Lord has made", ALLELUIAH ! AD MULTOS ANNOS.

AD JESUM PER MARIAM.- TO JESUS THROUGH MARY.

Alvin D Veloso
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
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