

FILIPINO COMMISSION

I still ponder on that wintry afternoon of November 2005, when a group of Filipinos appointed by the Bishop to the newly established Filipino Commission of the Diocese of Richmond, gathered for the first time at “the Well” retreat Center. Although we did not fully grasp the concept of the Filipino Commission, individually we knew why we choose to be there that day. We were Filipinos with one common bond– our culture and Filipino spirituality.

Four years has since elapsed. The Filipino Commission has changed in its composition. It has continued to evolve and grow in their mission and vision for the Filipino community reflective of the Diocese and the Catholic Church’s vision of the 20th century. With the theme of Ethnic Diversity, the Filipino Commission in collaboration with the Vietnamese and Korean Ministries was instrumental in the creation of an office for and a Director of Asian Ministry at the Diocese. One of our visions is to preserve and share our unique and beautiful Filipino culture and religious traditions with others in our faith. Thus, the start of the annual Filipino Liturgical Celebrations in July 2007, a mass celebrated with much splendor and pageantry, at different regions in the Diocese. In another, the goal of the Filipino Commission to have our Filipino youths and young adults be more actively engaged in their spiritual lives has slowly come to fruition. In October this year, the first Filipino Youth and Young Adult Forum was held in Williamsburg. This will be followed by a meeting at the Pastoral Center in December.

In the spirit of Advent, Filipinos will celebrate “Simbang Gabi” or “Misa de Gallo”, “Misa de Aguinaldo” as it is named in other parts of the Philippines. “Simbang Gabi” simply means, “Night Masses”. It is a valued religious tradition celebrated in preparation for the Advent season. It is a series of masses that starts on December 16 and ends on the midnight mass, December 24. The mass is held before dawn, announced by the ringing of church bells, playing of Christmas songs and church goers with “parols” (bamboo lanterns). It is a legacy of faith from the Spanish missionaries during its colonization of the Philippines. It traces its roots from Mexico in 1587. In the U.S., Filipinos had to adapt; mass is celebrated in the evening from December 15 to December 23. “Simbang Gabi” maybe celebrated other ways. But, its significance still echoes the depths of Catholicism in the hearts of Filipinos; the belief that God is ever present in our everyday life. It exemplifies the Filipino pride and contentment in their religious cultural ethnicity. “Simbang Gabi”, a message of hope, peace, joy and love for all.

In the Hampton Roads / Peninsula areas, an inter-parish “Simbang Gabi” will start on December 15 to December 23. Mass will start at 7 PM at the following parishes in the order listed: Star of the Sea, Church of the Holy Spirit, St. Matthew, St. Bede, St. Pius, own parish, Church of the Ascension, St. Luke and St. Gregory The Great. In the Richmond area, “Simbang Gabi” will start at 6 PM, Dec 15 - 23 at the Church of the Redeemer (Dec 15th), Our Lady of Lourdes (Dec 16th), St. Edwards (Dec 18th) and St. John Neumann (Powhatan) for the remaining days. The celebration is open to all, Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike. ALL ARE WELCOME.

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