

Cardinal Tagle has rapt audience at Mid-Atlantic Congress

The Filipino community of Baltimore took special interest in the Mid Atlantic Congress (MAC) Feb. 15, when Cardinal Luis Antonio G. Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, presided at the convention's opening Mass.

The seventh annual convention, organized by the Association of Catholic Publishers and the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Department of Evangelization, drew more than 1,500 pastoral leaders to the Hilton Baltimore.

This year's theme, Hope, was the focus of Cardinal Tagle's homily during Mass.

"Those who hope in God," Cardinal Tagle said, "find the energy to live."

Cardinal Tagle, president of Caritas Internationalis, the Catholic relief and social service organization, discussed the struggle to find hope in the world, especially in light of the previous day's school shooting in Florida that left 17 dead.

"Some question hope because there is so much negativity," Cardinal Tagle said. "But when you look at the Scriptures, we realize that the theological virtue of hope blooms in the midst of darkness."

In his welcome at the Mass, concelebrant Archbishop William E. Lori described Cardinal Tagle as "a young, energetic Cardinal."

"He is a wonderful pastor of souls," the archbishop said.

Sisters Chistian Maria Arayata and Janette Agnes Robles, among the Little Sisters of the Poor who serve at St. Martin's Home for the Aged in Catonsville, are both natives of the Philippines.

Sister Christian called Cardinal Tagle's talk "wonderful."

"(Filipinos) breathe faith," Sister Christian said. "That's what makes us resilient."

Sister Christian said that despite the struggles facing her home country, which include some areas beset by violence related to drug trafficking, they are hardworking, hospitable and happy people.

“Wherever we go,” Sister Christian said, “we bring (faith) with us.”

That describes other Filipino Catholics who have immigrated to the Baltimore area, who, in 2011, led to the formation of the Archdiocesan Filipino Council.

Its chairman is John Smith, retired from the U.S. Army as a lieutenant colonel, who was attracted to Filipino ministry by his wife, Lourdes (“Lorie”), a native of the Philippines. The couple will return to her homeland in late February to visit her family.

“Filipinos, we feel, are uniquely faithful,” Smith said.

The Filipino Council unites many communities, focusing on evangelization and serving as liaisons. It meets regularly, hosts functions, a Marian pilgrimage and a fiesta in September, which draws crowds from around the region to the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland.

Lorie Smith, meanwhile, is a member of the dance group that was to be featured during an Asian and Pacific Islander celebration at the MAC Feb. 16.

Her husband was among approximately 20 members of the Filipino Council who attended the MAC Mass with Cardinal Tagle.

“He was funny,” Smith said, “and he was also touching.”

Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services (CRS) honored Cardinal Tagle and Caritas Internationalis Feb. 14 with its Dignitas Award, which honors organizations that help eradicate poverty.

The Feb. 15 Mass concluded with a talk by Elias, a refugee from Syria invited to speak by CRS.

He had just completed his undergraduate degree in 2011 when war broke out, forcing him and his family to take flight. Today, his family is dispersed around the

world – including a sister who remains in Syria. Elias, who declined to use his last name, is attending graduate school in the United States, studying sustainable engineering.

“I would love to return to my home country,” Elias said, “but it’s not safe.”

He said that he has been overwhelmed by the happiness and welcoming nature he has witnessed in the United States.

It’s the largest gathering for the MAC, which offers workshops and breakout sessions led by national leaders in evangelization. Tracks, including one for Hispanic ministers and one for building intercultural competencies, allow ministers to focus on the specific needs of their communities.

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