

Special Mass offered to Filipino teachers as they arrive in Baltimore

With the arrival of about 110 new teachers from the Philippines to fill open slots in Baltimore area schools, the Catholic community seized the opportunity to welcome about 65 of the foreign educators with a special Mass and reception July 11.

Father Alphonsus Olive, C.S.s.R., celebrated a late afternoon Mass in an unfinished room alongside of the Symphony Center Apartments in Mount Vernon, where many of the new arrivals are staying.

During the reception that followed, Father Olive invited the teachers to attend regular Catholic services that cater to the 300 additional Filipino teachers who have made the region their home in recent years.

“We want to welcome these teachers, who are in a strange city and country, and offer them fellowship as they settle into their new surroundings,” said Father Olive, a resident priest at St. Mary, Annapolis, and a native of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. “We also want to keep the Catholics coming to our churches and remain within the faith.”

Though a majority of Filipinos are baptized Catholic, there are small percentages who are Protestants and Pentecostals, he said. “I think it’s important that as Catholics we let them know that we want them as a part of our community and that we will help them adjust to their new land.”

As Frenesi Anne Mangonon prepared for the special Mass, the 26-year-old special education teacher said it’s a tradition in her native Philippines to participate in a blessing when they arrive in a new place and before embarking on a new journey.

Her July 9 arrival marks the first time she has traveled outside of her homeland. Though nervous, she is excited about teaching in the Baltimore City school system and her new life with the Maryland Catholic community.

“I feel like I’m being embraced by the Catholics here,” Ms. Mangonon said. “It

makes moving to a foreign country not so scary.”

To help them weather the cold months in Baltimore, Father Olive and some of his parishioners have taken up a collection to provide some of the new teachers with winter clothing.

Church of the Annunciation, Rosedale, holds a special Mass each Sunday for the Filipino community, and St. Joseph, Fullerton, has become popular among the Filipino teachers. Additionally, St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park, expects to have a group of approximately 100 of the educators bussed to their church on the third Sunday of each month for a special Mass in their honor.

Baltimore City schools have been recruiting educators from the Philippines for the past two years to address teacher shortages in the school system.

Father Olive’s attention was drawn to the Filipino teachers by two parishioners of St. Mary’s – Lita and Ed Millan – who are natives of the Philippines and who have opened their home to many of the educators over the years.

“It’s not easy coming to a new country,” said Ms. Millan, who lives in Annapolis. “It can be very lonely. My husband and I think it’s very important to do what we can to provide a family-like atmosphere for these teachers. Most of them are so far away from their own families.”