

STRATEGY FOR EVANGELIZING THE FILIPINOS

IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA

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PROFILE OF THE FILIPINOS

General Background

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelago consisting of 7,100 islands situated about 500 miles off the southeast coast of Asia. It occupies a total land area of 115,800 square miles and supports a population of nearly 90 million. The Philippines takes its name from Philip II of Spain at the time of Spanish colonization in the 16th century when the first Spanish forces landed in Cebu. Because it was under Spanish rule for 333 years and under American tutelage for 50 years, the Philippines share many cultural affinities with the West.

It is, for example, the only Roman Catholic country in Southeast Asia, with 83% classified as Catholic, 9% Protestant and 5% Muslim. A fast growing sect with nationalistic overtones is Iglesia Ni Cristo. The Filipino people, however, most of whom are of Malay origin, are Asian both in consciousness and aspiration. This phenomenon is reflected in contemporary Philippine culture where East meets West. The Philippine economic system mirrors the classic characteristics of a developing economy. The large rural sector with its backward agriculture maintains a traditional way of life. However, the smaller urban sector is fairly prosperous and hospitable to new ideas and modern techniques.

Manila is the leading city of the Philippines and the center of Philippine political, social, and economic life. It is a modern metropolis with all amenities a city can offer. Manila leads the country in absorbing the cultural and technological imports from the West that gradually trickle down into the provinces. Driven by the desire to survive and succeed, these people face each new day with a constant struggle against economic, moral, social, and spiritual forces.

Filipinos have a “love-hate” relationship with the United States. While they owe their so-called “liberation” from the Japanese during World War II, they have paid a high price for the continued domination of America (and her capitalist allies) of their economy and culture, especially through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the various multinational corporations presently operating in the country. This explains their feeling of helplessness and a sense of skepticism when it comes to U.S. “aid”. In recent years, there has been a strong governmental support of U.S. policies, in light of the threat of indigenous movements categorized as loosely related to Al Qaeda, and Muslim independence movements in regions such as Mindanao, though the population continues to be moved more by political populism than by political loyalties to the United States.

Immigration Patterns

The migration of Filipinos to the United States is the result of special arrangements between the governments of both countries. Many service personnel stationed in the military bases on the islands have married Filipino spouses bringing them back to the United States. With the advantages of functional English as a second language for many urban Filipinos, and with job and trade skills useful to the American and Canadian economies, i.e. the medical professions, many Filipinos have immigrated with a relative ease into the North American world. As of 2004, over two and a half million Filipinos are legal residents in the U.S.

Major concentrations of Filipinos generally are found on the coasts, Los Angeles proper has 120,000, San

Diego, 90,000, San Jose, 55,000, San Francisco, 50,000, Daly City, 35,000. Honolulu, and New York City each have approximately 65,000 in the cities with many more in the outlying areas.

Among quick facts about Filipinos in the United States are these:

1. Filipinos are the second largest recent immigrant group to the U.S.
2. 40% of all Filipinos settle in California
3. Filipinos have a higher education level, larger households and higher average household incomes than the U.S. average
4. More Filipinos become naturalized citizens annually than any other immigrant group

Filipino culture exhibits these highlights: 1. “amor propio” or, roughly, “saving face” that is recognizing one’s fragile sense of self-worth and the need to be treated as a person rather than as an object. Therefore, they avoid put-downs, negative remarks, and personal affronts. 2. “hiya”, feelings of shame and embarrassment. 3. “utang na loob,” the feeling of obligation or indebtedness one develops when someone has done a favor for another. 4. “pakikisama,” referring to smooth interpersonal relations that avoid stressful situations. Filipinos are nonconfrontational by nature, sensitive to personal affront and rejection, and so use euphemisms, intermediaries, rather than direct confrontation. 5. “egalitarian” where Filipinos are generally group-oriented. Traditional Filipino families are patriarchal although women actually wield more power. This is reflective of Filipino culture’s matriarchal values. Respect and recognition are given to persons on the basis of age, socio-economic status, education, and their ability to wield political, economic, and social power. 6. “economic security” where high value is placed on getting rich, though the need for economic security is intimately tied with social acceptance. Filipinos tend to be deeply fatalistic and belief in “luck”. “Connections” and “pull,” and nepotism are outgrowths of this drive for economic security.

Religious Heritage

Nazarene work was begun officially in the Philippines in 1948 and has since spread to several of the islands and now engages a membership of Philippines of almost 18,000 members, more than 250 churches and preaching points in 9 districts, and two Bible colleges. Manila is also home to the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Sensing the need of Filipino pastors to minister to their own people, Rev. Jaime Galvez and Rev. Patricio Valenzuela were the first Filipino pastors to come to America. Understandably, their assignment was Hawaii where the majority of the Filipinos speak Ilocano. The Filipino congregation at Honolulu First Church was founded in 1981.

In 1984, Enrique Cainglet, a graduate of Nazarene education in the Philippines became the pastor of the First Filipino Church in Los Angeles, a group started by Rev. John Pattee, retired missionary to the Philippines. In rapid succession, other Nazarene ministers came as God opened doors of opportunity and service. Eleven churches are currently active centered primarily in Central and Southern California, Hawaii, Texas, Florida. Many Filipinos also attend English services or have Bible studies as part of the majority culture, ministries in Anchorage, Alaska being an example of this.

In Canada, Nazarene congregations have been formed in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg.

Often the Filipino ministry combines English language services with Tagalog with Ilocano and Visaya alternatives.

The Missional Task of Evangelizing Filipinos

General Suggestions:

Assist Filipinos to acquire an adequate grasp of American as well as Filipino-American cultures.

Utilize persons who have spent time in the Philippines, i.e. missionaries, children of missionaries and nationals for developing new ministries.

THE MISSION TASK FOR DISTRICTS IS TO:

- Offer greater access of resources both to existing Filipino congregations and new church plants, but permitting deputation tours to raise funds for the ministry under 10% mission giving. District support and General Church support may be necessary and as legitimate as “foreign field” subsidies.
- Develop “culture specific” literature, especially written by people sensitive to the unique needs of Filipinos, dealing with issues such as language and cultural barriers, race and race discrimination, stress, marital domestic issues, identity issues, cultural adaptation, employment, the problem of materialism, child rearing, loss of community, and practical outcomes of Christianity in relation to educational, social and economic opportunities.
- Study the community demographics to identify the presence of Filipinos, their concentration and their needs.
- Seek existing Filipino ministries to learn what their experience has been in the development of ministries in the local context.
- Ascertain if Filipinos open to ministry want cultural-specific ministry or if they desire to integrate more into majority culture congregations.
- Develop a committee of Filipino Ministry thrust to strategize the development of appropriate ministries and to guide the process along.
- Offer the necessary theological training, not only at the academic setting but also by modeling the commitment, effective communication, interpersonal relational skills, and creative imagination.

- Because of the lack of Filipino leadership for new ministries in North America, select “imported” leadership from the Philippines, recognizing the danger of “leadership” drain on their end, and the potential of mixed or compromised motives. However, some situations may be entirely appropriate and useful for Filipino-American church development.
- Recognize that Filipino leadership may require bivocational assignments. Therefore, help these same leaders to find compatible work assignments that are complementary and adequate for creating and sustaining ministry.
- Identify potential Nazarene leadership from other like-minded denominations, hand-picked from those who seek denominational affiliation combined with holiness passion.
- Encourage majority churches to sponsor new congregations either under host arrangements or as a group of churches.
- Proportion district funds for developing new Filipino works.
- Look into the development of a radio ministry specific to Filipinos.
- Target ministries especially in the following communities: Seattle, Alaska, Houston, New Jersey, Sacramento, Kauai, Long Beach-Carson, Anaheim-Orange, California City, San Gabriel, Santa Ana, Daly City, Benicia, Hercules, Santa Barbara, New York, and El Morro-San Luis Obispo.

THE MISSIONAL TASK FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH IS:

- Nurture small group ministries, house-family ministries and extended family ministries among Filipinos, utilizing Bible studies, ESL, cultural celebrations and family celebrations for bringing interested people together.
- Identify prospective Filipino students worthy of sponsorship who have indicated a call to ministry and are willing to study further at a Bible College or Seminary for North American ministry.
- Assist those Filipinos who are candidates for Nazarene ministry with immigration problems, document processing, and cultural adaptation.
- Identify those Nazarenes who have moved from the Philippines, maintaining contact through local church support, challenging them to continue loyalties, ministries either through the majority congregations or through new Filipino initiatives. Too many Nazarenes get lost in the transition.