



Diocesan Pastoral Plan for Ministry with
Asian and Pacific Islanders

Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester



Welcome
to the
House
of the
Lord



Saint
Jude
Pray
for
Us



January 5, 2016
Memorial of Saint John Neumann

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is my pleasure to present to you the Diocese of Rochester's *Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Asian and Pacific Islanders* in our Diocese.

In October, 2014, the Office for Cultural Diversity invited the Asian Catholic Communities to participate in developing a *Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Asian and Pacific Islanders* in our Diocese. Vietnamese, Korean, Asian Indian, Burmese, and Filipino Catholics gathered in small groups over a period of six months to reflect on their present realities and their involvement in the heart of the Church in order to identify priorities and make recommendations in four particular areas: the state of the family, the life of the Asian community, the life of the parish, and involvement in the local community.

In the pages which follow, you will find the *Pastoral Plan* which is the culmination of these meetings and the contributions made by the Asian Leadership Commission. The purpose of the *Plan* is to:

- provide a vision for ministry;
- affirm the gifts of the Asian community;
- increase awareness about their pastoral needs; and
- provide recommendations for addressing those needs.

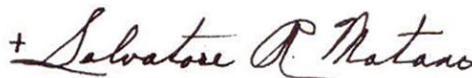
It is fitting that I write this letter today, the Memorial of Saint John Neumann, the saintly Bishop of Philadelphia who was born in Bohemia, but while in the seminary, feeling a desire to serve in the American missions, left his native homeland to come to New York. From 1836 to 1840, Father Neumann served in western New York, often traversing what would become the Diocese of Rochester, to care for the German immigrants and to nourish their faith so that they would become active members of the Church in their new homeland.

Similarly, today, we are privileged to welcome immigrants from Asia and the Pacific Islands who enrich the Diocese of Rochester and remind us that we are truly one, holy, catholic and apostolic, united in the faith of Jesus Christ professed in His Church. It is my hope that the pages which follow will increase pastoral leaders' understanding of and appreciation for their rich Asian spirituality; not what we think it should be, thereby fostering a pseudo-accommodation or secular driven agenda which has destroyed the solid religious heritage of other cultures, but rather as a great gift to rejuvenate the faith in the United States.

I am grateful to the Reverend Father Edison Tayag, the Asian Leadership Commission and the Diocesan Office for Cultural Diversity for their leadership and pastoral care of our sisters and brothers from Asia and the Pacific Islands. May our prayers, and those of Saint John Neumann, guide us in our ministry.

With an assurance of my prayers and asking a remembrance in your good prayers, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ 

*The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester*

Introduction & Overview



During the fall of 2014, the Asian Catholic Community of the Diocese of Rochester took part in a pastoral planning process in collaboration with the Office for Cultural Diversity. A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of the Asian Catholic Community in our Diocese is essential if the People of God are to respond to their spiritual and pastoral needs. This process provided a unique opportunity to acknowledge the identity of the Asian communities living in our Diocese and to invite them to share their gifts with the Catholic Church in our Diocese.

The Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Asian and Pacific Islanders is focused on five particular Asian communities. These are the Burmese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, and the Asian Indian Communities. While it is likely that immigrants from all areas of Asia and Pacific Islands have settled in our Diocese over the years, these five communities are better established in our parishes than others. They either gather to celebrate the Sunday Mass in their own language on a regular basis and/or participate regularly in small ecclesial communities.

Over a period of six months, each community gathered to share its experiences and offer ideas on how the Church can best respond to its needs: personal, spiritual, and cultural. This statement seeks to share the fruits of their reflections.

Ministry with Asian & Pacific Islanders

Saint John Paul II begins his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, saying, “In ‘the fullness of time’ (Gal 4:4), he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Savior, who took flesh as an Asian!”¹ He points out that “because Jesus was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land, that small portion of Western Asia became a land of promise and hope for all mankind.”² Yet, Jesus is often perceived as “a Western rather than an Asian figure.”³

Pastoral ministry with Asian and Pacific Islanders embraces an “intricate mosaic of [Asia’s] many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions.”⁴ We must actively work to raise awareness about the distinctions within the Asian culture so often overlooked when we gather into one group, communities with very different histories.

Asia is home to nearly two-thirds of the world’s population. Yet, we often treat as a single unit a vast area stretching from the Philippines and Samoa in the Pacific Ocean, then west across to Cambodia, including along the way Japan, China, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam (to name just a few). The Christian communities that are native to these countries express their common Catholic faith differently from communities in other Asian countries.

The economic situations on the Asian continent are also very diverse. “People migrate within Asia and from Asia to other continents for many reasons, among them poverty, war and ethnic conflicts, the denial of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”⁵ We caution against losing or confusing important cultural distinctions for the sake of inclusiveness.

Despite the many differences, Asian and Pacific Islanders share a common understanding of “being Asian.” It is described as “an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul” and found in “the spirit of complementarity and harmony.”⁶ “Harmony draws its inspiration and strength from the harmonious relationship of the Trinity. Asian and Pacific Islanders teach a threefold harmony: (1) harmony with a personal God, the source of all genuine harmony; (2) harmony among all people; and (3) harmony with the whole universe.”⁷

They also share many traditional values.

“The people of Asia take pride in their religious and cultural values, such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, the spirit of hard work, discipline, frugal living, the thirst for learning and philosophical inquiry. They hold dear the values of respect for life, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety towards parents, elders, and ancestors, and a highly developed sense of community. In particular they hold the family to be a vital source of strength, a closely knit community with a powerful sense of solidarity.”⁸

Here in the Diocese of Rochester, New York, where many Asian and Pacific Islanders have come over the years as immigrants, we are all called to understand and honor these differences and similarities. We must celebrate the many gifts the Asian Pacific Catholic communities bring to our Diocese and give thanks for the way they enrich our oneness as the Body of Christ. Unity is our goal, not uniformity.

The Present Reality

The Asian Catholic Community of Rochester is committed to the full and active participation in the life of their parishes as well as their respective Asian communities. On their journey of faith, they have undergone many joys and trials. Below are a list of five major accomplishments and challenges that they have experienced in the last couple of years.

Five major accomplishments

1. Supporting the spiritual life of the Asian Catholic Community through weekly prayer group meetings and an annual “Life in the Spirit” seminar
2. Encouraging devotional practices through dedicated rosary block groups that meet on a weekly/monthly basis
3. Fostering Asian cultural and religious traditions among children and youth through intentional efforts (i.e. language classes, praying the rosary, etc.)
4. Reaching out to the broader interreligious Asian community through special community events (i.e. Tet New Year’s celebration)
5. Offering continual support of international college students and a home away from home

Five major challenges

1. Retaining young people within the worshiping community, especially students
2. “Invisibility” to the larger community and even to other Asians
3. Gathering as a community because of geographical dispersion
4. Locating priests who speak the languages of the Asian communities or at least have some understanding of the communities’ histories and needs
5. Keeping alive the religious traditions from their countries of origin





Rochester's Asian & Pacific Communities

Following is a sketch of the general characteristics of the five communities targeted in this pastoral plan. Each quick portrait summarizes three characteristics of each community: its understanding of God, its orientation to family life, and its experience of the Church.

The Burmese Community

- *Understanding of God:* Burma (or Myanmar) is overwhelmingly Buddhist. Catholic Christians make up only 2% of the population, and continue to be persecuted, as do members of other religious minorities. The persecution is intensified by the fact that the majority of Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) belong to minority ethnic groups. Accordingly, Catholic worship emphasizes the cross.
- *Orientation to Family Life:* Family and church communities are central as pillars of support for those whose lives have been shaped by persecution.
- *Experience of the Church:* The Portuguese introduced and began the activity of the Church in Burma in the 16th century, a work to which the Dominicans, the Jesuits and the Augustinians selflessly devoted themselves. The commitment of the Catholic laity to the work of evangelization and the growth in vocations is a great source of hope. Fear produces a strong sense of suspicion of outsiders. The Church is a refuge.

The Korean Community

- *Understanding of God:* Catholicism is strongly rooted in local tradition because Korea was evangelized by lay people, not foreign missionaries. God is seen as the protector of family and clan, and a source and guarantor of the treasured values of peace and harmony.
- *Orientation to Family Life:* Family and community centered to the point where Koreans traditionally speak of “we” and “us” rather than “I” and “me.” Building a community and sustaining it are very much like building and maintaining a family. Respect for elders and seniority are strongly observed.
- *Experience of the Church:* Korean Catholic immigrants to the U.S., drawing on their indigenous independence and initiative as lay catechists, prefer to form their own Church communities. This independence, which is often misinterpreted as resistance to change or integration, is primarily due to difficulties with the English language and to maintain their Korean identity. They share a deep reverence for Korean martyrs and saints. Devotional activities are widely practiced especially to the Blessed Mother.

The Filipino Community

- *Understanding of God:* Deep faith in “Maykapal,” the Eternal One, Lord of life and death. They also have a deep confidence that “Bahalana,” God’s will provides.
- *Orientation to Family Life:* The family is central, supported by a strong Marian devotion. Child-centered, with emphasis on hierarchy and division of roles. Loyalty, kinship obligation, and smoothness of interpersonal relations are valued.
- *Experience of the Church:* There is little sense of the division of Church and state as the Philippines are predominantly Catholic. Fiestas, processions, pilgrimages and novenas mark the devotional practices of Filipino Catholics. As immigrants to the U.S., Filipinos sometimes find it difficult to continue many of these traditions due to weather conditions and geographic distance among community members.

The Vietnamese Community

- *Understanding of God:* Deeply influenced by Confucianism's shaping of the social system and Taoism's focus on contemplation and simplicity. French colonization and later civil war between the North and the South and resulting wars made worship difficult for the country's minority Catholic community (which represents about 7% of Vietnam's population). Coming from the war-torn background, the image of God so dear to the heart of the Vietnamese Catholics is the crucifix.
- *Orientation to Family Life:* Family is central. Extended family is the norm. Grief from the results of the past century's wars is still real as so many families were decimated or destroyed. Those who could come to the United States or other free countries have been trying hard to keep the value of family. The first generation works hard and sacrifices to live a simple life style to save up the money for their children to attend good schools. The second generation do their part by studying hard.
- *Experience of the Church:* In Vietnam, Christian worship has been much affected by its uneasy relation to the state. The role of the individual's free will in Christianity conflicts with governing communist ideology. In the U.S. and here in Rochester, of course the Vietnamese Catholics are blessed with the freedom to worship God. Integral to being Vietnamese Catholics in Rochester is to pray for the brothers and sisters still suffering from the lack of religious freedom and persecution under the Communist regime back in Vietnam. The devotion to Mary is also very important. Moreover, it is greatly supported, encouraged, and promoted by the priests of the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix (CMC) who provide continuous guidance and care to the Rochester Vietnamese Catholic community.

The Asian Indian Community

- *Understanding of God:* In a context with a strong tradition of spirituality, there is an affinity towards understanding of God as Spirit. The power of the Spirit is closely related to the person and work of Christ as Savior.
- *Orientation to Family Life:* The unity of family, community and church is treasured. A strong devotion to Mother Mary and the daily recital of the rosary is part of the family prayers. Respect for elders and love of children is instilled.
- *Experience of Church:* According to tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle preached the Gospel in India in 52 A.D. and baptized many people. East Indian Catholics mainly worship according to three rites: the Latin, the Syro-Malabar, and the Syro-Malankara. For centuries, the Indian Catholic Church has explored ways of expressing its faith in truly Indian ways both in life and worship. This has resulted in pioneering work in the areas of interreligious dialogue and social justice issues.

Statistical Overview

According to the U.S. Census, Asians are the fastest growing racial group in the U.S. The Asian population increased four times faster than the total U.S. population, which grew by 9.7 percent during the past decade.⁹ There are 24,281 Asians residing in Monroe County. The greatest concentrations are found in Rochester (6,493), Brighton (4,337) and Henrietta (3,070). An estimated 800 Burmese refugees live in Rochester.¹⁰

A 2015 preliminary report of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Asian Pacific Islander Catholics in the U.S. found that, in general, Asian immigrants are disproportionately Catholic compared to their presence in their countries of origin. Their religious engagement is very high with more than 63 percent attending church at least once a week and about 65 percent praying once a day.¹¹

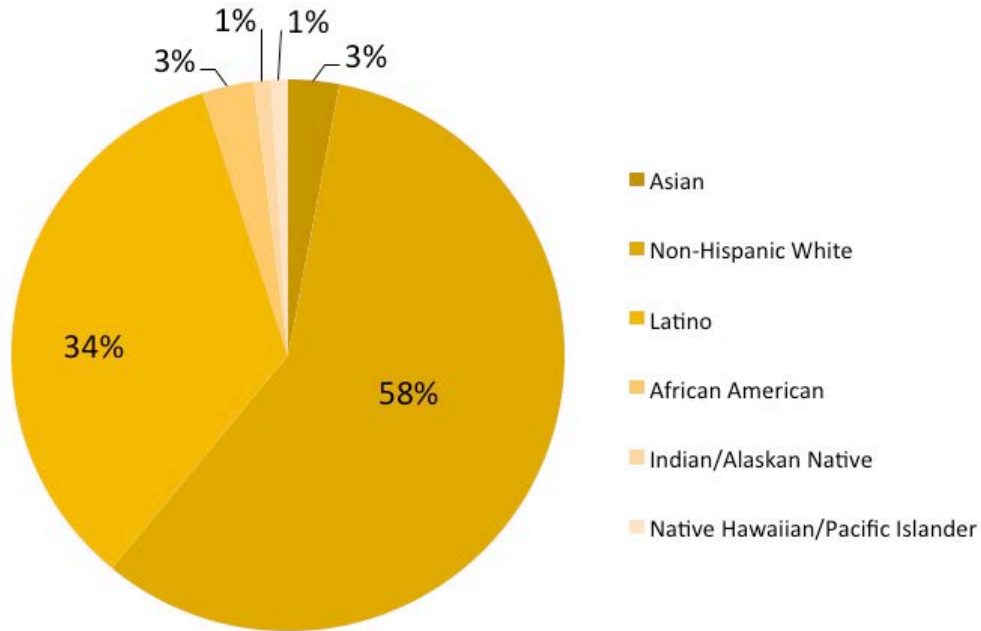


Figure 1. 2013 CARA Catholic Poll, Catholics by Ethnicity

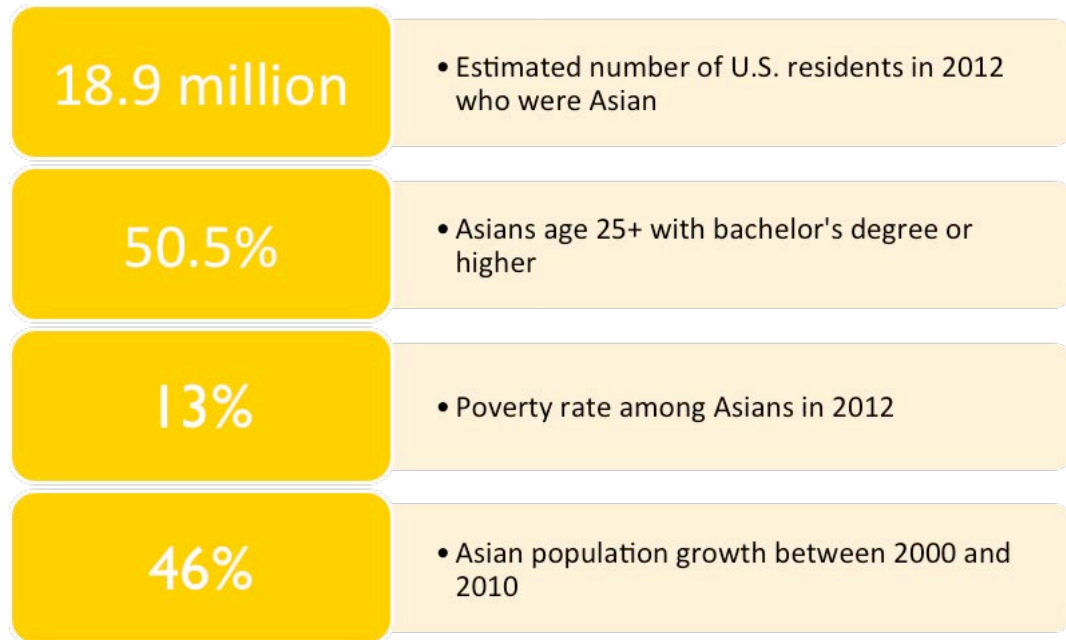


Figure 2. 2010 U.S. Census demographic data on Asian population

Mission Statement

We, the Asian Catholic Community of the Diocese of Rochester, are a community of communities united by our Catholic faith, Asian culture and traditional values. In the spirit of “Harmony in Faith,” we are called to:

- Embrace all God’s people as brothers and sisters in Christ
- Share the Good News and be a witness to others
- Live a profound spirituality rooted in prayer and tradition
- Honor our rich cultural heritage and share our gifts with the Church



Pastoral Priorities & Recommendations

We have identified four areas for particular attention in order to promote harmony and the sharing of gifts of the Asian Catholic communities within our Rochester Diocese: the State of the Family, Life in the Asian Community, Life in the Parish, and Involvement in the Local Community.

The State of the Family

“Seeking a better life” ... the desire that moved Asian community members to immigrate in the first place and sustains them still.

The integrity of the Asian family is being challenged, both positively and negatively. It is challenged positively by greater social mobility and economic opportunity here in the U.S. than in their home countries. It is challenged negatively by threats to traditional values caused by language and cultural differences. Younger generations are growing up in a world vastly different from their immigrant parents.

The impact of immigration, however, accents the value placed on building strong faith communities to help bridge the gap between the old and the new. Asian families continue to witness to the Gospel in their new reality. Prayer meetings, supplemented by cultural gatherings and classes in dance and language, ethnic organizations, and extended family relationships are resources for the support and strengthening of family life. These also help to maintain and foster their deep attachment to popular devotions, our Mother Mary, and the Eucharist.

Action Steps

Support households of faith among Asian families through community, worship and prayer

Promote sensitivity to culture and open dialogue during marriage preparation especially with interracial/ interreligious couples

Integrate ethnic stories and cultural values to religious education curriculum

Provide special pastoral attention to refugee families and their particular needs

Develop adult faith formation opportunities which include intergenerational programs that are sensitive to language

Identify or develop family resources on the Liturgy and the Sacraments in order to encourage full and active participation at Mass as a family

Offer parent workshops to strengthen interpersonal relationships with the next generations

Create opportunities to honor the elders within the community

Encourage Asian and Pacific Islanders with family concerns to seek support from pastoral leadership

Life in the Asian Community

“Celebrating culture and heritage” ... the desire to keep alive the memories of the values and traditions from their countries of origin.

Asian and Pacific Islanders recognize a cultural unity with one another. The desire to preserve culture and heritage finds support from common values along all Asian communities: their common desire to learn about and respect each other’s differences; their common delight in celebrating their ethnicity; their common respect for elders and for the cohesive family unit; their common commitment to support the “have not’s” in their home countries; and their common devotion to Mary.

The separation of one Asian community from another due to language and history, however, makes it difficult for them to promote unity. The language barrier makes it especially difficult to develop suitable communication networks. Better communication is a great need on many levels: between the Asian and Anglo communities, among the Asian communities themselves, and between generations of a single community, especially between immigrant members and their children.

Action Steps

Offer opportunities for everyone to learn about the history and traditions of the various Asian and Pacific Islander communities in our Diocese

Strengthen relations and increase opportunities for partnership across the various Asian and Pacific Islander communities

Increase vocations within the Asian Catholic communities

Support life-long faith formation to encourage spiritual growth, maintain traditional values and increase knowledge of the Catholic faith, especially through small ecclesial communities that are connected to the wider parish experience

Establish support groups for families who have recently arrived and may be experiencing a language barrier

Encourage pastors to inform parishioners about events and/or activities sponsored by different Asian and Pacific Islander communities

Organize a diocesan gathering of all Asian Catholic communities at least once a year





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Life in the Parish

“More lay opportunities in the US” ... the desire for deeper development as the People of God.

These opportunities to grow in faith are fostered in parishes that welcome families, that are encouraging of Asians' desire to worship in their own languages, and that are open to efforts which help bridge cultural differences between Asians and the larger parish community. Involvement promotes spiritual growth through active participation in Mass, through lay liturgical ministries, through catechetical instruction and prayer groups, through visits to the sick and homebound, and through strengthened family prayer. This involvement in turn leads to growth in relationships outside the parish's liturgical life.

The desire for involvement is sometimes hindered by a lack of sensitivity to the religious and cultural heritage of the people whom the parish serves. Discrimination is experienced, though of a subtle rather than an overt nature. They often feel “invisible.” When “seen,” the optic is often based on stereotypes. Burmese communities labor under a special difficulty because of comparative lack of English language skills.

Action Steps

Invite a priest at least once a year to celebrate liturgies and/or the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the Malayalam and Burmese communities in their own language

Organize international activities to promote community and increase relations between Asian and non-Asian parishioners

Provide workshops for pastoral leaders that promote understanding and respect of the elements of Asian spirituality and prayer

Increase opportunities for faith formation and leadership development among Asian young people

Foster greater involvement in liturgical ministries by Asian parishioners and occasionally include Asian languages at liturgies and prayer services

Provide bilingual translation of responses for the Mass in parishes shared with Asian Catholic communities

Establish formal channels of communication between parish pastoral leaders and Asian community leaders

Evaluate ministries and committees within individual Asian Catholic communities in collaboration with diocesan offices

Involvement in the Local Community

“Live in harmony with people around me” ... a common desire of all Asian community members to be at peace with and helpful to everyone, “regardless of culture and faith,” especially the poor and disadvantaged, including recent immigrants.

The parish itself is an important resource, as it is trusted more than governmental organizations. It plays a key role in connecting members to events, resources, and service opportunities in the wider community.

“Asians and Pacific Islanders embody certain characteristics of the poor since many still come to the U.S. seeking a better life, but also poor in spirit through the immigration process of departure, displacement, and resettlement. Thus, the Asian and Pacific Island presence affords the Church in the United States an opportunity to be the pilgrim people of God as the Church continually reexamines herself in light of global migration.”¹²

The diverse realities between the various Asian communities, however, make it difficult to act in solidarity. Each community takes care of its own pastoral needs but, as Pope Francis says, it is also important to go out to society’s peripheries to serve those most in need, spreading the faith through witness and work.

Action Steps

Develop an online social network between Asian and Pacific Islander communities and organizations to improve dialogue and foster greater communion

Organize occasional opportunities for gathered prayer with Asian Catholic communities focused on social concerns locally and in their countries of origin

Develop evangelization programs that reach out to Asian youth, especially young adult males

Provide opportunities to learn about putting the Gospel into action through charitable works and social justice

Develop and distribute contact/resource lists for Asian international college students and the elderly to help address their needs

Develop ministries to visit the elderly, the sick, and the homebound within the Asian Catholic community

End Notes

1. Post- Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia, John Paul II, 6 November 1999, 1.
2. Ibid, 1.
3. Ibid, 20.
4. Ibid, 6.
5. Ibid, 7.
6. Ibid, 6.
7. Asian and Pacific Presence, USCCB p. 14.
8. Ecclesia in Asia, 6.
9. 2010 U.S. Census Bureau
10. Ibid.
11. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, Asian Pacific Islander Catholics in the United States: A Preliminary Report, January 2015.
12. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, Asian and Pacific Island Affairs Survey (USCCB, 2011), 1.

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