

## 3<sup>rd</sup> National Assembly of Filipino Priests

by Fr. Joel Henson, Executive Council Member, National Association of Filipino Priests-USA



HOUSTON, TX – About 350 Filipino Catholic priests currently ministering all over the United States gathered for the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Assembly of Filipino Priests held November 7-10, 2017 in Houston, Texas. The triennial convention was an opportunity to renew fraternal bonds as well as reflect on themes of current interest in the life of both the American and the universal Church.

Hosted by the greater Houston Filipino community under the guidance of Fr. Edmund Eduarte, Vicar for Filipino

Catholics of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and the leadership of its Filipino Ministry Council, participants were treated to not only Filipino- but also Texas-style hospitality and a first-hand experience of “Houston-Strong”, the enduring motto of the local community that witnessed unprecedented devastation from Hurricane Harvey in late August. Undaunted by the natural events of a few months earlier, Filipino-Houstonians, many of whom had spent the better part of the last three years in preparation, met priests as early as their arrival at the local airports and were present throughout the entire time for various logistical details at the Royal Sonesta Houston Galleria, site of this year’s assembly.

Heeding the merits of Pope Francis’ call for a jubilee year in 2016, this year’s assembly centered around the theme of *Joyfully and Faithfully Sharing God’s Mercy*. Among the featured speakers were Cardinal Roger Mahony, retired Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and Dr. Stephen Cherry, sociology professor at the University of Houston, Clear Lake, who shared on their reflections and research, respectively, on immigrant Catholics in the United States. Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia and Dr. John and Mrs. Claire Grabowski of the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, shared their perspectives on Pope Francis’ encyclical *Amoris Laetitia* and its implications for the pastoral care of marriages and families. In their homilies at the daily celebration of the Eucharist, Bishop Oscar Solis of Salt Lake City, Utah, Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans, Louisiana, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Larry Silva of Honolulu, Hawaii, all expressed gratitude and appreciation for the presence and ministry of Filipino priests in the United States and highlighted their particular gift of being able to be bridge-builders and instruments of

reconciliation in a country marked by division on various levels, including, sadly, within certain sections of the Church.

Evenings at the assembly were marked by light-hearted conversation as well as serious networking, along with reminiscing among brother priests, especially those hailing from the same seminaries or regions in the Philippines. Following the model of the previous assembly in Orlando, Florida, dinner entertainment was provided mostly by participating clergy with group songs and dances. Thursday evening was graced by several numbers including singing star, Sheryn Regis.

The National Assembly began in 2011 with the first ever assembly in Los Angeles to organize and strengthen the effectiveness of Filipino priests serving the US. The National Association of Filipino Priests-USA will hold its next gathering in 2020 in the New York – New Jersey region.