

Korean American Priests Association (KAPA) Annual Conference by Fr. Gus Baek, SDB, Past KAPA President



Picture: Participants of the Annual KAPA Conference in front of St. Paul Jung Ha Sang Korean Catholic Church, Las Vegas, NV

Every year KAPA holds a conference in different states throughout the country. For over 34 years, the Korean American Priests Association (KAPA) has been serving Catholics of Korean descent in the United States and Canada. Established in 1983, KAPA's primary goal is to support ministries of clergy and lay leaders in nourishing the spiritual, cultural and generational needs of Korean American Catholics.

This year the annual KAPA conference was held in Las Vegas from May 8 to 12 at the Green Valley Ranch Resort. Bishop Hee-Jong Moon, along with twenty-four Korean-American priests from various dioceses across the U.S, attended the conference. Bishop Hee-Jong Moon is an auxiliary Bishop of the Suwon Diocese in South Korea, serving as chairman for both the Committee of the Mission Abroad and Pastoral Care of the Overseas, Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea.

The theme of this year's conference was "They may be all be one."(Jn. 17, 21), a theme carried forward from the year before. In 2016, Korean American Catholic (KAC) celebrated their 50th anniversary, commemorating 50 years of faith practice in the United States. Their first Korean Catholic community was established in San Francisco in 1966. Since then, they have grown to over 140 communities throughout the U.S.

KAPA's annual conference started with a day of retreat. We dedicated Tuesday, May 9th, as a day of prayer. For this day of prayer and retreat we were joined by Fr. Man-Sam Han from the African missionary, and Fr. Ho-Joon Yang from the South American missionary. Both priests shared their experiences and challenges with us. Their talks were very inspirational, courageous and helpful on our journey of faith and ministry. We were also encouraged to continue to do our work and cultivate our ministries with genuine faith. We were reminded once again that our vocation is a gift to churches, both in Korea and the United States. Overall it was a wonderful opportunity to renew our apostolic zeal.

Among many other topics, the final agenda was to elect KAPA's new president, a term that will be held for the following 3 years. The Fathers dedicated a significant amount of time sharing their thoughts on the present situation of Korean American Catholics of today, and how that should inform the necessary qualities of new leadership. After serious discussion, Fr. Sang-Jin Kim was elected as a new president of KAPA after the first ballot. He is a pastor of St. Paul Jung Ha Sang Korean Catholic Church in Las Vegas, NV. The conference Fathers affirmed his election and Fr. Sang-Jin Kim accepted his new role. At the conclusion of the conference, we attended Fr. Sang-Jin Kim's parish and celebrated evening mass with the parishioners. It was a truly joyful celebration.

There is no doubt that KAPA faces many challenges these days. However, the passionate spirit shown by the community gathered at the conference gave us great hope, and we realized our vocations are very unique. With the passion of our community and the leadership of our newly appointed new president, Fr. Sang-Jin Kim, we realize we are truly blessed and look positively towards the future.