NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

45 years and a community we call church: an immigrants' story

Jocelyn A. Sideco | May. 4, 2012 Young Voices

My parents are celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary on Monday. In the same vein as other recent milestones, my parents do their best to invite *everyone* and throw a big party. We had a huge celebration when they each turned 50, 55, 60, 65 and even 70 for my father a few years ago. We have tons of food -- no, really, Filipinos have enough food to ensure that everyone there would be able to eat for days, just in case an earthquake broke out and we all were stuck there together -- entertainment that only "American Idol" or "The Voice" can rival, and many, many stories.

What strikes me the most is how integral the church is to my parents' story.

They immigrated in 1968 about six months apart. My father, an electrical engineer by trade, cleaned hotel rooms by the airport as he settled in with his sister's family. When my mother came with my twin sisters, all four lived with my father's sister, her husband and their two kids. My mother, a grammar school teacher, got a job at a nearby convalescent home as a certified nurse's assistant, and my father got hired by a telephone company. Both worked the graveyard shift from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. After a year of saving my mother's salary, they put a down payment on a house close by and began their own, independent American dream.

Four blocks away from their home was a local Catholic church.

My mother likes to tell me that they would sit in the first pew each week until I was born. Apparently, my lungs were well developed, and I liked to share my gift of speaking out in church enough that my family moved to the last row of this huge church and camped out there all through my time in grammar school, junior high and high school. I might be wrong, but I think my parents found their way to the first row again when I was in college.

They raised four girls in the Catholic church. We went to Sunday Masses, days of obligation, and we worked and volunteered there, too. My older sisters spent high school afternoons answering phones in the rectory, and my younger sister and I did our best to be among the first crew of girls to serve at the altar. The Canossian sisters took our family under their wing. We are so grateful for their patience, kindness, teaching and ministry.

My parents had a group of people with whom most major and minor life events were shared. This *barkada*, or group of friends, included all Filipino families whose children attended the grammar school and went to the same church. From the fall festival to ciappino night, St. Patrick's dinner dance and the May crowning, they all had found community --friendship and fellowship -- with one another, and the church knew it.

After the kids had all graduated from our respective high schools and went our separate ways, we all find ourselves back at the church, kind of -- two high school teachers, a filmmaker fascinated with religion and spirituality and how that shapes gender, sexuality and community, and me. My older sisters have families and are doing their best to educate within a context of faith and spirituality. And even my parents have found themselves evermore deeply rooted in the church and its people.

Want a reception catered with tablecloths, flowers in vases and tasty food? Call Tony and Linda. Want a couple

to meet with a wedding planner prior to the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony, both for mentorship and for logistics? Call Tony and Linda. Want a few volunteers to visit the sick, reshape a garden and sweep outside the church and parish offices weekly? Call Tony and Linda.

The fruits of their love for one another and for their family continue to be paid forward to the church.

In fact, when they celebrate, they celebrate! After they receive a blessing on Sunday, the entire parish is invited to lunch in the parish hall. And yes, my parents are catering the event and bringing all the fixins in the hope that when people arrive, their presence is enough.

I am so grateful for my parents. I am so grateful for the church. But I wonder where this possibility of community is now for me and my generation. Do we need kids to participate fully in the life of the church? Can we form our own *barkada* across lines of culture, socioeconimc class and religion? Can the pain of the sex abuse scandal and the abuse of hierarchical power subside enough to generate a new expression and communiy of church? Can we find the strength to stop pointing fingers and to share the little we each have in order for all to be fed?

This celebration of a life in community brings great joy and sorrow. Sorrow for the uncertainty of a church future built with grace and virtue; joy for a testimony to making things work together.

Blessings, Mom and Dad, on your 45th wedding anniversary. Thank you for your pilgrim example to build community where hope is and to experience the joy of that resurrection. May we have the courage to do the same.

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a founding member of Contemplatives in Action, an urban ministry and retreat experience that began as a response to the needs in post-Katrina New Orleans and now continues as an online ministry offering spirituality resources for those working for justice throughout the world. Visit www.contemplativesinaction.org for more information.]

Source URL (retrieved on *12/12/2013 - 22:32*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/45-years-and-community-we-call-church-immigrants-story