

Filipinos foster faith through rosary

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Working as a foreign-service officer for the government of the Philippines in the 1960s was a glamorous life for Isabelita Tinio, 61, who said she met such luminaries as Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands as part of her job.

Tinio found herself close to the eye of the storm of world affairs, and was charged with analyzing such foreign crises as the seizure of the USS Pueblo by North Korea in 1968. That same year, her husband, Ferdinand, decided to move temporarily to the United States to pursue his legal studies. She stayed behind until he asked her to join him in 1969. She planned to stay for two years and then return home with her husband. But the couple's life changed in 1972 when Ferdinand Marcos seized control of the Philippines and began his dictatorial reign of terror.

"Many of our friends were tortured, and one died," she said, noting that her husband was a black-listed Marcos opponent whose family advised him not to return home. The couple has lived in the United States ever since, and currently attends Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester, where Ferdinand is employed as a legal editor. Yet, even though she knew it would be dangerous, Tinio said there was a time in her life when she pined to return home. Born into a wealthy family and missing her original career, she longed for the life she once knew.

"I can't forgive Marcos for that, but it's God's will," she said.

With the dictator's ouster in 1986 by a nonviolent revolution, she and her husband considered moving back to the Philippines. But when their children returned from a visit to the Philippines, they noted they could not adjust to life in the old country after growing up in the new, so the Tinios decided to stay in America. Then, in the late 1980s, Tinio began a journey that erased the pain of losing her old life, and led her to a new career, so to speak.

"Instead of being an ambassador for the Philippines government, I am now, hopefully, an ambassador for Mary — much better!" she said.

Since 1989, Tinio has coordinated the Filipino Block Rosary, a group of mostly Monroe County families who gather biweekly in their homes to pray the rosary, study the Bible and church teachings, and socialize. The term "block" comes from the Philippines, she said, where resi-



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Arielle Adrienne Atmosfera plays with a rosary while her mother, Anna Lynn, prays during the Dec. 8 meeting of the West 1 cell of the Filipino Block Rosary. The gathering took place at the Atmosferas' Webster home.

dential blocks of Catholics would pray the rosary together. In the Diocese of Rochester, she said, 90 families, including many who have non-Filipino and even non-Catholic members, are part of the Block.

Block rosary members have seven goals, Tinio said. Summarized, they are as follows:

- To bring more hearts to Jesus and Mary.
- To grow in love for the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Mother and the saints.
- To gain graces for themselves and the world through penance and prayer.
- To help each other grow in holiness through prayer and study of Scripture, tradition and church teachings.
- To learn about Catholic spirituality and morality, and to develop their consciences.
- To enable members to explain and defend church teachings.
- To foster a loving community of spiritual brothers and sisters.

Tinio said she was inspired to form the Filipino Block Rosary after traveling in 1987 to Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, site of reported apparitions of Mary. Her pil-

grimage changed her life, she said, noting that she saw the sun "spinning" and felt the presence of Mary and Jesus continually.

"I asked the Blessed Mother and her son to melt me down and completely reform me into whatever they wanted me to be," she said. She added that she has since visited sites of other Marian apparitions including most recently, Fatima, Portugal.

Mary reportedly asked the Medjugorje visionaries to encourage Catholics to form prayer "cells" or small groups to meet regularly, and Tinio decided to do just that when she returned home from Bosnia. The Tinios were one of four families that formed the original Block Rosary, which now consists of five cells.

The rosary devotees help each other to stay close to their faith and to one another, according to Maria Antonia Urayan, a Filipino immigrant who lives in Brighton with her husband, Oscar, and 7-year-old daughter, Carnette. The Urayans provide refreshments and snacks for the biweekly cell meeting at the Webster home of Benhur and Anna Lynn Atmosfera. About 15 adults and 15 children attend, Urayan said, noting the most recent meeting took

place Dec. 8, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which celebrates Mary's conception without original sin.

Urayan said the cell meetings not only nourish her family spiritually, they've helped her and her husband find friends in America. She added that Tinio has done a good job coordinating the block rosary.

"She's nice, and she's very supportive," Urayan said.

Tinio added that she has also become a lay order Carmelite. She no longer dwells on the life she left behind in her homeland, only on the life she's found in her faith.

"There's nothing I will not do for this lady," she said, hugging a small statue of Mary to her breast. "I love her."

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