



LEFT The Rev. Wilmer Toyoken (left), Grace Wandag (centre) and Bishop Alex Wandag (right) at St. Michael's. RIGHT Some of the multicultural congregation at St. Michael's. PHOTOS Courtesy of the Wandag Family

## New Beginnings at St. Michael's Multicultural Anglican Church

GREG TATCHELL

Sanctuary Planning Committee Secretary, St. Michael, Vancouver

A November 25th story on the Diocese of New Westminster's website ended with the words "The February issue of *Topic* will contain a feature story with photos covering Wilmer's installation and Bishop Alex's visit."

With these two primary activities as background, this article will develop the broader theme of the unique Filipino-Canadian culture that is thriving at St. Michael's Multicultural Anglican Church in Vancouver. In the season of Lent, a focus on the Filipino-Canadian attributes of sacrifice and new beginnings will be accentuated.

The two primary activities referred to in the November 25th web story were the concurrent two month visit to Vancouver by the Right Rev. Alex Wandag (on a two month sabbatical to be with his family), and the installation of the priest-in-charge at St. Michael's, the Rev. Wilmer Toyoken. The personal stories of the families of Alex and Wilmer typify and bring to life the separation endured by Filipino-Canadian families in establishing a new beginning for their families in Canada. Bishop Alex referred to the pain of this separation during his Advent IV homily, when he described the six years their family had been apart.

It is hard to overstate the sacrifices made, especially by some of the wives, in building new lives in a new country. Bishop Alex's wife Grace, a member of St. Michael's, came to Canada in 2006. Grace's six years of laying the groundwork for her family finally bore fruit when Alex and their two children arrived in Vancouver in early November. Bishop Alex needed to return to his Diocese of Santiago in the Philippines on January 6th, but Harris (24) and Maria (22) remained behind in Canada with their mother, secure with the Landed Immigrant Status their mother had earned for them.

Grace's story is the story of many Filipino-Canadian mothers at St. Michael's, and indeed across Canada. Another example at St. Michael's illustrates for the diocese how the parish has been able to triple in size over the last six years. Starting off in 1999 much like Grace, Sandra Baldo's family is now all at St. Michael's, where she is the Stewardship Chair, and her husband James, the Peoples Warden.

With Lent soon upon us, we enter the time in our calendar when we reflect upon the sacrifices Christ made for us. These sacrifices are made especially graphic for those in churches who celebrate the liturgy of the Stations of the Cross like at St. Michael's. These theological reflections on

sacrifice and suffering will once again resonate with the Mothers at St. Michael's. Christ-like, they suffer without complaining, in great humility. They see the need to help their neighbours in the diocese understand their story of sacrifice, but most assuredly would not have initiated the telling of their story without encouragement.

The Rev. Wilmer Toyoken's story is also one of absence and of laying groundwork for a new beginning for the family. Since his assumption of responsibilities at St. Michael's on November 15th, 2011, he has endured delays in his family's arrival while waiting for clearance for his wife Rose to bring their son Ezra into the country. Wilmer's story is somewhat unique in that it is the case of the husband waiting for the family to join him. The same, though, is the theme of sacrifice and the suffering of absences for new beginnings. Other recurring themes are: their high level of education, their family values, their spiritual depth, their Anglican roots, their ease with the English language and their self-sacrifice in supporting those back in the Philippines.

These stories, viewed in the proper light, are ultimately stories imbued with hope. An essential element of that hope, for families like the Wandag's, the Baldo's, the Toyoken's and many others, has been the multi-cultural community of faith at St. Michael's.

This hope found joyous expression at the November

25th Celebration of New Ministry at St. Michael's. The Ven. Dr. Ellen Clark-King captured the Wandag/Baldo/Toyoken theme of new beginnings with these opening words of her homily: "the triumph of hope over despair... an ending that is also a new beginning." The "triumph of hope" found passionate expression in the potluck festivities that followed in the hall. The energy levels that came close to raising the roof was a perfect storm of at least four hope-filled events taking place at the same time; the joy of re-united families (the Wandag's), a formal Diocesan recognition of the priest-in-charge at St. Michael's (by Archdeacon Ellen), a send-off to a husband and father to be with his family in the Philippines (Wilmer) and the recent completion of Restoration of the Sanctuary at St. Michael's (an article in the December *Topic*).

In Archdeacon Ellen's Celebration of New Ministry homily at St. Michael's, she included the following description of Archbishop Desmond Tutu; "In Tutu's presence you could see people relaxing and smiling and blossoming in the warmth of his regard. He didn't dominate; he welcomed and took delight in people. It was easy to see that the love of Christ reigned in his heart." These words come very close to describing the effect Bishop Wandag had during his six weeks at St. Michael's. Archdeacon Ellen would have seen that effect first hand during the joyous

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**Editor** Randy Murray  
rmurray@vancouver.anglican.ca

**Designer** Jennifer Ewing, BDes  
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### Address

Diocese of New Westminster  
#580 – 401 West Georgia Street  
Vancouver BC V6B 5A1

**Phone** 604.684.6306 ext. 223

**Website** For the latest news and features go to [www.vancouver.anglican.ca](http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca)

### Contributors & Helpers for this issue

Wayne Chose, Phil Colvin, Melanie Delva, Laurel Dykstra, Peter Elliott, Barbara Fensome, Douglas Fenton, Peter Goodwin, Kenneth Gray, Neil Gray, Denise Hambidge, Ronald Harrison, Michael Harvey, Carole Keighley, Rod Mackin, James McKenzie, Patricia McSherry, Thomas Roach, Sharon Salomons, John Sovereign, Greg Tatchell, David Westcott, Isabel Wood, Joe Wood and Veronica Wright.

**Thank you!**



TOP LEFT Bishop Alex Wandag (left) and the Rev. Wilmer Toyoken (right) with the ladies in traditional Filipino colours.

TOP RIGHT Left to right: Bishop Alex, the Rev. Wilmer, the Ven. Dr. Ellen and Fr. Im.

BOTTOM LEFT Traditional Filipino dancing with the St. Michael's congregation.

BOTTOM RIGHT Fr. Im showing off his dance skills.

PHOTOS Courtesy of the Wandag Family

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celebrations on November 25th. The congregation experienced this continued "Tutu effect" in at least five different ways over the following six weeks of Bishop Alex's visit; in his homilies; during his participation in the Christmas Pageant; with his involvement with the choir; during the funeral for Johnny Baguiewen in late December (attended by over 230 people); and in leading a "farewell" song in Japanese during a leadership transition. Always, it seemed, "you could see people relaxing and smiling and blossoming in the warmth of his regard."

As the multi-cultural community of St. Michael's enters Lent, it does so with a continued sense of joy and hope and anticipation as another family approaches the end of their time of separation; it is anticipated that Wilmer's son and wife, Ezra and Rose, will be with him for Easter.

The Ven. Dr. Ellen Clark-King's *Celebration of New Ministry* homily on November 25th ended with words for Wilmer that articulated the path to the future for him and the congregation at St. Michael's.

"Wilmer, my hope and prayer is that you and the people of St Michael's will continue to grow into the reign of Christ, that you will work together to be the best you can be individually and as a congregation, that you will bring the love of Christ to bear in this part of the city, that you will share your gifts with the wider church, that you will support one another and hold a vision together of what you could become."

As the congregation approaches their second annual 2018 Strategic Planning workshop (in Kelowna, March 8th to 10th), this prayer will guide and motivate them in the continuing process of discerning their vision as a multi-cultural church, grounded in sacrifice. ✠




St. Michael's multicultural congregation ready to celebrate with a potluck lunch and a lot of dancing.

PHOTO Courtesy of St. Michael's Parish



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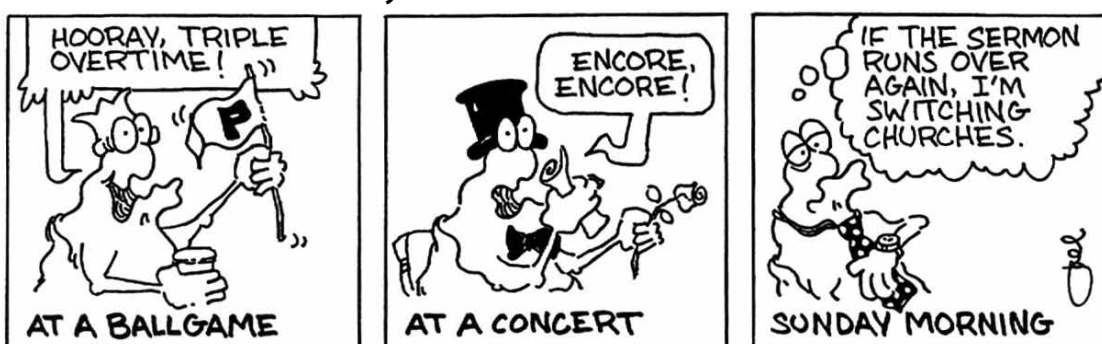
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## PONTIUS PUDDLE by Joel Kauffmann



## THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

compiled by Anglican Archivist Melanie Delva

- 50 years • 1963 The death of "an Indian girl" on "skid row" launches diocesan-wide questions and discussion on "Indian Problems" and unity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the diocese.
- 25 years • 1988 Agreement is signed between the Federal Government and the diocese on the sponsorship of refugees, "cutting out all the red tape."
- 20 years • 1993 Archbishop Hambidge announces plans to take up volunteer post in Tanzania.