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Have Faith, Will Integrate: The Roles of Catholic Communities
in the Social Integration of Filipino Migrant Workers in Japan –
The Case of Nagano Filipino Catholic Community

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ABSTRACT

The roles of migrant workers in sustainability and development were recognized by the United Nations and included in the 2030 Agenda. The UN recognized the “positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development” for migrants and their communities. For migrant workers to reach their potential, there must be a comprehensive policy on migration and social integration. Social integration as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a “two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and host societies. in which migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community.” Japan largely depends on the services of migrant workers as its population shrinks and labor force ages. Yet despite revising its foreign labor policies, the Japanese government has been criticized for its reluctance to implement a comprehensive migrant worker social integration policy.

Without any such policies in the near future, it falls on other institutions in their unofficial capacity to fulfill the task of social integration of migrant workers. One of these institutions is religion, or to be specific the religion of migrant workers. There were studies done about the roles of religion in the social integration of immigrants in other countries, but not from a community level. In Japan, studies have been done about Filipino Catholic migrant workers and the services provided by the Catholic church, but the aspects of social integration and the participants’ experiences were not fully explored. This study aims to fulfill these untapped areas of academic interest. The main goal of this study is to find out the *roles of the Catholic community in fostering and facilitating social integration of migrant workers* by taking on a small Filipino Catholic community in Nagano prefecture as a case study.

A total of 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted among members of the Nagano Filipino Catholic community. The interviews were designed to explore the community structure and the participants' migration and religious experiences and to find out how the Filipino Catholic community facilitate social integration. For the community structure, the community leaders were asked about the community organizational hierarchy, membership, operations, and the events, programs, and activities. The challenges met by the community were also explored. Next, all participants were interviewed about their personal backgrounds, migration experiences, religious experiences, and involvement with the community. Next, an Indicator of Integration framework was used to determine which domains – or areas of integration success – were achieved through the efforts of the community. Supported by these results, a thematic analysis of the interview answers was used to answer the question regarding the roles of the Catholic community in social integration.

The results suggested that the Filipino Catholic community plays three roles: *Host*, *Enabler*, and *Channel*. As a host, the community serves as social and spiritual spaces to gather the migrant members in one place and fulfill their social and spiritual needs. The community does so through its activities, events, and programs, as well as its religious and nonreligious services. As the enabler, the community encourages its members to participate and cooperate with fellow Catholic churchgoers in activities and other goals. Lastly, as the members gather in one place and participate in activities, the community then becomes a channel through which Filipinos and Japanese interact and communicate with each other, leading to language and cultural exchange. The paper concludes that these roles played by the Catholic community are important and help in the long-term social integration of its migrant worker members.

Keywords: OFW, migrant workers, social integration, immigration policy, Japan labor policy, Catholic communities