

# 'Father Sonny' comes back to celebrate with his friends

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At his farewell Mass at Mount Prospect's St. Cecilia Church last year, the Rev. Sonny de Rivera said "Hasta luego" — "until we meet again" — to the members of the Hispanic ministry he had led since 1997.

On Friday, they indeed met again, as "Father Sonny" celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination by the Society of the Divine Word at a banquet held at the Meridian Banquets in Rolling Meadows.

The evening of song and dance was organized by Mount Prospect residents Romeo and Amasaco Dihiansan and the Hispanic ministry.

The guests included several members of the Hispanic and Filipino communities as well as Mount Prospect Police Chief Richard Eddington.

Before Father Sonny arrived, Hispanics in the Northwest suburbs were unable to hear Mass in Spanish, said Maria Norman, who helped Father Sonny start the ministry.

In 1997, a group of Catholic parishes hired de Rivera, who had served as a missionary in Santiago, Chile, for 17 years, to coordinate the ministry.

The ministry started small, but after three years, started a church, school and added a Saturday Mass. It also formed valuable links with the community, including the Mount Prospect Police Department and Township High School District 214's Community Education Foundation.

In two years, the ministry went from being funded by the parishes to becoming a self-sustaining organization, said the Rev. Bernard Pietrzak, pastor of St. Raymond DePenafort Parish



MARK BLACK/DAILY HERALD FILE PHOTO

Cecilia Barriuso teaches the Rev. Sonny de Rivera how to do the flamenco at the fifth anniversary celebration of the Hispanic ministry at St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Mount Prospect in November 2002.

in Mount Prospect.

"He has great charisma," Pietrzak said. "He is a man everyone can find a home in."

"He touched a lot of people and made us feel like a family," Norman said.

John Brennan, a member of the Community Education Foundation, said he once wrote Cardinal Francis George that de Rivera would make a great bishop.

De Rivera said he now works with Hispanics and Haitians on behalf of the Diocese of Orlando, Fla. He said he even

says Mass in Creole.

He also helps out at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Winter Park, Fla.

"I think the most rewarding part is just being aware that you are a special channel of God to other people," he said.

Today, the Rev. Jack Hurley coordinates the Hispanic ministry, which holds its services at St. Cecilia and has its offices at St. Raymond.

Of de Rivera, Hurley said, "Everybody told me he was small in stature, but he left a lot of giant footsteps to follow."