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Special Bilingual Section Inside

Legacy of Love

ENDURING EMBRACE: Pope Francis had the heart of a pastor, who embodied mercy and love throughout his papacy. In May 15, 2019, he greeted a child during his general audience at the Vatican.



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Faithful from across region walk downtown streets to speak up for migrants and the vulnerable. **Page 3**



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**DIocese of
SAN DIEGO**

The Diocese of San Diego runs the length of California's border with Mexico and serves more than 1.3 million Catholics in San Diego and Imperial counties. It includes 96 parishes and 13 missions, 49 elementary and secondary schools, Catholic Charities and various social service and family support organizations throughout the region. It also includes five historic sites, the most well known of which is the Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá, the first mission established in California by St. Junipero Serra in 1769.

MORE FOR YOU

This symbol indicates where readers can go online to obtain more information about the subject at hand, including additional photos, video and other content.



'We Have To Make a Choice'

By Mark Zimmermann



WASHINGTON
— Jesus' Parable
of the Good

Samaritan shows today's Christians how to respond to current government policies affecting immigrants and the poor, Cardinal Robert W. McElroy said at a conference on migrants and refugees.

Washington's new archbishop was among the speakers at the gathering in the nation's capital hosted on March 24 by Jesuit Refugee Service/USA and the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

Cardinal McElroy noted Pope Francis' Feb. 11 letter to the nation's bishops, in which the pontiff addressed the Trump administration's program of mass deportations of undocumented immigrants.

"Pope Francis brought to the fore the Parable of the Good Samaritan. He said that herein lies the heart of Catholic moral teaching ... and what the implications of it are for us today," said the cardinal, who led the Diocese of San Diego for 10 years, ending in March.

The cardinal read the parable (Luke 10:25-37), in which a man was beaten by robbers and left on the roadside. A priest and Levite passed by him, but a Samaritan traveler, moved by compassion, lifted him up and cared for him and took him to an innkeeper.

The cardinal said the pope examined each of the figures in the parable, pointing out how the priest and the Levite had indifference and fear in their hearts that caused them to walk past the suffering man.

"Indifference is the fact that each of us becomes so preoccupied with our own well-being and concerns and needs, that we cease to be compassionate in a deep and profound and Christ-like sense of that word," the cardinal said.



Cardinal Robert W. McElroy

The cardinal pointed out how the pope also reflected on the suffering victim on the side of the road. "Each of us at times is the victim. Each of us goes through suffering in our lives through which we feel others are merely passing by," he said.

The cardinal noted how the parable sheds light on the impact of the Trump administration's moves to shut down the support provided to the world's poor by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

"If we look at the figure of the robber, at this moment, I think we must say to ourselves quite clearly, that the suspension of (these) monies for humanitarian relief is moral theft from the poorest and most desperate men, women and children in our world. It is unconscionable through any prism of Catholic thought," the cardinal said.

Officials from Caritas Internationalis and from Catholic Relief Services have warned that shutting down USAID funding will harm millions of people around the world.

The cardinal compared undocumented immigrants facing the government's policy of mass deportations to the victim in the parable, as they live in fear in a society where many have lived for decades.

"We, as a Church, need to advocate continually ... for their dignity as human

persons. We must not only advocate, but we must act in support of them in every way possible," he continued.

The figure of the Good Samaritan, Cardinal McElroy said, provides the centerpiece of the parable.

"The Good Samaritan is a foreigner, a stranger in that society in which he is living, an outcast, and yet he comes by, and he sees the man lying by the side of the road and he overcomes the danger and the indifference, and rescues the man," the cardinal said.

"This is the example of the figure that each of us is called to be, one who sacrifices and thinks of others in their suffering, and who is not bound by the chains of indifference and fear."

He said undocumented immigrants sacrifice for their families, work hard, and bring good values.

The cardinal said the United States has had a broken immigration system for a long time. "Both parties have been at fault for failing to reach an accord on immigration reform," he said.

"And now we face two different pathways. The first, which Catholic Social Teaching would support, to change our laws so that they have secure borders and dignity for the treatment of everyone at those borders, and a generous asylum and refugee policy ... I believe most Americans would be in favor of that pathway," Cardinal McElroy said.

The cardinal warned that "the other pathway is a crusade which comes from the darkest parts of our American psyche and our history. The crusade denigrates the undocumented, it labels them criminals."

He said, "We as a nation will have to make one choice. The pathway of crusade and mass deportation cannot be followed in conscience by those who call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ. We must work to make sure that does not happen in this nation in which we live and which we love."

The Catholic Standard

2,300 to Graduate from Schools

The Southern Cross



Local Catholic elementary and high school students will soon be sporting graduation caps and gowns and looking ahead to the next phase of their educational journeys.

Some 1,126 eighth-graders will be graduating from the 41 Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of San Diego at ceremonies that will take place between May 23 and June 14.

At the high school level, there will be 1,179 graduating seniors. Commencement ceremonies will be held May 22 for the Academy of Our Lady of Peace; May 23 for Mater Dei Catholic, St. Augustine, and Vincent Memorial Catholic high schools; May 30 for Cristo Rey San Diego High School; and May 31 for Cathedral Catholic High School.

"Graduation is always an exciting time for students, parents and teachers," said Leticia Oseguera, the diocese's superintendent of schools. "It's the culmination of all the hard work, sacrifice and diligence."

She noted that this year's graduating seniors were seventh-graders when the COVID-19 pandemic began, completed eighth-grade with a combination of distance-learning and in-person instruction, and then were the first class to experience all four years of high school free from the restrictions and protocols of the COVID era.

"They represent resilience and strength."

For Oseguera, this year's graduation season is especially meaningful, since her own daughter is among the graduating eighth-graders at Mater Dei Catholic Elementary School. Oseguera previously served as that school's principal from 2017 to 2022, when she became superintendent.

"As a mom, I can say that all parents are incredibly proud of their children," she said. "Graduating from a Catholic school makes it even more special."

Oseguera expressed her hopes for all of this year's graduates.

"I hope the students recognize the gift that they have received through their Catholic education," she said. "I hope they have grown in their faith, reached new academic heights and are ready to make a difference in the world."

Defending Vulnerable



FAITH IN ACTION: Hundreds of faithful walked from the County Administration Building to the federal building on April 12 to “Journey with Immigrants and Defend the Vulnerable,” a multi-faith prayer service and procession coordinated by the Diocese of San Diego, Catholic Charities and the San Diego Organizing Project.

By Aida Bustos



“Make America Care Again.”

Natividad Godina rode a bus early Saturday morning from Carlsbad to San Diego’s bayfront to carry her hand-made sign with that message through downtown streets.

She joined hundreds of other people of faith — women, men and children — who had come together once more for a bilingual prayer service and procession to “Journey with Immigrants and Defend the Vulnerable” on April 12.

The participants included Bishop Michael Pham, the diocesan administrator, and Auxiliary Bishops Ramón Bejarano and Felipe Pulido, from the San Diego Diocese; Jesuit Father Scott Santarosa, from Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Barrio Logan; Father Edmundo Zárate, from St. Jude Shrine of the West Parish; other priests, deacons and religious women; and leaders from other faiths.

Godina’s sign showed an image of the Statue of Liberty embracing a woman wearing a simple dress and head cover. She said her parents were from Mexico.

“Immigrants today are not being treated as humans,” said Godina, a member of St. Mark Parish in San Marcos. “That’s what inspired my sign. Immigrants should be treated fairly.”

The event was the second in three months organized by the diocese with Catholic Charities and the San Diego Organizing Project. The goal was to speak out against new federal policies targeting undocumented immigrants and to call attention to plans being considered that would cut billions from programs assisting poor families, the elderly and the sick.

The event was preceded by a “We



SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Hundreds participated to speak up for such vulnerable groups as poor families, the sick and the elderly.

are Matthew 25” novena in English, Spanish and Vietnamese presented over Facebook from April 4 to 12, led by the three bishops and various priests. The novena asked the faithful to support their brothers and sisters in Christ, in accordance with Catholic teaching, and to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges that vulnerable people faced.

Ten buses delivered faithful from Vista, Escondido, Carlsbad and Chula Vista to the County Administration Center. They joined hundreds of others who had converged there. Most carried palms since the event was being held on the day before Palm Sunday.

They listened to a Gospel passage read by Deacon Carlos Morales, from Christ the King Parish, and a homily by Bishop Susan Brown Snook, of the San Diego Episcopal Diocese. Then they heard two testimonies.

The first was from a woman whose

husband had been deported in February after the couple had dropped off their children at school. Agents came to their car in a store parking lot and detained the man, who was deported within hours to Tijuana. The testimony was read by two young women parishioners from Our Lady of Guadalupe, who struggled to fight back the tears.

“I want to be strong for our kids, so I don’t cry in front of them,” the testimony said. “But I cry at night. I don’t know what is going to happen to our family. But I know that God is with us.”

The participants next heard from Gonzalo Bautista, an immigrant legally in the country who struggled to have Medi-Cal pay for his treatment as he recovered from a heart attack. This caused him stress, which the doctor had advised him to avoid. After a time, he said, he was able to have the treatment covered.

Indeed, the U.S. Conference of

Catholic Bishops released a letter on April 15 to members of Congress who are considering federal budget cuts. The bishops urged them to protect the Medicaid program — a lifeline for nearly 80 million low-income families, mothers, children, elderly, disabled individuals, the unhoused, and working people across the nation.

The participants walked about a mile to the federal building. There, Bishop Pulido blessed the palms, while deacons walked around sprinkling holy water on the participants’ palms.

Bishop Bejarano then invited everyone to unite in prayer.

“We come together to pray to God to change the hearts of those authorities who are causing fear and terror and who seek to destroy families,” he said.

He said he was worried about the Trump Administration’s message to undocumented immigrants that, if they self-deported, they would be able to return to the country in the future.

“This is a great lie, simply false propaganda,” the bishop said.

He urged everyone to put their faith in action by staying informed through reliable sources, to always keep in mind that they are called by their faith to care for the most vulnerable, and to act concretely.

“We have to speak the truth as people of faith.”

Catholic Charities is offering virtual workshops in Spanish to advise immigrants about their rights, along with parishes.

The agency continues to offer an up-to-date webpage in English and Spanish with resources: plandeemergencia.org and emergencysafetyplan.org.


3,800 Teenagers to Be Enriched by Holy Spirit



TINA MENA, MISSION SAN LUIS REY PARISH

READY: Young people participated in the confirmation Mass on May 14, 2024, at Mission San Luis Rey celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido. This year, the diocese's three bishops will criss-cross San Diego and Imperial counties to confirm nearly 4,000 faithful, mostly teenagers.

By Denis Grasska

 Being confirmed was a grace-filled moment for Hope Clark, and she's still feeling those graces a year later.

Clark, 16, received the sacrament of confirmation last spring at Santa Sophia Parish in Spring Valley.

Years earlier, she had been told that, if she requested divine help with a specific grace right before confirmation, it would be granted by the Holy Spirit. When the big day arrived, she was ready.

"I knew exactly what I wanted ... a release of anxiety and fear of what's going to happen in the future," Clark said.

About a month after her confirmation, Clark realized that she hadn't experienced any anxious thoughts about the future during the intervening weeks. This continued for a few more months. Though anxious thoughts eventually returned, she discovered that they were easier to dispel.

"If I would start praying again, then that would all go away, and I'd be totally fine," she said.

But that's not all. Clark also credits the sacramental grace with another positive trend. Over the past year, she has found herself gravitating toward those friends who help her grow in her faith and caring less how she is perceived by those who don't.

"I feel like I can resist temptation a little bit better," she said.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, confirmation is "necessary for the completion of baptismal grace" and, through it, the baptized are "more perfectly bound



TINA MENA, MISSION SAN LUIS REY PARISH

to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit" (Paragraph 1285).

About 3,835 local Catholics, mostly teenagers, will soon have the opportunity to share Clark's experience when they are confirmed in the next two months. This is in addition to approximately 1,600 catechumens and candidates who went through the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) process and received their sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

In the Diocese of San Diego, confirmation season has begun in earnest. From late April through late June, Bishop Michael Pham, who is serving as diocesan administrator until the installation of the diocese's next bishop, and Auxiliary Bishops Ramón Bejarano and Felipe Pulido will travel extensively throughout the 8,852-square-mile diocese to confer the sacrament.

Collectively, the three bishops will celebrate 84 separate confirmation Masses this spring, beginning on April 24, with Bishop Pulido at Most Precious Blood Church in Chula Vista, and concluding on June 21, with Bishop Pham at St. Catherine Laboure Parish in Clairemont.

Two parishes have so many confirmation candidates — St. Mark Parish in San Marcos with 200 and St. Mary Parish in Escondido with 234 — that they will have two confirmation Masses each. Other parishes with smaller numbers will be coming together for the same Mass; these include St. Didacus and St. John the Evangelist (San Diego) parishes on May 6; St. Joseph Cathedral and Our Lady of Refuge parishes on May 13; and Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Agnes and St. Vincent de Paul parishes on May 17.

For the bishops, two months of confirmations means a grueling schedule.

Consider the case of Bishop Bejarano: On a single day, May 17, he will celebrate separate confirmation liturgies at three parishes (Corpus Christi, Bonita; Holy Family, Linda Vista; and St. Gabriel, Poway).

"It is very demanding for (the bishops) — the distance, the driving, and several a day sometimes," acknowledged Noreen McInnes, director of the diocesan Office for Liturgy and Spirituality. "However, I think there's great joy for them to see young people in our diocese receiving sacraments, and (that) they're able to minister to them."

On the flip side, the bishops' presence is also meaningful to the teens.

McInnes recalled what "a big, important moment" it was for her teenage self when her bishop visited her parish to confirm her. And among contemporary teens, she said, "there's still some of that sense of awe and importance and what a gift it is."

"I felt obviously strengthened by God," Katherine Nix, a 16-year-old Santa Sophia parishioner, said of the effects of receiving the sacrament, "but I also realized that my confirmation was one of the first steps in my faith journey."

As her confirmation saint, Nix chose St. Therese of Lisieux, famous for her "Little Way," a path to holiness that focuses on doing ordinary things with great love. Nix has taken inspiration from the saint's example: not feeling required to accomplish "some crazy big deed," but able to focus on "seemingly little things" and, in doing so, being able "to start taking small steps to bring God's kingdom here to Earth."

Sixteen-year-old Rose Staples, also

Sacrament *Continued on Page 5*

Sacrament *Continued from Page 4*

of Santa Sophia Parish, recalled being “a little worried” about the prospect of attending confirmation classes.

“I’ve been homeschooled my whole life, so going to a class was alien to me,” she said.

But since then, she’s seen the positive effects, describing the classes as “life-changing.”

“I grew closer to God after those classes, and the Holy Spirit has empowered me to do some great things now,” said Staples. “I feel more adult than I did before.”

“I feel like I’ve been gifted more patience, with the Holy Spirit working through me now, and I feel like I can do a lot of things easier now than I did before,” she said. “It’s strange ... but it’s not even really a ‘feeling’; it’s just something I ‘know’ happened.”

Joshua Garcia-Pederson, 17, credits confirmation with sparking “a positive shift in my spiritual strength.”

“Looking over this past year,” the Santa Sophia parishioner said, “I view this sacrament as my covenant with God to keep following Him, as my life progresses and I gain more freedom to choose between what I want and don’t want to be a part of.”

Before confirmation, he “wasn’t very inspired to go to Mass often” because he “didn’t really think it mattered much.”

“I now do my best to go to Mass every Sunday,” said Garcia-Pederson, “and my parents, who aren’t super religious, are also getting into going to Mass every Sunday.”

Alexis Rosas, 17, was confirmed last year at Corpus Christi Parish.

When it came to attending the mandatory two years of classes, she initially saw it as “an obligation” set for her by her parents.

However, as those classes went on, she felt her faith deepen and found the desire to go further, choosing to attend Lenten missions and other events.

Rosas even decided to continue her connection with her parish’s confirmation program by serving as a “Young Apostle” this year, a role that involves assisting the confirmation class instructors and serving as “a bridge” between them and the students.

She said that confirmation has been “definitely one of the biggest milestones” in her life. Through it, she said, “I have found a greater interest in Mass and I have become more intentional with my prayers.”

Her fellow parishioner, 16-year-old Alyssa Abalos, is also serving as a “Young Apostle.” She was inspired to become one after her experience at a retreat during her second year of confirmation preparation.

“I realized that a life without God felt like I was missing someone,” she said. “So, I wanted to teach the confirmation students that God truly loves you for who you are.”

Abalos said that, since being confirmed, she has relied on God for strength in difficult moments.

“I try to turn to God and Church,” she said, “because it makes me feel like everything is going to be alright.”

Confirmation Is One of Seven Sacraments in the Church



Along with baptism and the Eucharist, confirmation is among the three “sacraments of Christian initiation.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that confirmation “brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace” (Paragraph 1303).

In the Western Church, the diocesan bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament. Because it’s practically impossible for the bishop to be present for every infant baptism, especially in large dioceses, this has resulted in “the temporal separation of the two sacraments” (1290).

Noreen McInnes, director of the diocesan Office for Liturgy and Spirituality, said that Pope St. Pius X’s decision in 1910 to lower the age for receiving First Communion from age 12 to 7 resulted in an additional temporal separation.

She said it is “a misinterpretation” of confirmation to think of it as if it were a sort of “graduation” or a time for teenagers to make their own the baptismal vows that their godparents made on their behalf.

In the Eastern Catholic Church, all three sacraments of initiation are received by infants in quick succession.

Like baptism, the sacrament of confirmation leaves “a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian’s soul” and can be received only once (1317).

Confirmation is conferred when the bishop anoints the forehead of the confirmation candidate with sacred chrism and, in conjunction with the laying on of hands, says, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

A fully initiated Catholic serves as each confirmation candidate’s sponsor.

Of the sacrament of confirmation, the *Catechism* states that “it unites us more firmly to Christ; it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; it renders our bond with the Church more perfect; it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross” (1303).

McInnes said that, when we receive a sacrament, the graces of that sacrament may bear fruit immediately or at a later time when we are “better disposed.”

“We know, through our faith, that it will take a hold on them and they will receive the fullness of the sacrament as they need it, as they go forward and they mature in their lives as Christians.”

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“Children helping children.”

That’s the simple idea behind the Missionary Childhood Association (MCA).

“Through MCA, young people understand the universal nature of the Catholic Church and recognize that they are missionaries today in prayer and sacrifice,” said Sister Eva Rodríguez, a member of the Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, who serves as MCA director for the Diocese of San Diego.

“After learning about the great needs of the world’s poorest children,” she said, “young people are invited to pray and to offer financial help, so that children in the missions today may know Christ and experience his love and care.”

Founded in 1843 by the French Bishop Charles de Forbin-Janson and, formerly known as the Holy Childhood Association, the MCA is one of the four Pontifical Mission Societies, which operate under the jurisdiction of the pope.

At the diocesan level, the MCA is part of the diocesan Office for the Missions, which works in coordination with the Office for Schools and the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry.



LITTLE SAINTS: Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido interacted with Catholic school students portraying St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Damien of Molokai and Blessed Carlo Acutis, at the MCA Mass on March 18 at Our Mother of Confidence Parish.

The MCA is primarily for children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Locally, 39 Catholic elementary schools, one high school, and about 10 to 15 parishes’ religious education programs participate in the program each year.

It encourages them to pray, make sacrifices, and contribute financially to their peers in mission countries.

Sister Rodríguez visits all of the Catholic elementary schools annually to make presentations to the students.

“The stories that I share ... reflect

a reality of life that many of our young kids are not familiar with,” she said. “So, they ask questions, reflect on what they see, and become interested in the lives of these children (from mission countries) who smile even though they are poor. Children are compassionate, and their hearts are moved when they see someone in need.”

The MCA distributes small coin boxes, inviting students to offer their donations, especially during the Advent and Lenten seasons. In addition,

schools and religious education programs organize a variety of activities to raise funds.

Some of the most common fundraisers include bake sales, popsicle sales, ice cream socials, dime races, can and bottle recycling, and “Jeans for Jesus,” an activity through which students donate \$1 for the privilege of not having to wear their school uniform for a day.

Additionally, many schools use the

Missions *Continued on Page 7*

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Missions *Continued from Page 6*

MCA “mite boxes” and coin banks shaped like small globes to collect donations throughout the year.

The amount of money collected by the schools and parishes varies. Sister Rodríguez said that it often can range from \$250 to \$3,500.

She said that the Missions Office received a check April 14 from St. Michael’s School in Poway for \$11,898.04.

“This is the largest amount we have received recently,” she said. “I am happy and proud to see the students’ response and generosity when the school organizes activities to raise funds for MCA.”

Sister Rodríguez cited St. John of the Cross School in Lemon Grove as another recent example of students’ generosity.

This Lent, at a March 24 assembly, MCA School Coordinator Aurelia Barreto reminded St. John’s students of their baptismal call to be missionary disciples. She connected the three pillars of Lent — prayer, fasting and almsgiving — to their support for children in developing countries.

The students sang the song “Go Make a Difference” and, later in their classrooms, received MCA coin boxes and a letter to their parents that explained the project.

Every school year, the diocesan Missions Office holds two MCA Masses, one in March for San Diego County



AT PRAYER: Religious education students at Most Precious Blood Parish in Chula Vista pray the World Mission Rosary last October as part of their involvement with the Missionary Childhood Association.

and another in October for Imperial County. The purpose is to recognize and give thanks to God for the students’ generosity through the MCA.

Students take on various liturgical roles during the Masses, including serving as lectors and offertory gift-bearers, and many dress up in the cultural attire of mission countries or as missionary saints. At the conclusion of Mass, all of the schools are presented with a certificate in recognition of their support for the MCA, and everyone is invited to lunch.

About 475 people, including around

335 children representing 25 Catholic elementary schools, participated in the MCA Mass celebrated March 18 at Our Mother of Confidence Parish.

There is also an annual MCA Christmas Artwork Contest. From among all of the diocese’s entries, the Missions Office selects 25 for submission to the national level of the competition. Nicole Monroy, a fifth-grader at Sacred Heart School in Coronado, was recognized among the national winners in 2024.

“MCA brings the missions to the classroom and motivates the students

to put their faith into action,” Sister Rodríguez said.

She said it’s “wonderful” to meet high school students who are involved in charity work because they learned to help the poor as elementary school students.

“That is why I think that my job is to plant seeds, knowing that God will do the rest.”

See photo gallery at thesoutherncross.org/MCA2025



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Decade of Grants Lifts Needy in SD, Abroad

The Southern Cross



The St. Augustine Foundation is celebrating 10 years of grant-giving.

Augustinian Father Kevin Mullins, the foundation's president, describes it as "the philanthropic arm" of the Province of St. Augustine in California.

By the end of 2024, the foundation had awarded 212 grants totaling more than \$9 million. That includes 84 separate grants, representing more than \$3.2 million, to entities located within the Diocese of San Diego. Grants have been awarded to projects in 26 countries.

Grant applications for 2025 will be accepted through June 30.

"The primary purpose (of the foundation) is to support Augustinian ministries around the world," explained Executive Director David Canedo.

Not all of the projects are Augustinian-run, but one of the criteria is that all must be endorsed by an Augustinian friar of the province. (International projects require the endorsement of the Augustinian Prior General in Rome.)

The St. Augustine Foundation has four pillars of focus: Community Building and Pastoral Care, Care of Newcomers, Education, and Response to the Needy.

Canedo said that the sizes of the grants have ranged from about \$5,000 to about \$300,000.

Among the local organizations that have received grants are: Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego; Rise Up Industries; Casa Cornelia Law Center; Father Joe's Villages; Nazareth House; Turning Point Pregnancy Resource Center; and local Catholic schools, including Nativity Prep Academy, Our Lady's School, St. Patrick School (North Park), St. Rita's School, Cristo Rey San Diego High School, St.



SOLID FOUNDATION: Formerly incarcerated individuals are trained as Computer Numeric Control machine operators through Rise Up Industries, a local nonprofit that has received \$306,000 in grants from the St. Augustine Foundation.

Augustine High School and John Paul the Great Catholic University.

Through 2024, the foundation has awarded \$325,000 in grants to Catholic Charities and \$306,000 to Rise Up Industries. The latter is a nonprofit that trains previously incarcerated individuals to become Computer Numeric Control (CNC) machine operators.

Casa Cornelia Law Center, which provides pro bono immigration legal services, has received \$229,250 in grants from the foundation. Father Joe's Villages, San Diego's largest provider of homeless services, has received \$314,315 over the years.

Examples of projects outside the United States that have received grants include the Province of St. Augustine in Nigeria, which received a \$200,000 grant in 2021 to fund the relocation of its House of Theology after increasing security issues caused by Muslim extremists.

Hogar Infantil La Gloria, a Tijuana-based orphanage founded in 1975 in partnership with Augustinians

from San Diego, has received multiple grants. For example, in 2022, it received a \$100,000 grant for the construction of a perimeter security wall.

"I think it's pretty gratifying just to see ... the good that the Augustinians are doing throughout the world," Canedo said.

Initial funding for the St. Augustine Foundation came from the California province's sale of the Villa Nueva Apartments, an affordable housing community in San Ysidro, in 2007. Those funds were invested and are held in trust.

"We were able to build this foundation within a relatively short time to be in the position of granting money," Father Mullins said, adding that subsequent years have seen an increase in the number of grant requests that the foundation has been able to handle.

"That's a source of great pride for all of us," he said.

Canedo said that "the big problem"

facing the foundation is that it receives far more grant requests each year than it can approve. He said that, if all of the applications that met the foundation's criteria last year were approved, it would have meant distributing about \$2.6 million in grants.

"And our budget is only about \$1.2 million on a yearly basis," he said. "So, a lot of hard decisions have to be made."

"The way we operate is that we're not a foundation that tries to figure out a way not to give you money," he said. "We're a foundation that kind of bends over backwards trying to figure out ... how we might be able to support you."

For more information about the St. Augustine Foundation, visit theaugustinefoundation.com.



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‘Wonderful Encounter’ with Jesus on Street

By Denis Grasska



Have you been looking for a sign from God? If so, have you checked the nearest intersection?

Towering above the street traffic, three billboards are currently sharing the message of Jesus’ love and mercy with passing motorists and pedestrians in San Diego.

All of them feature the Divine Mercy image of Jesus, based on an artwork commissioned by the 20th-century Polish nun and mystic St. Faustina Kowalska at the request of Jesus himself, who appeared to her and told her that he wanted the image to be venerated.

The Divine Mercy image depicts Jesus with his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand held to his heart, from which two rays of light emanate. (The rays — one red, one white — represent the blood and water that flowed from his side at the crucifixion.) At the bottom is the inscription, “Jesus, I trust in You.”

The billboards, which measure about 10.4 feet by 22.6 feet, pair this image with a comforting message taken from St. Faustina’s diary, in which she transcribed all that Jesus communicated to her.

“Even if your sins are great, My Mercy is greater,” the billboards proclaim. “Come to My Divine Mercy.”

Three billboards went up in antici-



EVANGELIZATION: A billboard spreading the Divine Mercy message is seen April 10 near the intersection of Cass and Felspar streets in Pacific Beach.

pation of Easter Sunday, April 20, and Divine Mercy Sunday, April 27, and can still be seen at the intersections of El Cajon Boulevard and 58th Street (from March 10-May 18), Barnett Avenue and Midway Drive (March 10-May 4), and Cass and Felspar streets (April 7-May 4).

Another billboard, located on El Cajon Boulevard near the I-15 freeway, will be displayed from May 5 through June 1.

According to data from Clear Channel Outdoor, which rents the billboard space, these billboards

receive between 85,000 (Cass & Felspar) and 163,955 (Barnett & Midway) weekly views.

Sharing the Divine Mercy message through billboards is a ministry that has been undertaken by various people since the mid-1990s. The effort is currently led by Paul DeMartini, a member of Mary, Star of the Sea Parish in La Jolla, who has been involved since 2012, and by Gerard Greer, a member of St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach, who joined him two years later.

“The billboard plants the seed of Jesus and his mercy,” said Greer.

“Having heard this message, in the quiet of someone’s soul, they begin to trust in Jesus.”

Every July, the two men scout out potential billboard locations for the next year, taking into consideration such factors as visibility, traffic density and the presence of traffic lights and large numbers of pedestrians.

“I’m probably one of the few people that love red traffic lights,” quipped Greer, explaining that he and DeMartini often seek out locations where idling motorists will see the billboards, unexpectedly coming face-to-face with God’s mercy before continuing on their way.

With funds donated toward the project, DeMartini and Greer rent billboard space from Clear Channel Outdoor between September and May, during which Divine Mercy billboards can be seen in various San Diego locations.

“In this very, very secular world we live in,” said DeMartini, the billboards provide “this wonderful encounter with Christ and the most beautiful expression of who he is, his mercy, and his invitation.”

Information about the Divine Mercy devotion is available at thedivinemercy.org. To learn more about the billboard ministry, contact Gerard Greer at (858) 997-5278.



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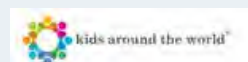
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By Denis Grasska

SANTEE — “Blessed Carlo Acutis Hall” is no more.

The 2,500-square-foot youth and young adult ministry center that Guardian Angels Parish built almost three years ago is now “Saint Carlo Acutis Hall,” renamed in anticipation of the upcoming canonization of its namesake.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager who used his computer savvy to spread devotion to the Eucharist before his death from leukemia in 2006, had been set to be canonized April 27. But, with the death of Pope Francis on April 21, it has been postponed.

“I remember when we put the sign up,” Ayla Dias, the parish’s former youth and young adult ministry coordinator, said before an April 2 youth group meeting. “We put ‘Blessed’ up there and we were like, ‘Oh, man, one day we’re going to have to change this, hopefully.’”

“It’s just amazing and surreal that that time has come,” she said.

Dias added that the significance of officially declaring 15-year-old Carlo Acutis to be among the saints in Heaven is “definitely not lost on the kids” who gather in the building named after him.

Ava Kelly, a 19-year-old member of Guardian Angels’ youth group, called it “fascinating to see someone from our day and age become a saint, because people don’t usually think a saint can be from the present day and only from years and years ago.”

Brissia Mendoza Trujillo, 17, described the hall’s namesake as “a highly inspirational individual” and said that “his love for God is something I hope to learn from.”

Isaac Deken, who has served as the parish’s coordinator of youth and young adult ministry since last year, said that having a parish building named after Carlo Acutis offers the opportunity “to talk about what a young saint looks like and how a young person can use the things that they’re interested in to grow closer to

God ... and to help others grow closer to God.”

Anna Leonhardt, a 22-year-old member of the parish’s young adult group, said that the upcoming canonization “has created a wave of excitement through everyone in the parish.”

“For the youth,” she said, “hearing that a soon-to-be saint played video games and enjoyed some of the same things they do, like Pokémon and soccer, has sparked a new interest in our faith among them.”

Though its name has changed, Saint Carlo Acutis Hall’s mission remains the same: to provide a dedicated space where youth and young adults can grow in faith and fellowship.

The hall exudes a youth-friendly atmosphere, complete with a sofa, a cardboard cut-out of Jesus standing beside it, and foosball, air hockey, ping pong, shuffleboard and pool tables.

A framed artwork of Carlo Acutis hangs on the wall near the entrance. In late March, a tear-away “Countdown to Canonization” was placed beside it, fueling excitement as the big day drew near.

“It’s important ... for our young people to meet and to gather in a space that feels welcoming to them, that they can see their place in the Church,” Deken said.

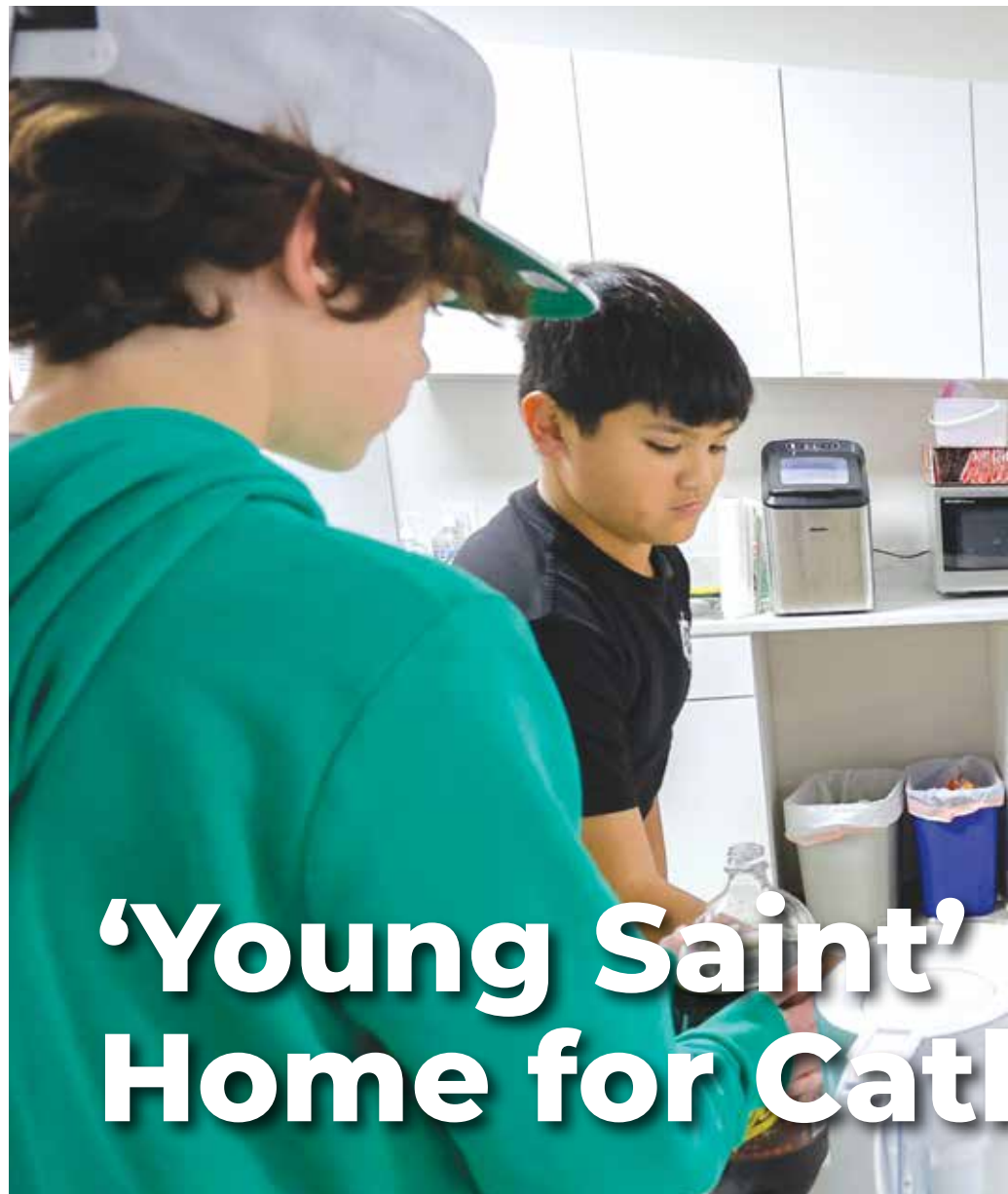
Guardian Angels broke ground on the building in September of 2021. It was dedicated in July of the following year.

Prior to the hall’s existence, Leonhardt said that the parish’s youth and young adults had met in the parish’s social hall.

“Often, we would find ourselves needing to relocate halfway through an activity because the room had been double-booked,” she recalled.

Tammy Mansir, the parish’s director of faith formation, said that the meeting space in the social hall was shared with “several” other groups, including the Knights of Columbus, the Women’s Guild and Alcoholics Anonymous.

“Sharing facilities with adult groups often made it difficult for our youth to feel a true sense of belonging,” she said. “A dedicated space is essential for young people to feel



SNACK TIME: Members of Guardian Angels Parish’s junior high youth group enjoy snacks before an April 2 youth group meeting.

that the church is not just a place they visit, but a home that welcomes and values them.”

Dias said that the youth, who had longed for “a space of their own,” were the impetus behind Saint Carlo Acutis Hall. They were “at the forefront of this whole project” and “did a lot” to make it a reality, she said, including filming a video for “Giving Tuesday” on the empty dirt lot where the hall stands today and assisting in various ways, from fundraising to painting.

Father André Ramos, pastor, recommended naming the hall after Acutis.

“I knew he would be a contemporary

inspiration for youth,” he said. “I said ‘yes’ to the construction under the condition of involving Carlo’s youthful saintliness.”

Currently, Saint Carlo Acutis Hall is the meeting place for several groups of younger parishioners.

A junior high youth group meets every Wednesday, a high school youth group every Sunday, a young adult group twice a month on Thursdays, and a confirmation preparation class for high schoolers twice monthly on Monday evenings.

Acutis *Continued on Page 11*



COUNTDOWN: A countdown to the canonization could be seen April 2, hanging beside a photo of the beatified teen. With the death of Pope Francis, the canonization has been postponed.



FUN & GAMES: Junior high youth play foosball before an April 2 youth group meeting.



Inspires Catholic Youth

2 meeting in Saint Carlo Acutis Hall.

Acutis *Continued from Page 10*

“All these are growing ministries,” Deken said. He noted that, within most of the groups, the current members “tend towards the young side of things,” meaning that it will be years before they age out of the group.

For example, he said, the young adult group is composed primarily of 18- to 21-year-olds, and most of the

high school youth group members are in the lower grades.

Deken said that there are active Catholic clubs at nearby West Hills and Santana high schools, which he expects will generate further growth in Guardian Angels Parish’s programs.

The hall also has served as a venue for various social events for youth and young adults, such as movie and game nights, as well as for the summer Va-

cation Bible School, which is led by junior high and high school youth group members for children in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Mansir said that the building has been “transformative in how we engage with our young people.”

“The space has become a sanctuary where youth and young adults can grow in their faith, build authentic relationships, and express themselves

creatively,” she said.

“It’s just become a common place where the kids can come and gather, and play games, and hang out, and be with one another,” said Dias, who stepped down as youth and young adult ministry coordinator in August of 2022, the month after the hall was dedicated, but continues to serve as a volunteer with the junior high youth group.

She said, “I’m a firm believer that the environment that our kids are in really does impact the growth of their faith and the comfort that they feel to be able to talk about their faith and interact with each other and with us.”

The youth themselves seem to agree.

“Our youth program is so blessed to be able to practice and grow in our faith in a fun and engaging space,” said Chloe Hernandez, 16, a member of the high school youth group.

Fourteen-year-old Gabby Collins said that “it feels like such a holy place, and it is filled with holy and blessed memories.”

Adelyne Russell, 13, likes that “there’s a lot of space” and that the community that gathers there is “really positive and accepting.”

“When you walk in, everybody’s smiling and everyone’s happy to be here,” she said.

Mia Sanchez, 14, also praised the “good, spacious area” that the parish has provided for her and other young parishioners.

Emmalynn Sales-Mensch, also 14, said that she and her fellow youth group members “wouldn’t even know each other” if it weren’t for Saint Carlo Acutis Hall.

“We all come together here,” she said, “because we all go to different schools.”

Thanks to the construction of “a dedicated spot for the youth and young adults,” Leonhardt said, “The youth and young adults feel more welcomed, appreciated and seen within the parish.”

She said that it’s also had the effect of making “the community connection between all age groups stronger.”

For Deken, Saint Carlo Acutis Hall shows that Guardian Angels Parish is walking the walk when it comes to youth and young adult ministry.

“For churches that are wanting to reach the young people, wanting to attract families, wanting to share the Gospel,” he said, “they need to make sure that it’s high on their list of priorities, that they’re dedicating resources towards that — prayer resources, financial resources, staff resources.”

“It’s great to say that you want the young people there,” he said, “but to really make a space for them and set up an environment that’s welcoming is really important.”

Deken expressed hope that the building will have a long future, “impacting generations of faith.”

“I hope this is a place where Catholic parents bring their kids one day and say, ‘This is where I had my youth group.’”



PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS: Isaac Deken, coordinator of youth and young adult ministry, introduces a presentation on “True Happiness” April 2 in Saint Carlo Acutis Hall.

Seven Accept Call to Become Deacons

By Denis Grasska



Seven men will be ordained to the permanent diaconate on Saturday, May 24, at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish in Carmel Valley.

The ordination Mass, which will be celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido, will be livestreamed at sdcatholic.org/deacons2025.

Those being ordained include:

RONALD JAY ESTEBAN AQUINO
St. Rose of Lima Parish, Chula Vista

As a member of the pastoral council at St. Rose of Lima Parish, Ron Aquino came to realize “just how much pastors have on their plate.”

“In my childhood, there were more priests per parish to spread out the load,” said Aquino, 47, who shared that the priest shortage was what “pushed me over the edge to submit my application” to the diaconate formation program.

Aquino is a software applications engineer with Kaiser Permanente.

Prior to entering diaconal formation, he had been asked by multiple people if he would consider becoming a deacon.

“I became a pro at gracefully dodging the suggestion and had all my lines down,” said Aquino, who during his youth had considered becoming a priest.

But when his current pastor, Father Miguel Campos, arrived at the parish and asked him the same question, he promised to “pray on it.”

Barely a week later, his wife, Christine, “randomly” told him that she would be okay with him entering the diaconate. Previously, she had been opposed to it, having observed the busy schedules of their deacon friends and their wives.

A few months of discernment later, he applied.

“For me, it truly is about service,” Aquino said of diaconal ministry, “about taking the life given to you by God and (returning) it to Him in service to Him and His people.”

Ron and Christine Aquino have been married for 22 years and have two sons. They have been members of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Chula Vista for 13 years.



ROBERT MICHAEL EHNOW
Sacred Heart Parish, Coronado

“I am literally a ‘cradle Catholic,’ as I was adopted through Catholic Charities as an infant,” said Bobby Ehnou, 59.

His adoptive parents were practicing Catholics, and he is a product of Catholic education from elementary school through college.

“I have always been involved in the parishes where I lived, and have been willing to serve in any capacity. I think my openness to serve in the parish and for our Church allowed me to discern a call from God to become a deacon,” said Ehnou, who remembers a priest at his high school inviting him to consider the priesthood.

Ehnou first thought about the diaconate after retiring from the U.S. Marine Corps in 2008. But, his children were still at home, so he waited.

A pilgrimage in 2016 with his wife, Colette, was pivotal in his discernment.

“One afternoon, while standing on Mt. Beatitude on the Northern Shore of Galilee,” he said, “I promised God that I would listen to him, and I pledged that I would follow Him wherever He leads me and my family.”

In 2018, he began working for the Diocese of San Diego, where he heads the Office for Life, Peace and Justice. A year after joining the diocesan staff, he was encouraged by a colleague, Jesuit Father Eddie Samaniego, to enter diaconal formation.

Being a deacon means “to serve the Church as a humble, servant leader with compassion,” he said, “to serve the poor and marginalized, to be a visible, sacramental sign of service to those most in need.”

Bobby and Colette Ehnou have been married for 21 years and have a blended family with four children. They have been members of Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado for 22 years.



JOSÉ RAMON GARCÍA
St. Mary Parish, Escondido

In 2007, José Ramon Garcia attended a Marriage Encounter retreat with his wife, Lucía.

That experience gave them “a different way of living life, which is done by walking on the side of God,” said García, 57, who subsequently got involved with the Marriage Encounter ministry.

“I thought, with the help of God, I can be of use to prepare marriages in a more spiritual way.”

During his involvement with Marriage Encounter, people began suggesting that he consider becoming a deacon.

At the time, García’s job required him to work most weekends. He didn’t see how he could serve as a deacon unless he found another job that left his weekends free — something that happened seven years ago, when he accepted a job as facilities manager at St. Mary Parish in Escondido.

He began diaconal formation in 2021. In 2023, he lost a son, then only 28.

“It was only through the grace of God,” he said, “(that) we were able to ... continue the process.”

Among other things, he looks forward to assisting with marriage preparation as an ordained deacon.

“The family is the domestic Church,” he said, “and, in our times, I feel we need stronger marriages, so the love of God can be reflected in long-lasting marriages, so the sons and daughters from those marriages also wish to have stronger families.”

José and Lucía García have been married and members of St. Mary Parish in Escondido for 32 years. They have three sons, one deceased.

THOMAS GERALD KELLY
Mission San Diego de Alcalá Parish

In Catholic school, Thomas Kelly learned about “the many ways the Church serves others.”

“I wanted to be a part of that mission,” said Kelly, 56.

Though he considered the priesthood, he also felt drawn to marriage and fatherhood.

It was while taking part in a Boy Scout hike led by Deacon Bob Ekhaml that he heard about the perma-

Deacons *Continued on Page 13*

Deacons' Ordination

On May 24, Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido will ordain seven men to the permanent diaconate during

a 10 a.m. Mass at St. Thérèse of Carmel Church, 4355 Del Mar Trails Road, San Diego, CA 92130. The Mass will be livestreamed through sdcatholic.org/deacons2025.

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Deacons *Continued from Page 12*

ment diaconate for the first time.

“Something resonated deeply within me,” he said. “I recognized what I was being called to.”

The sense of a call never left him.

Kelly said that he and his wife, Vanessa, even discussed the topic before they got married — “even down to the detail of when to start the process.”

Once in formation, he became even more convinced of his calling.

“I have continually experienced reassurance that serving others as a permanent deacon is part of God’s plan for me,” said Kelly, a pediatrician for 26 years. “With deep gratitude and great excitement, I look forward to embracing this calling.”

A deacon, he said, is expected to be “a living representative of Christ to all people at all times.”

“By meeting others where they are and accompanying them on their faith journeys as Christ would,” he said, “I hope to empower them to invite God into their lives more fully and, in turn, to embrace their role in his divine plan.”

Thomas and Vanessa Kelly have been married for 13 years and have two boys. He has been a member of Mission San Diego de Alcalá Parish since 1983.



MIGUEL MADERA
St. Stephen Parish, Valley Center

A deacon at Miguel Madera’s parish asked why he wasn’t thinking about becoming a deacon.

“From then on, a seed was planted and, afterwards, the priest also encouraged me,” said Madera, 54, who has worked as a waste truck driver for EDCO for the past 30 years.

After the deacon’s initial question, it would be another three years before Madera entered the formation program. And, in the interim, fellow parishioners asked why he wasn’t a deacon yet.

“I felt a bit disappointed during that time, because I never thought to get involved to that extent in the Church and, for me, it was something very new, a



new path towards service,” said Madera, who has volunteered with the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults process, teaching baptismal preparation classes, and bringing the Eucharist to the sick.

Those ministries led him “to feel the calling to the diaconate.”

Reflecting on his experiences in diaconal formation, Madera said that he benefitted greatly from having a spiritual advisor and going through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

“It helped me to deepen my prayer ... and to live what I read,” he said.

Madera considers diaconal ministry to be “a large commitment and responsibility.”

“I know that it will not be easy,” he said, “but at the end, it is a service to God through the Church and for God’s glory.”

Miguel and Juana Madera have been married for 31 years and have four children. He has been a member of St. Stephen Parish in Valley Center for 33 years.

MATTHEW DAVID MURRAY RIFAT
St. Vincent de Paul Parish

Matthew Rifat says, “My lifetime has been a period of preparation for the diaconate.”

Rifat, 55, described the Catholic faith as having been “central” and “a constant” in his life, and he said that the Sisters of Mercy who staffed St. Vincent de Paul School during his elementary school days had an impact on him that “cannot be overemphasized.”

“In fifth grade, I had an encounter with Christ, and he asked me to become his priest,” he recalled. “The world took over my life, and that call did not come to fulfillment, but an empty space in my heart and mind persisted. With marriage and family, the priesthood dropped away, but a call to commit to prayer and service continued to be heard.”

“The call never ceased from the time I was in fifth grade,” said Rifat, who has been an attorney for the past 30 years.

In obedience to that call, he entered diaconal formation, which he described as “a journey of never-ending graces.”

“Christ has walked with me during formation — and, more often than not, carried me,” he said.

Rifat believes that diaconal service involves “not merely spiritually feeding parishioners, but seeking out those who do not yet know Christ.”

“I pray daily that God gives me the wisdom and courage to serve effectively,” he said.



JAMES THOMAS RIZZOTTO
St. Stephen Parish, Valley Center

James Thomas Rizzotto stopped attending Mass after high school, and he didn’t pick up the practice again until he and his wife, Victoria, were expecting their first child.

He has made up for the lost time.

“Since my return, “I have experienced just a steady growing of my faith and love for Jesus, and it was in service to him where I found my call to the diaconate,” said Rizzotto, 52, who has worked in construction for 34 years, owns a millwork company and runs a carpentry business with his son.

He felt called to the diaconate in 2008, during a silent moment at work.

“I heard a voice in my head,” he recalled, “which sounded like my own, that said, ‘Be a deacon.’”

Taking his pastor’s advice, Rizzotto waited until his children had left home before he applied to enter diaconal formation. He and his wife prayed about the decision for about three years before he finally entered.

“I don’t feel worthy, but I know it’s only by God’s grace that we can achieve anything,” he said, “and I know it’s his will that I serve.”

He looks forward to officiating at baptisms and weddings.

“Baptism, because I want to be on the front lines claiming souls for Jesus Christ; marriage, because it’s the foundation of civilization and the means of salvation for those called to that vocation,” he explained.

“God loves the Holy Family,” said Rizzotto. “Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the family model par excellence, and I want to form and sacramentalize couples to reflect that love in the world, in the name of Jesus Christ.”

James and Victoria Rizzotto have been married 28 years and have three children. They have been members of St. Stephen Parish in Valley Center for more than 25 years.

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Have you been feeling stressed lately? If so, you're not alone.

Approximately one in five adults is struggling with a mental illness in the United States, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

"That means that many of us know people right now who are struggling with a mental health disorder," said Jennifer Zwolinski, Ph.D., a practicing Catholic and board-certified clinical psychologist.

May is "Mental Health Awareness Month" and, to mark that occasion, we've asked Zwolinski for advice on navigating the difficult times many individuals are facing. She works in private practice and is also a psychology professor at the University of San Diego.

Zwolinski offers three questions to ask yourself to determine whether you might need support from a mental health professional:

- Have you had changes in your mood, thoughts and/or behaviors that cause you or others to be concerned?
 - Do you have and/or use coping strategies that are either unhealthy or do not work to help you feel better for the long term?
 - If your friends and/or family are expressing concerns about your well-being or behavior, is it possible that their perceptions are accurate?
- "Sometimes, it's the people who are closest to us that can see some changes in behaviors or thoughts that



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Psychologist Jennifer Zwolinski, Ph.D, identified steps that people can take to improve or safeguard their mental health.

Seek out social support and prioritize relationships

"Belonging matters and people tend to feel better when they are surrounded by others who are caring and supportive."

Prioritize Sleep

"When we sleep well, we think and feel better and we improve our physical health."

Engage in some form of physical activity

"Even a brief, 10-minute walk in nature can help improve your mood."

Become active in your faith community

"This shared sense of meaning and values and a supportive community that provides hope will help to navigate during difficult times."

Participate in activities that use your skills and interests

Volunteer

"Giving back to organizations you value can bring a sense of meaning and engagement to your life."

Focus on the positive

"Share gratitude with others and count your blessings."

we cannot see," said Zwolinski. "If you are noticing negative or distressing changes in your mood, behavior, thoughts or social interactions, and these are causing you distress, or if you have tried unsuccessfully to feel better, a mental health professional can help you. You don't have to do this alone."

She cited "clear warning signs of mental distress," such as thoughts about hurting oneself or engaging in dangerous behaviors; experiencing debilitating depression or anxiety; or struggling to distinguish reality from fantasy. Additional warning signs are that the thoughts, emotions or behaviors are causing social, professional or legal problems.

"If you see these signs, seek professional support," Zwolinski advises. "Even if you are not completely sure, it's wise to contact a mental health professional who can do an evaluation."

She said that research shows the benefits of incorporating a client's spiritual and religious life into the plan for psychotherapy.

"By working in collaboration with our clients and their values," she said, "I believe that we can help them to feel better faster."

Learn more about the diocesan Mental Health Ministry, including its referral network of local therapists and other resources, at sd catholic.org/family-life-and-spirituality/mental-health-ministry.



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'Pilgrims of Hope' for the Care of Creation

By Christina Bagaglio Slentz, Ph.D.

 What gets you out of bed well before dawn to embark on a nine-hour bus ride, study and cram, sleep on a gym floor, speak your heart and pray publicly, engage in dialogue with powerful strangers, and repeat the ride home, all within 42 hours?

For 47 San Diegans, predominantly high school students, a “Laudato Si” Advocacy Summit Pilgrimage to Sacramento” on April 6 and 7 inspired such a faith-filled journey. Sponsored by the California Chapter of the “Laudato Si” Movement and Jesuits West, this student-led action gathered over 400 people from almost every diocese in the state, becoming the largest “Laudato Si” advocacy event in North American history.

Hope in God Does Not Disappoint



Students load into the bus for their trip to the State Capitol building.

In his recently released message, “Pilgrims of Hope: the Gift of Life,” Pope Francis writes, “Our world needs young people who are pilgrims of hope, who courageously devote their lives to Christ and rejoice in being his disciples and missionaries.”

Courageously, our local youth — our hope! — from Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Diego, Cristo Rey San Diego and Mater Dei Catholic high schools, and diocesan Creation Care Teens from Cathedral Catholic High School and the Academy of Our Lady of Peace joyfully took up the mission of advocating for the vulnerable, calling for state officials to respond to the cries of our Sister, Mother Earth, and to those impacted by today’s environmental crises.

In the weeks preceding the pilgrimage, youth from all over California worked prayerfully and collaboratively over Zoom to research and choose pieces of legislation that seek to restore creation and secure pathways of environmental adaptation and resilience. The two-day event began with a Mass, celebrated by Bishop Jaime Soto, of the Diocese of Sacramento, followed by a shared meal. Then, the students got to work making final preparations for their presentations to state assembly members and senators. They worked until “lights out,” demonstrating



The San Diego delegation of students poses in front of the State Capitol building.



Mater Dei Catholic students present in the office of Assembly Member Chris Ward.

great devotion. The next morning, the pilgrims rose early to dress in their most professional attire and headed to the State Capitol. There, they promoted policies addressing fire resilience and prevention, to include the development of community resilience hubs to act as shelters in times of emergency.

Several students shared personal stories of being affected by the recent fires in Los Angeles. They also advocated for more stringent safe water regulation, recycling for non-drinking usage, and water protections connected to critical habitat conservation.

Intergenerational Solidarity

Monday night, just before midnight, the bus rolled back into San Diego, and students returned to the loving hugs of their families. In “Laudato Si,” Pope Francis calls us to “intergenerational solidarity,” meaning we have to work together across all ages to bring about ecological justice.

Do you have a young person at home? Have you asked him or her about today’s environmental crisis? Students are so well educated on the science of these dynamics! Talking to them and showing your respect for their newly acquired knowledge is a good way to demonstrate your love and willingness to partner with them in bringing about a more just society. Be sure to share your faith perspective, too, as this importantly undergirds our caring for creation with a strong foundation in our Catholic teaching.



Father Amer Awad of Sacramento provides spiritual guidance and inspiration for advocacy pilgrims.

Save the Date!



If you are interested in participating in our next “Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation,” the Diocese of San Diego is hosting a “Pilgrimage to the Salton Sea” in November 2025 to recognize the 10th anniversary of “Laudato Si” and our Jubilee Year. Scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/SSPilgrimageInterestForm for more information and to receive updates. As always, contact Christina Slentz with questions at cslentz@sdcatholic.org.



Send pictures of your family or parish illustrating Care for Creation to cslentz@sdcatholic.org. We will post them on our Facebook and Instagram accounts.

sdcatholic.org/creation



‘Am I Not Here?’ Mary’s Voice in Wounded World



One of the most beautiful phrases in the *Nican Mopohua* is Our Lady of Guadalupe’s resolute voice as she guides Juan Diego through his fear.

“Am I not here,” she tells him, “I who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection?” It is difficult to find a more compelling example of the best of humanity than Mary. Whether walking through the hills of Palestine or in Tepeyac centuries later, Mary models what it means to love fiercely and fearlessly as a mother does, and to harness the power of true empathy for the good of all. During this month when we honor Mary and all mothers, how do we learn to do the same?

Times of Chaos
Open your eyes, and before you’ve had coffee, the news has already reached you about the latest crisis, another shocking executive order or the defamation of a whole new group of people. Far from welcoming the day with gratitude to serve a world

Columnist

Cecilia González-Andrieu, Ph.D.



that needs us, today most of us feel stunned and demoralized. The normal reaction to chaos is disorientation followed by paralysis and this is no accident; the point of unleashing chaos is to impede our ability to respond.

In the Gospels, the remarkable young Mary is thrust into the middle of the brutal Roman occupation destroying her people, and centuries later in Mexico, she comes to aid the indigenous and conquered threatened with annihilation. We can see a throughline to us. Chaos is the tool of oppressive powers used to break a society: Fire thousands of workers without cause; starve organizations that provide aid in the midst of famines, wars, disease, and environmental disasters, forcing them to close their doors; violate international laws and conventions on refugees and asylum-seekers by terminating all avenues to safety; cut off funding for scientific research

that will help the sick and hungry; disband programs that try to remedy historically unjust social structures; persecute immigrants by dehumanizing them. There’s so many of these actions and they are so extreme, that there are almost 200 court cases right now trying to stop them. The deluge has a goal: the destruction of our capacity for empathy, because empathy builds community, and communities can be selfless, united and resilient. In Galilee and Tepeyac, Mary teaches us radical empathy.

Mary’s Ways

Empathy is the cultivation of our ability to try to feel as the other feels and, through that experience, be transformed. In Luke’s Gospel, our first glimpse of Mary is that she is troubled, yet she overcomes her fear, says yes to God and finds a new voice. By identifying with the lowly and powerless, Mary experiences their suffering, and a spirit of prophetic courage overtakes her. Mary proclaims that God “has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart ... thrown down the rulers from their thrones ... and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:51-52). Mary of Naz-

areth communicates a God, who like a mother caring for her brood, frees them and feeds them.


In Mexico, *La Virgen’s* identification with the suffering indigenous is so profound that she appears as one of them speaking their language. Her empathy is what brings her into history. Having heard their cries, she intervenes — appearing to Juan Diego as a representative of all displaced and conquered peoples throughout history. She takes up their cause, confronts the powerful, builds up their voice and promises to always be present to “listen to their weeping, their sadness, to remedy, to cleanse and nurse all their different troubles, their miseries, their suffering.”

Mary invites us all to be mothers right now — those who love deeply and extend love and protection to all.

When we think of honoring her and mothers this May, may it be by following Mary’s example of empathy. Holding on to her veil resplendent with stars, may we have the courage to do what is difficult.

Theologian Cecilia González-Andrieu, Ph.D., is a professor at Loyola Marymount University.

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Mary, Thanks For Your Tender Company



I was born in a family where my mother received from her mother a devotion to Mary. I lived in a culture marked by Marian traditions and celebrations.

When I was little and went to church, I used to see people light candles to the image of a woman carrying a child in her arms. These experiences immersed me in the mysteries of God at a young age, and they left a profound mark in the psyche, in my soul.

In my emotional memory, where time stands still, I can re-create the emotion and amazement that I felt when I lighted a candle, asked Mary for a blessing and felt my mother's joy as I accompanied her.

Looking back at these years, like

Columnist

Ricardo Márquez



in the story in Genesis, everything was good. Today, I recognize that I received the gift of faith from my parents and the emotional connection to the Mother of the Christ Child. It's in these first years of life where the seeds of faith are planted.

This assumes a conscious decision by the parents to model and introduce faith to their children at an age when they can experience the mystery of something momentous from the vantage point of their innocence. It's the task of the "domestic Church" — using stories in the Bible and simple prayer rituals during meals and bedtime — to nourish the ground where that seed

can grow. What is not watered, dries up and dies.

In my adolescent years, I studied at a school that promoted a Marian devotion. My classmates used to come together, under the guidance of a teacher, to read the Gospel and a newspaper, a way to relate Scripture to daily life. We used to plan our service activities with seniors, hospital visits and food collections for needy families.

Mary was the inspiration to get to know Jesus more deeply and intimately and to serve him, guided by his message, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt 25:40).

I recognize today the gift of teachers who gave me advice and encouragement, of friends, and of an educational institution that promoted values, such as academic excellence and service to the community. I remember the times when I used to pass by the school chapel with its image of Mother Mary, which we used

to call *La Virgencita del Colegio*, or "Little Virgin of the School."

The confidence and "psychic" closeness to her I had developed since I was little allowed me to express to her my doubts, anxieties and needs spontaneously, with a secret security, given the love and accompaniment I felt from her.

As an adult, when I'm more conscious of my lights and shadows, of my limitations, of the accidental and the essential, of what is historic and significant ... Mary is for me the feminine figure that inspires respect for women, the "archetype" of the universal mother that connects me with the Lord Jesus and his teachings; the intimate presence in whom I can share my fears, who can repair my emotional fractures and sustain my faith and hope, including in me and my humanity, all the while living in times of intense vulnerability.

Come walk with us, Holy Mother. Come!

Ricardo Márquez can be reached at marquez_muskus@yahoo.com.

Service with a Purpose: Become an IVC Volunteer in a Local Catholic School

The Ignatian Volunteer Corps of San Diego seeks caring and committed 50+ adults to serve in meaningful roles with selected County-wide Catholic Schools



Nazareth School Mission Valley



St. Francis of Assisi Vista



St. Rita's School Valencia Park



St. Mary School Escondido



Our Lady's School Sherman Heights



St. Patrick School North Park

You can make a positive impact by bringing hope and support to underprivileged youth attending one of these six schools.

As an IVC Team Member, you'll fill a meaningful role such as tutor, mentor, classroom aide, counselor, assistant coach, librarian, art/music assistant and more!

You'll agree to contribute your time and experience for 8 or 16 hours each week for 10 months beginning at the start of the school year in September.

In addition, you become part of the supportive faith community of fellow IVC Team Members that meets each month.

For more information or to apply, please contact:

Curran Gaughan
 IVC San Diego Regional Director
 cgaughan@ivcusa.org



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Scan for a Virtual Tour



Pilgrimages Planned for Jubilee Year

VATICAN: Many pilgrimages plan to stop at sites such as St. Peter's Square, in Vatican City.

The Southern Cross



The Diocese of San Diego, as well as several

individual parishes, are organizing pilgrimages during Jubilee Year 2025.

The holy year, which began on Dec. 24, 2024, and will conclude on Jan. 6, 2026, is a special period dedicated to repentance and conversion. The theme is "Pilgrims of Hope."

The list of pilgrimages includes:

San Rafael Parish Golden Jubilee Pilgrimage to Italy

Dates: May 12-22

Destination: Venice, Padua, Florence, Assisi, Rome and Vatican City

Host: Father Jay Bananal, with Msgr. Dennis Mikulanis

Steps of St. Paul — Turkey and Rome (in Spanish)

Date: Oct. 6-17

Destination: Istanbul, Nicea, Çanakkale, Pérgamo, Esmirna, Sardes, Laodicea, Pamukkale,

Éfeso and Rome

Spiritual director: Father José Luis Muro

Coordinator: Deacon Manuel Rivas

St. Mary, Star of the Sea Parish 12-Day Jubilee Pilgrimage

Dates: Oct. 13-24

Destination: Krakow, Czestochowa, Lagiewniki, Rome, Vatican City and Assisi

Host: Father Reynald Evangelista

Holy Name of Jesus Pilgrimage to Italy

Dates: Oct. 22-Nov. 1

Destination: Milan, Florence, Siena and Rome

With: Father Sean Embury

A Jubilee Journey to Assisi & Rome

Dates: Oct. 27-Nov. 7

Destination: Rome, Assisi and Orvieto

Spiritual Leaders: Bishop Michael Pham and Auxiliary Bishops Ramón Bejarano and Felipe Pulido

For more information about these jubilee pilgrimages, visit sdcatholic.org/jubilee-year-2025/jubilee-pilgrimages.



News Briefs

Retrouvaille Weekend Heals Troubled Marriages

Many couples continue to struggle in their marriages but are not willing to give up on each other. There is hope.

Retrouvaille is a program designed to help struggling marriages regain their health. It helps a husband and a wife re-awaken the love, trust and commitment that originally brought them together.

A Retrouvaille weekend retreat will be offered in English from Friday, May 2, to Sunday, May 4. The location will be provided upon confirmation. The cost is \$500 per couple.

For more information, visit helpourmarriage-sandiego.org. To register for the upcoming weekend, call (951) 259-9474 or email 6016r@helpourmarriage.org.

Retreat Offers Healing for Widowed, Divorced

OCEANSIDE — Divorced, widowed and separated men and women are invited to register for a healing Beginning Experience Weekend.

The next weekend will be held from Friday, May 2, to Sunday, May 4, at Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside.

The weekend focuses on healing and moving beyond grief in a supportive and caring environment with others who are going through and have gone through the same experiences.

For more information, email

beginningexperiencesd@gmail.com or call (858) 748-2273.

Women's Retreatants Hope to Encounter Risen Christ

JULIAN — The Whispering Winds Women's Auxiliary will hold its annual Women's Spring Retreat from Friday, May 16, to Sunday, May 18, at Whispering Winds Catholic Camp and Conference Center in Julian. The theme is "Encountering the Risen Christ."

It will be presented by Jenene Francis, who adapts the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius for days of reflection for wide audiences and supports ministry leaders and boards of directors engaged in strategic discernment.

During the weekend, participants will experience familiar and new ways to pray as they ask for the grace to recognize encounters with the Risen Christ. There will be time for individual prayer and small group conversation.

The cost for members of the Whispering Winds Women's Auxiliary is \$220 per person; for non-members, it is \$250. Scholarships are available. For information or to register, visit whisperingwinds.org/womens-retreat.

ISP Retreats Help Recovery from Homelessness, Addiction

The Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP) invites those recovering from

Briefs Continued on Page 19





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Briefs *Continued from Page 18*

homelessness and addiction to experience God's unconditional love. Its programs are designed for men and women in substance use recovery who desire to deepen their spirituality and are open to sharing their story and listening to others.

Though founded in the Jesuit tradition, people of all (or no) faith traditions are welcome.

Guided by the wisdom of Ignatian spirituality and interwoven with traditional 12-Step approaches, ISP retreat programs offer individuals recovering from homelessness and addiction a chance to deepen their relationship with God, to identify the places inside that need healing, and to bond with others on the journey.

Every year, ISP welcomes over 1,250 individuals on overnight retreats and provides over 10,000 experiences of hope and healing through ongoing reflection programs in the community.

For more information, visit ispretreats.org.

Professors Release Family-Friendly Zombies

The independent feature film "Don't Get Eaten," a family-friendly comedy about a streamer who creates zombie-survival videos until an actual zombie apocalypse disrupts his family's weekend getaway, is now available on DVD and streaming services.

The film was written and directed by George Simon and his brother, Joe, and produced by Melinda Simon, who also stars. George and Melinda Simon,

who are married with three children, are professors at John Paul the Great Catholic University. All three of the filmmakers are alumni.

Principal photography on "Don't Get Eaten" took place over four weeks in Michigan in March of 2022 with a small crew consisting completely of JPCatholic alumni and students.

Young Adults Can Network at YCP Events

The San Diego chapter of Young Catholic Professionals (YCP) hosts regular events for young Catholics in their 20s and 30s.

Among the organization's recurring events is its Executive Speaker Series, where a Catholic speaker is invited to reflect on his or her faith and career. There is no cost for admission, and attendees can enjoy free beer, wine and appetizers, as well as time for networking.

YCP San Diego also holds networking happy hours, half-day retreats and other events.

For more information on upcoming events, visit youngcatholicprofessionals.org/chapter/san-diego.

Men Invited to Join 'Rosary Crusade'

The Men's Rosary Crusade gathers at 9 a.m., every first Saturday of the month, at the corner of 6th and Laurel in Balboa Park. All men are welcome.

The rosary intentions are for reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the conversion of America, for families and for the unborn.

For more information, email

**Parishes Host Shroud Exhibit**

IMAGE: The exhibit was presented on April 15 in the St. Mary's School gym in El Centro.

Local parishes, in collaboration with JP2 Catholic Radio, have been hosting the traveling "Man of the Shroud Exhibit."

The free exhibit offers an opportunity to explore the profound mystery, history and faith associated with the Shroud of Turin, which many believe to be the burial shroud of Jesus Christ.

The exhibit features 41 life-size panels that explore the Shroud's historical context, scientific studies, and its deep connection to Jesus' passion and resurrection. Visitors will also experience an immersive display, including authentic artifacts related to the Shroud and a full-size replica of the Shroud.

It can be viewed next at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in Little Italy, from May 6 to 8. The exhibit is available at no cost to local parishes, schools and Catholic organizations.

For information about the exhibit, including viewing and presentation times, or to explore hosting opportunities, visit jp2radio.com/shroud-of-turin-exhibit.

draguez@sbcglobal.net or call (619) 920-8363.

Catholics Can 'Encounter' Jesus in Rancho Peñasquitos

Encounter, a Spirit-filled evening of inspiring music, prayer and Eucharistic adoration, is held on the second Friday of each month at Our

Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Rancho Peñasquitos.

Sponsored by the parish's Hearts of Fire Ministry, the event runs from 7 to 8 p.m. Confession will be available, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

For more information, contact Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish at (858) 324-0490.

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