THE SOUTHERN CROSS
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO

COURTESY OFFICE FOR THE MISSIONS

DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the weekend of Oct. 18 to 19, 2025, we joyfully celebrate World Mission Sunday, a powerful reminder of our shared responsibility to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. On this day, Catholics around the world unite in prayer and solidarity to support the missionary work of the Church.

This year's theme, "Missionaries of Hope Among All Peoples" (cf. Bull "Spes Non Confundit"), reflects the heart of our faith and the vision of our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, who spent much of his priestly ministry as a missionary in the remote regions of Peru. He calls us to participate actively in the Church's evangelizing mission through our witness of life, prayer, sacrifice and generosity.

The Church, impelled by the love of Christ, continues her missionary journey, responding to the cries of a suffering humanity. In a world marked by crisis, confusion, loneliness and indifference — especially toward the elderly and those in need — Christian communities are called to be signs of a new humanity. Despite our technological advancements, true "proximity" is fading. We are increasingly interconnected, yet less relational. The pursuit of efficiency and success often leads to self-centeredness and a diminished capacity for compassion. Yet, the Gospel restores us to a whole, healthy and redeemed humanity.

Missionaries of hope are people of prayer, for "the person who hopes is a person who prays." Through prayer, we keep alive the spark of hope that God has placed within us, allowing it to grow into a fire that enlightens and warms those around us.

Your generous contribution on World Mission Sunday supports the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the pope's official means of assisting Catholic communities in the world's poorest and most remote regions. Your support helps missionaries serving in 1,124 mission territories, where the Church is young, vibrant and often faces persecution or poverty. It provides vital resources for: formation of seminarians and religious sisters, training of lay catechists, education for children, basic medical care, construction and maintenance of churches and parish centers. These sacred spaces allow the faithful to gather, worship and grow in their relationship with Jesus.

Each time we support the missions, we affirm that we are one Church, one family in Christ, united in bringing hope and love to all people. I encourage you to respond with a generous heart, knowing that your support makes a real difference in the lives of those who might otherwise never hear the Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us turn to Blessed Mother Mary, our hope. To her we entrust our missionaries and their efforts. May this World Mission Sunday deepen our commitment to the missionary dimension of our faith. Let us go forth as "missionaries of hope," bringing God's love and mercy to all.

With every blessing and deep gratitude for your generosity to the missions,

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+Michael Pham

Most Rev. Michael Pham, Bishop of San Diego

Church Spotlights 'Missionaries of Hope'

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY — Recognizing themselves as members of the one body of Christ, all Catholics should sense an urgency to share the Gospel message of God's love with others and to welcome them as brothers and sisters, Pope Leo XIV said.

"Our world, wounded by war, violence and injustice, needs to hear the Gospel message of God's love and to experience the reconciling power of Christ's grace," the pope said May 22 as he met more than 120 national directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies.

Working in coordination with the Dicastery for Evangelization, the societies are: the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Society of St. Peter Apostle, the Missionary Childhood Association and the Missionary Union of Priests and Religious.

The societies raise awareness about the foreign missions, educate Catholics of all ages about their responsibility to be missionary disciples and raise money to support the missions and missionaries.

Recognizing "our communion as members of the body of Christ naturally opens us to the universal dimension of the Church's mission of evangelization," he said, and it should inspire Catholics "to transcend the confines of our individual parishes, dioceses and nations, in order to share with every nation and people the surpassing richness of the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

Pope Leo asked the national directors to focus on cultivating and promoting "the vision of the Church as the communion of believers, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, who enables us to enter into the perfect communion and harmony of the blessed Trinity."

"Christ is our savior and in him we are one, a family of God, beyond the rich variety of our languages, cultures and experiences," Pope Leo said.

This year, World Mission Sunday will be observed Oct. 19. The theme is "Missionaries of Hope Among All Peoples."

The message for this year's observance was written by Pope Francis and was released Feb. 6 at the Vatican, two and a half months before his death April 21.

Christians should become "messengers of hope for all, in every place and circumstance that God has granted us to live," the late pope wrote.

"May all the baptized, as missionary disciples of Christ, make his hope shine forth in every corner of the earth," he wrote.

Ultimately, Pope Francis said, the project of renewing the mission of hope begins with prayer and continues with the building and nurturing of Christian communities.

"By praying," as well as "by those concrete actions and gestures that prayer itself inspires," he said, "we keep alive the spark of hope lit by God within us, so that it can become a great fire which enlightens and warms everyone around us."

Catholic News Service
Justin McLellan contributed to this article.

helpthemissions.org

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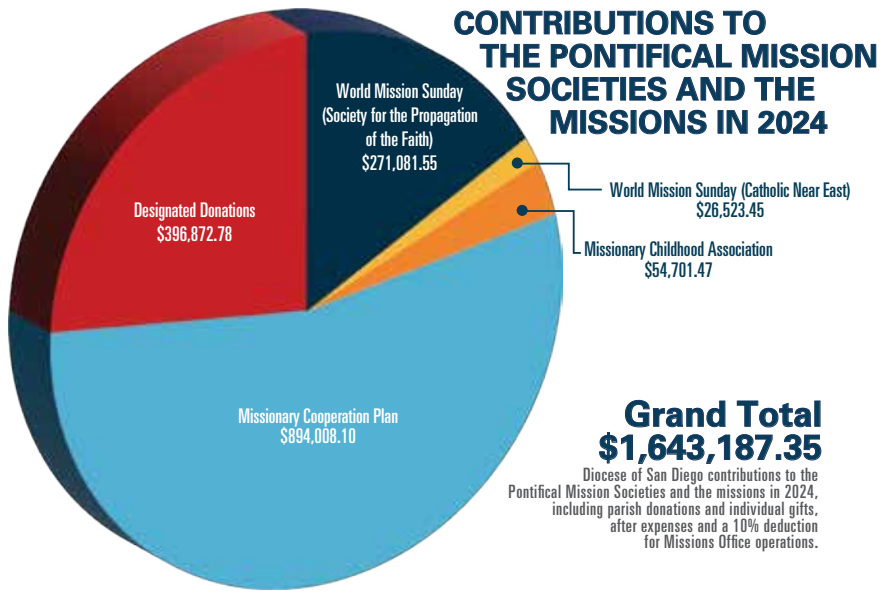
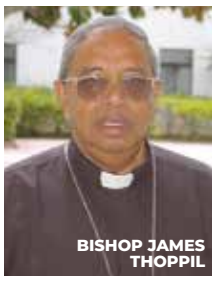


PARISH	MISSION SUNDAY	MCA*	MCP**	TOTAL
All Hallows, La Jolla	$2,660.00	$677.80	$10,635.00	$13,972.80
Ascension, San Diego	$3,010.25		$10,982.04	$13,992.29
Blessed Sacrament, San Diego	$4,108.00		$6,502.00	$10,610.00
Christ the King, San Diego	$288.00		$756.58	$1,044.58
Corpus Christi, Bonita	$9,379.00		$15,721.29	$25,100.29
Good Shepherd, San Diego	$100.00	$916.07	$28,141.00	$29,157.07
Guardian Angels, Santee	$1,271.00		$4,964.00	$6,235.00
Holy Family, San Diego	$5,523.00		$29,559.00	$35,082.00
Holy Spirit, San Diego	$2,831.00		$6,180.00	$9,011.00
Holy Trinity, El Cajon	$4,244.00	$447.48	$3,323.06	$8,014.54
Immaculate Conception, San Diego	$1,813.00		$5,018.00	$6,831.00
Immaculate Heart of Mary, Ramona	$2,470.00	$100.00	$2,555.00	$5,125.00
Mary, Star of the Sea, La Jolla	$1,708.00	$1,894.21	$18,602.88	$22,205.09
Mater Dei, Chula Vista	$8,964.16		$13,706.30	$22,670.46
Mission San Antonio de Pala, Pala	$1,237.00		$6,779.00	$8,016.00
Mission San Diego de Alcalá, San Diego	$7,495.46		$15,690.66	$23,186.12
Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, Oceanside	$7,945.45		$18,433.65	$26,379.10
Most Precious Blood, Chula Vista	$1,847.00		$4,235.00	$6,082.00
Nativity, Rancho Santa Fe	$13,240.00	$3,815.00	$9,433.00	$26,488.00
Our Lady of Angels, San Diego	$1,565.00		$1,807.00	$3,372.00
Our Lady of Grace, El Cajon	$2,566.00		$17,776.18	$20,342.18
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Calexico	$1,405.05	$1,147.24	$4,357.13	$6,909.42
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Chula Vista	$3,757.00		$5,149.00	$8,906.00
Our Lady of Guadalupe, San Diego		$86.23	$9,351.47	$9,437.70
Our Lady of Light, Descanso	$475.00		$1,513.00	$1,988.00
Our Lady of Mount Carmel, San Diego	$6,156.00		$12,843.00	$18,999.00
Our Lady of Mount Carmel, San Ysidro	$23,153.00	$440.04	$12,888.00	$36,481.04
Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Lakeside	$1,185.00	$25.00	$12,679.76	$13,889.76
Our Lady of Refuge, San Diego	$2,125.00		$3,032.00	$5,157.00
Our Lady of the Rosary, San Diego	$3,101.00		$5,541.00	$8,642.00
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, San Diego	$3,250.00	$320.00	$12,808.00	$16,378.00
Our Lady of the Valley - Our Lady of Guadalupe, El Centro	$375.00		$3,207.00	$3,582.00
Our Lady of the Valley - St. Mary, El Centro	$410.00		$4,957.00	$5,367.00
Our Lady of the Valley, El Centro	$120.00	$1,791.03	$540.00	$2,451.03
Our Mother of Confidence, San Diego	$5,124.00		$5,730.00	$10,854.00
Queen of Angels, Alpine	$1,100.00		$1,978.00	$3,078.00
Resurrection, Escondido	$3,354.00		$21,243.00	$24,597.00
Sacred Heart, Brawley	$851.00	$380.16	$2,217.00	$3,448.16
Sacred Heart, Coronado	$1,475.00	$4,896.84	$19,716.41	$26,088.25
Sacred Heart, Ocean Beach	$2,656.00		$2,680.00	$5,336.00
San Rafael, Rancho Bernardo	$6,575.00		$56,129.00	$62,704.00
Santa Sophia, Spring Valley	$3,055.07	$600.00	$8,852.35	$12,507.42
Santa Ysabel Indian Mission, Santa Ysabel	$220.00		$550.00	$770.00
St. Adelaide of Burgundy, Campo	$160.00		$837.00	$997.00
St. Agnes, San Diego	$3,978.00		$4,624.06	$8,602.06
St. Anne, San Diego			$3,912.00	$3,912.00
St. Anthony of Padua, Imperial			$2,583.00	$2,583.00
St. Anthony of Padua, National City	$1,864.00		$3,115.00	$4,979.00
St. Brigid, San Diego	$4,206.00		$9,160.60	$13,366.60
St. Catherine Laboure, San Diego	$5,625.00		$18,258.00	$23,883.00
St. Charles Borromeo, San Diego	$1,433.00		$9,001.10	$10,434.10
St. Charles, San Diego	$3,577.00	$2,821.81	$20,289.72	$26,688.53
St. Columba, San Diego	$5,677.50		$14,025.17	$19,702.67
St. Didacus, San Diego		$637.61	$3,189.00	$3,826.61
St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Julian	$152.00		$1,145.00	$1,297.00
St. Elizabeth Seton, Carlsbad	$3,530.00		$13,884.00	$17,414.00
St. Francis of Assisi, Vista	$2,500.00	$3,115.43	$10,709.00	$16,324.43
St. Gabriel, Poway	$5,600.00		$14,297.00	$19,897.00
St. Gregory the Great, San Diego	$12,773.59	$469.54	$16,707.00	$29,950.13
St. James, Solana Beach	$1,974.00	$100.00	$7,776.00	$9,850.00
St. John of the Cross, Lemon Grove	$2,104.00	$99.25	$8,876.10	$11,079.35
St. John the Evangelist, Encinitas	$1,746.00	$1,280.00	$18,040.00	$21,066.00
St. John the Evangelist, San Diego	$1,659.00		$820.00	$2,479.00
St. Joseph Cathedral, San Diego	$950.00		$5,681.00	$6,631.00
St. Joseph, Holtville	$186.00		$466.00	$652.00
St. Joseph, Westmorland	$184.00		$0.00	$184.00
St. Jude Shrine of the West, San Diego	$5,989.18		$3,455.34	$9,444.52
St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Lakeside	$496.00		$1,389.00	$1,885.00
St. Kieran, El Cajon	$1,895.00	$3,015.11	$8,894.00	$13,804.11
St. Louise de Marillac, El Cajon	$680.00		$1,412.00	$2,092.00
St. Luke, El Cajon	$6,096.00		$11,313.00	$17,409.00
St. Margaret Mary, Brawley	$998.23		$2,504.04	$3,502.27
St. Margaret, Oceanside	$1,753.00		$9,057.00	$10,810.00
St. Mark, San Marcos	$12,846.00	$25.00	$14,409.00	$27,280.00
St. Martin of Tours, La Mesa	$8,304.61	$1,832.46	$11,941.67	$22,078.74
St. Mary Magdalene, San Diego	$3,939.00	$1,422.53	$5,797.00	$11,158.53
St. Mary, Escondido	$525.00	$104.00	$16,301.10	$16,930.10
St. Mary, National City	$2,654.00		$5,301.00	$7,955.00
St. Mary, Star of the Sea, Oceanside	$2,840.00		$10,523.77	$13,363.77
St. Maximilian Kolbe Mission, San Diego	$484.00			$484.00
St. Michael, Poway	$3,670.00	$10,170.18	$11,408.00	$25,248.18
St. Michael, San Diego	$6,524.86		$6,889.23	$13,414.09
St. Patrick, Calipatria			$963.00	$963.00
St. Patrick, Carlsbad	$1,615.00	$1,400.00	$19,205.00	$22,220.00
St. Patrick, San Diego	$235.00		$2,058.00	$2,293.00
St. Peter the Apostle, Fallbrook	$8,042.30	$1,925.41	$10,879.00	$20,846.71
St. Pius X, Chula Vista	$1,936.00	$402.02	$21,087.00	$23,425.02
St. Pius X, Jamul	$225.00		$2,552.00	$2,777.00
St. Richard, Borrego Springs	$1,510.16		$887.00	$2,397.16
St. Rita, San Diego	$1,649.00	$415.50	$4,053.00	$6,117.50
St. Rose of Lima, Chula Vista	$115.00	$1,356.83	$8,910.00	$10,381.83
St. Stephen, Valley Center	$2,968.00		$8,150.00	$11,118.00
St. Therese of Carmel, Del Mar	$5,384.00		$12,390.00	$17,774.00
St. Therese, San Diego	$3,179.00	$637.68	$13,763.00	$17,579.68
St. Thomas Indian Mission, Fort Yuma	$983.00		$610.00	$1,593.00
St. Thomas More, Oceanside	$980.00		$7,965.00	$8,945.00
St. Timothy, Escondido	$4,170.76		$7,884.40	$12,055.16
St. Vincent de Paul, San Diego	$45.00	$455.94	$9,094.04	$9,594.98
The Immaculata, San Diego	$3,443.00		$13,644.00	$17,087.00
Unspecified	$370.00	$2,790.00	$3,160.00	$6,320.00
St. Katharine Drexel Academy		$166.50		$166.50
Nazareth School		$1,965.40		$1,965.40
Notre Dame Academy		$556.17		$556.17
TOTAL	**$310,611.63**	**$54,701.47**	**$894,008.10**	**$1,259,321.20**

Spreading the Gospel Among 'Mosaic of Tribes'

By Denis Grasska


BISHOP JAMES THOPPIL

Bishop James Thoppil leads the Diocese of Kohima, located in northeastern India.

It's a region populated by what the bishop describes as "a mosaic of tribes," whose members are ethnically different from those found elsewhere in India.

The Kohima Diocese encompasses the entire Indian state of Nagaland and is inhabited by 17 major tribes, each with its own language and traditions. It is one of only three states in India with a Christian majority.

As strange as it might sound, the bishop said, the region was first evangelized by the American Baptist Church. When the ruling British government divided India into various regions, assigning each to a particular non-Catholic Christian denomination, Nagaland was awarded to the American Baptists, who sent missionaries as early as 1847.

By comparison, he said, the Catholic Church that he oversees is still "very young."

The first Catholic missionary arrived in 1908, but his efforts didn't have much success.

In late 1949, two religious sisters and a priest from Spain came to run a new hospital in Nagaland.


COURTESY DIOCESE OF KOHIMA

DEDICATION: *Bishop James Thoppil, left, on May 18 blessed the Sisters of St. Elizabeth's new St. Vianney Convent in Toluvi, a village in Nagaland, India.*

Bishop Thoppil said that the new arrivals were forbidden to evangelize, because the authorities didn't want friction with the already established Baptist community. As a result, the first recorded Catholic baptism didn't occur until December of 1952.

"Now, there are more than 63,000 Catholics in the whole diocese … and the greatest joy for us today definitely is the growth of the vocations to priesthood and religious life," said Bishop Thoppil, who is originally from Kerala, in southwestern India, but was ordained to the priesthood in Nagaland. "I already have, from these indigenous tribes, more than 78 priests. … And there are more than 250 sisters. So, vocations are flourishing."

With the Local Church operating more than 100 primary schools and about 30 secondary schools, he said, education represents "our main evangelizing means."

"The school is not in itself an end, but rather a means to evangelization," he said.

But even with the Church's expansion in the Kohima Diocese, there are challenges.

Bishop Thoppil, who delivered a mission appeal at St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach over the summer, has two projects for which he is seeking financial assistance.

One is supporting a shelter where orphaned children will receive food, lodging and an education.

Another project is building new Catholic churches in the various villages throughout his diocese.

Bishop Thoppil explained that, when multiple families decide to become Catholic, he encourages them to construct a church building of their own.

"They make it with local materials like bamboo, leaves and wood, et cetera," he said.

After several years, that first church structure will begin to decay, but the community will have proven in the interim its commitment to the faith.

At that "second phase of their faith life," the bishop said, the diocese works to help build them a church. But the diocese includes more than 200 villages, he said, and each church comes with a price tag of about $20,000 to $30,000.

For these villages, a church building is of vital importance.

With priests only able to celebrate Mass there five or six times a year, Bishop Thoppil said, these churches are for more than Mass. On other Sundays, a catechist reads the Bible and teaches, and Catholics pray and sing religious songs together. They also gather for prayer throughout the week.

"The Baptist Church is the majority there; (the Catholics) are a tiny minority in the village," explained Bishop Thoppil. "So, for them, to have a church is an identity."

'Why Are These Children Not Like Me?'

By Denis Grasska


SISTER ELENA SEVCOVA

Affiliated with the Belarusian Orthodox Church, the Sisterhood of St. Elisabeth reaches out to some of their most marginalized countrymen.

Among them are children and adults with special needs, adults recovering from homelessness and addiction, and the formerly incarcerated.

Sister Elena Sevcova is a Lay Sister of Mercy. Eventually, she hopes to be one of the nuns at St. Elisabeth Convent in the Orthodox Diocese of Minsk.

She recently spoke with *The Southern Cross* about the Sisterhood's work, what she has seen in her ministry, and the projects that need support.

One location where the Sisterhood ministers is at the National Psychiatric Clinic, which has more than 2,000 patients.

"Many of them have been rejected by their families — and the children since they've been born," Sister Sevcova said.

She acknowledged that many of these patients will never be able to lead a "normal life," but, because of their mental illness, will require care "until the last day of their life."

Members of the Sisterhood also serve at boarding houses and a rehabilitation center for those with mental health challenges.

Sister Sevcova recalled a touching moment when a young boy accompanied his mother on a visit to one of these facilities.

The boy, about 5 years old, asked her, "Why are these children not like me?"

Sister Sevcova explained that they weren't so different. Her young visitor quickly recognized that a child with special needs has "the same heart" that he does, and he suggested that he would give millions of dollars to one of the boys with special needs to make him happy.

She told the boy that money isn't enough to bring happiness. When he asked her what is, she said it's love. The little boy then walked over to a boy with special needs, around the same age as himself, and hugged him.

"And the first time for that little, sick boy, we heard a word (from him)," Sister Sevcova said.

St. Elisabeth Convent has founded


COURTESY SISTERHOOD OF ST. ELISABETH

LOVING: *Members of the Sisterhood of St. Elisabeth extend God's love through service to those on the margins, including adults and children with special needs.*

two shelters for the homeless, those addicted to drugs and alcohol, former inmates, and others on the margins. One houses more than 180 male residents, while the other is home to about 40 women. Residents receive meals, medication, and assistance with other needs.

As part of their rehabilitation, former addicts and inmates perform agricultural work, including growing crops, working in gardens and greenhouses, and livestock farming.

"They really like to do some physical work," Sister Sevcova said.

Donations will be accepted to continue construction at the rehabilitation center for women recovering from addiction, to purchase medicines and personal care items for residents of the boarding houses for children and adults with special needs, and to purchase similar items and food for residents of the rehabilitation center for men overcoming addiction.

In early 2025, Sister Sevcova said, the Sisterhood began preparations for "a huge project": a planned almshouse for elderly persons in need. The current plan envisions at least 250 people being housed there.

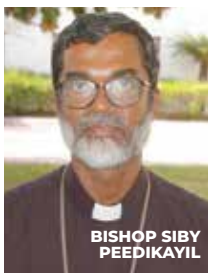
"We decided to build a big, spacious almshouse for the people who are lonely, who (have) got no support" from children or grandchildren, she said.

"This is going to be our biggest project," Sister Sevcova said.

"We decided to do this," she said, "because … we can see how many sad, old faces (are) around, and we don't want to see that."

His Legs Were Healed 'to Walk ... for the Lord'

By Denis Grasska



Bishop Siby Peedikayil, of the Diocese of Aitape, Papua New Guinea, was born into a "strong, traditional Catholic family" in Kerala, India.

"It was my childhood desire (to become a priest)," he said, "and that desire never disappeared."

In 1986, he joined the Heralds of Good News, a missionary society of apostolic life whose charism is training priests to serve where there is a shortage of vocations. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1995.

Toward the end of his seminary studies, he answered the call to serve as a missionary in the Diocese of Vanimo, Papua New Guinea.

He recalled that the bishop of Vanimo didn't sugarcoat the challenges involved in that ministry, not neglecting to acknowledge that the absence of "many roads and such conveniences" meant that missionaries would need "to be ready to walk a lot."

"When I heard all this," said Bishop Peedikayil, "I thought maybe that is a place I must go."

He explained that he had been born with a cleft foot, which was healed during his early years. Being invited to serve in a place that required much walking seemed providential.

"I thought I must use my legs in order to walk and work for the Lord," he said.

PASTORAL: *Bishop Siby Peedikayil, center, poses with parishioners during a pastoral visit. His diocese includes 32 parishes and more than 200 chapels.*

In 2021, Pope Francis appointed him to lead the Diocese of Aitape.

"Papua New Guinea … has over 600 islands and over 800 languages," said Bishop Peedikayil, "and it is a Christian country."

Aitape is one of 19 Catholic dioceses in Papua New Guinea. Evangelization efforts began in the area in 1896, and today about 75% of its population is Catholic.

"The people are strong in their faith, and they are very caring, loving and compassionate towards one another," Bishop Peedikayil said.

However, life is challenging, and the diocese has pressing needs.

Bishop Peedikayil said that the diocese, which includes 32 parishes and more than 200 chapels, is located in "one of the remote and underdeveloped regions of the country," where most of the locals are subsistence farmers.

He said that resources and infrastructure are limited, with most of the people lacking access to electricity, running water, refrigeration and good roads.

Bishop Peedikayil visited parishes in the Diocese of San Diego over the summer, making an appeal for financial assistance.

Among others things, donations from U.S. Catholics will help fund the diocese's operating expenses.

"Most of our churches, and chapels, and rectories, and schools … are dilapidated," he said. "Many of them need rebuilding or maintenance."

He said that increasing the number of priests is also of utmost importance.

Currently, he said, there are only 19 priests ministering to a Catholic population of 160,000.

"One of the urgent needs is to get more missionaries to give Jesus to the people, to keep the work of evangelization going," he said. "But, in the long run, the future of … the local Church of Aitape depends on local priests."

Bishop Peedikayil said that funds also are needed for the diocese's Catholic schools and to build a rehabilitation center for destitute psychiatric patients.

"We are all invited to participate in the work of evangelization," he said. "First of all, to bear witness to Christ and share the gift of faith that God has given us within our own family and our own parish. But also, we are invited to be concerned about the needs of the Church, (the) needs of our brothers and sisters around the world."

Sorsogon Diocese Focused on Seminarians, Priests

By Denis Grasska

Father Brian Victor M. de Castro was 12 years old when he entered the high school seminary in his home Diocese of Sorsogon in the Philippines.

But that doesn't mean that he intended to become a priest.

Father de Castro, now 30, explained that the seminary was essentially an all-boys Catholic high school, and two of his brothers also were students there.

He hadn't planned to advance to the seminary college, but rather to attend a university where he could study medicine. However, during his senior year, the bishop instituted a policy that made it impossible for him to take the necessary college entrance exams.

Father de Castro decided to "try the college seminary for just a year," all the while intending to transfer to another university after that.

"But, during that first year … almost everything changed," he said, recalling how opportunities to visit many parishes and chapels across the diocese changed his perspective on the priesthood.

VOCATIONS: *Priests and seminarians performed in a concert to promote vocations in the Diocese of Sorsogon, Philippines, where seminary formation and caring for aging priests are major diocesan priorities.*

Contrary to his original plans, he stayed at the seminary. During his third and fourth years, he became certain that priesthood was "the path that the Lord asked of me."

"Discernment is a process," said Father de Castro, who was ordained to the priesthood on July 31, 2021. "That's what the seminary is for, to just help you discern if it's for you or not."

These days, he is a formator and professor at the Sorsogon Diocese's college seminary.

Father de Castro said that forming future priests and caring for retired ones are among the biggest challenges facing the Diocese of Sorsogon, which was founded in 1951 and is located in the northern part of the Philippine archipelago.

Referring to the most recent census, he said that there are about 830,000 people living within the geographical boundaries of the diocese. Of that number, he said, about 790,000 are baptized Catholics.

Father de Castro said that farming, particularly rice and coconuts, and fishing represent the most common livelihoods in the area.

"The majority are Catholic," he said. "And, thanks be to God, there are plenty of churchgoers."

He said that there are about 77 priests still in active ministry, serving 30 parishes, each of which covers a large area that might include 15 chapels or more, where Masses are celebrated at least once a month. So, there is still a need for priests.

The diocese has three seminaries — high school, college and theology.

Father de Castro said that the diocese currently has 111 seminarians, the majority in the high school seminary.

The Diocese of Sorsogon also needs funding to support aging and sick priests.

Father de Castro said that there are 22 retired priests. Eight live at an assisted living facility, where they receive 24/7 care. He said that the retired priests range in age from about 70 to 87.

While making mission appeals last summer in the Imperial Valley, Father de Castro expressed gratitude for the generosity of U.S. Catholics, thanking them for "giving us a big help in the Philippines, not only financially, but also spiritually."