

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO



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GRACE-FILLED: The sacrament of confirmation perfects and completes the grace received at baptism. This spring, Bishop Michael Pham and Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido will devote three months to conferring this sacrament in around 80 individual liturgies, crisscrossing San Diego and Imperial counties.



Coveted Prizes

A total of 36 teams from local Catholic schools put their brains to a super test in decathlon. **Page 4**



1 Million More!

Annual Million Meal Event ups the stakes with a goal to pack 2 million meals for the hungry. **Page 6**



'Election' Day

More than 1,850 people at Rite of Election are on path to full communion with Church. **Pages 10-11**

Bishop's Easter Message

The Gift and Challenge of Resurrection

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THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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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.



Message from Bishop Michael Pham

Resurrection Is a Gift — and a Challenge

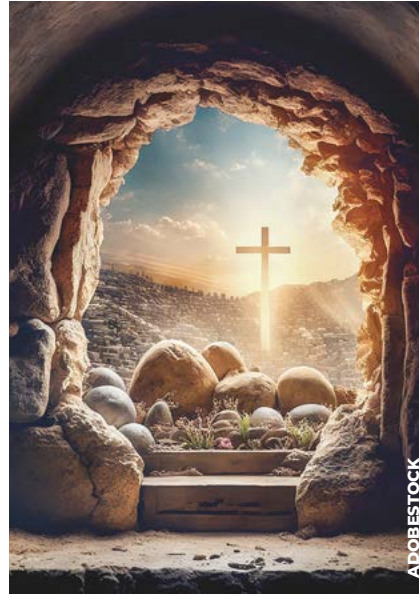
What a glorious day! A bare sanctuary is filled with the fragrance and beauty of flowers. The church smells clean and fresh. The sound of water trickling over the baptistery is back. The “Alleluia” resounds once again throughout our churches. The year has come full circle. We celebrate the most important thing we believe as Christian people: Jesus has risen from the dead!

It took the disciples of Jesus some time to fully realize what “to rise from the dead” meant. We can only imagine their confusion when the body of Jesus was missing. At first, they may have imagined that it had been stolen. That would have been even another insult and indignity to their Master. Just when their hearts had sunk to the lowest point, they were faced with another possibility. Could he have risen?

So, on this Easter, we light a new fire, we bless water and are sprinkled with it, we renew our baptismal promises. We welcome new members and are strengthened by their faith. And we glory in all that has happened.

It takes a lifetime for us to realize what happened that day almost 2,000 years ago and what happens over and over again — and will do so until the Lord Jesus returns.

When we celebrate Easter, we hold holy the memory of God's great



act in raising Jesus from the dead. We believe that God's graciousness will be extended to ourselves and that our own death will not be the final word. Our faith educates our hope that we will participate fully in Jesus' resurrection on the last day. But a question emerges: Is our faith limited to remembering Jesus' resurrection and hoping for our own on the last day? What happens between these two moments in time? What about today?

When we look at our world today, we have to close our eyes and ears not to see and hear how suffering, violence and war continue to disfigure so many people. There are people here today who can feel the wounds and suffering they have had

to endure in their own lives. What does the resurrection of Jesus say to all this?

The challenge of Easter today is to understand the history of human suffering in the light of Jesus' resurrection. This means that we have to take God's part, as it were, in protesting against the violence and the suffering that are accepted so readily as inevitable. As Christians, we have to make our protest against death in the midst of life and to bring peace to the world.

Each one of us in many ways can participate in our risen Lord's mission. For example, we are invited to be a voice for the voiceless, to support and care for the needy in all walks of life of our society. We are challenged to transmit Christian values to our children by our words and our good example. Especially — and this is something we all can do — we can pray that all people, without exception, will receive the great Easter gift of our risen Lord — God's Holy Spirit — the Spirit who alone can transform our lives and the lives of others.

As the beloved disciples of our Savior who see in the dark what no one else sees, we too believe firmly that the Spirit of our risen Lord can bring us and this world to a newness of life.

Happy Easter!

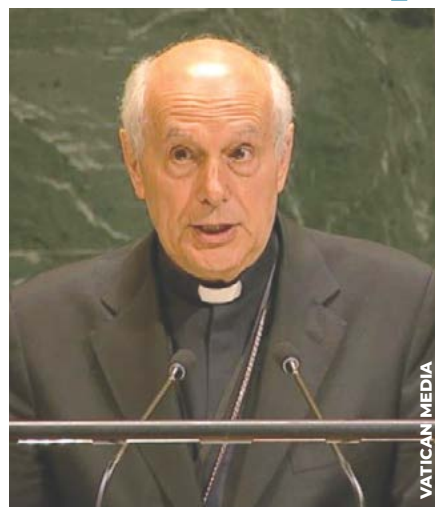
Pope Names U.S. Representative

The Southern Cross



WASHINGTON — Pope Leo XIV has appointed

Archbishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia, as the new apostolic nuncio to the United States. Archbishop Caccia, 68, has served as Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations since 2019, and succeeds Cardinal Christophe Pierre, 80, who has held the post since 2016.



Archbishop Gabriele Giordano Caccia, the new apostolic nuncio in the U.S.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, welcomed the March 7 appointment, according to a statement from the USCCB.

“It is with joy that I welcome the news that our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, has appointed as his personal representative and nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Caccia. On behalf

of my brother bishops, I wish to extend our warmest welcome and our prayerful support to him as he carries out his responsibilities across the United States, and we look forward to working with him.

“At the same time, I wish to express my sincere and prayerful appreciation

to Cardinal Pierre, who has served as nuncio to the United States for nearly a decade. I have had many opportunities to work with Cardinal Pierre over the years, particularly over the last four months through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Thank you, Your Eminence, for your tireless service to the Church in the United States, and on behalf of my brother bishops, I offer our heartfelt prayers and best wishes in your retirement.”

Archbishop Caccia was born on Feb. 24, 1958, in Milan, Italy. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1983 and has served in the Diplomatic Service to the Holy See since 1991.

Cardinal Pierre retired after a decade as apostolic nuncio. On Feb. 19, he represented Pope Leo at the installation Mass in Monterey for Bishop Ramón Bejarano, who had served as auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of San Diego. The next day, Cardinal Pierre participated in the installation Mass for Bishop James A. Misko in the Diocese of Tucson.



Confirmation Not Just a Ceremony, But a Call

SEASON: Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido conferred the sacrament of confirmation, mostly to young people, at Mission San Luis Rey Parish on May 14, 2024. He and Bishop Michael Pham will preside at around 80 confirmation liturgies from April to June across the diocese.

By Denis Grasska



An epic journey is about to begin.

The bishops of the Diocese of San Diego will soon travel the length and breadth of the 8,852-square-mile diocese, which encompasses both San Diego and Imperial counties, to confer the sacrament of confirmation at local parishes.

Over a period of three months, from April 11 through June 20, there will be 82 individual liturgies, where 3,817 people, primarily teenagers, will be confirmed. This is in addition to the 1,846 who have gone through the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) process and will receive the sacraments of initiation at their parishes during the Easter Vigil.

Bishop Michael Pham will preside at 40 of the confirmation liturgies and Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido at another 38. The diocese has one fewer bishop this year, following former Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano's installation Feb. 19 as bishop of the Diocese of Monterey.

Bishop Pham has delegated to two pastors — Father Bill Zondler, of Sacred Heart Parish in San Diego, and Eudist Father Ricardo Chinchilla, of the St. James/St. Leo Catholic Community in Solana Beach — the authority to validly confirm their own parishioners this year.

The confirmation schedule will be packed. For example, on May 3 alone, both bishops will have two confirmation liturgies each. Three different parishes hosting confirmations on the same day is not unheard of; on May 9, there will be five in a single day, including the one with Father Chinchilla presiding.

"It's just a great joy to go and visit different parishes throughout the (confirmation) season, as well as to be with the people," Bishop Pham said.



"I don't feel tired; matter of fact, I'm more energized," he said, reflecting on the restorative effect that this annual tradition has on his ministry.

He said that, when he looks out at the "confirmandi," or those who are about to be confirmed, he sees on their faces evidence of their readiness to listen to his message and of their desire to receive the sacrament with an understanding of what it is that they are undertaking.

Bishop Pham said that the teens who receive the sacrament have expressed, "through their own will, that they're ready to live in the world (and to) witness Jesus in their own environments."

The bishop said that the expressions of gratitude that he has received from some of the teens after their confirmation shows that "something (has) touched their lives."

"The schedule is very full, and there are many miles traveled," said Bishop Pulido, "but it is always worth it. During confirmation season, we see parishes come together — priests, catechists, families, sponsors and

the entire community — to celebrate something beautiful."

"Many young people and their families want to know their bishop personally," he said. "Confirmation provides a meaningful opportunity for that encounter. It creates a space where we can introduce ourselves to them, and they can introduce themselves to us. The Church is not only about celebrating rites; it is also about building relationships."

Confirmation is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Along with baptism and the Eucharist, it is one of the three "sacraments of Christian initiation."

In the Western Church, the diocesan bishop is the ordinary minister of the sacrament, which 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."

Leticia Trent, director of the diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry, explained that

confirmation is important because it "completes and strengthens the grace first received in baptism," and confirmation candidates "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in a fuller way, a seal that marks us as belonging to Christ forever."

"I often think of confirmation as a kind of spiritual strength and nourishment — like the vitamins that energize us for mission," said Trent. "The Holy Spirit equips us with courage, wisdom and the gifts we need to bring Christ's presence into the world."

Bishop Pham expressed hope that the teenagers he confirms this year will "continue to connect with the Church."

"We are social beings," he said, adding that our relationships with God and with one another "will ever grow deeper if we continue to connect and to attend Church."

"Through attending — and if they're attentive — the word of God will guide them and give them direction in their lives and to witness Christ in their journey," Bishop Pham said.

Bishop Pulido said that the sacrament "fully initiates us into the life of the Church" and gives us "a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit that strengthens us to live our faith more intentionally."

"Confirmation is not simply a ceremony," he said. "It is a call — for our young people and for all of us — to live as missionary disciples."

Bishop Pulido urged parishes to take advantage of the "great opportunity" of confirmation season to "reach out to these young people, welcome them, and help them feel that they truly belong."

"I pray that confirmation will not be an endpoint for (these teenagers)," he said, "but the beginning of a deeper relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope they come to know that they are loved, called and sent."



TEAM SPIRIT: The atmosphere at times at the Catholic Academic Junior High Decathlon, held March 7 at St. Augustine High School, could be likened to a sporting event, with banners and cheering.

By Denis Grasska



Just how exciting was the 2026 Catholic Academic Junior High Decathlon?

To answer a question with a question, have you ever heard of an awards ceremony that lasted over two hours because there was so much cheering?

“The decibels hurt all of our ears,” said Elizabeth Kramer, associate superintendent of the Diocese of San Diego’s Catholic schools and a decathlon regional coordinator.

“The energy in the room is really electric and just fun to be around,” she said, describing a scene that included “huge banners, and signs, and posters, and ... lots of cheering.”

At the diocesan-level decathlon event, which was held March 7 at St. Augustine High School, 36 teams from local Catholic elementary schools competed for the honor of representing the diocese at the national-level of the competition, which was to be held virtually on March 20.

For the second year in a row, St. Michael’s School won first-place-overall. Last year, the school went on to earn fourth-place-overall nationally.

Second- and third-place-overall went to Good Shepherd School in Mira Mesa and the Gold Team from St. Patrick School in Carlsbad, one of two teams the school sent to the competition.



WINNERS: The team from St. Michael’s School took first-place-overall at the diocesan level and went on to represent the diocese at the national competition.

There were two full-team events — the Logic Quiz and the Super Quiz — and eight individual subject tests, where only one member per team participated. The first-place winners in the individual subject tests also went on to participate in the national competition.

For the Logic Quiz, all 10 students on each team were given an hour to work together to solve 20 challenging logic puzzles. For the Super Quiz, they collaborated to answer 50 multiple-choice questions about Fine Arts, Literature, Religion, Science and Social Studies.

For each subject test, individual stu-

dents were given 50 minutes to complete the multiple-choice test.

“I am extremely proud of the 355 students that worked tirelessly all year long to study in preparation for the Academic Junior High Decathlon,” said Kramer. “They showed grit, determination, perseverance, teamwork, collaboration, and a joy for the celebration of learning.”

“It was a really fun, amazing day,” she said of the diocesan-level event, “and all of the students should be proud of their accomplishments, whether they walked away with a ribbon, or a medal, or not.”

Congratulations!

St. Michael’s School won first-place in the Logic Quiz, while Good Shepherd School claimed top honors in the Super Quiz.

The first-place winners in the individual subject tests were:

Current Events: Clara Garrison, Stella Maris Academy

English: Arielle Smith, Mater Dei Catholic Elementary School’s Blue Team

Fine Arts: Makenna Mohnacky, St. Patrick School’s (Carlsbad) Gold Team

Literature: Iris Ettenhofer, St. Didacus School

Math: Nathan Lee, St. Michael’s School

Religion: Emilio Garcia Cora, St. Mary’s School (El Centro) Team 1

Science: Evelyn Ceschini, St. Pius X School (Chula Vista) Blue Team


Social Studies: Maria Joby, St. Michael’s School

For more information, visit catholicajhd.org or email ekramer@sdcatholic.org.



Vibrant Event Celebrates Young Church

By Denis Grasska

 San Diego Catholic Youth Day will be held April 11.

Hosted by the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, the annual event will take place at Cathedral Catholic High School.

“This is a great opportunity for fellowship,” said Maricruz Flores Strauss, director of the Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry.

“Where their (parish) youth group might have 20 or 30 kids ... we usually have over 800 teens from all over the San Diego Diocese,” added Associate Director Evelyn Knuff, “and (participating teens) get to experience the vibrancy and the fullness of the young Church.”

This year’s theme — trilingual in English, Spanish and Latin — is “Peace, Paz, Pacem.”

Flores Strauss explained that the theme was inspired by Pope Leo XIV’s first words to the world after his election — a quotation from the Risen Jesus — “Peace be with you all.”

Knuff said that, in speaking with youth ministers and the youth themselves, one thing that “always comes up” is that teens feel “overwhelmed, and stressed, and anxious.”

“We wanted to echo Pope Leo’s words, but also the words of Jesus him-



BREAK INTO SONG: Praise-and-worship music is a recurring feature of San Diego Youth Day, an annual event for teenagers that will be held April 11 at Cathedral Catholic High School.



Father Agustino Torres

self, of saying, ‘Peace be with you,’ to bring peace into the chaos that they’re experiencing,” she said.

The keynote speaker will be Father

Agustino Torres, a member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and founder of the youth and young adult ministry *Corazón Puro*.

The schedule will include various faith-based workshops and will feature live praise-and-worship music performed by The Scally Brothers. There will also be Eucharistic adoration and opportunities for confession and for visiting various Catholic exhibitors. The day will conclude with a 5:30 p.m. Mass celebrated by Bishop Michael Pham.

One workshop will focus on St.

Francis of Assisi, in honor of the 800th anniversary of his death, which is being observed in 2026 throughout the Universal Church.

Service and social justice will be covered by another workshop, to be presented by a group of local teens who participated in a mission trip to Ghana last year. They will share their experiences and explain how teens can serve in their local communities if they are unable to go on an international trip.

The Scally Brothers will present a breakout session, during which they will share their own faith journeys and lead the teens in praise-and-worship.

There will be separate vocations panels for boys and girls, and there also are plans for a “soccer clinic,” through which the teens will learn how faith and sports can work together.

Knuff said that San Diego Youth Day is “always a really fun, high-energy day.”

“Teens get a different setting than their parish that they might go to every week,” she said, “and get to worship the Lord and hear about faith in a different way.”

The cost to attend is \$50 per participant. Advance registration is required. For more information, email tsotelo@sdcatholic.org or call (858) 490-8260.



2 MILLION MEALS EVENT

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MATTHEW 25:35

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JUNE 13TH & 14TH, 2026

Cathedral Catholic High School

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Deacons Seek Help to Pack 2 Million Meals

By Denis Grasska



This year's Million Meal Event is shaping up to be the biggest yet.

When it returns to Cathedral Catholic High School on Saturday, June 13, and Sunday, June 14, for its fifth year, the goal won't be to pack just 1 million meals for hungry people in San Diego, Tijuana and Africa.

It won't even be the more ambitious goal of 1.5 million meals undertaken in 2024, before reverting to 1 million last year.

At the request of Bishop Michael Pham, organizers plan to pack 2 million meals this year.

"We're not going to say no to that, for sure. He's the boss; he wants it, we'll get it," Deacon Mike Daniels, of St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach, said of the bishop's request.

The Million Meal Event is a charitable project of the diocese's permanent deacons, who promote it at their parishes, in collaboration with the non-profit organization Kids Around the World and Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego.

Since the beginning, Kids Around the World has provided raw materials and equipment. Catholic Charities, which gives support with logistics, promotion and volunteer coordination, began its involvement with last year's installment.

About 500,000 meals will be distributed in Tijuana and another 500,000 shipped to Zambia. The additional



MAKING MEALS: Volunteers at the Million Meal Event work in assembly-line fashion to fill food packets with red lentils, rice, dried vegetables, and vitamins.

1 million meals this year will be kept locally, where Catholic Charities will distribute them to food pantries in San Diego and Imperial counties through its Emergency Food Distribution Network + program.

The network includes 21 distribution sites, including 14 Catholic parishes and Cathedral Catholic High School.

"Food insecurity in San Diego County and Imperial County continues to be a serious and growing challenge," said Appaswamy "Vino" Pajanor, CEO of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego. "Rising housing costs, inflation, and reductions in SNAP benefits have made it increasingly difficult for many households to afford groceries."

"That is why the additional 1 mil-

lion meals staying local are so important," he said. "These meals will help strengthen local food pantries, keep shelves stocked, and expand support to families, students and seniors across our region."

Fulfilling Bishop Pham's request to pack 2 million meals will mean raising about \$600,000 to purchase the necessary supplies. ("That's a challenge right there," Deacon Daniels said.) It will also mean signing up about 5,000 volunteers. ("That's a lot of people," the deacon acknowledged.)

"But if we spread it out to the entire diocese, it's not too much for each parish to help out," said Deacon Daniels, who noted that people can already register and make donations at millionmealevent.org.

Volunteers will serve in 2.5-hour

shifts, working in assembly-line fashion to fill food packets with red lentils, rice, dried vegetables, and vitamins. Each packet makes six meals. There will be two shifts on Saturday, from 8:30 to 11 a.m. and from 1 to 3:30 p.m., and one on Sunday, from 12:30 to 3 p.m.

Along with food-packers, volunteers are also needed to serve as table captains, who supervise the other volunteers at their assigned table, and as box runners, who carry boxes of the various ingredients to each table to replenish their supplies. Other volunteers will set up tables and canopies on Friday morning and clean up on Sunday afternoon.

Deacon Daniels recalled the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus describes the Last Judgment and says that our eternal fate will be determined by how we reached out to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger in our midst, the naked, the ill and the imprisoned.

The Million Meal Event is "a chance to really live that Matthew 25 message of helping those that need help," he said.

And it's fun, too, he said, referencing the festive atmosphere that permeates the event, where food-packers do their work to the accompaniment of upbeat pop music played by a DJ.

"People are just dancing and having a good time," he said, "and it's a really joyful place to be."

For more information, to register or donate, visit millionmealevent.org.



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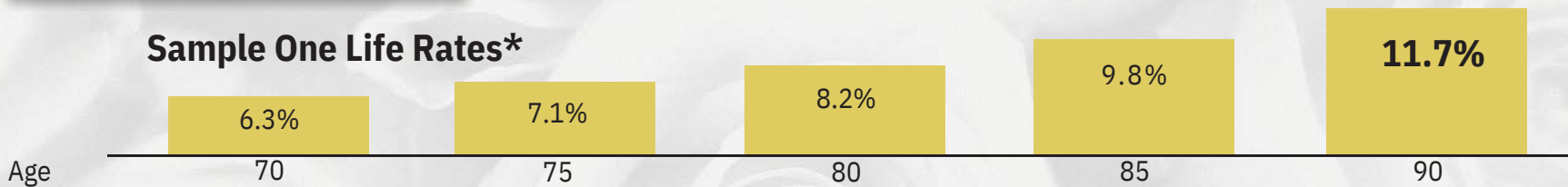
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Unpacking Faith: Miracle of Resurrection

By Denis Grasska



Easter will be celebrated on Sunday, April 5, this year.

What is Easter?

Easter is the solemnity celebrating the Resurrection of the Lord, when Jesus rose from the dead after his death by crucifixion on Good Friday. It is not only the most important liturgical celebration of the year, but also commemorates the core of the Christian faith: Jesus' victory over sin and death, which opened for us the possibility of eternal life with God.

Just how significant is this celebration?

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul puts it bluntly: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. ... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all" (1 Cor 15:17-19).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is similarly emphatic, explaining in Paragraph 1169 that Easter "is not simply one feast among others, but the 'Feast of feasts,' the 'Solemnity of solemnities.'"

The *Catechism* explains, "The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ's works and teachings. All truths, even those most inaccessible to human reason, find their justification if Christ by his Resurrection has given the definitive proof of his divine authority, which he had promised" (Paragraph 651).



HE IS RISEN: A stained-glass window at St. Didacus Church depicts Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to St. Mary Magdalene on Easter morning.

Where is it found in the Bible?

Accounts of Jesus' resurrection can be found near the conclusion of all four Gospels — the 28th chapter in Matthew's, 16th chapter in Mark's, 24th chapter in Luke's, and 20th chapter in John's.

Why isn't Easter celebrated on the same day every year?

The date of Easter is based on the solar and lunar cycles. Each year, it takes place on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. This means that it can be as early as March 22 or as late as April 25.

When does Easter begin and end?

Easter isn't just one day. It's actually a 50-day liturgical season that starts at nightfall on Holy Saturday (April 4 this year) with the Easter Vigil, a beautiful liturgy that begins outside the church with the blessing of a blazing fire that is used to light the Paschal Candle.

The candle, which represents the risen Christ as the "Light of the World," will stand in the sanctuary throughout the Easter season. Outside of the Easter season, the Paschal Candle resides next to the baptismal font, symbolizing the light of Christ received at baptism. During funerals, it is placed next to the coffin or cremated remains, symbolizing our hope in the resurrection.

Resurrection *Continued on Page 9*

THE EC Mission Conference

by The Evangelical Catholic

APRIL 30 2026
6:00 pm – 9:00 pm

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Key Notes: Jason Simon — EC President
Jamie Cleaton — Paradigm Missions Founder
Conference Host: Bob Schrimpf
Adoration: Fr. John Amsberry
Worship Leader: Echo Harbor's Lucy Spotts
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Resurrection *Continued from Page 8*

The Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, when Jesus bodily ascended to Heaven 40 days after his resurrection, falls during the Easter season. Though traditionally celebrated on a Thursday, many dioceses (including San Diego) transfer it to the following Sunday. This year, that will be Sunday, May 17.

The Easter season concludes with Pentecost, 50 days after Easter Sunday. (“Pentecost” originates from a Greek word meaning “50th.”) This solemnity, which will be observed on May 24 this year, commemorates the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in Jerusalem.

What is the Easter Octave?

Christ’s momentous victory over death is not limited to a one-day celebration, but extends over eight joyful days. The eight days from Easter Sunday to the Sunday that follows are regarded as the Octave of Easter. (“Octave” is derived from a Latin word meaning “eight.”)

All eight of these days are classified as solemnities, the highest rank of liturgical feasts. In fact, liturgically, the eight days are treated as a single day, as if Easter Sunday itself were stretched out to last a full week. The Masses during the octave include the Gloria, and we are dismissed with a double Alleluia.

What is Divine Mercy Sunday?

The second Sunday in the Easter Octave (April 12 this year) has been known by many names, including “Low Sunday,” “Quasimodo Sunday” and “White Sunday” (*Dominica in albis*). But, for the past 26 years, it has been more widely known by another name.



VICTORY: The Resurrection is depicted in stained glass at The Immaculata Church, signifying Jesus’ victory over death.

In the Year 2000, Pope St. John Paul II officially declared it Divine Mercy Sunday, fulfilling a request made by Jesus when he appeared to the Polish nun and mystic St. Faustina Kowalska in Poland during the 1930s.

What’s special about Divine Mercy Sunday?

According to St. Faustina, Jesus said, “The soul that will go to confession and receive Holy Communion (on Divine Mercy Sunday) shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment.” That includes the time that one would have to spend in Purgatory.

Additionally, Pope John Paul granted a plenary indulgence to the faithful who participate in devotions held in a church or chapel for Divine Mercy Sunday, as well as for those who, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding “a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus,” such as “Merciful Jesus, I trust in You.”

The usual conditions for plenary indulgences apply. These include going to confession, receiving Communion, and offering a prayer for the intentions of the pope. These conditions can be fulfilled within 20 days of performing the indulgenced act. The person seeking the indulgence also must perform the indulgenced act “in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for a sin, even a venial sin.”

Indulgences can be gained for oneself or for a soul in Purgatory.

A wealth of information about the Divine Mercy devotion can be found at thedivinemercy.org.

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BOOK-BEARERS: Parish representatives carry the Book of the Elect, which contains the names of the catechumens at their parish. They walk in procession to have the books signed by Bishop Michael Pham or Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido.

By Denis Grasska



SAN DIEGO — A massive crowd of more than 4,760 people recently filled the Jenny Craig Pavilion at the University of San Diego.

“I go to a lot of concerts, and I haven’t seen a line this long, even at most shows I go to,” said John Ledesma, a catechumen from Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá.

“It’s a very special event, and you can feel it,” he added. “It means a lot to a lot of people.”

The occasion was the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, the annual diocesan liturgy where those enrolled in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) process are presented to the bishop and declared ready to receive the sacraments of initiation in their parishes during the upcoming Easter Vigil. It was held on March 1 this year.

“I really had no idea of how many people would actually just be there,” said Larissa Castro, a catechumen from The Immaculata Parish, which is located on the USD campus.

“It’s an entire basketball stadium’s worth of people. It’s really humbling to have that many people be there to welcome you into a faith,” said Castro, who described it as “overwhelming in the best way.”

Aiden Morgan Paterson, another catechumen from Mission San Diego, said that attending the Rite of Election was “incredibly meaningful.”

“All the people coming here today, everybody dressed up,” he said. “It was fun to walk in and mesh with the crowd, and it really felt like joining something ... much bigger than myself.”

In attendance were 611 adult catechumens and 1,242 adult candidates from 76 parishes and faith communities; 102 child catechumens and candidates; 1,803 godparents and sponsors; 319 parish team members; and 687 guests.

Catechumens are those who are

preparing for baptism, confirmation and First Communion. Candidates, who are already baptized Christians, are seeking only confirmation and, if they haven’t already received it, First Communion.

This year marked the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that the Rite of Election was held as a single ceremony, attended by all participating parishes. In recent years, the practice had been to hold multiple ceremonies. For example, last year, the diocese held six liturgies — five at Good Shepherd Parish in Mira Mesa and one at St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Imperial.

Bishop Michael Pham, presiding over his first Rite of Election since his installation last July as bishop of San Diego, referenced the size of the assembly in his homily.

He invited those in attendance to consider that, while the Diocese of San Diego alone was able to attract “a great number like this,” similar gatherings were being held in dioceses throughout the country and around the world.

“Imagine so many being touched by the grace of God, the person of Jesus Christ, wanting to enter into (the) Catholic Church,” the bishop said. “That is so beautiful for us to reflect upon this Lenten season.”

Bishop Pham identified Lent as “a time for all of us to return to the Lord with our whole hearts and our whole minds.”

“In prayers and in silence, we hear the voice of Jesus,” the bishop continued, explaining that we can hear Jesus telling us several things. Among them is the call to repent and believe in the Gospel and to live out the Beatitudes, being humble, meek and finding ways to be peacemakers in a world that is “full of conflicts and problems.”

He said, “We hear the voice of Jesus (saying), ‘Remain in my love. I’m with you to the end of time. Remain in my love to care for one another, to care for the vulnerable, the weak, the homeless, the poor, the immigrants, the refugees, and the migrants, (who) are facing difficult times’; they need the voice of

us today.”

Bishop Pham concluded with words of encouragement and welcome for the catechumens in attendance, who, during the Rite of Election are officially declared to be no longer catechumens, but “members of the elect,” those who will be “initiated into the sacred mysteries.”

“Every time we gather together at the altar of the Lord, celebrating the sacrament of the Eucharist,” said Bishop Pham, we experience “the foretaste of the banquet of the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth. And I hope and pray that the elect today will come and join us at the Easter Vigil ... to be welcomed into the Church as you taste the banquet of the Lord.”

The significance of the Rite of Election wasn’t lost on David Weintraub, of Mission San Diego Parish, who attended this year’s liturgy as Ledesma’s godparent.

“It means a lot. Last year, I was baptized, became a Catholic, and it just changed my whole life,” he said, sharing that he had regularly attended Sunday Mass with his wife and chil-



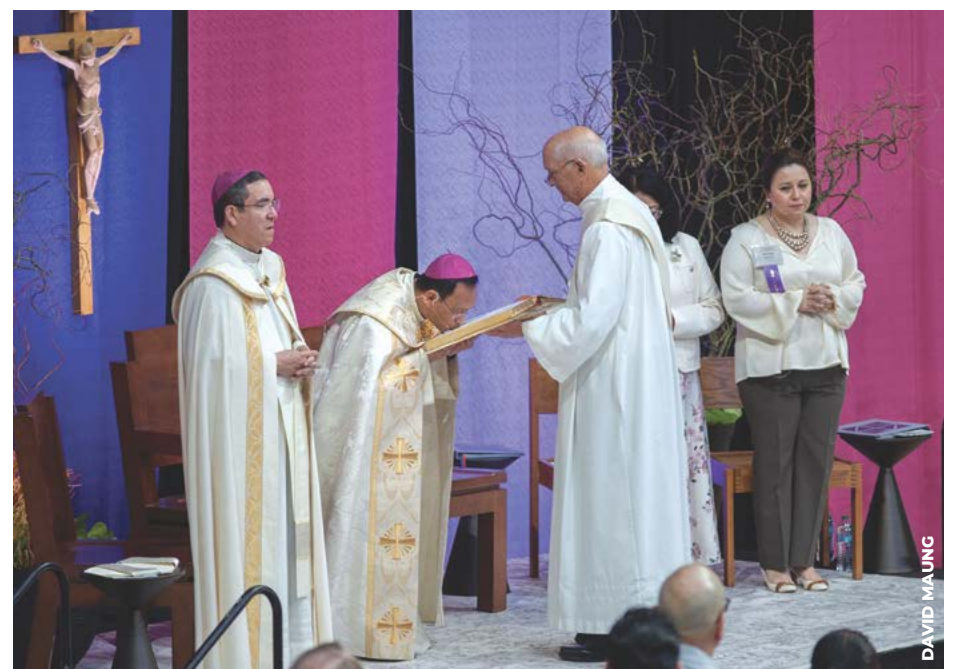
MULTITUDE: A massive crowd of about 4,760 people was held March 1 at the University of San Diego’s Jenny Craig Pavilion.

dren, but had never been baptized himself.

Reflecting on why the new convert decided to serve as a godparent this year, he said, “I didn’t want to just get baptized, and that was it. I wanted to continue to grow in the faith.”

“I’m really enjoying watching John

Rite Continued on Page 11



REVERENCE: Bishop Michael Pham kisses the Book of the Gospels, held by Deacon Kevin Murray of Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado, before delivering his homily. Also pictured are Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido; Leticia Trent, director of the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry; and Chancellor Marioly Galván.



Being Touched of God'

DAVID MAUNG

People watch as Bishop Michael Pham and Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido sign the Book of the Elect for every parish that brought catechumens to the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion. The event was held at the University of Phoenix Arena.

Rite *Continued from Page 10*

go through the process and helping him any way I can," Weintraub said.

In 2024, Joseph Burger attended the event as a catechumen from Mission San Diego. This year, he was back as a godparent for catechumen Quinn Fogel.

He said, "I'm in a kind of unique place ... because I remember all the excitement that I had going into that moment

and leading up to ultimately receiving the sacraments at the Easter Vigil."

"There was just so much excitement," he recalled, "and, so, I feel like I can channel that a little bit into being here for Quinn."

He shared his pride in Fogel's commitment over the past year and a half to the OCIA process, which he has balanced with his responsibilities as a full-time student and active-duty Marine.

Burger said, "This guy has put in a lot of work ... He's got a lot of different things that he's had to persevere through to make it to today."

Also seated with the group from Mission San Diego, Jerry Bianco said that this Rite of Election was a "special" one for him.

"I'm sponsoring my younger brother to complete his initiation into the Church," he said, "and I'm commuting

every week (of Lent) from Phoenix to be here on his journey."

He described it as his "Lenten sacrifice" to make a 600-mile round trip each weekend to accompany his brother, Johnny, a candidate, on the road to full communion with the Catholic Church.

"It's inspiring to watch him go through it," he said, "and it's an honor to be part of that."



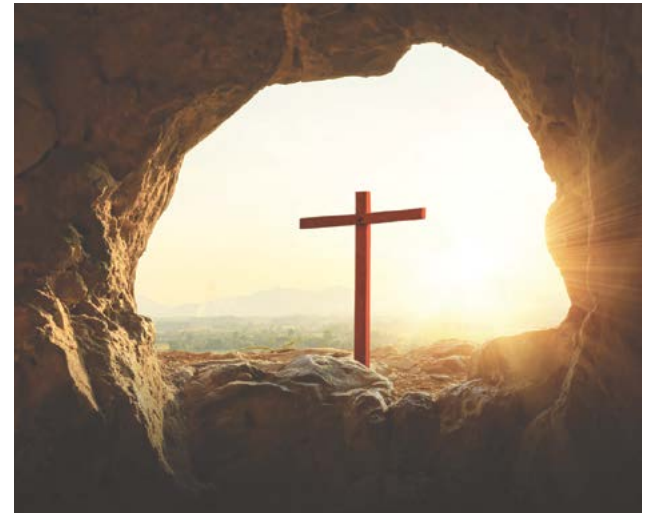
DAVID MAUNG

ACCOMPANIED: During the Rite of Election, godparents and sponsors placed their hands on the shoulder of the catechumen or candidate they have walked alongside during the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults process.



DAVID MAUNG

JOYFUL: Smiles could be seen on the faces of many, for whom a sometimes long spiritual journey has finally led them to a spiritual home in the Catholic Church.



Crucifixion Thorn, formally known as *castela emoryi*, is located near Ocotillo, serving as a site for Lenten reflection this year.

Bishops Call Us to Ecological Conversion

By Christina Bagaglio Slentz, Ph.D.



On the eve of Ash Wednesday, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued “An Invitation to Ecological Conversion for U.S. Catholics,” encouraging discernment and action during our Lenten season.

As we approach Holy Week, a time of sacred reflection, opening our hearts to this call might serve as a valuable spiritual exercise, whether you are well-versed in ecological spirituality or brand new to it.



Scan to read the full USCCB invitation to ecological conversion and concluding prayer



Our Lady of La Vang statue at Holy Spirit Parish, San Diego

“This time of Lent reminds us that we are in need of conversion,” the bishops’ invitation begins. “Indifference and distance from one another have led to devastating consequences for God’s creation, including the poor.”

Most of us are pretty good about avoiding intentional harm to God’s creation and the human family, but indifference and distance might sneak up on us. Consider:

- When did you last express gratitude for the gift of creation?
- Do you actively seek awareness to see creation from God’s point of view — both the beauty and the suffering?
- Have you reflected on the ripple effects of your life choices on the poor and vulnerable who share our common home?

As the document suggests, “we rarely pause to listen to ‘the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor,’ nor do we regularly reflect on how our choices impact our brothers and sisters around the world.”

Our own Bishop Michael Pham

writes, “As one of the most biodiverse dioceses in the United States, the Diocese of San Diego recognizes the great responsibility we have been given to steward the vast richness of our region; understanding a thriving integral ecology makes human flourishing possible. Through the gifts of the earth, we are able to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and clothe the naked — responding to the cry of the poor and vulnerable.”

Moving from Reflection to Conversion

The practice of the Ignatian Examen moves us spiritually from gratitude to awareness, to understanding, to conversion, at which point we make a choice to turn our behavior around, as the word “convert” suggests — “con” meaning “with,” and “vert” referencing a vertex, the point from which two lines travel in different directions. What is this new direction of ecological conversion? How might we shift our behavior toward right relationship with all of God’s creation?

Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV hold up the Seven Goals of “Laudato Si,” areas for action that offer us a pathway to ecological justice and reconciliation with our Creator. They are:

1. Response to the Cry of the Earth
2. Response to the Cry of the Poor
3. Ecological Economics
4. Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles
5. Ecological Education
6. Ecological Spirituality
7. Community Resilience and Empowerment

The USCCB call beseeches us, “We must each make daily choices that reflect our conversion to better care for God’s creation and the people, communities, and livelihoods that are interconnected. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and many organizations offer regular opportunities for individuals to express and practice conversion, in their own daily lives and through ongoing advocacy. We invite you to prayerfully discern how you, your parish, and your community might participate ...” The invitation closes with a beautiful prayer, the final step in the process of the Ignatian Examen.



San Diego is the most biodiverse county in the continental U.S.

Our Response: Accompaniment on the Journey

The Creation Care Ministry can help with charting a new course to ecological conversion. Thursday, April 9, we will offer a “Laudato Si” Action Planning workshop at the Pastoral Center to guide your household, your parish, or your school toward right relationship with all of creation. Find more information and register for this free event at bit.ly/LSAP9APR26. We begin with an optional pizza dinner at 5:30 p.m. and start the presentation at 6 p.m. Learn how to find Catholic resources for this journey, how to discern steps forward for your community, and how to participate with the Vatican’s “Laudato Si” Action Platform.

Join the diocese, the University of San Diego, the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, Mater Dei Catholic High School, and 12 amazing parishes as enrollees on the platform in answer to our bishops’ call.

“This Lent is an opportunity for discernment and action. May we quiet our hearts and enter the solitude of the desert, that we might hear the voice of God and listen to the cries of his children around the world whose livelihoods are impacted by our own actions and lifestyles. May we each reflect deeply — individually and as communities — and discern how to act. How are we being called to enter the desert of Lent and discern how the Spirit invites us to act to protect the book of nature, God’s creation?”

— USCCB, “An Invitation to Ecological Conversion”



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

Priest Brings Border Experience to Valley

By Roman T. Flores

CALEXICO — The new associate director of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish is no stranger to serving on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Diocese of San Diego assigned Father Pedro Lucia Reyes, who turns 56 on April 3, to Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish last September. Previously, he served at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Tijuana.

He is a member of the Piarist Fathers, an order dedicated to educating youth and those in need.

As associate pastor, he assists at Mass, administers sacraments and helps in Bible study, among other duties, serving the parish's more than 2,000 families. He also assists at Our Lady of Guadalupe Academy and at Vincent Memorial Catholic High School.

"The people of OLG are very wonderful, and I hope to continue to share Christ with the youth, opening their eyes to the possibilities God has in store for them," Father Lucia said.

"Our scholastic, religious and faith missions must be strengthened; we, as pastors don't just do the bare minimum," he said. "We hope the community participates and supports us as we minister to them in all of their necessities."

Born in San Luis Acatlán, Guerrero, Mexico, Father Lucia credits his humble home, which set a good example



AT HOME: Father Pedro Lucia Reyes brings a deep experience of serving on both sides of the border to his new assignment as associate pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Calexico.

for him in the faith, as fostering his interest in becoming a priest.

"My father was a fieldworker who cultivated the earth, and my mother was a housewife, taking care of us, the children," he said, noting that there were four children in the family.

He said that his father was a very devout Catholic, always in prayer. "So that planted the little seed in me to follow God."

He said that he, too, learned to live

devoutly.

"Once I became older, I felt the call to a vocation in religious life. God called and ... showed me, through my parents, how to follow him, following the good path and a life of prayer."

In 1992, he moved to Los Angeles, where he lived in a religious community of young men discerning to become Piarist priests. He went to Celaya, in the Mexican state of Guanajuato, in 1998 with another Piarist religious

community, made up of men from all over that country and Puerto Rico, where he became a novice at age 28.

"We learned the charisms of the order, the mission of the Piarists and the writings of our founder, St. Joseph Calasanz."

In 2000, he studied philosophy in Mexicali and theology in Tijuana in 2003. He was sent to minister in a group home in Costa Rica, guiding young men who otherwise would live on the streets.

He returned to Tijuana to continue his studies in 2008. He was ordained at San Pablo Apóstol in Mexicali, on Dec. 5 of that year. His first assignment as a priest was in Mexicali, also in 2008, where he became a primary school teacher.

"For me, that was a very beautiful time of service," he said. "It is important to be near the youth of all ages, to educate and serve them."

Father Lucia said he hopes the faithful utilize Lent as a time of grace.

"The Holy Spirit will give us guidance and lead us to Christ, many times in reflective silence, if we let him and do not fear getting closer to God," he said. "I pray that God renews us in Lent, guides us to Easter, to the moment of his resurrection, and makes us a new creation in the walk with Christ."

Meet Father Kizito Uzoma Ndugbu, new at Our Lady of the Valley Parish, in the May issue of The Southern Cross.



WELCOME HOME: A VETERAN'S RETREAT





All military men and women and their adult family members are invited to Coming Home: A Veteran's Retreat at Mission San Luis Rey, led by Br. Ed McKenzie—a one-day retreat focused on healing, reflection, and community. Through prayer, quiet conversation, and shared stories, veterans are invited to gently lay down the "warrior survival skills" of service life and rediscover peace, connection, and hope.

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Sisters Now Affiliated with Augustinians

The Southern Cross

 The Augustinian Family has gotten bigger.

In an official notice shared March 18 by the Province of St. Augustine in California, the Order of St. Augustine announced the “formal aggregation” of the Sisters of Nazareth.

With the aggregation, which went into effect on Aug. 28, 2025, the Sisters of Nazareth “enter into full spiritual communion with the Augustinian Family,” and their congregation “shares in the spiritual goods of the Order, including the indulgences, privileges and graces granted by the Apostolic See to the Order of St. Augustine,” the news release said.

“This aggregation signifies not only a canonical act, but a profound spiritual communion,” said Augustinian Father Barnaby Johns, prior provincial of the Province of St. Augustine in California.

“It affirms a close religious bond rooted in the teaching of our holy father St. Augustine and strengthens our shared call to seek God together, with one soul and one heart turned toward him,” said Father Johns, who noted that the Sisters of Nazareth, like the Augustinian friars, live their community life guided by the Rule of St. Augustine.

The Sisters of Nazareth remain “a completely independent congregation” after the aggregation, acknowledged Sister Rose Hoye, regional superior.



'FAMILY' PHOTO: The Sisters of Nazareth have been “aggregated” to the Order of St. Augustine, making them part of the Augustinian family. Local sisters and Augustinian friars celebrated the Affiliation at a dinner Jan. 28. Pictured, from left, are: Barbara Anne Crowley, CEO of Nazareth Care; Sister Gertrude Hennessey; Sister Chitondezyo Nyoni; Augustinian Father Gary Sanders; Sister Rose Hoye; Sister Loreta Matila; Sister Marie McCormack; Sister Vera Chan; and Augustinian Father Barnaby Johns.

Explaining what aggregation means to her congregation, she said, “We’ve always had a strong affection ... for the Augustinians, and now it’s kind of solidified in that we’re part of the same family.”

Sister Hoye anticipates that the sisters will be “united with the Augustinians, not just here locally, but throughout the world,” and will collaborate in “sharing more of the teachings and values of St. Augustine.”

Father Johns said that Bishop Michael Campbell, a retired Augustinian bishop in the Augustinian Province of England and Scotland, and London-based Sisters of Nazareth made a request to the Augustinians’ Prior General in Rome for the aggregation.

This decision, at the international

level, has ramifications for the Diocese of San Diego, where both the Order of St. Augustine and the Sisters of Nazareth have an active presence and already enjoyed a close bond with one another.

The Augustinians run St. Augustine High School, which was founded in 1922, as well as St. Patrick Parish, both in the North Park neighborhood of San Diego. The Sisters of Nazareth run Nazareth House of San Diego, a Catholic assisted-living community, and nearby Nazareth School, an elementary school next-door to Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá.

Local Augustinian friars and Sisters of Nazareth celebrated the aggregation on Jan. 28 with a dinner held on the campus of St. Augustine High School. “We’ve always had a very good

relationship with (the Sisters of Nazareth), but it’s strengthened, particularly now,” Father Johns said.

When Father Johns became the provincial, he said, one of his goals was to bring Augustinian sisters to California.

“I’ve been looking at opportunities to invite our Augustinian sisters, even maybe creating a community of Augustinian sisters,” he said. “But out of the sky drops this aggregation.”

Through the aggregation, he said, the Sisters of Nazareth “become part of the fabric of our Augustinian life.”

He envisions a future where the two groups attend important celebrations together. He said the Augustinians regularly pray for their deceased members, and this aggregation means that deceased Sisters of Nazareth will share in those prayers.





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New Vicar for Ethnic Communities Named

By Denis Grasska

 **Father Christopher Bongato has been appointed diocesan Vicar for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities.**

He succeeds former Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano, who held that position prior to his installation Feb. 19 as the sixth bishop of Monterey, California.

Over the past year, Father Bongato served under Bishop Bejarano as secretary of the Office for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities, which works with 21 distinct cultural groups.

These groups include African American, African, Brazilian, Chinese, Filipino, German, Guam-Chamorro, Indian, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Korean, Laotian, Kumeyaay (Native American), Luiseño (Native American), Samoan, Tongan, Ukrainian and Vietnamese Catholics, as well as Spanish-speaking Catholics.

Father Bongato views his new role as “a great responsibility.” As secretary, he attended Masses hosted by various cultural communities that make up the Local Church; as vicar, he takes a leadership role in planning events like the annual Pentecost Mass for All Peoples, a multilingual liturgy followed by a



NEW SUPPORT: Father Christopher Bongato, center, participated in the Mass on Jan. 18, 2026, to honor Dr. Martin Luther King’s Call to Service, at St. Rita Church in San Diego. Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano, left, celebrated the Mass, with Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido and assisted by Deacon Robert Booth.

cultural festival where various ethnicities share their traditional cuisine.

About 2,000 people are expected to attend the next Pentecost Mass, when it is held at 11 a.m., Saturday, May 23, at Cathedral Catholic High School.

In addition to his work as vicar, Father Bongato also serves as the associate pastor of St. Martin of Tours Parish

in La Mesa. In July, he will transfer to a new parish assignment as associate pastor of St. Thomas More Parish in Oceanside.

Father Bongato said that Bishop Michael Pham’s vision is for the diocese to be not merely “multicultural,” but “intercultural,” so that “we can all be the People of God together.”

The new vicar said his duties will include meeting with the leaders of Catholic cultural communities, “seeing how the diocese can continue to work with them and ... how we can better integrate these communities within our diocese.”

Father Bongato explained that, when one cultural community has a celebration, “everybody is invited.”

“We are Catholic, we are universal ... It’s not just one cultural group, but we’re all called to worship together,” he said.

Father Bongato, who was ordained to the priesthood in 2023, got an up-close look at the diocese’s work with Ethnic and Intercultural Communities early on. While still a seminarian, he spent a pastoral year at Good Shepherd Parish in Mira Mesa, working alongside the pastor, then Father (now Bishop) Pham, who was Vicar for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities then.

“It was already in my heart at that time that, eventually, I would love to be able to walk with these different communities, just to be able to celebrate Mass with them,” said Father Bongato. “I really thought that would be 10 or 15 years down the road, but here I am.”



This Easter send a loving, meaningful message to someone in Hospice care.

At this time I hope you remember the friendship we shared with joy and love. Take the joy and love with you as you journey on. Fill your heart with love.

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Ministry Leader at National City Parish Had Lasting Impact

The Southern Cross



Martha Guido was “a worthy worker in the Lord’s harvest, wherever He called her.”



Martha Guido

That was how her husband, Javier, described her in a tribute prepared for her funeral Mass Feb. 21 at St. Anthony of Padua Church in National City.

Guido died on Feb. 4 from cancer. She was 70.

Over the past two decades, she and her husband had firmly established two ministries, Prayer and Life Workshops and Family Catechesis, at St. Anthony of Padua Parish, where they were parishioners since 2002.

Martha Guido was born in Santiago Ixcuintla, Nayarit, where she met and married Javier. The couple moved to Chula Vista in 1999.

In 2005, the Guidos began their long association with Prayer and Life Workshops, a Catholic lay ministry founded in Santiago, Chile, by Father Ignacio Larrañaga. The workshops, which are led by trained lay “Guides,” teach participants how to grow deeper in prayer.

In 2008, the couple attended the International Convention of Prayer and Life Workshops in Monterrey, Mexico, as workshop leaders. In early 2009, they participated in a Formation School for Guides. Following a

commissioning Mass in June 2010 at St. Anthony of Padua Church, they served as Guides for 16 years.

“The Lord completely transformed our lives,” Javier said. “He ... sent us to be his witnesses and missionaries in this great evangelizing work of the Prayer and Life Workshops.”

He said that the workshops that he and Martha led have “transformed the lives of many people.”

In 2009, the Guidos also began their involvement with Family Catechesis, a program that prepares children for First Communion. Parents are trained to catechize their children at home and, as a result, the whole family is evangelized.

Martha Guido served as coordinator of Family Catechesis at St. Anthony of Padua Parish for seven years, from 2009 to 2016.

In 2011, the couple accompanied Father Emmet Farrell on a trip to Peru, the birthplace of Family Catechesis, to observe how it was practiced there. The couple returned with new materials and experiences, Father Farrell said, that gave Family Catechesis “a great boost that still prevails in the parish.”

Father Farrell, who presided over Guido’s funeral Mass, said that she was leading a Prayer and Life Workshop on Feb. 2, when she collapsed as a result of the cancer weakening her body.

“It can be said,” he reflected, “that she gave the last drop of her energy working in this ministry.”

Obituary

Msgr. Roger A. Lechner

Msgr. Roger A. Lechner, a retired priest of the Diocese of San Diego, died March 11. He was 85.



Born in Brawley, Msgr. Lechner was ordained to the priesthood on May 19, 1966.

After assignments as an associate pastor, he was named the founding pastor of St. Stephen Parish in Valley Center in 1981. Then, in 1987, he became pastor of Resurrection Parish in Escondido. He was pastor of Holy Spirit Parish, from 1992 until his retirement from active ministry in 2015.

Among his non-parish assignments, Msgr. Lechner served as secretary to Bishop Francis J. Furey and his successor, Bishop Leo T. Maher, from 1968 to 1973, and as vice chancellor from 1968 to 1976.

He was made a monsignor on Dec. 16, 1988.

The viewing will begin at 4 p.m., Monday, March 30, followed by a 6 p.m. Vigil Mass, at Holy Spirit Parish. The funeral Mass will be at 10 a.m., March 31, also at Holy Spirit Parish.



Mass for Souls in Purgatory



OCEANSIDE — A Mass is being offered every month for the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

It is held on the third Thursday of each month at St. Margaret Parish in Oceanside. Many priests from across North County and from St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California, have come to celebrate Mass for souls in Purgatory.

Eucharistic adoration and confessions are at 5 p.m., with Mass at 6 p.m., followed by the rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet.

For more information, call (760) 941-5560.

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A war somewhere in the world is not just a distant war. Its effects extend like waves that cross borders, economies, cultures and hearts.

We live in an era in which we know — because of science, experience and also faith — that everything is profoundly connected.

We believed that we would not once again witness conflicts with global consequences. We thought that the horrors of the past had elevated our collective consciousness and transformed relationships between peoples. However, today we see wars involving various nations, each one defending its own interests and justifying the destruction of the other for its own security.

At the same time, we live in an era in which we understand better than at any other time the interconnection among human, social, political and spiritual realities. Physicists and mystics agree on a fundamental belief: Our reality is a living network of relationships where everything is profoundly linked.

The more complicated a system, the more sensitive it becomes to tiny

Columnist

Ricardo Márquez



changes. We saw it clearly with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which caused COVID-19. This virus barely measures between 60 to 140 nanometers in diameter, a nanometer being a metric unit equal to one billionth of a meter. Something practically invisible changed the entire world, transforming our relationships, our economies and our way of life.

Something similar occurs with human suffering. In war, every death, every tear, every displacement generates waves that expand much further from where they occurred. These affect us in ways that are visible and invisible. The greater a person's sensitivity, the more they perceive these emotional and spiritual changes.

I think of the moment when Jesus experienced the weight of abandonment and loneliness in the Garden of Gethsemane: "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to

the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Pain is not the only thing that generates waves in the world. Kindness, solidarity and love also do. In the midst of conflicts — although they rarely appear in headlines — emerge innumerable gestures of humanity: homes that welcome those who are fleeing, food that is shared, volunteers that transport the wounded and the elderly, health workers that risk their lives to save the lives of others, communities that become places of refuge.

There, hope is alive. There, beats a profound sense of life. There, Jesus' message resounds: "That all of them may be one" (John 17:21). Said another way: Let us not forget that we are all united and connected.

That is why nothing is lost. Each gesture of kindness, each silent prayer, each act of service generates waves of life that strengthen, sustain and heal. Even in the midst of darkness, we can always choose to be a source of light, compassion and solidarity.

Extraordinary acts are not needed. It's enough to do the ordinary in an extraordinary way: with intention, conscience and common sense.

These wars prompt necessary questions: What are they showing us? What have we neglected? What values have

guided our decisions, as people and as societies?

To ask these questions opens the door to transformation. They invite us to look within, to awaken and undertake new ways to live and to relate as families, communities and peoples, even if the process is painful.

My gestures matter.

My decisions matter.

My prayers in the silence of my room matter.

My effort to cultivate solidarity and service matter.

We already have recommendations for these times: "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful" (Col 3:12-16).

In a world profoundly interconnected, your gestures of light matter and contribute to changing the course of history. It all begins with you.

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

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News Briefs

April Dedicated to Preventing Child Abuse

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

In 2025, more than 525,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect nationwide. In addition to that, there was an “alarming” spike in AI-related child sexual exploitation reports, soaring from 6,835 to over 440,000 according to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

Learn more this month about ways to recognize the signs of abuse and take action including prayer, by joining the campaign on all diocesan social media pages, [#sandiegochildabuseprotection2026](#), and at [sdcatholic.org/child-and-youth-protection](#).

Pajanor Elected to Catholic Charities USA’s Board

Appaswamy “Vino” Pajanor, CEO of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego, has been elected as the vice chair of Catholic Charities USA’s Board of Directors.

The board members are drawn from a cross section of the social service and corporate worlds and provide oversight and governance of the national organization and its strategic initiatives.

Catholic Charities USA supports a national network of 169 Catholic Charities agencies committed to encountering and assisting vulnerable populations, regardless of their faith.

Franciscan School of Theology Names New President

The Franciscan School of Theology (FST) has selected as its next president, Brother Keith Warner, OFM, who has spent several decades with FST.

“I feel the mission of FST in my bones. It’s been a source of inspiration and practical wisdom to me, and a great gift for my vocation,” said Brother Warner, who will start as president on July 1.

FST is a Catholic graduate school rooted in the Franciscan intellectual and spiritual tradition of the Order of Friars Minor. Located in San Diego, it has been an affiliate of the University of San Diego since 2012. The school is near the USD campus and uses its classrooms and facilities to carry out its mission, but it’s also a philosophical partner with USD.

Retrouvaille Offers Hope for Troubled Marriages

Not willing to let go of your marriage? Many couples continue to struggle, 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 assists a husband and a wife to re-awaken the love, trust and commitment that originally brought them together.

Retrouvaille retreats will be held in English and in Spanish, at separate locations, during the April 17-19 weekend.

For more information, visit [helpourmarriage-sandiego.org](#). Register for the

English retreat at (951) 259-9474 or [JoseandMary@helpourmarriage.org](#); register for the Spanish retreat at (619) 423-0182 or [Retrouspanolsd@gmail.com](#).

Children of the Immaculate Heart Holding Gala April 11

Children of the Immaculate Heart will hold its 13th annual gala from 6 to 9 p.m., Saturday, April 11, at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish.

The fundraiser has supported San Diego survivors of sex trafficking and their children with services that include housing assistance, counseling, financial tutoring, career planning, education, groceries and transportation since 2013.

The evening will include a three-course dinner, drinks, pianist, silent and live auctions, and door prizes. The guest speaker will be Crystalina Evert, founder of Women Made New and co-founder of the Chastity Project. Christopher Check of Catholic Answers will be the emcee.

Tickets are \$100 per person. RSVP is required at [childrenoftheimmaculateheart.org/events](#) or (619) 431-5537.

IVC Hosting ‘Evening of Gratitude’

The Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC) will hold its annual Evening of Gratitude on Sunday, April 26, at St. Catherine Labouré Parish.

The St. Augustine Foundation, which has been described as the philanthropic arm of the Province of St. Augustine in California, will be honored with the Madonna Della Strada Award. Chef Michel Malecot, founder of The French Gourmet restaurant,

will receive the Sheila O’Malley Vision and Dedication Award.

The evening will begin with Mass at 4 p.m., followed by a reception at 5 p.m. Tickets are \$125 each, and sponsorship opportunities are available. For more information, visit [ivcusa.org/SanDiegoEOG2026](#).

Widowed, Divorced Invited to Healing Weekend

OCEANSIDE — Beginning Experience, an international ministry that helps the widowed, divorced and separated move beyond grief, will hold its next retreat during the May 1-3 weekend 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 Retreat to Be Held in Julian

JULIAN — The Whispering Winds Women’s Auxiliary Spring Retreat will be held from May 15 to 17 at Whispering Winds Catholic Camp and Conference Center in Julian.

The theme will be “When Jesus Sees You: Encounter, Healing and Mission.”

Participants will arrive at 4 p.m. on Friday, with dinner at 6 p.m. The retreat will conclude after lunch on Sunday.

Guest speaker Anne Truant will guide retreatants on a journey of reflection about what it means to be truly seen by Christ — and how that

Briefs *Continued on Page 19*

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Priest Assignment

The Office of the Bishop has announced the following priest assignment:

Father Elmer Mandac as Moderator of the Curia, in addition to his current assignment as pastor of Good Shepherd Parish, effective immediately.

Briefs *Continued from Page 18*

encounter brings healing and sends us forth on mission.

The cost is \$240 for members of the Whispering Winds Women's Auxiliary and \$260 for non-members. Registration closes on Friday, May 8.

Register at whisperingwinds.org/womens-retreat. For more information, email laurie@whisperingwinds.org. To apply for financial aid, email chrisvilalalobos5@gmail.com.

Day Retreat Based in Carmelite Spirituality

CHULA VISTA — The Garden of Carmel Confraternity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel will hold its annual day retreat on Saturday, May 16. It will take place from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at St. Rose of Lima Parish in Chula Vista.

The theme will be St. John of the Cross' teaching on "Silence and Contemplation; Resting in God's Presence."

The retreat will be led by Father John Cordero, MMHC, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Artesia California. It will include confession, Eucharistic adoration and Benediction, and spiritual conferences, followed by Mass.

RSVP by Monday, April 20. For more information, call (619) 646-7676 or (619) 302-0027 or email aespangilinan@gmail.com.

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, visit youngcatholicprofessionals.org/chapter/san-diego.

Women Invited to Discern Vocation

Women ages 18 to 35 are invited to a discernment session to explore religious life. The weekly meetings are held at 6:30 p.m., Mondays, at Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá.

Women are invited to come and share their experience and walk with other women in discernment.

For more information, contact Sister Katia Chavez, SJS, at (760) 562-2727.



Feeding the Hungry

A ribbon-cutting Feb. 25 at the Civic Center Chula Vista Public Library (365 F St.) celebrated the opening of South Bay's first city-operated food pantry.

The pantry, which opened to the public March 4, operates out of the library. It is a partnership between the City of Chula Vista and Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego.

The pantry offers a rotating selection of food items to help address food insecurity in the Chula Vista community.

Appaswamy "Vino" Pajanor, CEO of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego, said that the new food pantry "represents a meaningful step forward in making food assistance more accessible, dignified and welcoming for all."

The pantry is part of Catholic Charities' Emergency Food Distribution Network + program, which delivers food to individuals and families through a network of 21 food distribution sites in San Diego and Imperial counties.

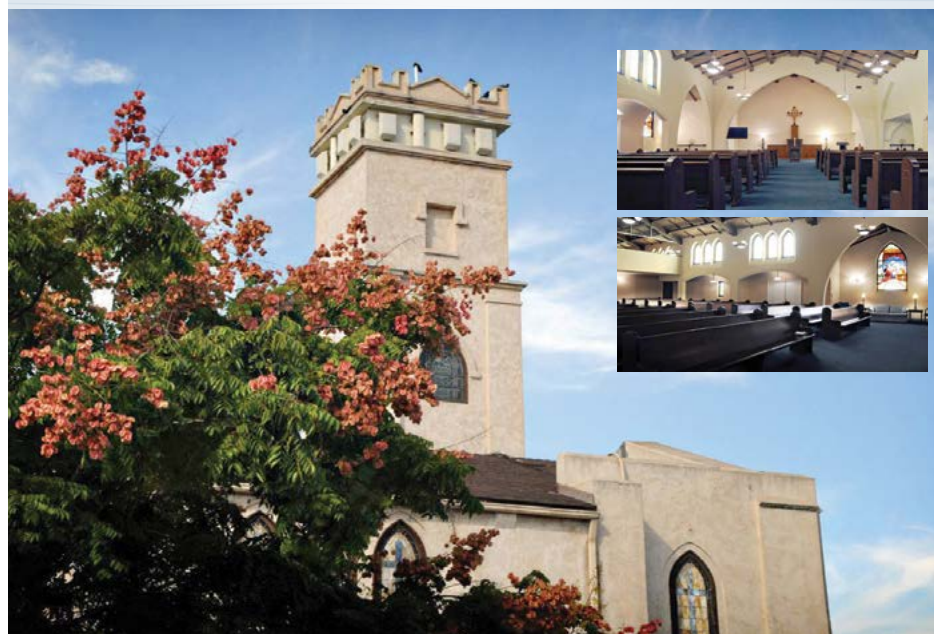
"By operating our Emergency Food Distribution Network + program in a trusted community space like the library," said Pajanor, "we are meeting people where they are and ensuring that no family in our community has to face hunger alone."

Hours of operation are Mondays and Wednesdays from noon to 7 p.m. Patrons are required to register online at chulavistaca.gov or by phone at (619) 323-2841, with languages available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

For more information, visit ccdsd.org.

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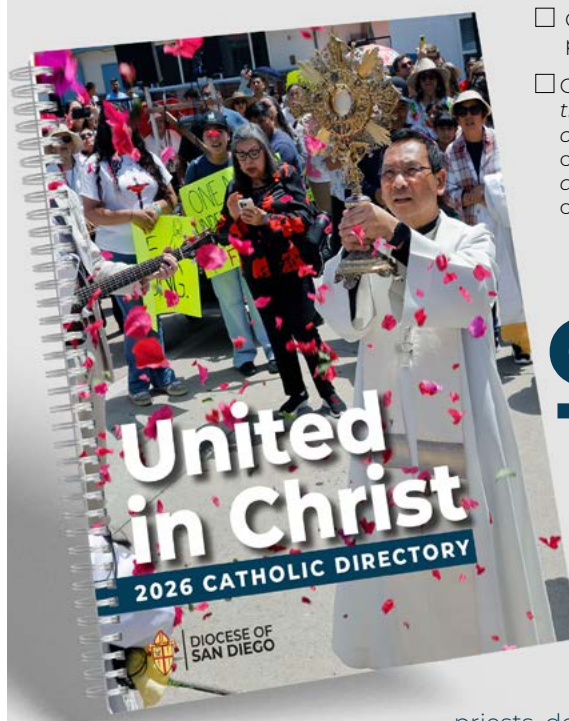
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Feed Forward: Help Fight Hunger in Our Community

Rising housing costs, utilities, and food prices—combined with increasing unemployment—are creating a growing crisis in San Diego County. Nearly one million residents are struggling to afford basic groceries.

Local data shows that more than 218,000 children in San Diego County face food insecurity—about 16.5% of the region’s child population. This statistic highlights the ongoing challenge many families face in accessing enough healthy food and underscores the urgent need for continued community support.

For the past six years, Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego has responded through the Emergency Food Distribution Network Plus (EFDN+) Program, providing food assistance via 21 distribution sites and 16 food pantries across San Diego and Imperial Counties. Families receive supplemental food boxes and fresh produce to help put meals on the table each week.

As the need continues to grow, so must our response. Feed Forward is a new community-driven initiative to sustain and expand this vital program—ensuring that no neighbor goes hungry.

Your support helps build healthier, well-nourished communities and advances the mission of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego: strengthening our local community so that every person can reach their full potential.

Guided by its mission and strategic theory of change, the organization focuses on meeting basic needs—like consistent access to nutritious food through programs such as EFDN+—to stabilize families in San Diego and Imperial Counties and promote their long-term well-being.

Give today and help us Feed Forward.

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