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CHARLIE NEUMAN

MOVING: At three recent events, the diocese's cultural communities shared traditions that are deeply rooted in their Catholic faith. The Filipino Santacruzán celebration on May 30 included a vibrant procession by 15 parishes and groups in National City. Read about the three Masses inside.



Immigration

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'I Will Never Forget You'

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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.



Power of Faith, at Sea and Land

By Aida Bustos



Immigrants fearing for their lives in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and inside a U.S. courthouse.

People of faith who risk their lives and livelihoods to help them in both settings came together one extraordinary day in San Diego to share their work, to bring their organizations together and to pray.

The exchange confirmed the power of faith and hope to lift the lives of immigrants in their darkest moments, and planted seeds of future collaboration among the participants, which included Bishop Michael Pham, clergy, and lay volunteers.

The visiting delegation was composed of Father Mattia Ferrari and Luca Casarini, who traveled from their native Italy, and César Piscoya, who arrived from Chile.

Father Ferrari is the coordinator of the World Meeting of Popular Movements, a network started by Pope Francis to support grassroots organizations around the globe that help the poor.

The priest is also the chaplain for the organization *Mediterranea Saving Humans*, whose ship navigates the Mediterranean Sea to rescue men, women and children fleeing the African continent in precarious vessels, desperately trying to reach European soil to seek asylum.

Casarini is a co-founder of that organization, itself a “popular” organization.

Piscoya works for the Conference of Catholic Bishops in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The three visited San Diego on June 22, the second day of a trip to visit member “popular” organizations in cities across the country, ending in New York City on July 30. They wanted to support the organizations, encourage collaboration among them, and strengthen their connection with the Church.

“We are here to listen to them, learn from them, and to build bridges,” Father Ferrari said.

The local affiliate of one of these “popular” groups is the San Diego Organizing Project, which, together with the San Diego Catholic Diocese and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Diego), runs the FAITH ministry that accompanies immigrants to their court hearings and ICE check-ins.

The delegation's day began with a morning visit to the federal courthouse, coordinated by Jesuit Father Scott Santarosa, of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish. They sat in on court hearings for two migrants on the fourth floor.

“We were very, very moved,” Father Ferrari said later in an interview. “It was terrible to see the suffering of the people who were there. It was something that hurt our humanity.



ENCOUNTER: An international delegation meets with clergy and volunteers assisting immigrants at a dinner June 22 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Diego). The visitors were César Piscoya, center, Luca Casarini and Father Mattia Ferrari.



SUPPORT: Bishop Michael Pham shared his experiences with the delegation.

“But at the same time, it was a very, very powerful experience of the Gospel to see the Church this way, because this is the work of Jesus.”

Father Ferrari and Piscoya accompanied a mother named Francisca to a scheduled check-in with ICE on the building's second floor.

She “was suffering, almost crying,” the priest recalled, fearing she would be detained on the spot.

“We prayed the rosary with Francisca, and this gift saved her,” he said. “And she was sent home.”

After the visit to the courthouse, the delegation headed south. They visited Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Chula Vista and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in San Ysidro. They prayed at the U.S.-Mexico border wall, and stopped at the Otay Mesa Detention Center, where migrants are held.

Their day ended back in San Diego, at the Pope Francis Center, run by Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, which assists immigrants. There, Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido celebrated a thanksgiving Mass, attended by around 30 people, including FAITH volunteers, clergy and community members.

Afterward, they ate dinner together, swapped stories and reflected on their mission.

“The situation in the Mediterranean is the same as on your border,” Casarini shared. “The system has transformed the area into a cemetery. And this cemetery is full of our brothers

and sisters, our sons, our uncles, our grandfathers, our grandmothers.”

The Mediterranean is considered the deadliest migration route in the world. The Italian Red Cross estimates that between 100,000 to 200,000 people have died there in the last 12 years, Father Ferrari said.

An immigrant couple, Lucas and Yesenia, described how they were detained by ICE agents one morning outside of their apartment building as he was going to work. They took their cell phones, so they could not tell their family what was happening.

“This was something very hard for us,” he said.

They were taken to the Otay Mesa Detention Center, where they spent five months before being able to post bail and be released.

The couple have five children, with the youngest 8 years old. The detentions thrust the couple's oldest daughter, Deisy, into the role of the family provider.

“I only had a part-time job,” she said, as she wept softly, burying her head on her dad's shoulder. “I did not know what to do. I had never thought this would happen to us. I felt so alone.”

Bishop Pham said he could identify with the daughter. He shared that he had fled Vietnam with his siblings and had ended up in a refugee camp in Malaysia.

“What am I going to do?” he recalled thinking at the time. “How are we going to live? I felt alone.”

He said that is why it's so important to help the most vulnerable in our midst.

“We are one human family,” he told the gathering. “We have to come together to care for one another, to be in solidarity with each other in the midst of difficulties.”

Father Ferrari said he was inspired by what he had seen.

“Christ is here in San Diego. Christ is working inside the federal building. Why? Because there are Christian people who choose to open their hearts. This is the power of the Gospel.”



'Deeper Service to People of God'

JOHN CASTALDO

NEW DEACONS: Bishop Michael Pham ordained eight men to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of San Diego at St. Thomas More Church on May 30. From left, they are Kevin R. Johnson, Christopher Haack, Joseph Naval, Juan Pablo Rodriguez, Joseph Parker, David Vacchi, Mike Macie and Francisco Sánchez. Also pictured, fifth from left, is Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido.

By Denis Grasska



OCEANSIDE –
Bishop Michael Pham recently presided over his first ordinations since being entrusted with the San Diego Diocese last summer.

Through the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination, the bishop ordained Christopher Haack, Kevin Johnson, Michael Macie, Joseph Naval, Joseph Parker, Juan Pablo Rodriguez, Francisco Sanchez and David Vacchi to the permanent diaconate on May 30 at St. Thomas More Church in Oceanside.

“Today, you are not simply receiving a title or a role,” Bishop Pham told them in his homily. “You are being configured more closely to Christ the Servant. The Church asks you to lay down your lives daily in prayer, in service, in sacrifice and in love.”

At the beginning of his homily, Bishop Pham recalled meeting with each of the eight deacon candidates and their wives and asking the men why they desired ordination. He shared their vocation stories with the congregation.

“Listening to all of you,” he told the eight, “I realize each story is different, yet all are united by one thing: a desire to serve Christ and his people with humility, generosity and love.”

Bishop Pham joked that he also knew “the real reason” they wanted to become deacons: to receive all seven sacraments.

Noting that most people will only ever receive six at most, with priests



JOHN CASTALDO

PARTNERS: During the Mass, the wives helped the men being ordained to vest; the wife of Kevin R. Johnson, Bridgette, among them.

receiving holy orders and married couples the sacrament of matrimony, he told the eight married men who were about to be ordained, “Today, you are one sacrament ahead of most people.”

Adopting a more serious tone, Bishop Pham explained that, through the sacrament of holy orders, the men would “receive an indelible spiritual mark” and be “entrusted with a ministry rooted in service.”

He explained that the word “deacon” itself is derived from “diakonos,”

a Greek word that means “servant.” A deacon’s responsibilities, he said, include proclaiming the Gospel, assisting at the altar and reaching out to the poor, sick and marginalized.

“There is a tremendous need (in this diocese) for this ministry of compassionate presence and service,” Bishop Pham said.

He reminded the eight men that diaconal ministry is “not about status, recognition or authority,” but about “humble service” after the manner of Jesus.

“In a world that often values power, recognition and success,” he said, “the diaconate reminds us that greatness in the eyes of God is measured by our willingness to serve.”

Bishop Pham said that a deacon cannot bring Christ to others unless he himself remains close to Christ.

“Ministry without prayer becomes empty,” he said. “Service without love becomes duty.”

The bishop acknowledged that answering the call to the diaconate also entails “a great sacrifice” for the deacons’ wives.

“I hope you asked her for permission first. Did you?” Bishop Pham asked the men, eliciting laughter from the congregation.

He reminded them that, even after ordination, their family will continue to be their “first vocation” and “primary responsibility.” But, with their wives, they now will offer themselves “more deeply in service to the people of God.”

“Your ministry will reach the sanctuary and the streets,” Bishop Pham told the men. “You will stand at the altar, but you must also walk among the people, bringing Christ’s compassion into homes, hospitals, prisons, schools, shelters and neighborhoods.

“Many people may never remember your homily,” he continued, “but they will remember your kindness; they will remember your patience; they will remember whether you listened to them when they were hurting. That is the ministry of the deacon.”



Message from Bishop Michael Pham

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As you know, Pope Leo XIV has recently published his first encyclical, “Magnifica Humanitas.” Many people throughout the world are eager to

read and understand what he wishes to teach both the Catholic faithful and all people of goodwill. As Catholics, we recognize that the Church has always spoken clearly about the dignity of the human person because we believe that every person is created in the image and likeness of God.

This encyclical addresses the intersection of human dignity and the rapidly developing age of artificial intelligence (AI). Drawing upon Sacred Scripture and the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching, Pope Leo offers a thoughtful reflection on the opportunities and challenges presented by these new technologies.

I would like to share a few reflections that emerged for me while reading the document.

No matter how we view it, artificial intelligence is not going away. It is here to stay. If that is the case, how should we understand ourselves in light of its growing presence?

AI is an algorithm-based technology that gathers and processes data to generate responses to human requests. Because of this, users must carefully discern whether the information provided is accurate, reliable and beneficial. This responsibility is essential for promoting truth and serving the common good. Facts must be verified and information should be cross-checked before it is shared.

In a world increasingly shaped by AI, everything seems to move at a faster pace. As a result, thoughtful decision-making becomes even more important. We need moments of silence and reflection to pray, meditate and carefully evaluate the choices before us. Without such moments, our interior lives can become diminished.

Pope Leo reminds us that technology should serve the human person, not replace the need for wisdom, contemplation and discernment. When individuals and societies act without reflection, patience and moral responsibility, misunderstandings and conflicts can grow. History reminds us that decisions made without proper discernment can contribute to division, violence and even



FIRST: Pope Leo XIV's encyclical, “Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence.”

war. Sometimes, we simply need to put down our phones and make room for silence.

AI is undoubtedly a powerful tool and offers many benefits. Yet, if we are not careful, it can reduce reality to only what is measurable and quantifiable. When we rely exclusively on what can be calculated, we risk losing sight of human creativity, intuition and wisdom.

While AI can imitate language and certain human behaviors, it can never fully replicate human experience, relationships or emotions. Consequently, it cannot assume moral responsibility or replace the human person in making ethical decisions that affect the lives of others.

The encyclical also highlights the importance of safeguarding peace. Decisions involving human life, national security and the use of force must never be surrendered to technical calculations alone. No algorithm can bear moral responsibility for the consequences of war. Such decisions require human wisdom, ethical judgment, compassion and accountability. Pope Leo reminds us that true peace cannot be achieved by force alone, but is built through dialogue, diplomacy, understanding and mutual respect.

Another concern raised by Pope Leo is the possibility that technology may distance people from one another. If we rely too heavily on artificial forms of interaction, we may lose sight of the importance of human closeness and personal connection. The

absence of genuine human encounter can lead to isolation, distance and disengagement. The fullness of human life does not come from technological power but from relationships rooted in freedom, love and peace.

Pope Leo also expresses particular concern for children and young people, who are growing up in a world increasingly shaped by digital technology and artificial intelligence. While these tools can support learning, creativity and communication, they can also expose young people to misinformation, manipulation, unhealthy dependencies and a diminished capacity for authentic human interaction.

The Holy Father reminds parents, educators, and society as a whole of their shared responsibility to protect children, foster critical thinking and ensure that technology supports their growth in wisdom, virtue and genuine human relationships.

Overall, “Magnifica Humanitas” is a timely and important contribution to the conversation about the future of humanity in an age of rapidly advancing technology. Pope Leo challenges us to consider whether we are building a new Tower of Babel rooted in self-sufficiency and control, or helping to build a holy city founded upon truth, justice and human dignity. The document serves as a reminder that technological progress must never come at the expense of the human person.

Ultimately, Pope Leo reminds us that technology is one of humanity's greatest achievements, but it must always remain a servant of the human person and never become its master. Human dignity, freedom, relationships and our openness to God must remain at the center of every technological advancement.

By raising awareness of these concerns, Pope Leo invites governments, businesses, organizations, faith communities and individuals to work together in solidarity and subsidiarity to ensure that human dignity remains at the center of technological development.

There is much more within the encyclical that deserves prayerful reflection and discussion. These are simply a few of the insights that I have learned and wanted to share with you.

May God continue to guide us in using every gift of human ingenuity for the service of humanity and the glory of God.

Pope Safeguards Human Life in Age of AI

By Carol Glatz



VATICAN CITY
— At a time
when digital

technologies are developing at a rapid and unpredictable pace, every single person must decide if she or he will be: a passive bystander; an unhelpful commentator; an avaricious architect of a new “Tower of Babel”; or a patient, hope-filled builder of a “civilization of love,” Pope Leo XIV said in his first encyclical, “Magnifica Humanitas.”

In the 82-page document, released May 25, the pope also asked forgiveness for the Church's long tolerance of slavery, and he declared that its “just war theory” was now outdated.



TEACHING: Pope Leo XIV speaks at a presentation of his first encyclical, on July 25.

“Today, more than ever, without prejudice to the right to self-defense in the strictest sense, it is important to reaffirm that the ‘just war’ theory, which

has all too often been used to justify any kind of war, is now outdated,” he wrote.

“Humanity possesses far more effective and capable tools for promoting human life and resolving conflicts, such as dialogue, diplomacy and forgiveness. The use of force, violence and weapons reflects a relational poverty that always has disastrous consequences for civilian populations,” the pope's document said.

The document, signed May 15, marked the 135th anniversary of his namesake's landmark social encyclical, “Rerum Novarum,” which reflected on society, the economy and politics, and ushered in what is now known as the “Social Doctrine of the Church.”

While Pope Leo XIII focused on the industrial revolution's impact on the human being and society, Pope Leo looked at the consequences of the digital revolution in the 21st-century and how best to safeguard “the human person in the time of artificial intelligence.”

Pope Leo used nearly the first half of the document to outline the role and development of the church's social teaching, and why and how it continues to be needed in a world facing both old and new challenges.

“Today, the Social Doctrine of the Church is a legacy of wisdom, where we find principles for thought, criteria for discernment and judgment, and concrete guidelines for action” to “clearly interpret the challenges of the present and identify appropriate ways for living out a clear Christian witness, with joy and in service to the world,” he wrote.

Engaging with the wider world, especially those active in the fields of science, technology, academia and politics, he wrote, is crucial to a process of “shared discernment” to identify and heal the spiritual and cultural roots of present-day problems.

Safeguards *Continued on Page 5*

Safeguards *Continued from Page 4*

While the Church is concerned with theological and social questions, it is also “necessary to establish adequate regulatory tools capable of upholding justice and curbing the distorting effects of technological power,” the pope wrote.

“Nevertheless, the issue is not limited to regulation. As Pope Francis warned, we must realistically ask ourselves who holds this power today and how they use it,” he added.

“Humanity, created by God in all its grandeur, is today facing a pivotal choice: either to construct a new Tower of Babel or to build the city in which God and humanity dwell together,” he wrote. Every generation has the same duty of “guiding history to become a place where the dignity of every person is safeguarded, justice is promoted and fraternity is made possible.”

While the document also discussed the exploitation of people and nature; war; the arms race; disrespect for human life; threats to democracy and the common good; discrimination against the poor and women; and new forms of slavery.

While the Catholic Church constantly affirmed the dignity of every human being, he wrote, “neither can we deny or diminish the delay with which both society and the Church came to denounce the scourge of slavery,” noting it wasn’t until the 19th century “that a formal, absolute and universal condemnation of slavery was clearly articulated, notably under Pope Leo XIII...



“This constitutes a wound in Christian memory, one from which we cannot consider ourselves detached,” he wrote, and “for this, in the name of the Church, I sincerely ask for pardon.”

It is “a shared responsibility,” he wrote, of all members of the human family to come together and discern “Where are we going? Toward what goal do we wish to orient ourselves? What direction should we choose as a people and as a human community?”

“The search for the truth in public life, education in the digital environment, the transformation of work, the fragility of families and new forms of slavery are not isolated phenomena,” he wrote. “Rather, they reflect a common underlying issue, namely that, if technology becomes the ultimate criterion, the human person risks being reduced to data, a cog in a machine or a commodity.”

“If, however, technology is integrat-

ed with a wise perspective, it can become an instrument of growth, justice and fraternity,” he added.

Referring often to St. Augustine’s teachings, Pope Leo clearly defined the two “cities” people today must choose to contribute to: either a worldly, selfish land dedicated to building a “Tower of Babel” or a Christian “civilization of love in the digital age.”

Pope Leo proposed five paths toward daily and public responsibility: “the need to disarm words; building peace through justice; adopting the perspective of victims; cultivating a healthy realism; and reviving dialogue and multilateralism.”

Fundamentally, he added, what is needed is the Christian view of humanity and understanding of God’s plan for his creation.

“As a believer among believers, I invite everyone to contemplate, in the face of the Son of God, the grandeur of

humanity that shines a light also on the era of AI,” he wrote. “In Christ, we are called to cooperate in the work of creation, rather than be disinterested observers of technological processes that limit our freedom and responsibility.

“No computational system, however sophisticated, can create a heart that gives itself, or a conscience that discerns good from evil,” he wrote. “Even when machines excel in efficiency, a human face that asks to be gazed upon remains the center of our history.”

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido, from the San Diego Diocese, said that the pope’s encyclical “invites us to work together to uphold human dignity and the common good.”

“As the pope wrote, ‘the primary choice is not between a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to technology, but rather between constructing Babel or rebuilding Jerusalem; between a power that claims to dominate the heavens and a people who work together in the presence of God to rebuild the walls of fraternal coexistence.’”

The bishop said, “Let us always choose to build up the dignity of the human person.”



Helping Kids Navigate Digital Landscape

By Janelle Peregoy



Ding! Ding!

Despite having our Tin Can (Wi-Fi enabled landline for kids) for months, its high-pitched ring still transports me back to 1998. My incoming fourth- and second-graders do not spend mindless hours talking while twisting the vintage cord. They do, however, call their neighborhood friends for approximately 20 seconds to see if they will go outside with them.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently updated its guidance to help support children and parents as they navigate a complicated digital ecosystem (social media, AI, online gaming, podcasts, digital assistants and more). Algorithms reinforce compulsive use while generating even more data about children's preferences. The relationship that some children and teens cultivate with screens may lead to real-world harm.

In early childhood, frequent screen use correlates with delays in language, cognition and development of social skills. It reduces opportunities for reading, physical movement and exploration. In school-aged children, overuse of digital devices correlates to unhealthy sleep, lower academic performance, reduced attention span, limited exercise and risk for weight gain. Teens may be exposed to inappropriate content that promotes self-harm, eating disorders, violence or other dangerous behaviors. Negative effects may include sleep loss, negative peer pressure, reduced exercise and less time spent with family and friends.

At couples' retreats, current and future parents frequently raise concerns about these digital minefields. Parents and educators are savvier than ever about the perils of screens and social media use.



How Parents Can Help

The academy's guidance is balanced. It acknowledges that technology can offer positive outlets, especially in areas such as education, creativity and long-distance social connection. Parents must take an active and engaged role in supervising digital use and ensuring that household technology is used appropriately.

Young children (0-5 years)

Real-world interaction is the most effective way for young children to learn.

Encourage free play and outdoor activity because movement is necessary for physical development.

Find media content that promotes faith, learning and social-emotional skills. "Guillermo & Will" are bilingual puppet friends who share silly antics, adventures and a biblical worldview.

Healthy sleep habits begin early. Create routines (bath/showers, stories/books, family prayer, cuddling, etc.) that naturally relax children before bedtime.

Watch media with children whenever possible. Use parental controls on all devices.

School-aged kids (6-12 years)

Prioritize balance. Screens should not detract from family time, academics or exercise.

Delay personal tablets. Shared devices make it easier for parental content monitoring.

Encourage new hobbies and activities. This is an ideal age to explore sports, music, art/crafts, nature and other new interests!

Create locations (bedrooms, etc.) and scheduled activities (meals, family nights, etc.) that are intentionally screen-free.

Help kids build digital literacy — ad recognition, privacy protection, appropriate use of AI, healthy screen use, and more.

Find like-minded parents who share similar concerns about smartphones. "Wait until 8th" pledges are increasingly common among parents and schools.

Teens (13+)

Mental health is a priority when considering screen use.

Be vigilant about detecting changes in teens' conduct, including shifting

sleep patterns, irritability, withdrawal from activities or secretive behavior.

Consider a teen's maturity and sense of responsibility if allowing for a first smartphone. Use privacy settings and/or purchase a "dumb phone" with talk & text only features.

Invoke "digital detox" vacations and outings for the whole family!

Communicate openly and encourage dialogue. Ask to see teens' social media accounts, favorite memes or videos. The more parents can share in their teens' digital landscape, the easier it becomes to guide them in their choices.

Resources for Parents

Create a family media plan.

Pope Leo XIV's encyclical, "Magnifica Humanitas," focuses on our shared humanity in relationship to these greater concerns. Catholic parents should reflect on it.

Book recommendations include "The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness" by Jonathan Haidt and "10 Rules for Raising Kids in a High-Tech World" by Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D.

Catholic educators can utilize The Catholic Companion Framework, which offers a model for guiding technology integration through a Catholic lens.

Parents are their children's first teachers and should model a healthy balance with screens. Discern if adjustments need to be made. Then, enjoy some quality, screen-free time with the family!

Janelle Peregoy is associate director of the diocese's Office for Family Life and Spirituality.

The Southern Cross



"Never did I ever think that it would be this big."

Deacon Jim Scull was referring to the Million Meal Event, which he and a small team of deacons from the Diocese of San Diego launched five years ago. At the inaugural event, volunteers packed 1 million nutritious meals to distribute to impoverished families across the border in Tijuana and in Africa.

The deacons held the fifth edition of the Million Meal Event over the June 13 and 14 weekend, again at Cathedral Catholic High School. This year, around 5,100 volunteers doubled the number of meals they packed, to 2 million.

The event is a project of the diocese's permanent deacons to serve the most vulnerable. They recruit volunteers at their parishes and raise funds to cover the event's costs, which



2 Million Meals

HELPING HANDS: More than 5,000 volunteers, including these from The Immaculata Parish, packed 2 million meals on June 13 and 14 at Cathedral Catholic High School.

this year totaled about \$600,000.

They collaborate with a Christ-centered nonprofit organization, Kids Around the World, which buys the bulk ingredients and distributes a portion of the meals overseas to the communities they serve. This year's

Million Meal Event was the largest of the nearly 200 packing events the agency will support in 2026.

Two years ago, the deacons joined forces with Catholic Charities, also part of the Diocese of San Diego, to strengthen their event. The agency

works with many parishes to serve needy families in their communities through its Emergency Food Distribution Network+. Under the leadership of Bishop Michael Pham, Catholic Charities set out to pack an additional 1 million meals this year to provide for hungry families across the diocese.

Of the remaining million meals, 500,000 will again be destined for an urban center that serves needy families in Tijuana, Casa de los Pobres, operated by Franciscan Sisters. And the other 500,000 will be transported to Ecuador, where Kids Around the World serves 4,000 poor children.

The volunteers — about 34% more than last year — came from 78 of the diocese's parishes and from schools and other organizations.

"I wanted to give back to the community," said Briana Powell, a first-time participant from The Immaculata Parish. "And to be a part of something great."

Diocese Seeks to Promote Social Teaching

By Denis Grasska



The dignity of every human being, from birth to natural death, must be recognized and respected.

That basic concept lies at the heart of what is known as Catholic social teaching.

Through a new commission established by Bishop Michael Pham, the Diocese of San Diego has begun discerning ways to promote the tenets of Catholic social teaching and put them into action locally at the diocesan and parish levels.

The “Diocese of San Diego Commission on Integral Human Development: The Dignity of Life from Womb to Tomb” gathered for its inaugural meeting June 23 at the diocesan Pastoral Center. Moving forward, the plan is for monthly meetings via Zoom and quarterly meetings in person.

It is envisioned as a standing commission that will become a fixture in the diocese.

The commission has an executive steering committee consisting of Bishop Pham, Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido, diocesan Chancellor Marioly Galván and diocesan CFO Shirley Pajanor. Its co-chairs are Deacon Bobby Ehnou, director of the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice, and Appaswamy “Vino” Pajanor, CEO of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego.

The 19 commission members include priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and lay Catholics, among them several leaders at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

“I always like to say Catholic social teaching is one of the great gems of the Church that we don’t talk about very often,” said Deacon Ehnou, who is excited that the new commission will be able to rectify this situation.

Catholic social teaching is based on



FAITH IN ACTION: Bishop Michael Pham led a rally April 1 near the downtown federal courthouse to affirm the faith community’s accompaniment of immigrants and refugees at court hearings.

three core principles: human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity. The latter is the principle that a higher-level community should not take over tasks that properly belong to a lower-level community, such as persons, families, or another intermediary groups. In Catholic social teaching, subsidiarity protects the dignity of persons, enabling people to be protagonists of their own growth.

From the core principles, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on its website derives “seven themes” — Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community and Participation; Rights and Responsibilities; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; and Care for God’s Creation. These

will serve as a roadmap for the diocesan commission.

Deacon Ehnou said that the impetus for the new commission was the 135th anniversary of “Rerum Novarum” (On Capital and Labor), an encyclical written by Pope Leo XIII, which he described as “the foundational document for modern Catholic social teaching.”

Recently, Pope Leo XIV himself marked the anniversary with the publication of his first encyclical, “Magnifica Humanitas” (On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence). The document was signed on July 15, exactly 135 years after the signing of “Rerum Novarum.”

Deacon Ehnou lamented that Catholic social teaching is often misunderstood as a “progressive agenda,” when

it’s actually something that is “at the very heart of our faith, which is living the Gospel and treating every person with dignity and respect.”

He explained that Catholic social teaching asks us to live out “that Gospel message of loving every person the way Christ loved us when he was here and the way he continues to love us as the head of our Church.”

Vino Pajanor explained that the diocesan commission will employ a “synodal methodology,” with members engaging in dialogue to discern together the path forward.

He said that Bishop Pham has delineated an ongoing, three-step process of catechesis, formation and implementation. The successful implementation of some aspect of Catholic social teaching will not spell the end of the process or of the commission’s work, he said, explaining that the cycle of catechesis, formation and implementation will continue indefinitely.

Pajanor explained that the catechesis stage, where commission members seek to determine how to educate local Catholics about Catholic social teaching, is an essential point of embarkation.

“We cannot go (into) action directly, without getting our bearings,” he said.

Applying a different metaphor, he said, “We all need to have a common language. ... The catechesis part will get us all into a same common understanding of what is it that the Church teachings are on integral human development, on human dignity, from the womb to the tomb.”

Pajanor acknowledged that getting from catechesis to implementation “is not going to happen overnight.”

“Bishop Pham does understand that this will take a long time for us,” he said, “but he wants this to be an ongoing process” and hopes “that this becomes almost the DNA ... of our Local Church.”

Commission Members

The “Diocese of San Diego Commission on Integral Human Development: The Dignity of Life from Womb to Tomb” has 19 members:

- Dr. Mary Lyons, president emeritus of the University of San Diego
- Father Scott Santarosa, SJ, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, San Diego
- Father Ramiro Chan, CS, pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, San Ysidro
- Dr. Christina Slentz, associate director for Creation Care in the Office for Life, Peace and Justice
- Deacon Jim Vargas, president and CEO of Father Joe’s Villages
- Leonardo Enrique Fonseca, diocesan social media manager
- Maria Valencia, associate director for Culture of Life in the Office for Life, Peace and Justice
- Kat Albrandt, parishioner at The Immaculata Parish
- Sister Terri Monroe, RSCJ, associate professor emeritus at the University of San Diego
- Sister Lourdes Reyes, of the Eudists of the 11th Hour
- Maricruz Flores Strauss, director of the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry
- Father Gary Sanders, OSA, of St. Augustine Monastery
- Father Brent Kruger, who will be pastor of St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish, effective July 1
- Father Bernardo Lara, who will be pastor of Our Lady of Angels Parish, effective July 1
- Father Luke Jauregui, pastor of St. Stephen Parish
- John Prust, director of the diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality
- Laura Martin-Spencer, director of pastoral formation at St. Francis Center
- Father Eddie Samaniego, SJ, director of the diocesan Office for the Permanent Diaconate
- Leticia Oseguera, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Diocese of San Diego.

Funding Cut to Father Joe's Center

The Southern Cross



The San Diego City Council has slashed funding to the Neil Good Day Center, a homeless services hub run by Father Joe's Villages for the past 35 years in downtown San Diego.

The cuts, finalized on June 9, were made as part of the city's efforts to address its budget deficit.

But Father Joe's Villages remains committed to providing a day center for the city's homeless.

Voice of San Diego reported that the organization had decided to retrofit part of the cafeteria on its campus on Imperial Avenue to serve as an alternative day center location once the center closes.

The new space will receive no funding from the city, will be able to serve at least 25% fewer people, and will be only about one-third the size of the Neil Good Day Center, according to *Voice of San Diego*.

The center, located in the East Village, is a vital hub that represented less than 1 percent of the City's homelessness spending, yet played an outsized role in stabilizing neighbors in need and connecting them to care. It has served nearly 7,000 individuals annually.

Deacon Jim Vargas, CEO of Father Joe's Villages, issued a statement after the City's Office of the Independent Budget Analyst released its modifications to the mayor's proposed fiscal year 2027 budget, which only partially funded the center.

"The City cannot claim homelessness is a top



VITAL: The City of San Diego's 2027 budget cuts funding for the Neil Good Day Center, a facility for homeless residents, operated by Father Joe's Villages.

priority while simultaneously dismantling one of the most heavily used access points into the homelessness response system," he said.

Deacon Vargas said that the Day Center is "not optional" for thousands of people, who depend on it as a place to shower, receive mail, access medical care, connect with outreach workers, and take the first steps toward stability.

"Communities are judged by how they treat their most vulnerable residents," he said. "San Diego should not become a city that turns away from people in need, while offering no realistic plan for where they are supposed to go next."



Catholic Night Returns To Padres on July 10

The Southern Cross



More than 5,000 faithful from around 40 parishes are expected to attend the San Diego Padres' Catholic Night on Friday, July 10.

The team will play against the Toronto Blue Jays at Petco Park, starting at 6:40 p.m.

Those who buy the "theme game" tickets will receive a Catholic Night cap, which this year is white and purple with the outline of a dove on one side and a colorful design resembling stained-glass on the inside of the bill.

Attendance at the promotion has grown each year since it was first launched in 2015, with the 2026 edition expected to draw the largest Catholic turnout, according to Chris Connolly, the team's chief marketing officer.

Parishes from North County to Imperial Beach will attend this year, he added.

Catholic community members have historically participated in the ceremonial "first pitch" and served as bell-ringer before the game starts.

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Binational Students Celebrate Milestone

By Roman T. Flores

CALEXICO — Sixty-three eighth-graders graduated from Our Lady of Guadalupe Academy, a joyous event that marked the end of the academic year at a school that is both enriched and challenged by the U.S.-Mexico border.

Virtually all of the students were born in the United States but live in Mexicali, Baja California. They crossed the border daily to attend school. On June 5, their families crossed once more to gather at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church for the bilingual baccalaureate Mass and commencement ceremony.

Many students and their families received recognitions at the graduation.

Seven students earned a Presidential Award for academic achievement, which came with a message from President Donald J. Trump read publicly. Nine additional students, with near-perfect GPAs, received awards for academic excellence.

A total of 19 students, who attended parochial school from transitional kindergarten to eighth grade, were recognized as Fidelity Students. And five families with graduates were recognized for schooling all of their chil-



JOYFUL: The Gallego family celebrates the graduation of their three students from Our Lady of Guadalupe Academy while holding a photo given to all of the “Fidelity Families” during the commencement ceremony on June 5. Left, Father Hilario Flores, parish pastor; at right, the school’s principal, Sister Maria Elvia González.

dren in parochial schools.

The principal, Sister Maria Elvia González, noted why parents chose to send their children to OLGA, as the school is known.

“There are a lot of schools in Mexicali that are bilingual, but ours is also bicultural,” she said, “and because of this, our students can succeed either in the U.S. or Mexico.”

The classes are taught in English, however, the school celebrates the Mexican culture, observing such holidays like Mexican Independence Day and Día de los Muertos.

The parents want their child’s education grounded in Catholic values, the principal said.

“My parents wanted me to learn my

Catholic faith and go to a good academic school, so they decided OLGA was the best one,” said Ricardo Borunda, the class valedictorian. “The Catholic values we have learned and all the memories we have made in this school are what I will take away from my time at the school.”

Borunda, like the other two students interviewed by *The Southern Cross*, said he will be attending Vincent Memorial Catholic High School, also in Calexico, next year.

Jurgen Banda was one of the 19 Fidelity Students who had attended OLGA since transitional kindergarten.

“I learned I should be responsible for my work, and I shouldn’t leave things to the last minute,” Banda said

about his time at the school.

Fellow graduate, Lauren Cadena, expressed mixed emotions as her time at the school came to an end.

“I’ll always remember all the friendships I had with everyone and all my teachers. I really love that they really took care of me,” she said.

She, too, noted the role of faith in her education. “Catholic school (brings us) closer to God and Jesus.”

The Trump Administration has conducted a massive campaign to detain and deport undocumented immigrants across the country, including in the border region. The new policies have made life more challenging for those who cross the border regularly, including long wait times, and greater review by U.S. Customs agents.

The school made some adaptations to ensure the students can start the school day on time, said the principal.

She said the school has seen a dip in attendance numbers in the last two years. A total of 420 students attended the school in the academic year that just ended.

Despite the challenges, the principal said Mexican parents want their students schooled in the U.S.

She said, in the past, Mexican parents would have their children attend junior high in Mexico, but “now they want them to come here, so we have a waiting list for the seventh grade.”



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Tradition Is a Moving Experience

CHARLIE NEUMAN

DEVOTION: A total of 15 parishes and groups participated in the Santacruzán Filipino procession, which traveled on the streets surrounding St. Mary Church in National City on May 30.

By Aida Bustos



NATIONAL CITY
— “We should thank God for how grounded we are in our history together, not only just within our culture, but also within our faith.”

That is how Father Chris Bongato began his homily at the vigil Mass for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity on May 30 at St. Mary Church.

He was celebrating three milestones: the 100th anniversary of St. Mary Parish; the Filipino *Santacruzán* tradition, whose centerpiece was a grand procession, and his first liturgy as the diocese’s new vicar for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities.

The parish congregation is mainly comprised of Filipino and Mexican families, which share a common heritage. Spain ruled Mexico and the Philippines for about 300 years. The Spanish colonizers, particularly Catholic missionaries, profoundly shaped both cultures. Indeed, English, Spanish and Tagalog blended seamlessly during the day’s liturgy and procession.

The Mass was part of the second annual *Santacruzán* celebration organized by the Diocesan Commission for Filipino Catholics. The celebration is a popular Filipino devotion that honors the Virgin Mary and comes at the end of a month of floral offerings and rosaries for her, called *Flores de Mayo*.

“The *Santacruzán* tradition is deeply rooted in our Catholic faith and Filipino heritage,” said Yolamarie Arguilla, a commission leader and long-time member of St. Mary’s Parish, in opening remarks at the Mass.



NEW LEADER: Father Chris Bongato celebrated his first Mass as the diocese’s new vicar for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities at St. Mary Church on May 30.

She explained that the tradition commemorates the search by St. Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, in the early 4th century for the cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified.

“Through faith and perseverance, the True Cross was discovered in Jerusalem, a powerful reminder that salvation comes through the cross of Christ,” she said.

“As we celebrate this centennial year, may we remember that for 100 years this parish has carried the cross of Christ through generations, in times of joy and friendship, in mission and service, and in prayer and sacrifice,” she continued. “We honor the faith of those who came before us and entrust the future of our Church to the next generation.”

The parish, led by Father Nemesio Sungcad, is planning a grand centennial celebration on Nov. 14, the date of

its dedication in 1926.

In his homily, Father Bongato challenged the Mass-goers to delve deeper into the day’s celebrations, the Most Holy Trinity and *Santacruzán*.

“God is not meant to be understood as three independent entities” that make the one whole, he said. Rather, the concept is harder to grasp, he continued.

“We have to pay attention to how God has revealed himself to us,” he said. “The Son reveals the Father to us. And the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, makes known who Jesus is, and in turn, the Father.”

He said that, in the very being of God, there is a community of Persons united perfectly in love.

“God is love, perfect and infinite.”

Then Father Bongato, who was born in the Philippines, turned to the day’s other celebration, *Santacruzán*.

“St. Helena led excavations, moving all these rocks to find the True Cross of Christ ... This is something that we have to dig up for ourselves, figuratively speaking, to seek the True Cross of our faith, which gives us salvation.”

He challenged the next generation “to also shake the dust off and find what’s underneath, see what the treasure our faith is.”

After the Mass, the faithful moved outside for a procession on the streets around the church. A total of 15 parishes and groups participated.

The procession was made up of historical, biblical and Marian characters, led by the Queen of Peace. It included 23 “reinas,” young queens dressed in beautiful gowns, each escorted by a young man in traditional attire. They walked under arches, known as “arcos,” adorned with fresh and brightly colored paper flowers.

Men pushed three “carrozas,” or carts, beautifully decorated with fresh flowers carrying statues of Our Lady of Manaoag, Our Lady of Fatima and the Virgin Mary.

“The *Santacruzán* teaches us about faith, hope, charity, humility, purity and obedience to God,” Arguilla said. “Above all, it points us to Jesus Christ, who gave his life on the cross out of love for humanity.”



Details of celebration and photo gallery





'Glimpse of Heavenly Kingdom'

RITE: For the first time, the Pentecost Mass for All Peoples featured members of the Indian community sharing the Syro-Malabar rite. They processed into the gym at Cathedral Catholic High School on May 23, hoisting a beautiful gold and silver cross, symbolizing redemption, and 10 decorated umbrellas, expressing reverence and celebration.

By Aida Bustos



SAN DIEGO — A “field of dreams” with more than 1,800 faithful

gathered for the diocese’s annual Pentecost Mass for All Peoples, celebrated by Bishop Michael Pham.

At the beginning of the liturgy, the bishop surveyed the packed stands at Cathedral Catholic High School on May 23 and compared what he saw to one of his favorite movies, "Field of Dreams" (1989).

“People of all cultures gathered together like in a field of dreams, united in Christ at the altar,” he said. “It’s a glimpse of the heavenly kingdom we yearn for.”

The ninth annual Mass has become a tradition in the diocese since then Father Pham first organized it in 2018 as vicar for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities, under the leadership of then Bishop Robert W. McElroy.

More than 20 Catholic cultural communities came together that first year, with roots in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe. They turned out for the 2026 edition, as well, processing into the high school’s gym wearing brightly colored traditional attire, as they had done since the beginning. Their number has grown over the years, now including Panamanians, Peruvians and others.

“On this day, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the descending of the Holy Spirit,” Bishop Pham said in his opening remarks, “gathering us together as one people, as one family, one in Christ. We are being sent into the world to share the Good News.”

As has become tradition, members



TRADITION: Community members dress the altar with a cloth representative of their culture.



UNITED: Faithful from diverse communities come together at the Mass as one family in Christ.

of the communities participated in the liturgy. For instance, the Universal Prayer was proclaimed in Chinese, English, Igbo, Indian, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Korean, Laotian, Native American (Luiseño and Kupa), Peruvian, Portuguese, Samoan, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese.

Bishop Pham began his homily by recalling the initial effort to start the Mass. He said the leaders of the cultural communities had told him that gathering everyone was “going to be a tough task.”

“I said to them that the Holy Spirit can do it all. And here it is, the Holy Spirit is gathering us, after nine years,” he continued, as the Mass-goers applauded.

“This is our faith and our opportunity to witness the life of Jesus in our world today,” he said.

He noted that, in the day’s Gospel, when Jesus appeared to his disciples, the first thing he said to them was “Peace be with you.”

“The Holy Spirit is calling us to bring peace and justice to the world,” the bishop said. “That is our challenge.”

He said that, while God’s people are diverse, they are unified by God’s love.

“Look at ourselves,” he continued. “All cultures, all ethnic groups, all languages, sitting together, united in Christ. That is love, unity and peace coming together. That is the energy that we need to (go) out into the world.”




Details of celebration and photo gallery



'In Times of Suffering, Their Faith Endured'

By Aida Bustos

 The African American Catholic experience has much to teach the whole Church, Bishop Michael told those gathered for the diocese's annual Juneteenth Mass.

"In times of suffering, their faith endured. In times of persecution, communities continued to gather in prayer and praise," the bishop said. "Through family life, preaching, music, service, and steadfast trust in God, generations proclaimed that God remains faithful to his promises."

The bishop celebrated the Mass on June 21 at St. Rita Church to commemorate the day in 1865 that the last enslaved people were freed in Texas, more than two years after the nation officially ended slavery. The African American Catholic community organized the celebration, and the Christ the King Gospel Choir provided the joyous accompaniment.

"Juneteenth reminds us that freedom proclaimed and freedom experienced are not always the same," the bishop said in his homily.

"Is this not also true in our spiritual lives? Through Christ, we have been set free from sin and death. Through



CELEBRATION: From left, Father Silverio Espenilla, Deacon Robert Booth, Father Chris Bongato and Deacon Marvin Threatt exit the Juneteenth Mass on June 21 at St. Rita Church.

our baptism, we have been made sisters and brothers in Christ. We have been given a dignity that no one can take away.

"Yet many people continue to live burdened by fear, resentments, prejudice, hopelessness, shame, or the belief that they are somehow less worthy of God's love."

He said the day's Gospel spoke to those fears (Matthew 10:26-33).

"Three times Jesus tells his disciples,

'Do not be afraid.' He knew they would face rejection and misunderstanding ..., yet he reminded them that they were precious in the eyes of God."

The witness of "our African American sisters and brothers" offers lessons for everyone, the bishop said. He cited the courageous work of icons such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jackie Robinson, as well as African American faith leaders being advanced for canonization, such as Venerable Father

Augustus Tolton, Venerable Mother Mary Lange, and Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman.

The bishop said that unity does not require for everyone's stories be identical.

"It does not erase painful chapters of history. Rather, it means that we bring our different stories, cultures, struggles, joys and hopes to the foot of the Cross and to the table of the Eucharist.

"At this altar, no one is invisible. At this altar, no one is forgotten. At this altar, we remember who we truly are: beloved brothers and sisters.

"As we remember the significance of Juneteenth, may the Lord free our hearts from fear and strengthen us to be witnesses of hope. The work of healing and reconciliation belongs to all of us. But we do not undertake it alone. God walks with us. And because he walks with us, we can move forward with courage, hope and love."



Details of celebration and photo gallery



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'One-of-a-Kind' Sister Made Big Impact

By Denis Grasska



"No thanks."

That was Sister Kathy Warren's response when first invited to apply for the position of director of San Diego's diocesan Office for Women Religious.

She wasn't interested in relocating from her native Rochester, Minnesota, and was happily leading Franciscan pilgrimages to Assisi and Rome and giving talks on Franciscan spirituality.

But when the question was posed a third time and, especially once she realized that the part-time position wouldn't require her to stop promoting the Franciscan message of nonviolence and peace, she recognized God's hand at work.

"I know this of God. I know the invitation is coming for a reason, so strong, three times," Sister Warren, who is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, recalled thinking.

Her ultimate "yes" led to nine years as head of the Office for Women Religious, where she served as the official liaison between the bishop and the consecrated women who live and minister in the diocese. Currently, there are about 145 of them, representing 28 congregations.

Sister Warren, who turned 77 in June, stepped down as the office's director on May 28. The previous month, she



GRATITUDE: Sister Kathy Warren gives Cardinal Robert W. McElroy a gift at the Jubilee Celebration on March 1, 2025, at the Pastoral Center.

had been elected to a four-year term as the leader of the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester.

"As I return to Minnesota to serve as the congregational minister/president of the Franciscan Sisters, I do so with deep gratitude for the ministry that I've been privileged to provide in the Diocese of San Diego," she said. "Serving as the director of the Office for Women Religious has been a pro-

found honor — a role that allowed me to accompany, support and collaborate with remarkable communities of women religious whose dedication to who they are and what they are about continues to inspire me."

Among her main responsibilities as director of the Office for Women Religious, Sister Warren organized the Annual Sisters Appreciation and Jubilee Celebration, an event that for

decades has served as an expression of the bishop's appreciation for the contributions of consecrated women in his diocese.

About 85 to 100 sisters typically attend that celebration, which begins with a Mass followed by a luncheon. At the event, sisters who are marking milestone anniversaries, or jubilees, receive special recognition. This year's celebration was held Feb. 28 at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

In addition to this event, the Office for Women Religious also holds at least two enrichment events each year, one in the fall and another in the spring, which provide an opportunity for communal prayer and reflection.

Sister Warren said that, at those events, the sisters were asked not to sit with members of their own congregations but to "mix up" by sitting with other sisters.

"It was scary at first, because they didn't know each other," she said, "but they loved getting to know each other."

Sister Warren typed up a chronology of milestones over the past nine years, which she shared with the women religious of the diocese. It was titled "What We've Done Together." That list of milestones included the following:

A Sisters Council was formed and began meeting in August of 2018.

Sister *Continued on Page 14*



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Sister *Continued from Page 13*

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, sisters accepted an invitation from then Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan to be trained to lead faith-sharing sessions with small groups of lay people via Zoom.

In 2023, the Sisters' Faith-In-Action Network (FAN), a consortium of 11 religious congregations that was formed in response to a \$2.7-million grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, began its collaborative work. The grant, which was jointly awarded to the 11 congregations and to Catholic Charities-Diocese of San Diego, funded 15 individual projects sponsored by the sisters and three Catholic Charities projects.

In 2024, the first annual gathering of the diocese's priests, men and women religious, and parish life coordinators was held. The idea for this event came from the Sisters Council. This year's installment took place April 14 at All Hallows Parish.

At a farewell reception held May 27, Bishop Michael Pham recalled meeting Sister Warren for the first time nine years ago after the diocesan Pentecost Mass for All Peoples and, following his appointment as an auxiliary bishop in 2023, working closely with her to organize what became the annual gathering of priests, religious and parish life coordinators.

Noting that the latter event has been "getting better and better," he jokingly told her, "You better stay."

Local women religious, lay Catholics



TRIBUTE: Sister Kathy Warren at a farewell reception May 27 at the Pastoral Center.

and Pastoral Center staff spoke warmly of Sister Warren and her ministry in interviews with *The Southern Cross*.

"I felt she really brought new life," said Sister Rosemary Nicholson, a member of the Religious of Jesus and Mary. "She certainly got to know the sisters of our different congregations here and helped us to get to know each other better also."

Sister Rebeca Zuro, a member of the Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, described Sister Warren as "one of a kind" and "a person that creates unity." She said that Sister Warren had been able "to gather all the sisters, and help us work together, and know each other, and collaborate."

Margie Carroll, former regional director of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps,

said she "became fast friends" with Sister Warren, shortly after the latter's arrival in San Diego.

Three years ago, she shared, the duo walked 95 miles together along the ancient pilgrimage route called the Camino de Santiago, or Way of St. James, in France and Spain.

More recently, they have participated together in the FAITH (Faithful Accompaniment in Trust & Hope) ministry, through which clergy and faithful from various faith traditions accompany migrants to their immigration hearings at the federal courthouse in downtown San Diego.

"I'm going to be very sorry to lose her here (in San Diego), but certainly our friendship will continue across the miles," said Carroll, who described her friend as "a woman of deep faith, passion and vision — and a great sense of humor."

Christina Bagaglio Slentz, who oversees Creation Care Ministry in the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice, connected with Sister Warren shortly after joining the diocesan staff in 2022.

She later invited Sister Warren to join the Pastoral Center's "Laudato Si" Subcommittee, which evaluated actions that could be taken within the diocese to live out the message of "Laudato Si," Pope Francis' 2015 en-

cyclical on care for creation.

"Sister Kathy is very warm and friendly to everyone, and she's a very dynamic person. ... I think she is great at fostering relationship, and she has a real gift for that," Slentz said.

Sister Warren entered consecrated life in January of 1968, as part of the first group to enter the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. She professed her first vows in 1970 and final vows in 1975.

As director of the Office for Women Religious, Sister Warren said that she typically received about 12 to 15 calls a year from women who are discerning religious life.

"The call to live as a consecrated, vowed woman or man is a real call yet today," she said, "even though there are fewer people at this point entering into religious life, primarily because there are so many ways both men and women can serve in Church ministries without being in religious life."

"It's a beautiful life; it's a life of joy," she said. "It, of course, has its own challenges, as every mode of life, vocation does. But the validity of it is no less than it was ever before."



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Magnificent Humanity — God’s Greatest Creation!

By Christina Bagaglio Slentz, Ph.D.



Pope Leo XIV published his first encyclical, “Magnifica Humanitas,” in May.

He reflects on humanity (God’s greatest creation), what good (or integral) human development looks like (the Kingdom of God), and how technology — particularly, the rise of artificial intelligence — poses significant risks to human dignity and our collective human capacity to serve as co-creators of God’s Kingdom.

Do you feel this tension with tech in your own life? In your household and human relationships? Do you see AI creeping into the fabric of our social world in a way that gives you pause? How might the gift of creation offer a counterbalance to soften the risks associated with these powerful tools? Moreover, how can we ensure technology serves humanity rather than humanity serving technology?



Not ‘Inherently Evil’ but ‘Never Neutral’

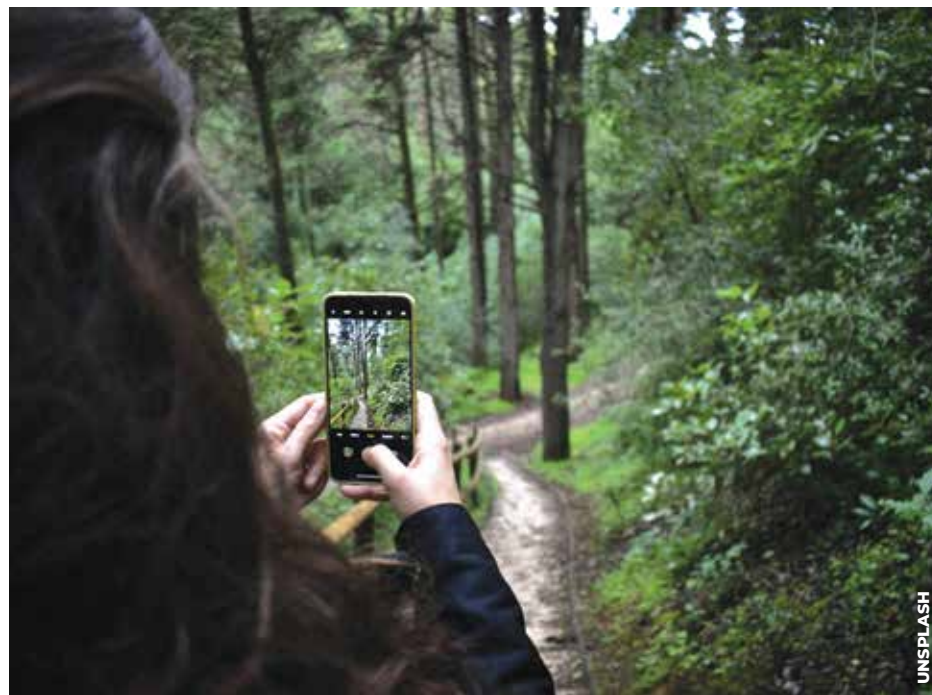
In his encyclical, Pope Leo writes, it is through the framework of integral human development that we can interpret the changes brought forward by the rapidly unfolding digital revolution. He explains, the quality of human flourishing is “measured by the ability to integrate justice toward people and the care of our common home, and to promote dignified living conditions, access to necessary goods, just social relations, care of creation and consideration for future generations” (No. 84).

So often, we apply technological solutions to these goals, but Pope Leo cautions, “technology is never neutral, because it takes on the characteristics of those who devise, finance, regulate and use it” (No. 9).

He uses the Scripture story of the Tower of Babel to illustrate the temptations of power and wealth that can lead to dehumanization in the development of new technology.

On the other hand, Pope Leo recognizes that technology offers many goods that have uplifted humanity. He uses the Scripture story of the Book of Nehemiah, in which the people rebuild Jerusalem upon their return from the Babylonian exile, to show how we might collaboratively draw on our diverse skills and qualities to build a New Jerusalem.

There, creation lives not in a market or tech-driven uniformity, but rather in sacred unity with God at the center. Therefore, the pope concludes, technology involves an ancient choice for users, rooted largely in its intention.




Technology and Creation?

“The Holy Spirit challenges us today regarding our relationship with technology,” Pope Leo writes. This year’s diocesan Catholic Campaign for Human Development intern, Pia Kellems, reflected on this new encyclical and explored how we might prioritize human dignity in the age of AI by using it for the common purpose of caring for creation. If you have a smart phone, you can do this!

As she explains, AI cannot replace humanity’s desire to care for the environment, but many environmental phone applications rely on crowdsourced data, meaning they depend on human users to provide real-time, everyday data such as biodiversity sightings and water- and air-quality information. Because creation is highly vulnerable to our human behavior and, since water and air pollution disproportionately impact low-income communities, engagement with these “apps” responds to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Here are a few free apps she recommends for nurturing your relationship with creation and supporting the integral human development of our communities:


-  **AirNow** — EPA’s app providing air-quality information.
-  **Earth Hero** — tracks your carbon emissions and helps to set sustainability goals.
-  **California Smoke Spotter** — tracks fires/smoke/air quality and hazard location.
-  **Get It Done** — allows users to report non-emergency problems to the City of San Diego, such as infrastructure issues and neighborhood cleanliness.
-  **iNaturalist** — allows users to ID plants and animals and share biodiversity data.
-  **Merlin Bird** — identifies and tracks birds based on sight or sound.
-  **StarMap 3D+** — experience the awe and wonder of the night sky.



To access the pope’s encyclical on the Vatican’s website in a range of languages, please scan the QR code or go to this case-sensitive link, bit.ly/MagnificaHumanitas2026. The Dicastery for Integral Human Development also offers this pastoral kit, humandevlopment.va/en/magnifica-humanitas/risorse/kit-pastorale, as a resource to guide exploration of the encyclical.

St. Carlos Acutis, known for your good use of technology, pray for us!

A Celebration of Senses and Spirit

 The installation of Bishop Michael Pham as the seventh bishop of San Diego a year ago was celebrated in a liturgy that wrapped our diocese in a seamless garment of the mantle of Christ.

“United in Christ,” Bishop Pham’s motto emblazoned on his Coat of Arms, became a reality through efficacious liturgical symbols that brought to life what they signified.

As the liturgy began on July 17, 2025, we were immediately drawn to the dominant symbol in the sanctuary: the powerful yet tender crucifix, with the loving and welcoming outstretched arms of Christ.

Our ears received a symphony of multiple languages layered in harmony. Our eyes took in a divine tapestry of humanity in the assembled cultural communities that mirrored the image and likeness of God.

Though this was a beginning, in many ways, it was also a continuation of the inspiration the Holy Spirit had begun decades ago.

At the age of 13, Bishop Pham and two siblings, and later the remainder of his family of 10, were blessed to have safe passage from the hunger and oppression in Vietnam to the United States.

In gratitude for this gracious gift and answering the beckoning of the Holy Spirit, Bishop Pham said “yes”

Columnist

Noreen McInnes



to the call to the priesthood.

The Holy Spirit continued to plant seeds that germinated in his ministry as the Vicar for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities. He launched synodal listening sessions for various cultures and inspired the vibrant Pentecost Mass for all Peoples.

The music offered another symbol of our unity in Christ. The hymns carefully chosen by Bishop Pham followed the three judgments for good liturgical music: pastoral, liturgical, and musical.

The pastoral judgment indicates that hymns should invite the assembly to sing with full, active participation. Consequently, the hymns were well known and sung in the various languages of our diocese by a multicultural choir.

The liturgical judgment requires that the lyrics and tempo of a hymn accompany the liturgical action and reflect the Scriptures proclaimed. The Processional hymn, “Gathered as One” by Light and Tate, united the assembly into one voice and set the tone not only for this liturgy, but also Bishop Pham’s mission as the Good Shepherd of the diocese.

The Offertory hymn, “Ang Katawan Ni Kristo” by Manalo, is Filipino for “The Body of Christ.” The lyrics “We

have come to break the bread; we have come to share our lives. Let us bring these fruits to the table, the love of God yours and mine” describe the liturgical action of offering of ourselves in sacrifice.

The assembly joined in one voice to sing the fitting Communion hymn, “Ubi Caritas” by Hurd: “Where true charity is, God is there ... The love of Christ joins us together” was sung as we received the Body of Christ.

The musical judgment implies that musical selections are to have a high level of competence and dignity. The choir embellished the assembly’s participation with four-part harmonies and instrumentation that provided the celebratory nature an installation Mass deserves.

In Bishop Pham’s homily, he drew a comparison between the Mass of Installation and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Bishop Pham observed, “Here we are today again in one place together through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognize the will of God in our Church.”

He continued, “It is the Holy Spirit who unites us to our Risen Lord and brings us to birth as a Universal Church to go forth proclaiming God’s love and salvation to the world. Jesus was sent to us by the Father to give us his spirit of love; we, too, are sent by Jesus to bring the same spirit of love to

the world filled with division and hatred through our active participation in justice and peace, in forgiveness and reconciliation actualized now in the Eucharist. This is what we are celebrating sacramentally today. True love unites in diversity.”

Bishop Pham’s mission to serve the Lord and God’s people is echoed in the compelling Communion hymn he requested, “Tâm Tình Hiến Dâng” by Oanh Song Lam. “What return could I make? Could I ever repay? With my life, O God, may I love as you have loved” was sung in English and Vietnamese. Jesus emptied himself, saying, “Father ... not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Bishop Pham also empties himself to do the will of God and models for us to do the same.

As the assembly was sent forth from the Mass to glorify the Lord, we boldly sang out in one voice “Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo” by Cortez and Hurd. “We are the Body of Christ ... We’ve answered ‘Yes’ to the call of the Lord ... We come to bring the good news to the world.” We received the Body of Christ. We are the Body of Christ. We are now sent to minister to the Body of Christ! The Diocese of San Diego is a living symbol of Bishop Pham’s motto, “United in Christ.” Amen!

Noreen McInnes ended her service as director of the Office for Liturgy and Spirituality on June 30.

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Dedicated Hands and Heart Lifted Liturgies

By Denis Grasska



No one can accuse Noreen Madden McInnes of being a slacker.

For almost 12 years as director of the diocesan Office for Liturgy and Spirituality, she helped to plan and coordinate some of the most significant liturgical celebrations in this Local Church.

Her tenure, which spanned four bishops, included overseeing:

- The ordinations of 31 priests and 87 permanent deacons
- The installation of two bishops (Bishops Robert W. McElroy and Michael Pham) and consecrations of four bishops (when then Fathers John Dolan, Ramón Bejarano, Felipe Pulido and Pham were made auxiliary bishops)
- Funeral Masses for two bishops (Bishop Cirilo Flores and Bishop Robert H. Brom) and for 52 priests
- Five dedications of churches and altars
- The training of more than 2,000 lay Eucharistic ministers
- A Mass of Thanksgiving for Bishop McElroy's elevation to cardinal, which was celebrated on Aug. 28, 2022, at St. Patrick's Church in Rome.

"It was just an amazing blessing, all these wonderful liturgies that I got to do," said McInnes, 68. "I loved every one of them."

But after all of that, she said, she no longer has "the bandwidth to keep up with all the work."

She stepped down on June 30 as director of the Liturgy Office. But she will be assisting her successor, Father Daniel Holgren, as a consultant. She also will stay on as chair of the office's



PREPARATIONS: Noreen Madden McInnes, who retired as director of the diocesan Liturgy Office, helped the cultural communities with their altar cloths during the Pentecost Mass for All Peoples on May 27, 2023, in San Diego Miramar College's gymnasium.

Art and Architecture Committee, which reviews plans for new and renovated worship spaces at local parishes.

As liturgy director, McInnes' duties included overseeing the many, large-scale diocesan liturgies that are held each year, including ordination Masses for priests and deacons; the Chrism Mass, where the holy oils used in sacramental celebrations are blessed and distributed; the Pentecost Mass for All Peoples; and the diocesan observances of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Simbang Gabi, a traditional Filipino celebration held during the Advent season.

She also has overseen the celebration of weekday Masses at the diocesan Pastoral Center and Masses at the annual Priests' Convocation and the

Imperial Valley Catholic Conference.

Beyond that, McInnes' responsibilities also included maintaining the diocese's liturgical supplies; responding to liturgical questions from bishops, priests, deacons, parishioners and others; and updating the diocese on any liturgical changes instituted by the Vatican or the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Bishop Pham praised McInnes as "very dedicated to her ministry."

"She felt such an honor to serve the Church in the particular area of liturgy," he said. "She is a wonderful, beautiful and prayerful person to work with over the years. I am grateful for her work with the diocesan celebration of Pentecost, in which I have the privilege to work with her."

Father Efrain Bautista, pastor of Corpus Christi Parish in Bonita, serves as master of ceremonies for all major diocesan Masses, priests' funeral Masses, and other Masses where the bishop requests his services. He has been doing so for about as long as McInnes has directed the Liturgy Office and, as such, they have been close collaborators.

"Noreen is very spiritual and always puts prayer above all," said Father Bautista. "She is very dedicated and gives of herself completely to what she does. For her, it is not a job, but a ministry and service to the Church."

He added, "We will miss her smile and giving of herself unconditionally to make our liturgies beautiful."

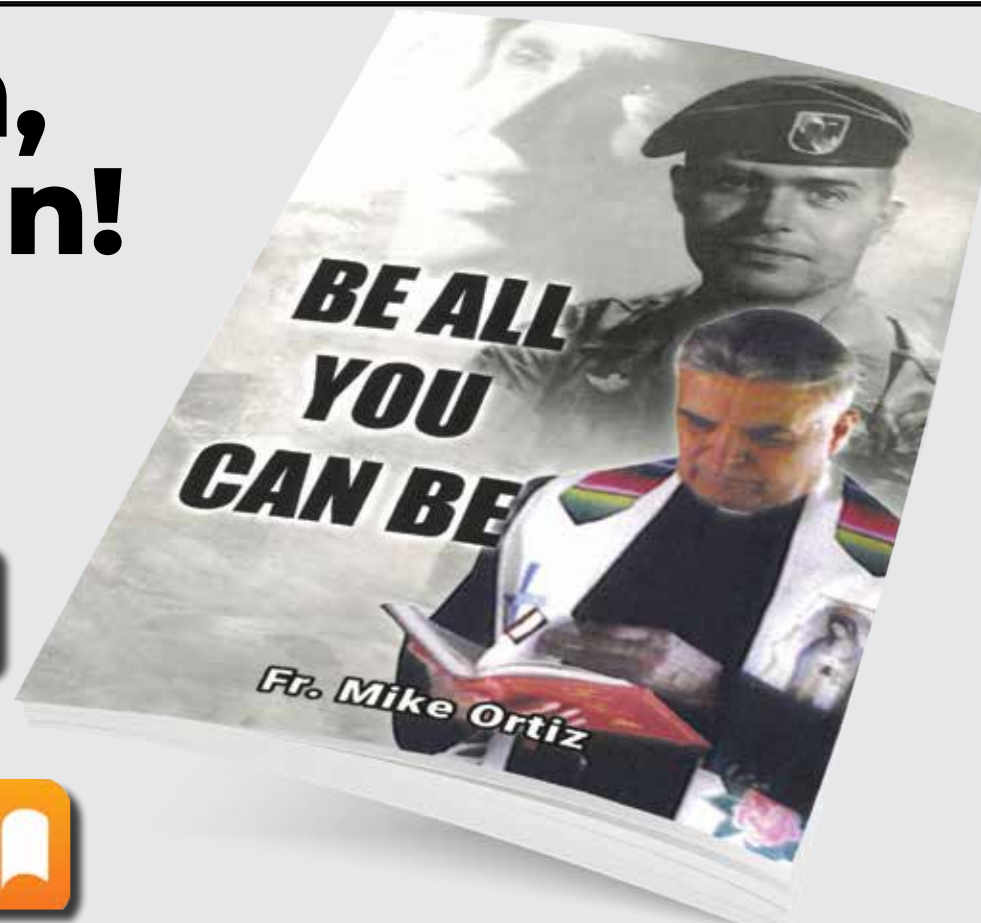
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Father Mike Ortiz is now retired from both the army chaplaincy, and the active priesthood.

After several attempts to become a military chaplain he was finally accepted and volunteered for the Green Berets.

After retirement from the military, he returned to "active duty" as a diocesan priest in San Diego.

Father Mike is now a full-time consultant to others in his retirement home, whether they want his advice or not. He is still enjoying life there at 97.

News Briefs

St. Carlo Acutis Relic Enshrined at Cathedral

The translation, veneration and enshrinement of a relic of St. Carlo Acutis followed a Mass celebrated June 24 by Bishop Michael Pham at St. Joseph Cathedral in downtown San Diego.

For more information, contact the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry at tsotelo@sdccatholic.org.

'Green Mass' for Mental Health Clinicians

All Catholic mental health clinicians and therapists are invited to join Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido and the Mental Health Ministry Network at the diocese's inaugural "Green Mass."

It will be celebrated at 9 a.m., Friday, July 10, at the diocesan Pastoral Center and will be followed by a reception. July is observed as Mental Health Awareness Month.

For more information, call (858) 490-8256 or email jprust@sdccatholic.org.

Young Adults Invited to Diocesan Holy Hour, Mass

The annual Young Adult Holy Hour and Mass will be held on Sunday, July 12, at The Immaculata Church, located on the campus of the University of San Diego.

The event typically attracts more than 300 young adults, ages 18 to 39, from across the diocese.

There will be an hour of Eucharistic adoration, beginning at 5 p.m., followed by Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido at 6 p.m. and a social with tacos and live music at 7 p.m.

For more information, call (858) 490-8260 or email tsotelo@sdccatholic.org.

Women's Retreat Offers Healing After Abortion

The Rachel's Hope ministry is hosting an after-abortion healing retreat for Catholic women.

It will be held from Friday, July 17, to Sunday, July 19, and include a closing Mass.

Housing is included. Group size is limited. The cost to attend is \$120 per person. Partial scholarships are available.

For more information or registration, call (858) 581-3022, text (858) 752-9378, email rachels_hope@juno.com or visit RachelsHope.org.

Widowed, Divorced Invited to Begin Healing

CARLSBAD — "In the Beginning ... Coping with Life Alone," a day for men and women experiencing the loss of a spouse through death, separation or divorce, will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday, July 18, at St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Carlsbad.

The cost to attend is \$50, including meals, snacks and drinks. For information or to register, call (858) 748-2273 or email BeginningExperienceSD@gmail.com.

Diocese Hosting Grandparents' Day Retreat

The second annual Grandparents' Day Retreat, sponsored by the diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality, will be held from 10 a.m. to 3

Briefs *Continued on Page 19*



Paper Wins Catholic Media Awards

ATLANTIC CITY — "The Southern Cross" was among the winners in a national journalism competition sponsored by the Catholic Media Association. The awards it received included two first-places.

The Catholic Media Awards were presented June 19, at the conclusion of the annual Catholic Media Conference, held in Atlantic City.

Assistant Editor Denis Grasska won first place in the "Best Feature Writing — Non-Weekly" category for an article about You Did It For Me, a homeless ministry in East County. The article was the cover story for the November 2025 issue.

The contest judges wrote, "This piece was spellbinding! It effectively captures the candor shared in interviews, from the founder's epiphany to the deacon's enlightenment ('I never thought of them as our neighbors before.') through to the neighbor's testimonial."

Another first place — this time in the "Best Photograph — Immigration/Migration" category — went to photographer Charlie Neuman, a regular freelancer for "The Southern Cross."

The judges said, "The image is a striking and beautifully composed photograph, using light and shadow to great effect while capturing a compelling expression that draws the viewer in and invites deeper curiosity."

The photograph (pictured above), which appeared on the cover of the December 2025 issue, depicted a woman at a candlelit prayer vigil for detained migrants outside the federal building in downtown San Diego.

Editor Aida Bustos and freelance photographer Charlie Neuman won honorable mention in the "Best Story and Photo Package — By Two Individuals or More" category for coverage of a procession in solidarity with the immigrant community in the March 2025 issue.

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COURTESY ST. MICHAEL PARISH

Breaking Ground

Parishioners of St. Michael Parish in Paradise Hills and guests gathered June 15 for a groundbreaking ceremony, marking the renovation of the parish hall.

Father Manuel Ediza, who retired June 30 after two decades as pastor, presided over the ceremony and blessed the hall. Members of the Building Committee, Finance Council,

Capital Campaign Fundraising Committee and the Parish Pastoral Council joined parishioners in celebration and thanksgiving.

The renovation includes a 2,123-square-foot addition designed to complement the original building, which was constructed in 1969. The updated hall will accommodate 300 people in theater-style seating.

The estimated renovation cost, excluding kitchen fixtures and new equipment, is \$2,369,000. The projected completion date is May 2027.

It is part of a two-phase renovation that, after the parish hall, will move on to the parish office and adoration chapel.

Ken Sewell-Parel of One World Architecture is the project architect, and Alex Bain of Action Construction and Demolition, Inc., is the contractor.

The renovated building will feature a commercial kitchen, more ADA-accessible restrooms, a relocated stage, and expanded gathering space for parish activities, such as meetings, liturgical feasts and weddings.

Planning and fundraising for the renovation took years. Working with the Finance Council and in consultation with the Services Corporation of the Diocese of San Diego, the Building Committee carefully guided the project forward despite challenges along the way.

Priest Assignments

The Office of the Bishop has announced the following priest assignments, with the permission of their provincials:

Father Edward Chow, SJ, to priestly ministry, teaching and working in campus ministry at Mater Dei Catholic High School, effective after his ordination on June 13.

Father Anthony Fill, FSSP, as associate pastor of St. Anne Parish.

Father Pedro Lucia Reyes, Sch.P., as associate pastor at Our Lady of the Valley Parish.

Father Christopher Nguyen, SJ, as associate director of the diocesan Office for the Permanent Diaconate, in addition to assisting at the Newman Center Catholic Community at UCSD, all effective July 1.

Briefs *Continued from Page 18*

p.m., Wednesday, July 22, at Ascension Parish.

The retreat's grandparent speakers will reflect on the spiritual influence that grandparents share with their adult children and grandchildren. There will be ample opportunity together for prayer, reflection and fellowship. The retreat will conclude with daily Mass.

The cost is \$25 per person and includes lunch. Register at sdcatholic.org/event/grandparents-day-retreat. For more information, email jperegoy@sdcatholic.org or call (858) 490-8292.

Young Adults Preparing for WYD 2027

The diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry is accepting applications to join its delegation to World Youth Day next summer in

Seoul, South Korea.

Those who are interested in joining the diocesan group or plan on taking a group of their own are invited to attend an in-person information session and group leaders meeting. It will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Wednesday, July 22, at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

For more information, visit sdcatholic.org/event/world-youth-day-2027, call (858) 490-8260 or email tsotelo@sdcatholic.org.

Retreat Offers Healing for Adult Children of Divorce

OCEANSIDE — Life-Giving Wounds is a unique retreat experience for those who have been impacted by parental divorce, separation or family brokenness.

The next retreat will be held from Friday, July 31, to Sunday, Aug. 2, at Mission San Luis Rey Retreat Center in Oceanside.

Register at rcbo.org/ministry/family-life/pastoral-care/adult-children-of-divorce. For more information, email jperegoy@sdcatholic.org.

Obituary

Msgr. Robert J. Ecker



Msgr. Robert J. Ecker, who was ordained for the Diocese of Brooklyn but ministered in the Diocese of San Diego, died June 3.

Msgr. Ecker, 99, served for nearly 75 years as a priest.

Born in Brooklyn, he was ordained to the priesthood on June 5, 1951, for his home diocese. He was named a monsignor in July of 1982.

Msgr. Ecker lived in Coronado for a number of years and served as a supply priest at St. Didacus and Immaculate Conception parishes and at Nazareth House San Diego.

His funeral Mass will be celebrated in Montauk, New York, and a memorial Mass is expected to be held at Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado.

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