

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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Youthful Spirit

Page 5

DAVID MAUNG

REVERENT: Around 600 faithful from across the San Diego-Imperial Valley region lifted their voices and prayers during the diocese's annual Young Adult Mass, held on July 12 at The Immaculata Church. The turnout included a growing number of young parents with babies and children.



Synod Celebration

Two events will highlight the diocese's journey to "Re-Imagine Parish Life and Leadership." **Page 2**



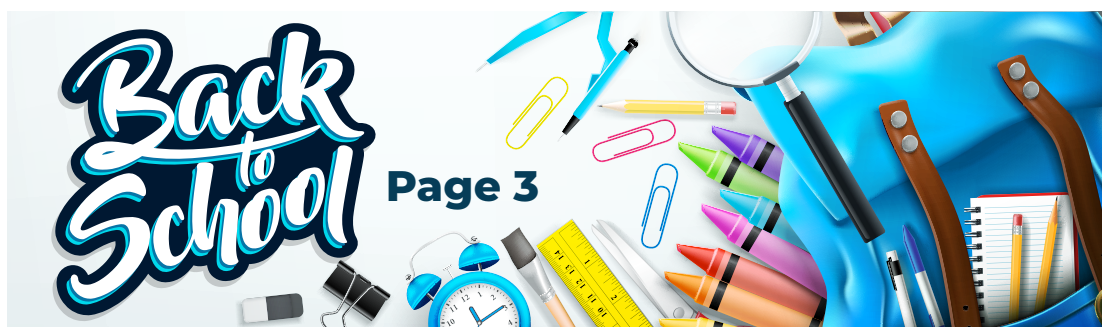
First Anniversary

Participants in the ministry that accompanies immigrants reflect on its impact. **Page 11**



Hidden Life

Carmelite sisters have spent a century in San Diego in quiet prayer. **Pages 15-16**



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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.



Events Celebrate Fruits of Synod

By Aida Bustos



A transformation is unfolding at nearly half of the parishes in the diocese, as lay leaders and their pastors re-imagine daily parish life and leadership.

They are bringing to life a concept initially championed in the Universal Church by Pope Francis, called synodality, and now affirmed by Pope Leo XIV.

Two events at the Diocese of San Diego in August will highlight that transformation.

On Friday evening, Aug. 21, Sister Nathalie Becquart, will offer a reflection on "Re-Imagining Parish Life in a Synodal Church." She is the Vatican's Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, the office that shapes how the Catholic Church listens, discerns and implements synodality.

The following day, Sister Becquart will speak at the diocese's third annual synod convocation, addressing clergy and lay leaders participating in the diocese's initiative to sow synodality at its parishes. A total of 44 are now participating in the two-year-old effort — and counting.

Paulist Father John Hurley, the diocese's synod facilitator, expects close to 400 people to attend the convocation, to be held at St. Thomas More Parish, including the 23 members of the Diocesan Commission for a Synodal Church.

The commission, launched last spring by Bishop Michael Pham, is primarily made up of pastors and synod coordinators at parishes in each of the diocese's seven deaneries. Their goal is to share their real-life experiences of implementing a synodal approach in their parishes with fellow pastors, and to help one another in this process.

The final document from the Synod of Bishops, presented in 2024, defined synodality this way:

"Synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform that enables the Church to be more participatory and missionary, so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ."

The diocese has been on a synodal journey for a decade, beginning with a Synod on Family Life, convened by then Bishop Robert W. McElroy in 2016.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of that synod. The convocation on Aug. 22 will feature a presentation about the experience of implementing that synod's recommendations, which included the creation of a diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality.

The diocese also held a Synod on Young Adults in 2019. And, in the ensuing years, hosted several rounds of listening sessions at parishes in preparation for the universal Synod on Synodality.

At the beginning of 2024, Cardinal McElroy launched the initiative



SHARING: Pastors and lay leaders participating in the diocese's "Re-Imagining Parish Life and Leadership in a Synodal Church" effort met on March 19 at the Pastoral Center.

Vatican Leader to Speak in San Diego



The Diocese of San Diego invites all faithful to hear one of the leading voices in the Universal Church, Sister Nathalie Becquart, who will speak on "Re-Imagining Parish Life in a Synodal Church," on Aug. 21, 7 to 9 p.m., at St. Gregory the Great Parish.

Sister Becquart is the Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, the highest-ranking woman in a governance office in the Church, and the first woman able to vote in a universal synod.

A native of France, she is a member of the Congregation of Xavières, a religious institute rooted in Ignatian spirituality and the work of St. Francis Xavier.

Please scan the QR code to register.



"Re-Imagining Parish Life and Leadership in a Synodal Church," starting with 16 pilot parishes.

The goal was to encourage greater participation in the life of the parish, particularly by those who felt excluded, renewing and growing not just the parish, but the Church itself.

Each parish was to identify two goals, one to re-imagine parish life and the other to re-imagine parish leadership. Often, these goals grew out of parish listening sessions.

Then the pastor, supported by a parish synod coordinator and a lay team of parishioners, would develop an action plan to bring the goals to life, using the synodal practices of listening and discerning a path forward together.

Key to this process was an openness to being guided by the Holy Spirit.

By this summer, the number of participating parishes has reached 44 from across the San Diego-Imperial Valley region.

The pastors and lay leaders have shared how working on their goals has positively changed their parishes.

At a synod gathering last Dec. 4, Father Bernardo Lara described the situation at his two parishes in Brawley.

Their members were highly polarized along language, social and economic lines, reflecting entrenched attitudes about the other parish's members.

Using an intentional synodal approach, he said, which included listening sessions that brought people from both parishes together, attitudes began to change.

"The person was not just an idea any longer," he shared. "It was a person with a face, with a name, with a background, with a family, with a house next to mine."

The synodal process involved various phases, he continued, each bringing their own successes, including members of both parishes embracing a sense of co-responsibility for what happened at their parish and beyond.

"We started sharing that sense of 'we're all in charge of this big boat called Church,'" he said. "And then we moved into another phase, which was evangelization."

As the synod facilitator, Father Hurley has heard all of these stories, and looks forward to more.

"I think we have a movement happening in the diocese."

Schools Ready to Welcome Students Back

By Denis Grasska



Summer vacation is winding down, and a new school year will soon commence.

“The beginning of the school year is always an exciting time for families, for students, for teachers, for principals,” said Diocesan Superintendent Leticia Oseguera. “It’s bringing life back to the campus.”

More than 15,000 students from preschool through 12th grade are expected to attend local Catholic schools during the 2026-2027 academic year. This includes about 1,000 preschoolers; 9,300 elementary school students; and 4,800 high school students.

Across the San Diego Diocese, Catholic elementary schools will be holding their first day of class between Aug. 11 and 26, with Mater Dei Catholic Elementary School in Chula Vista being the first and Holy Trinity School in El Cajon being the last to return. On Aug. 19, at least 22 schools are scheduled to begin classes.

The first day of class for Catholic high school students will be Aug. 10 at Mater Dei Catholic High School, Aug. 11 at the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, Cathedral Catholic High School and Vincent Memorial Catholic High School, and Aug. 17 at both Cristo Rey San Diego and St. Augustine high schools.

At eight schools, returning students will encounter new principals: Brooke Bundy, St. Mary’s School, El Centro; Tina Demarchi, Holy Trinity School, El Cajon; Amber Wilson, St. Martin of Tours Academy, La Mesa; Paige Villalobos, St. Therese Academy, Del Cerro; Josh Englund, St. John School, Encinitas; Karen Shannahan, St. Mary Star of the Sea School, Oceanside; Sister Susana del Toro-Vargas, SJS, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School, San Ysidro; and Sara Odioso, Cristo Rey San Diego High School.

Over the summer, the diocesan Office for Schools also said farewell to Elijah Bonde, who was associate superintendent since July 2023. He left June 30 to become president of Nativity Prep Academy, where he previously served from 2008 to 2013. His most recent assignment there was as vice president for institutional advancement.

Describing Bonde as a “very valuable member of our team,” Oseguera said, “We are definitely sad to see him go, but I am also very happy for him ... He’ll make a huge impact for that school community, and we’re happy that he continues to be part of our Catholic school family.”

This summer, the Schools Office continues its tradition of offering professional learning for pastors, principals and teachers.

Six local pastors — Fathers Jun Cinco, Ignatius Dibeashi, Ricardo Juarez, Brent Kruger, Bernardo Lara and Roldan Nuñez — participated in



WARM HANDOFF: Catholic schools across the San Diego-Imperial Valley region will welcome more than 15,000 students and their families in August to the 2026-2027 academic year.



FLOOR TIME: Students, like these kindergarteners last year at St. Charles Catholic School, are ready to learn after the summer break.

the School Pastors’ Institute, a four-day leadership formation symposium offered by the University of Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education. The conference, held from June 15 to 18, examined the role of a pastor in a parish school and shared best practices.

The Schools Office itself hosted a New Pastor-Principal Meeting on July 21 for those who will be members of a new partnership this year, whether that’s because a new pastor has been assigned to a parish, a new principal has been hired for a school, or both the pastor and principal are new this year.

A Leadership Summit will be held Aug. 3 to 4 at Cathedral Catholic High School. Principals will attend both days, with school presidents and vice principals also welcome on the first day and school pastors on the second day.

On Day One, speakers will address topics like building a school brand, increasing enrollment and cultivating alumni relationships.

The second day will include the presentation of short- and long-term goals set by the Task Force for Schools, which was established last year by Bishop Michael Pham, and inspired by feedback received at synodal listening sessions. Oseguera said that the 12 short-term goals are to be accomplished by the end of the new school year.

The annual “Faith & Science” Conference, a collaboration between the Schools Office and the diocesan Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry, will be held Aug. 6. This year’s conference will be a field trip to “The Shroud of Turin: An Immersive Experience” at the Christ Cathedral

Cultural Center in Garden Grove.

Open to all teachers, the event is especially recommended for religion and science teachers. Each school is required to send at least one representative.

The diocese introduced the Magis Center’s faith-and-science curriculum into its elementary schools and parish religious-education programs in the fall of 2021. That curriculum was developed by Jesuit Father Robert Spitzer in response to statistics showing that 42% of young people lose their faith before age 25, almost half of them because they mistakenly believe that science and religion are incompatible.

First-year teachers, as well as experienced teachers new to Catholic schools, will meet six times as part of the Institute for Novice Teachers, a program that provides professional learning and support. Their first session will be Aug. 12, and their last will be on May 5, 2027.

Associate Superintendent Elizabeth Kramer said that between 35 and 50 teachers participate in the program each year. Last year, she said, they had 43.

New Catholic school principals will also take part in a yearlong support program sponsored by the Schools Office in partnership with the University of San Diego. From Aug. 27 to May 11, 2027, they will meet monthly to cover various topics related to their new role.

Oseguera said that the meeting locations will rotate among each of the principals’ campuses, enabling them to see other Catholic schools and to solicit feedback from one another.

Director Returns to 'Awe' of Youth Ministry

By Denis Grasska



"Bittersweet."

That's how Gerardo Rojas describes leaving the diocesan Pastoral Center, where he worked for the past 18 years, to teach theology at the Academy of Our Lady of Peace (OLP).

Rojas, 44, stepped down as director of the Diocesan Institute on July 10. He served in that role for seven years, following 11 years as director of the diocesan Office for Youth Ministry.

He feels grateful for his time at the diocese and sad to leave, but is excited about the future.

Originally from Mexico, Rojas earned his bachelor's degree in 2004 from the University of Notre Dame, majoring in Political Science, with a supplemental major in Theology. Two years later, he earned a master's in Theology from Notre Dame.

Rojas recalled "falling in love" with "the process of trying to unravel the mystery of who God is and who we are meant to be," and he was inspired "to dedicate my professional life to that."

After two years of ministry in Colorado, he came to San Diego to head the Office for Youth Ministry, beginning in August of 2008.

"For 11 years, he spearheaded the department and led thousands of youth to an intentional encounter with Christ," diocesan Chancellor Marioly Galván said at a farewell reception July



JOYFUL: Gerardo Rojas participated in the National Fifth Encuentro on Sept. 20, 2018, in Grapevine, Texas, as part of the delegation that attended from the Diocese of San Diego.

8 at the Pastoral Center.

"Gerardo has been more than a colleague; he has been a trusted teammate, a dependable friend, and a source of joy for everyone fortunate enough to work alongside him," Galván continued. "I would know. I was his assistant for nearly five years, while serving in the Youth and Young Adult Office, and I can attest to Gerardo's genuine nature, servant leadership and pastoral kindness."

Almost from the start, Rojas taught for the Diocesan Institute, a theological formation program that offers

courses for Catholic adults, mostly those preparing for ministry work. It also provides intellectual formation for candidates for the permanent diaconate, who attend classes with their wives for the four years before ordination.

In July of 2019, Rojas became director of the Diocesan Institute.

He said that the Institute offers about 80 courses annually and averages about 450 students each quarter.

As the Institute's director, Rojas appreciated finding himself once again "in the academic environment of the study of theology." He contrasted that

with the more "pastoral" nature of youth ministry.

That's not to say that there weren't aspects of youth ministry that he missed after making the transition, particularly how youth "experience life and God and the way in which they wrestle with the things that they're ... encountering."

"Not that there's anything wrong with working with adults ... But I kind of missed that curiosity, challenge, but also wonder and awe," he said.

Rojas felt called to return to working with young people, albeit in a different way than before. He first considered becoming a high school teacher after observing his daughters' experience with Catholic secondary education, how their instructors and school environment had helped them "discern who they are, who they're meant to be (and) who God is."

"The more I thought about it, the more I prayed about it," he said, "the more I felt like ... this is something that I need to explore."

At OLP, he welcomes students for the first day of class on Aug. 11.

At the farewell reception, Galván said that the new job "seems perfectly suited to (Rojas') gifts."

"His future students will not only learn theology from him," she said. "They will learn compassion, integrity, joy and what it means to live one's faith authentically."



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Concelebrants: Filipino and Diocesan Clergy

Reception Following the Mass



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Planting Fruitful Seeds

CELEBRATION: Young faithful gathered after the Young Adult Mass for a reception next to The Immaculata Church on July 12, including Father Evan Bui, associate pastor of Good Shepherd Parish.

By Aida Bustos



“What kind of soil is my heart?”

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido asked the women and men attending the diocese’s annual Young Adult Mass to ponder that question. An estimated 600 packed the pews and lined the walls for the Mass on July 12 at The Immaculata Church, one of the largest turnouts in recent memory.

The director of the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Maricruz Flores Strauss, noted that a greater number of young families participated than in previous years.

“We had so many babies and toddlers,” she said. “We had strollers in the church. It was a beautiful thing to see.”

Besides the Mass, the office coordinates workshops, retreats and more to meet the needs and interests of young adult faithful across the San Diego-Imperial Valley region. The office also helps to connect them to “flourishing ministries” at parishes eager to serve them.

In his homily, Bishop Pulido reflected on the parable in that Sunday’s Gospel reading (Matt 13:1-23).

“A sower goes out to sow. Some seed falls on the path. Some falls on rocky ground. Some falls among thorns. And some falls on rich soil.

“If the sower knows that the seed will only grow well in fertile soil, why does he scatter seed everywhere? The answer is beautiful. Because the sower is God.

“His generosity has no limits. He believes in every human heart. He never says, ‘This person is not worth trying.’

“The real question,” he continued,



ARMFUL: More families with babies and toddlers attended the Young Adult Mass this year.

“is not about the seed. The real question is: What kind of soil is my heart?”

“Jesus gives us several possibilities.

“Some seed falls on the path, and the birds eat it. Today, those birds can represent our constant distractions ... Social media demands our attention. Messages, emails, notifications, videos — they can consume our minds. Our distractions can steal the Word of God before it has the chance to enter our hearts.

“Then Jesus speaks about the rocky ground. The seed grows quickly, but because it has no deep roots, it withers when the sun becomes hot.

“How often does that happen to us? We attend a retreat. We leave inspired. We decide to pray every day. But after a few weeks, the enthusiasm disap-

pears. Without deep roots in prayer and perseverance, faith cannot survive the challenges of life.

“Then Jesus speaks about the thorns. The seed begins to grow, but the thorns choke it. Those thorns can represent the worries, anxieties and pressures of daily life.

“Many people sincerely want to follow Christ, but they become overwhelmed by work, family responsibilities, financial concerns, illnesses or endless activities.

“So, today, Jesus lovingly asks each one of us: What kind of soil is your heart? Is it distracted? Is it shallow? Is it overwhelmed? Or is it ready to receive His Word?”

He said that the beautiful part of this Gospel is that the soil can change.

“No farmer expects good fruit without first preparing the land. The same is true of our hearts.

“Sometimes, we need to loosen the soil. That means allowing God to touch those places we prefer to keep hidden ... But healing begins when we allow God into those places.

“We also need to water the soil. What are we watering our hearts with? If we constantly fill ourselves with bad news, complaints, negativity, endless entertainment, or social media, it becomes difficult for God’s Word to flourish.

“Instead, we should nourish our hearts with Scripture, prayer, the Eucharist, silence, acts of charity and good friendships.

“Finally,” he continued, “every gardener knows that weeds must be removed. There are habits, resentments, fears, sins and attachments that choke God’s life within us. They need to be pulled out, so that grace may grow freely.

“May we allow him today to cultivate our hearts, so that his Word may take deep root and bear fruit — thirty, sixty and a hundredfold — for the glory of God and the good of the world.”



Details of celebration and photo gallery



Reflection on Martyr's Courage at Auschwitz

By Denis Grasska



Aug. 14 is the feast day of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

It's also the 85th anniversary of the day on which the Franciscan friar was martyred at Auschwitz, the infamous Nazi death camp, where he offered his life in exchange for that of a fellow prisoner who was a husband and father.

St. Maximilian was canonized on Oct. 10, 1982, by Pope St. John Paul II.

Deacon Bobby Ehnou, director of the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice, has long had a devotion to St. Maximilian, whom he describes as “a spiritual ally” and, at times, affectionately refers to as simply “Max.”

“He has been a ‘go-to’ saint of mine since I was incarcerated in 2013,” he said, “and I continue to ask for his intercession to counsel and bless the ministry that I lead at the diocese.”

Recently returned from a visit to the saint's native Poland, which included a tour of Auschwitz, Deacon Ehnou reflected on his relationship with St. Maximilian and what we can learn from his life and death.

It was in the summer of 2013 that Deacon Ehnou first encountered St. Maximilian. At the time, the future deacon was an inmate at a federal prison in Colorado and had barely begun



TRIBUTE: St. Maximilian Kolbe died in this cell at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Poland in 1941, after being starved and injected with poison. He died a martyr for his faith.

the 27 and a half months that he would serve there for conspiracy to commit wire fraud and for bribery.

In the prison chapel, he stumbled across a documentary about St. Maximilian, which taught him that the martyr is a patron saint for prisoners and was a strong promoter of the rosary — at the time, a devotion that Deacon Ehnou had recently embraced.

Deacon Ehnou prayed the rosary on his first night in prison and continued to pray it for the entirety of his 807 days in custody. Early in his incarceration, he started a rosary group that, within six months, had grown to include about 20 inmates.

St. Maximilian made another appearance in Deacon Ehnou's life shortly after he joined the diocesan staff, where his focus is primarily on restorative justice and prison ministry.

In the summer of 2018, about a month into the job, he was given an icon of St. Maximilian by a fellow diocesan employee who had taken up iconography. The gift inspired him to learn more about the saint's life.

He said, “He's been a real inspiration for me and ... a spiritual ally because of the ministry that I'm working in.”

Deacon Ehnou recently attended and spoke at the 13th International Conference of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, which was held

Kolbe Continued on Page 7

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Kolbe *Continued from Page 6*

from June 11 to 13, at SWPS University in Poznań, Poland.

Before the conference, he paid a visit to Krakow, which included a day trip to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp on June 8. He described it as “the largest cemetery on the planet, where 1.1 million people were murdered and their remains incinerated in massive ovens and open fields.”

Among them was St. Maximilian, who was sent to Auschwitz in May of 1941. About two months later, the deputy camp commander ordered that 10 men be killed by starvation as a punishment for another prisoner’s successful escape. One of the men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, pleaded that he had a wife and children, and Father Kolbe volunteered to take his place.

Gajowniczek, a fellow Polish Catholic, would not only survive the war, but live to attend the beatification and canonization of St. Maximilian in 1971 and 1982, respectively. He died in 1995 at age 93.

In his recently published book, “All Things New: A Journey from Brokenness to Restoration,” Deacon Ehn timer recounted the story of St. Maximilian’s martyrdom.

“In the starvation bunker, he led prayers, strengthening the other men,” the deacon wrote. “After two weeks, only four prisoners, including Father Kolbe, remained. The Nazis executed them by injecting carbolic acid into their veins.”



DEATH TRACKS: Nazi Germany used trains to forcibly transport millions of Jewish people and other victims across Europe to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

“Witnesses reported that Kolbe peacefully raised his arm in surrender. He died a martyr for his faith,” added Deacon Ehn timer, who, during his visit to Auschwitz, saw Cell 18 in Block 11, where St. Maximilian died.

Deacon Ehn timer told *The Southern Cross* that the Polish saint was “a man of not only deep faith, but also of courage,” and had demonstrated these virtues long before his final moments. Among his ministry assignments, St. Maximilian had run a Catholic publishing house and served as a missionary in China, Japan and India.

“Standing up for what’s right is a

part of what we’re supposed to do as Christians,” Deacon Ehn timer explained.

“We don’t talk about it all the time, but the ask is, to die for Christ,” he said, recalling Jesus’ exhortation: “I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John 13:34).

“Jesus literally died for us,” he said, “and he’s asking us to have the same kind of love for each other, which means sacrificial love to the point of death.”

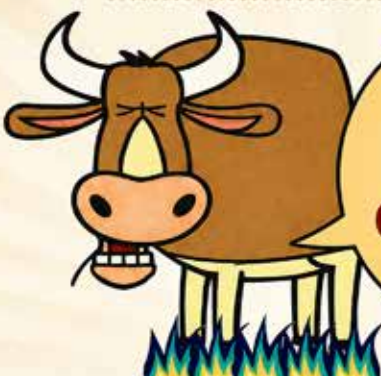
More About Maximilian

San Diego is home to St. Maximilian Kolbe Roman Catholic Polish Mission, which is located at 1735 Grand Ave. in Pacific Beach. Masses, all celebrated in Polish, are celebrated at 7 p.m. on Fridays and at 9 and 11 a.m. on Sundays. Learn more at polishmission.org.



St. Maximilian’s martyrdom also was recently the subject of a dramatic film, “Triumph of the Heart,” which was released in 2025 and is now available on DVD and streaming. Learn more at triumphoftheheart.com.

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Unpacking Faith: Assumption of Mary

By Denis Grasska



The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is observed on Saturday, Aug. 15.

What does this celebration commemorate?

It celebrates the fact that Mary, at the end of her earthly life, was taken up (or, assumed) — both body and soul — into Heaven.

Is it a holy day of obligation?

Not this year, at least not in the United States.

The Code of Canon Law includes it as one of 10 holy days of obligation that, like every Sunday of the year, “must be observed” (Canon 1244). However, it notes that, with approval of the Holy See, national bishops conferences can suppress some holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a decree, which went into effect in 1993, that the obligation to attend Mass for the Solemnity of the Assumption is dispensed when it falls on a Saturday (like this year) or a Monday.

What’s the difference between “assumption” and “ascension”?

Jesus, who was fully God as well as fully human, “ascended” to Heaven by his own divine power as God. Mary,



ALTAR: The mission church at the Barona Indian Reservation is named Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, part of St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish. The altar features a mosaic of the Assumption.

who is only human, was entirely dependent on God to “assume” her body and soul into Heaven.

Must Catholics believe in the Assumption?

Yes. The dogma of the Assumption of Mary was infallibly defined by Pope Pius XII on Nov. 1, 1950, in the apostolic constitution “Munificentissimus Deus.” In it, he wrote, “By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”

Does this mean that the Church didn’t believe in Mary’s Assumption before 1950?

No, that’s not how papal infallibility works. “Munificentissimus Deus” even cites the First Vatican Council’s teaching on papal infallibility, that “the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter in such a way that, by his revelation, they might manifest new doctrine, but so that, by his assistance, they might guard as sacred and might faithfully propose the revelation delivered through the apostles, or the deposit of faith” (Paragraph 12).

Virgin Continued on Page 9

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Virgin *Continued from Page 8*

Catholic apologist Tim Staples, in a 2019 article for “Catholic Answers,” wrote that the Church’s teaching regarding the Assumption “began with a historical event ... that (has) been believed in the Church for 2,000 years. It was passed down in the oral tradition of the Church and developed over the centuries, but it was always believed by the Catholic faithful.”

He noted that, despite the Church’s tradition of venerating saints’ relics, there has never been a purported relic of Mary’s body. Two locations are claimed as her tomb, but neither contains bodily remains.

“As revered as Mary was, (having no one claim to have relics of her body) would be very strange,” said Staples, “except for the fact of the assumption of her body.”

The year 1950 wasn’t that long ago. Are there recordings of the proclamation of the dogma?

A contemporary *British Pathé* news report can be viewed on YouTube. The brief video is under two minutes long. To find it, search for “The Assumption Proclamation (1950).”

Is Mary the only person to be bodily assumed into Heaven?

Based on Scripture, many believe that the prophet Elijah, who “went up to heaven in a whirlwind” (2 Kings 2:11), and Enoch, of whom Scripture says he “walked with God, and he was no longer here, for God took him” (Gen 5:24), were similarly assumed.

How frequently do Catholics reflect on the Assumption?

The Assumption is the fourth of the five Glorious Mysteries of the rosary,

typically prayed on Wednesdays and Sundays. So, for Catholics who pray a daily rosary, the answer is: at least twice a week.

What does the Assumption mean for us?

When you and I die, our bodies and souls will be separated. The former will decompose in our graves, while the latter go to Heaven (either directly or after passing through Purgatory) or to Hell. Our bodies and souls will not be reunited until the end of time.

That’s not the case with Mary, and her example gives a glimpse of our future.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that Mary “already shares in the glory of her Son’s Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body” (Paragraph 974).

“Munificentissimus Deus” (Paragraph 5) states that Mary, “by an entirely unique privilege, completely overcame sin by her Immaculate Conception, and as a result, she was not subject to the law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body.”

Pope Pius expressed hope “that belief in Mary’s bodily Assumption into heaven will make our belief in our own resurrection stronger and render it more effective” (Paragraph 42).

Are any local parishes named after the Assumption?

No, but St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish in Lakeside is composed of three mission churches on three Indian reservations. One of them, located at Barona, is Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Bishops to Lead Pilgrimage To Basilica in Mexico City

The Southern Cross



In preparation for the 500th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 2031, a contingent from the Dioceses of San Diego and Monterey will travel to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

The pilgrimage, July 27 to Aug. 3, will be led by Bishop Michael Pham and Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido, of the Diocese of San Diego; and Bishop Ramón Bejarano, of the Diocese of Monterey. Bishop Bejarano was auxiliary bishop in San Diego until last January.

The pilgrims will visit sacred and historic sites in Mexico City, Tlaxcala, Teotihuacán, and Puebla, and celebrate Mass together.

According to tradition, Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared in December of 1531 to St. Juan Diego in Tepeyac Hill, near what is now Mexico City, leaving her image imprinted on his tilma, or cloak.

The cloak is displayed at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which the pilgrims will visit. The bishops will receive a life-sized, authentic replica, with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The replica will be touched to the original, making it a third-class relic. It will be brought back to San Diego,



SACRED: The cloak with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is displayed at the basilica named after her in Mexico City.

where it will visit parishes and Catholic schools and be present at diocesan events, like the Pentecost Mass for All Peoples.

The visits are part of a five-year plan the San Diego Diocese intends to announce in October to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the apparitions, which ignited a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe that has inspired and sustained the peoples of the Americas.



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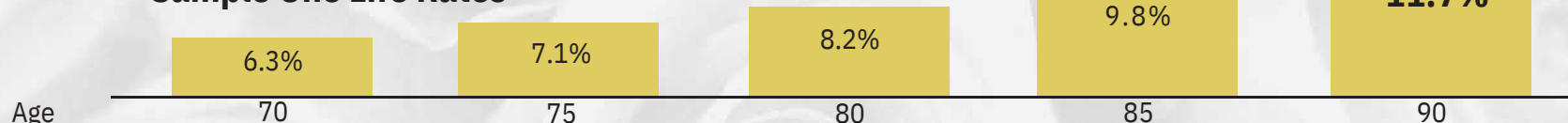
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Amid Despair, Simple Power of Presence

By Aida Bustos



Presence has enormous power.

Power to make someone feel human. Power to bear witness. Power to bring God's warm love into a cold courthouse.

The ministry that accompanies undocumented immigrants to their hearings and ICE check-ins at the downtown federal courthouse marks its first year in August.

In that time, clergy members and volunteers have prayed with countless migrants, comforted family members whose loved ones were detained and raised awareness to what is unfolding daily as the federal government wages a massive deportation campaign.

In 2024, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained around 600 undocumented immigrants in the San Diego-Imperial Valley region. In 2025, they detained 8,300, according to *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

The ministry, known as FAITH (Faithful Accompaniment in Trust and Hope), is a collaborative effort of the Catholic Diocese of San Diego, under the leadership of Bishop Michael Pham; Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Barrio Logan, and the San Diego Organizing Project.

'Traumatic and Awful'

The ministry volunteers meet weekdays outside of the courthouse to serve in two-hour shifts, starting at 7:30 a.m., 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. They pray together and head inside.

"We pray for those that we hope to serve, and for the people who work in the building," said Deacon Chris Hulburt, a volunteer since the ministry began.

At times, migrants request accompaniment. The volunteers meet them outside of the building, pray with them and walk in with them and their family members.

The action occurs mainly on two floors. The second floor houses the ICE office and another one, known as ISAP (Intensive Supervision Appearance Program). The courtrooms where the hearings are heard are located on the fourth floor, which has a waiting area.

The volunteers head to the fourth floor, which is open to the public, where they can sit in on court hearings. They can approach migrants in the hallways and in the waiting area, introduce themselves and offer to pray with them.

Jesuit Father Scott Santarosa, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, said the situation inside the building has evolved in the last year, viewing distinct phases as chapters.

"The first chapter was very bleak," he said, of the period last summer when the ministry began.

Deacon Hulburt recalls that period well.

"The horrific thing was that immigrants would have a hearing in a courtroom with the judge, make ar-



PRAYER: The ministry that accompanies immigrants to their court hearings is marking its first year. One of the dozens of clergy volunteers is Deacon Chris Hulburt, pictured leading a prayer on April 1 in front of the federal courthouse, alongside Bishop Michael Pham and Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido.

Who Are FAITH Volunteers?

Total trained as ministry volunteers: 713

Clergy volunteers of all faith traditions: 162

Catholic priests: 51

Catholic deacons: 24

Catholic religious sisters: 13

Number of religious traditions of volunteers: 17

Information is as of July 14.

Scan the QR code for information about this ministry or to request accompaniment.



rangements to come back another day or even have their case dismissed.

"And then, they would walk out and be surrounded by heavily armed, disguised, intensely intimidating ICE agents, and be swept away. It was really traumatic, awful and terrifying."

He said the volunteers were "present for all of that, praying with family members who were left behind, stunned, praying with those who were being detained."

Chapter 2 began in late fall, Father Santarosa said. ICE agents would arrest the migrants on the second floor, a restricted area not open to the public.

In Chapter 3, the agents were not necessarily arresting many migrants but rather putting a surveillance device on them, such as an ankle bracelet, to keep tabs on them.

The current chapter involves "mass dockets," when as many as 100 migrants are summoned to court on a given day, often on short notice. The people who do not show up face automatic detention and deportation.

'Incredibly Emotional'

Fidel is an undocumented immigrant from Mexico. He and his wife have been members of Christ the King Parish for 27 years. They have two U.S.-born daughters, ages 20 and 26.

Immigration authorities ordered Fidel to appear in court on Oct. 9. His family requested FAITH volunteers accompany him to his hearing.

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido; Father Tommie Jennings and Deacon Carlos Morales, both from his parish; and several parishioners, agreed to ac-

company him.

"When I was asked to accompany Fidel, I immediately said 'yes,'" Bishop Pulido said. "His story and his family's faith have left a lasting impression on me."

At the hearing, the judge continued Fidel's case until January.

"As we stepped out of the courtroom and into the hallway, an ICE agent approached us and asked, 'Who is Fidel? I have a message for him,'" the bishop recalled.

Fidel's attorney explained that he had just received a new court date. The agent replied that Fidel needed to report to the second floor for what he described as a routine check-in.

Once on the second floor, only the attorney was permitted to go into the ICE office with Fidel.

About 10 minutes later, the attorney emerged with heartbreaking news: "They are taking everyone."

Moments later, they watched ICE agents rush Fidel to the elevator to take him to a holding cell in the building's basement.

His two daughters began to cry.

The group walked outside, where Fidel's wife was waiting.

"It was an incredibly emotional reunion," the bishop recalled. "Everyone embraced one another, and despite her own pain, the wife said with remarkable faith, 'Let us not lose hope. God is with us, and he will help us through this difficult journey.'"

'We Felt Human'

In the interview, Fidel described the harsh conditions in the cell.

"There were 20 of us crammed into

a small room," he recalled. "We slept sitting on the floor, and received cold, sometimes spoiled food to eat. It was very ugly in there."

After four days, he was transferred to the Otay Mesa Detention Center, where he spent the next six weeks, until his release on Nov. 24.

As the immigration case against him proceeded, the volunteers have continued to accompany him to his court hearings, held in April and May.

Fidel described the impact of the accompaniment.

"We felt that we were important to someone," he said. "When we saw our Church and other people supporting us, we felt like human beings."

He continued, "I felt that I was not alone, that God was always with me."

Since his release, Fidel has struggled to make ends meet. And he developed diabetes in detention, a condition he works to control daily.

His youngest daughter suffers from severe depression, worsened by his immigration crisis, he said. His attorney is pursuing a special visa to allow Fidel to stay in the country to take care of her. If he does not receive it by October, he will be forced to voluntarily return to Mexico or be deported.

'Core of Who We Are'

Deacon Hulburt has worked as a civil trial attorney in San Diego for 38 years, and serves at his parish, St. Brigid's, since being ordained 13 years ago.

The deacon does not doubt the Church's role at the courthouse.

"This FAITH ministry is the essential ministry of the Church, which is to accompany the least of these, to accompany the outsider, to care for the oppressed, to defend the defenseless, to speak for the voiceless. This is the core of who we're called to be as Christians."

Bishop Pulido reflected on the simple power of accompaniment.

"Accompanying Fidel and his family reminded me that ministry is not about having all the answers," he said. "Sometimes, the greatest gift we can offer is simply our presence, our prayers, and the assurance that no one has to face suffering alone."



As the years pass,
I have come to
believe even more
something I heard from
older brothers who were
more advanced than me
on the road of spirituality. I
recall them saying:

“Your life is nourished by an intimate and personal experience with God; in our case, with Jesus, an incarnated and historical presence among us, and with the Spirit of Life he left us.”

From that experience, faith, hope and love are born, cultivated and sustained. What is not connected to that deep well ends up weakened.

I have experienced this in my own life. I lived it during the years I shared the Jesuit mission.

Action — as urgent, just and necessary as it was — ended up wearing me down when it did not spring from within. Then came long periods of emptiness. The more I neglected silent spaces to listen, in the intimacy of my conscience, to the voice of eternal Wisdom that lives in the soul, the darker and colder life turned.

With time, I learned that those mo-

Columnist

Ricardo Márquez



ments are, in reality, a call from the soul: an invitation to turn our gaze inward, to awaken, to pay attention to that which we have neglected, to return to the house of the Father, where grace and love are always available.

Today, I recall the numerous Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola to open myself up to accepting this concept. St. Ignatius invites us to commence with “The Principle and Foundation”: to experience from within a Creator God, a Trinity of Love, that loved us from the origin of creation itself and continues to love us with a tenderness that surpasses all comprehension.

It is not a matter of reaching a logical conclusion, but of receiving a gift. That is why St. Ignatius insists on “feeling it and enjoying it in our interior.”

St. Ignatius recommends that we don’t rush to advance before we have profoundly experienced this fundamental truth. He himself said that this

grace led him to cry abundant tears because, once he allowed himself to be seen by this Love, he discovered the pain of not having amply returned it.

Those tears can include feelings of shame and guilt, but when they are embraced by mercy, they can bring healing.

From that experience, St. Ignatius invites us to review our life, the decisions we have made, and the mistaken paths we have taken. “Sin” is no longer seen as a moral stain and recovers its original meaning: *hamartia*, a word related to the art of the archer that means “miss the bullseye,” “fail the direction” and “not reach the goal.”

To look back on one’s life without having experienced first God’s unconditional love can lead to desperation; to do it from the certainty of being loved leads to a conversion.

The next step of the Exercises is an invitation to find in Jesus the way, truth and life. That is why, during this time of prayer, Ignatius proposes a simple and profound petition: “to know Jesus intimately, to love him and follow him more.” To know him in his joys and sufferings, in his compassion for the poor, in his closeness to the excluded, in his self-giving until the cross and in the joy of his resurrection.

All our senses are invited to participate: to see, listen, touch, smell and contemplate with our imagination the events of the Gospel, allowing them to pass through our minds to our heart and, from our hearts, to our lives. This process culminates in “Contemplation to reach love,” which flows into authentic contemplation in action.

After experiencing this grace, our gaze changes. We receive the gift of discovering the presence of God in all things.

Then we begin to recognize his touch in those who smile at us, in the hand that consoles the sick, in the mother who breastfeeds her baby, in the forgotten prisoner, in the cook who prepares food with love, in the dawn, in the hummingbird and the bees ... All becomes a song to the Creator, as perceived by St. Ignatius, St. Francis of Assisi and so many saints.

And then come tears, but different ones: tears of gratitude, of amazement, of joy in discovering the presence of Love in everything.

This road was not only for them. It’s also an invitation for you and me.

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

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Journey from Optometrist to Parish Priest

By Roman T. Flores



EL CENTRO — July is the traditional time priests are assigned to new parishes. This summer, 25 priests in the Imperial Valley have been moved, 75% of the total serving in that region. The arrivals and departures are rippling across the small-town communities they serve.

The Imperial Valley's largest parish, Our Lady of the Valley (OLOV) in El Centro, welcomed Msgr. Federico "Jun" Cinco III as its parish administrator. The parish's pastor, Father Mark Edney, began a one-year sabbatical. Father Pedro Lucia Reyes moved in as associate pastor as Father Ed Horning moved to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in his hometown of Lakeside. The parish also eagerly awaits the return of its second associate pastor, Father Kizito Uzoma Ndugbu, from Africa.

Msgr. Cinco comes to the Imperial Valley from St. Michael Catholic Church, in the Paradise Hills neighborhood of San Diego, after having served there for six years. *The Southern Cross* invited him to share a bit about himself and his service.

Question: Can you tell us about yourself?

Answer: I was born on March 7 and grew up in the Philippines. I studied



Msgr. Federico "Jun" Cinco III

from elementary until university in the Philippines. After a year of practice in my clinical profession (as an optometrist), I entered the seminary until I was ordained a priest.

Where did you learn the faith?

I am the fifth of seven children of my parents, Francisco II and Adelaida Honrade-Cinco. I started serving in the church when I was 7 years old as an altar server, and I later became a choir member and a lector.

Our family house is just in front of the church (in our hometown) and the public and the Catholic schools. I am so blessed being brought up by my parents, who are active in the church with the gift of faith.

I loved serving in the church, but (growing up) I never dreamed of becoming a priest. What was in my mind was to become a doctor. I later graduated as a Doctor of Optometry and practiced for a year as a licensed optometrist, then as a hired practitioner.

When did you hear the call to become a priest?

One summer, I went home to my province supposedly to (open) my own clinic. It was then that the pastor of our parish kept pushing me to enter the seminary, but I resisted until he told me to just try seminary life. He said, "God will be with you and, if it is not meant for you, then you can go out anytime."

Out of obedience, I entered the seminary, and it was there that I forgot my plan to practice my career and to have my own clinic. Despite the different lifestyle than when I was studying at the university, I absolutely enjoyed my seminary life. The main thing I remember from that time can be summed up as "No regret" and "No time wasted," despite life adjustments.

How long did it take you to become a priest? What was that journey like?

It took me six years of Philosophy and Theology, despite my late vocation. I was ordained a priest on April 8, 1992, at the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, Calbayog City, Samar, Philippines.

After 25 years in the pastoral ministry in the Diocese of Calbayog, I came to the Diocese of San Diego in December 2019. From Jan. 1 to June 30, 2020, I was assigned as administrator of Our Lady of Angels Parish in San Diego. And from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2026, I was an associate pastor of St. Michael Parish in San Diego. Now, starting July 1, I have started a new

journey of pastoral ministry at Our Lady of the Valley Parish.

What is your message as you begin this new assignment?

I humbly ask the parishioners and the people of God, as your new parish administrator, to let us continue our journey together as disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us build a vibrant community centered on the Holy Eucharist, nourished by God's Word, strengthened through the sacraments, and inspired to serve one another with compassion and generosity. As your parish administrator, I come not only to lead, but also to listen, to learn from you, and to work alongside you.

I told the parishioners here on my first weekend celebrating Masses, "Thank you so much for the warm welcome, both inside the building and outside of the building." Everyone laughed.

I encourage everyone to continue sharing your gifts and talents for the growth of our parish and for the glory of God Almighty. May God bless you all.

What experiences, if any, stand out to you in your years of service as a priest?

All I can say is I feel joy, the joy inside my heart I have as a priest. I know it's a big sacrifice, but joy is what I know is in my heart, and I have no regrets. It is wonderful.

I am happy here. I love the place here in El Centro, and I'll serve wherever God asks me to serve, for as long as he asks me to serve.



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100 Years of a Simple, 'Hidden Life'

By Denis Grasska



The Discalced Carmelites are celebrating a century of "hidden life" and "prayerful presence" in San Diego.

Bishop Michael Pham joined the cloistered sisters on June 20 to mark the milestone anniversary. He celebrated Mass in the chapel of their monastery, Carmel of the Trinity, which is located on Hawley Boulevard in the Normal Heights neighborhood.

Sister Maria Fideles Musiko, who has served as prioress for almost a year, reflected on the significance of the centennial.

"The 100 years' celebration brings us peace and love as we thank God for his blessings in our lives as a contemplative monastery here in San Diego," she told *The Southern Cross*.

She said, "We look back with gratitude and appreciation in all that we have been and achieved ... Our prayerful presence is a beacon of hope to the diocese, both Christians and non-Christians."

Sister Musiko explained that the Carmelite charism is "union with God through contemplative prayer."

"Prayer is the core of our life," she said. "We bring the whole world before Christ."

The Discalced Carmelites' local history dates to when Bishop John J.



FOUNDATION: Four of the original five women who came to San Diego to found Carmel of the Trinity monastery are seen in this historic photo circa the 1950s. Pictured, from left, they are Sister Joseph of the Heart of Mary, Sister Magdalene of Jesus Crucified, Mother Stanislaus of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and Mother Emmanuel of the Passion.

Cantwell, then bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles-San Diego, invited Carmel of Santa Clara to send sisters to establish a new community in his diocese.

Five nuns arrived on June 11, 1926, and two houses in the North Park neighborhood were transformed into a temporary monastery for them.

The current monastery was built in 1932 and is now home to 14 sisters, who range in age from early 30s to mid-90s; the latter has been there for 74 years. Sister Musiko said that the

community also has two women who are currently in formation.

The San Diego Community of Discalced Carmelite Seculars was established 71 years ago in the monastery's chapel. It's composed of lay men and women — both single and married — who are affiliated with the Carmelite Order and have undergone more than seven years of formation; made formal promises of chastity, poverty and obedience; and gather regularly as a community. Currently, there are more than 50 active members and another 55 who are homebound; about 30 took

part in the June 20 celebration.

Sister Léonie Williams, 31, told *The Southern Cross* what the sisters' daily schedule is like.

They gather together at 6:45 a.m. on Mondays through Saturdays to recite the Divine Office and attend Mass. (On Sundays, they sleep in until 9 a.m.)

Between then and 5 p.m., when the community gathers once again for Vespers, the sisters individually complete their daily tasks, one hour each of spiritual reading and silent mental prayer, and the little hours of the Divine Office.

Sister Williams said the sisters' jobs include serving as sacristan; as provisor, who is responsible for ordering groceries, primarily online; working in the altar bread room and in the vestry (which includes the house pharmacy and other household supplies); various cleaning assignments; and maintaining the monastery garden.

On Wednesdays through Sundays, the days when the sisters share a meal in common, Sister Williams said, the nuns take turns cooking for the whole community.

After Vespers comes another hour of silent mental prayer, followed by supper together in the refectory. This is followed by an hour of recreation, which usually consists of the sisters sharing about their day, but can also include card games and ping pong.

The day ends with Compline at 8 p.m., followed by "grand silence," a

Carmelites *Continued on Page 16*



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Carmelites *Continued from Page 15*

special period of silence and solitude during which all non-emergency tasks are avoided.

“As a fully contemplative community,” said Sister Williams, “we have limited direct contact with the outside world. ... Besides doctor’s appointments and the occasional grocery run, the nuns are not generally permitted to leave the cloister.”

She said that the public is welcome to attend Mass in the monastery chapel, which is celebrated at 7:30 a.m. on Monday through Saturday and at 4 p.m. on Sunday, and friends and family are allowed to visit an individual nun monthly in one of the monastery’s “speak rooms.”

The monastery has an email address and phone number, through which it receives prayer requests, which are posted daily on the community board, so that all the sisters can see them. They also have a newspaper room, where they can keep up on current events, and a library computer that all of the sisters can use.

“After the first few years of formation, a nun is permitted to have a phone, especially if her office requires her to use one,” said Sister Williams. “In all cases, the nuns are encouraged to use technology only in ways that do not interfere with her vocation of prayer and total commitment to God.”

Sister Musiko, 62, entered religious life at the Nairobi Carmel in 1984, professing her first and final vows in 1987 and 1990, respectively. She came



HIGH GROUND: The Discalced Carmelite nuns lead hidden lives of prayer in a monastery that overlooks the hustle and bustle of Mission Valley.

to Carmel of the Trinity in 2017.

“Saying ‘yes’ to God’s call has been the greatest joy of my life,” she said, “and I know, if I were to start all over again, I will still choose to be a Carmelite.”

“That doesn’t mean that it has been a straight line scattered with roses only,” she said. “There’s been ups and downs, sorrow and pain, and loss of loved ones. This keeps me grounded with all humanity in their sorrows and pain, carrying the cross daily focused on Christ our savior. And, as St. Therese said, we come to realize that everything is grace.”

Sister Michaela Gresko, 77, is a former prioress of Carmel of the Trinity. She entered religious life in 1971, professed first vows in 1974 and made her final profession in 1976.

“It’s a hidden life, simple and without obvious significance,” she said. “It says a great deal to me that our mon-

astery has stood on top of a hill overlooking Mission Valley for 100 years and yet most people don’t know we’re here, don’t know who we are or what we are. That has never bothered me, nor has it kept our community from doing what God put us here to do.”

Sister Gresko described it as “a life stripped to its essentials and focused on ‘the one thing necessary.’” She said that her vocation has given her the opportunity “to live a life with depth and with substance.”

Sister Musiko expressed her community’s gratitude to Bishop Pham, Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido, local clergy, men and women religious, lay Catholics, and all who have “helped the monastery arrive at this celebration of 100 years.”

“We appreciate the spiritual and material help given,” she said. “We

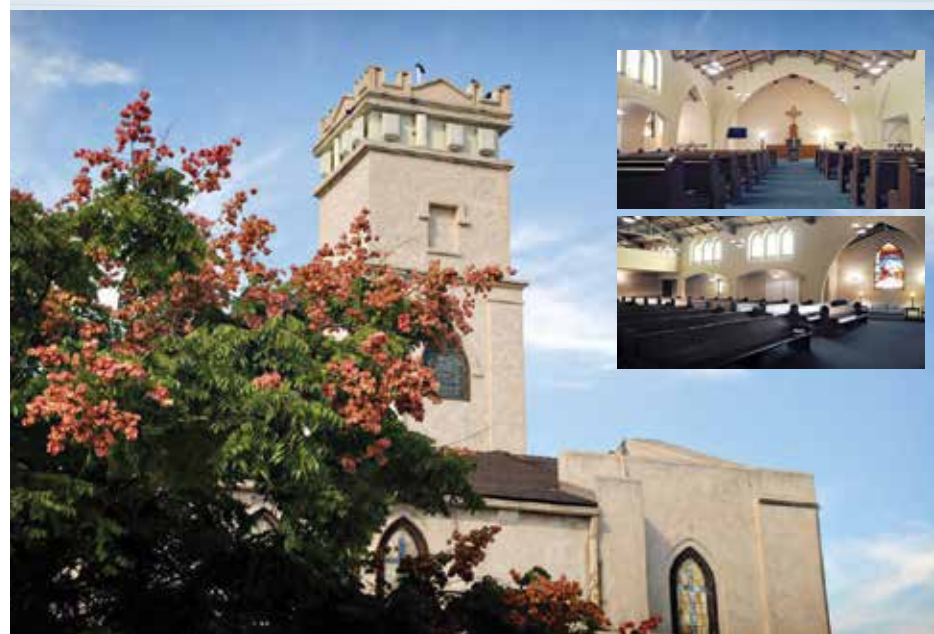
appreciate, too, the moral encouragement and challenge.”

Sister Gresko said that, through her years of living there, she has had “one prayer, one desire for this monastery.”

“It’s that, God willing, the sanctuary light burning day and night in our chapel and in our choir never go out,” she said, “but that it always be a silent and unassuming radiance, softly shining in the night of our earthly life for those who need it in their lives, especially those living in darkness and unawareness of God, in order that they find their way to him; that, regardless of the winds and storms of time and life, it keeps burning with a strong and steady flame of living love.”

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BIG BLOOMS: In the spirit of Pope Leo's *Borgo Laudato Si'*, gardens flourish at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Diego, the Society of the Divine Word *Laudato Si'* Farm in Tagaytay, Philippines, and St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish in Oceanside.

Initiative: 'Common Home, Common Ground'

By Christina Bagaglio Slentz, Ph.D.



With over half of our parishes solarized and divestment from fossil fuels accomplished, Bishop Michael Pham is adding a new Diocese of San Diego initiative in response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

We have named this initiative "Common Home, Common Ground," or CHCG. Moved by what he observed while visiting the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) *Laudato Si'* Farm in Tagaytay, Philippines, Bishop Pham is asking every parish and school to reflect on how we can engage with the land we steward, gardening and farming our Catholic land to sow beauty and feed our community.

Bigger Than Texas!

The Catholic Church owns about 177 million acres of land worldwide, making it the largest non-governmental landowner on Earth. That is



HANDS-ON: Creation Care Summer Teens visit Groundworks San Diego-Chollas Creek, which partners with numerous local educational and nonprofit organizations to build healthier, greener, empowered communities with a particular focus on youth leadership.

larger than France, the largest country in Europe, and bigger than Texas, the largest state in the continental United States.

Certainly, stewarding this property comes with great responsibility and, as the gift of creation is naturally life-giving, this land offers great potential for the promotion of human flourishing, especially helping our brothers and sisters in need. In Tagaytay, they not only foster eco-spirituality on the beautiful grounds, but also grow food.



GROWTH: Corn grown in the nutrient richness of unwashed eggs at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (San Diego) in its *Tepeyac* garden. This 5-year-old urban garden has augmented food provisions for vulnerable households for several years.

Pope Leo launched *Borgo Laudato Si'*, an educational and economic project located on the papal grounds in Castel Gandolfo. The project teaches sustainable farming, in particular to students from vulnerable communities.

With almost 100 parishes and approximately 50 school campuses, what might the diocese do with the land we steward?

The diocesan Pastoral Center, for example, sits on about 5.5 acres, and, of course, the building and parking take up a good bit of space, but it is not unreasonable to think that one acre could be set aside for gardening/farming.

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, one acre of land can grow a variety of crops, including 50,000 pounds of strawberries or 46.4

bushels of wheat — that's a lot of strawberry shortcake! If each parish and school set aside one acre, coming to 150 acres altogether, the bureau contends 3.75 million pounds of potatoes could be grown per year — enough to feed over 60,000 people.

A Growing Need and a Bishop's Vision

This June 1, legislative changes to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), also known as "CalFresh," have left an estimated 90,000 San Diegans suddenly stripped of food aid. As Imperial County has one of the highest CalFresh participation rates in the state, this half of our diocese is likely experiencing a similar if not worse impact than the San Diego side. Consequently, Catholic Charities of San Diego expects these changes will soon result in an urgent need for emergency food assistance across our diocese.

The "Common Home, Common Ground" initiative asks us how we, the Catholic community, might re-connect with Our Sister, Mother Earth, recognizing the gift of life that sits in our hands. Might we grow the flowers that adorn our altars? What kind of savings might that achieve, and what plastic containers might be avoided in the process? Might we venture into planting fruit trees or even cultivating crops to augment local food pantries? Many parishes and schools are already doing this work, and if you are a pastor or principal, we want to hear from you at this case-sensitive survey link, bit.ly/SDCatholicLand.

The Creation Care Ministry and expert parishes with established gardens are developing beginner, intermediate and advanced pathways to grow and engage in this new initiative that officially launches at our 2026 Season of Creation Mass with Bishop Pham on Saturday, Sept. 5, at 6 p.m., at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Vista. To celebrate the new initiative, we ask that attendees bring to the Mass harvested produce from their parish/school/backyard gardens for donation to the parish's chosen food bank. Register now to attend at bit.ly/SOCMass26.

More "Common Home, Common Ground" information is soon to come. If you are interested in getting involved or learning more, please contact Christina Slentz at cslentz@sdccatholic.org.



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

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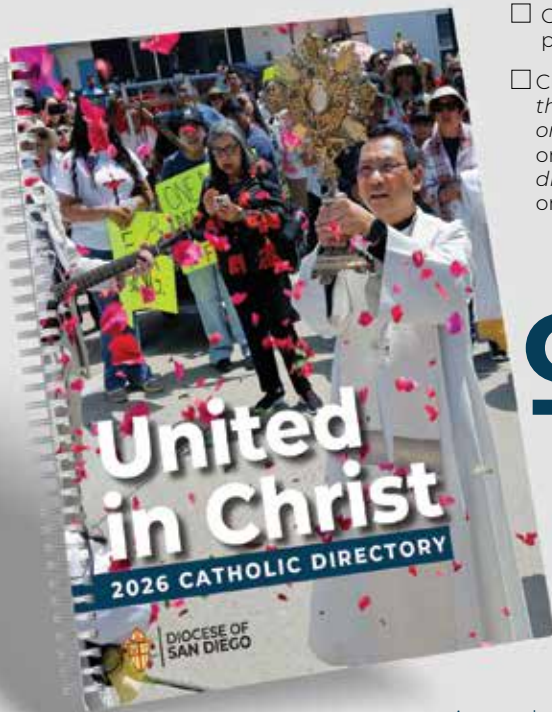
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Assistant Editor Receives Award

Denis Grasska, assistant editor of *The Southern Cross*, was among the winners of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) San Diego Pro Chapter's annual journalism contest.

He received the James Julian Memorial Award (for Best Community Service story) for his article about You Did It For Me, a nonprofit that serves the homeless and those at risk of homelessness in East County. It was the cover story for the November 2025 edition.

SPJ San Diego's awards ceremony was held June 25 in Mission Valley.

Of Grasska's article, the contest judge commented, "It is grassroots efforts like this that can make so much difference in a community. The writer did an excellent job of conveying that difference and getting the perspective of both volunteers and beneficiaries."

The same article previously won first place in the "Best Feature Writing — Non-Weekly" category about a week earlier at the Catholic Media Awards.



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News Briefs

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@sdccatholic.org.

Retrouvaille Weekend to Heal Struggling Marriages

Retrouvaille is a program designed to help struggling marriages regain their health.

The next Retrouvaille weekend will be from Friday, Sept. 25, to Sunday, Sept. 27. English and Spanish weekends will be held in separate locations. The cost is \$700.

For more information, visit helpourmarriage-sandiego.org or email joseandmary@helpourmarriage.org.

Young Adults Preparing for World Youth Day 2027

The diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry is accepting applications to join its delegation to World Youth Day next year in Seoul, South Korea.

Young adult pilgrims from the San Diego Diocese must be ages 21 to 39 to join the diocesan delegation.

The next international World Youth Day gathering will be held from Aug. 3 to 8, 2027. The theme will be “Take courage! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The first official celebration of World Youth Day took place in 1986 in Rome. The most recent international gathering, held in 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal, drew about 1.5 million young people from around the globe, including more than 100 from the San Diego region.

For more information, visit sdccatholic.org/event/world-youth-day-2027 or contact the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry at (858) 490-8260 or tsotelo@sdccatholic.org.



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 Priest Assignments

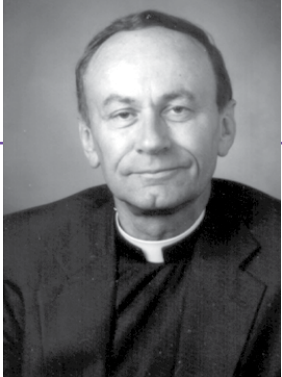
With the permission of their provincials, the Office of the Bishop has announced the following priest assignments:

Father Lawrence Goodwin, CJM, as hospital chaplain at Palomar Medical Center and Tri City Medical, effective June 18

Father Rigoberto Olivares Mejia, cs, as administrator of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Chula Vista, effective July 1

Father Gerard Timkang M. Sala, CRSP, as associate pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, effective June 15

 Obituary



Msgr. Neal Dolan

Msgr. Neal Dolan, a retired priest of the Diocese of San Diego, died July 7. He was 88.

After completing his priestly formation at Immaculate Heart Seminary in San Diego, he was ordained to the priesthood on March 19, 1964.

His first assignments were as an assistant pastor at St. Therese Parish in Palm Springs and then at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in San Bernardino, at a time when both Riverside and San Bernardino County were still part of the Diocese of San Diego.

From 1967 through 1980, he served at St. Francis Seminary in a succession of roles: director of vocations, faculty member in conjunction with his vocations director role, and director of the Diaconate Office.

He was named founding pastor of Ascension Parish in Tierrasanta in early August of 1980, serving there until late June of 1987. He was made a monsignor on May 8, 1985.

Msgr. Dolan was then sent to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Lakeside, initially as parish administrator. Within a year, he was appointed pastor and continued in that role until July of 2001.

His final assignment was as pastor of St. Michael Parish in Poway, serving there for 13 years until retiring from active ministry in early July of 2014.

A vigil will be held at 4 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 6, at St. Michael Parish in Poway. The funeral Mass will be at 10 a.m., Friday, Aug. 7, also at St. Michael's, with a reception to follow.

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When Faith Was All He Had

Too often, people assume that homelessness is simply the result of addiction, substance use, or poor personal choices. While those challenges can play a role for some individuals, they do not tell the whole story.

The reality is that many people become unhoused because of circumstances beyond their control. Seniors living on fixed incomes, veterans, people facing medical crises, and individuals who have lost their support systems can all find themselves without a safe place to call home. For many, there is simply no family or safety net to turn to.

Research in San Diego found that more than one-quarter of the region's unhoused population is age 55 or older - about 2,000 older adults. More than half said that an additional \$300 per month or less could have prevented their homelessness.

Barnave's story is one such example. At 62 years old, after serving our country as a Marine for nearly 20 years, he never imagined he would experience homelessness. Yet after a series of difficult circumstances, Barnave found himself sleeping on the streets of Oceanside for six months.

Barnave arrived at La Posada de Guadalupe amid chaos and uncertainty, but La Posada offered him something no money can buy: peace of mind. **"This is safety right here, my peace of mind. I can go to the Library or the VA and not have to worry about where I'm going to sleep tonight."** La Posada provides more than just shelter; it also offers services such as case management, employment resources, mental health resources, substance abuse resources, 3 daily meals, and transportation for men who are unsheltered.

Barnave shared with us that **"Catholic Charities reinforced my faith in life. With Catholic Charities, it's not just the buildings; it's the people who work here as well. I'm having faith in God and having faith in people again."**



Imagine, after serving your country with honor for nearly 20 years as a Marine, finding yourself at 62 with nowhere to lay your head. That was Barnave's heartbreaking reality. After a painful series of circumstances, this proud veteran spent six long, lonely months sleeping on the cold streets of Oceanside—each night wondering if he would be safe, if tomorrow would be any different.

When Barnave walked through the doors of La Posada de Guadalupe, he carried the heavy weight of exhaustion, fear, and lost hope. But what he found there moved him to tears: genuine safety, compassion, and the warm embrace of human kindness.

At La Posada, Barnave didn't just receive shelter. He received restoration. Through Catholic Charities' caring team, he received multiple touchpoints of support to help him pursue stable employment—each offered with dignity and love. Most powerfully, his faith in God and in people was gently rekindled.

Although Barnave found refuge at La Posada de Guadalupe, thousands of men, women and children across our region face similar challenges. As one of six Catholic Charities programs serving individuals experiencing homelessness throughout San Diego and Imperial Counties, La Posada is part of a comprehensive continuum of care that offers safety, compassionate support, and a pathway toward permanent housing and renewed hope.

Tonight, someone in our community will face the uncertainty of sleeping on the streets—cold, afraid, and losing hope. But because of caring supporters like you, another person will have a safe bed, a warm meal, and a path forward. Your gift can be the answer to someone's desperate prayer. Please make a gift today and help ensure that more individuals like Barnave can find hope again when they need it most.

Your gift today helps ensure that more people like Barnave do not have to face life's challenges alone.