

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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JOIN US! Bishop Michael Pham has joyously led the region's Catholic community since his appointment last year as bishop of the Diocese of San Diego. This edition shares the initiatives he's launched on multiple fronts, such as synodality, immigration, Catholic education, evangelization and more.



Blessing for Cemetery

Good Shepherd Catholic Cemetery, the diocese's second cemetery, opens in Vista. **Page 2**



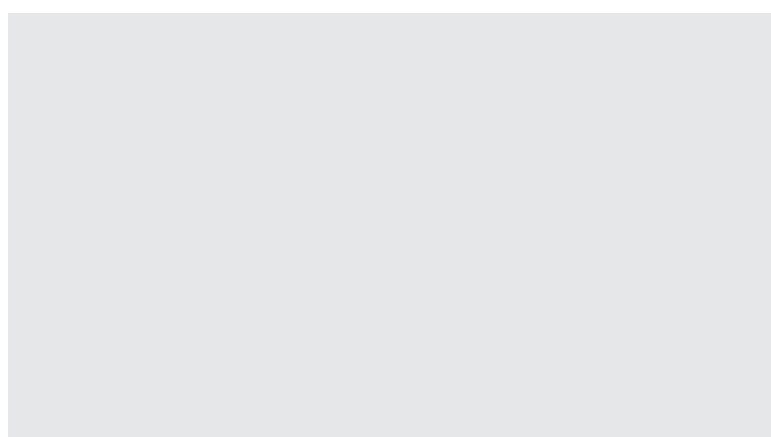
Our Lady Arrives

San Diego welcomes relic of Our Lady of Guadalupe in build-up to apparition's 500th anniversary. **Page 3**



100 Years

St. Didacus Parish, named for diocese's patron saint, is celebrating centennial. **Pages 18-19**



World Mission Sunday • Oct. 18, 2026

Supplement Inside

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THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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**DIOCESE OF
SAN DIEGO**

The Diocese of San Diego runs the length of California's border with Mexico and serves more than 1.4 million Catholics in San Diego and Imperial counties. It includes 96 parishes and 13 missions, 47 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.



First Burials at New Cemetery

By Aida Bustos



VISTA — The diocese's second Catholic cemetery opened in September with the burial of the cremated remains of six individuals.

The new locale, Good Shepherd Catholic Cemetery, answers a growing pastoral need as Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery and Mausoleum in San Diego nears capacity for ground burials, ensuring that the Church continues to accompany her sons and daughters from the moment of death until the day of the Lord's return.

The cemetery is situated on 14.5 acres directly northeast of St. Thomas More Parish in Oceanside.

Bishop Michael Pham blessed the grounds on Aug. 22, on a hot, sunny afternoon before a small group of diocesan staff and crew.

"This is such a beautiful, wonderful day that we gather here to bless this piece of land for Catholic faithful and others," Bishop Pham said in his opening remarks. "We want to prepare this land so people can rest here in peace while waiting to enter the kingdom of Heaven, both body and soul."

He led a special prayer. Then, he walked the perimeter of the property, sprinkling holy water to consecrate and purify the site.

"After preparing this resting place for the dead, we shall raise our hearts from earth to Heaven and look to Christ, who suffered and rose again for our salvation," Bishop Pham said. "He has commanded that we keep watch for his coming and has promised to meet us when we rise again."

He was accompanied by Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido, who assisted in the rite, and by Father Efraín Bautista, director of diocesan cemeteries;



RITE: Bishop Michael Pham blessed the grounds of Good Shepherd Catholic Cemetery in Vista on Aug. 22, accompanied by Ron Briseno, from St. Thomas More Parish.

Robert Dorsey, executive director and manager of diocesan cemeteries; diocesan Chancellor Marioly Galván; Shirley Pajanor, diocesan director of finance; Appaswamy "Vino" Pajanor, chief executive officer of Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego; Father Derek Twilliger, pastor of St. Thomas More Parish; Ron Briseno, director of development and stewardship at St. Thomas More; and diocesan and cemetery staff members.

On Sept. 2, Father Bautista presided over a graveside service for the first individuals to be interred at the new cemetery. Their earthly remains were brought to Good Shepherd to be buried. These individuals were Mary Quigley, Viola McPerson, Jennifer Ellen Prats, Mateo Pasqual, Philip Martin and Philip Beltron Aguilar.

"Families will bring their loved ones to this newly consecrated ground, con-

fident that those who rest here do so in the hope of rising with Christ," said Dorsey.

"Good Shepherd Catholic Cemetery thus stands not merely as a place of burial, but as a quiet proclamation of the Gospel: that death does not have the final word and that every faithful soul, body and spirit, is destined for the fullness of life in the kingdom of Heaven."

In other news, Father Bautista is going to bless a new columbarium at Holy Cross dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi to mark the 800th anniversary of his death. This blessing will be on Friday, Oct. 2, after the 11 a.m. Mass.

Information about the diocesan cemeteries is available at sdccatholiccemeteries.org.



Valley Conference Will Be Nov. 7

By Roman T. Flores



BRAWLEY — The diocese invites the Catholic community in the Imperial Valley to an "Encounter with Our Lady of Guadalupe," the theme of its biennial conference on Saturday, Nov. 7.

The conference is one of the first public events the diocese is holding at the beginning of its five-year initiative to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico in 2031.

The Imperial Valley Catholic Conference will be held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Brawley, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and is hosted by the diocese's Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry.

Leticia Trent, the office's director, said the bilingual conference will feature a relic of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a replica of the tilma bearing her image. Bishop Pham received it during a pilgrimage to Mexico City last July.

"We're going to present the tilma to the Imperial Valley," she said, noting that the relic is to travel across the region in the next five years, including to all parishes and Catholic schools. Sacred Heart in Brawley will be the first parish in the Valley to host the traveling tilma, she added.

This will be the fourth edition of the conference, which the diocese hosts every two years in the Valley.

The conference is geared for parish and ministry lay leaders, with tracks in English and Spanish. The event will present workshops, a Mass, confession and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. In addition, there will be live

music and local exhibitors.

The diocese's pastoral offices will each explore Our Lady of Guadalupe from distinct perspectives. They include the offices for Youth and Young Adult Ministry; Family Life and Spirituality; Liturgy and Spirituality; Diocesan Institute; and Life, Peace and Justice.

The keynote speaker will be Father Rafael Capó — known as the "body-building priest" — of St. Thomas University of Miami, Florida, who will also offer workshops in Spanish.

The cost to attend the conference is \$35, which includes lunch. The church is located at 402 S. Imperial Ave., Brawley.

For more information or to register, visit bit.ly/ImperialValleyCatholicConference2026.



Tilma Relic Arrives from Mexico to SD

By Aida Bustos



“She is our Mother, and she does not have borders.”

Wendy Baez was reflecting on the experience of being part of a small diocesan delegation that on Sept. 15 escorted an official relic with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe from Tijuana to her new home in San Diego.

She said that “it was a beautiful experience to pick up our Mother” at that city’s cathedral, which is under construction.

“I thought about how we’re also building the foundation of our faith by receiving Our Lady,” said Baez, the diocese’s new director of the Office for Family Life and Spirituality. Her husband and two children had accompanied her on the trip.

It was an opportunity “to deepen our faith and teach our children a little of the history of how *La Virgen* arrived in Mexico and why we love her so much.”

The relic is at the heart of the Diocese of San Diego’s five-year initiative to celebrate the 500th anniversary of her apparitions in Mexico in 2031.

The diocese invites the entire community to the first public appearance of the tilma, on Saturday, Oct. 10, at Cathedral Catholic High School, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Guadalupe 2031 Initiative calls for Our Lady’s image to visit all parishes and Catholic schools in the San Diego-Imperial Valley region, as well as public places, in the next five years.

The tilma, a cloak made out of cactus fibers, is about 5½ feet tall and 3½ feet wide and is housed in an ornate silver and gold frame. It’s considered a third-class relic in the Catholic Church, since it touched the original when it was being prepared.

The original is at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Bishop Michael Pham led a pilgrimage there in July to receive the relic.



IN LINE: A specially designed van, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, transported the tilma relic with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe across the border at San Ysidro on Sept. 15 to the diocesan Pastoral Center.

‘Guadalupe 2031’ Initiative Launch

The diocese invites everyone to encounter Our Lady of Guadalupe at a special event.

**Oct. 10, 2026 — 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Cathedral Catholic High School**

- *First appearance in public of the tilma replica in diocese*
- *Rosary and prayer service*
- *Procession and festival*



The basilica is located near Tepeyac Hill, where Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to St. Juan Diego five times in December of 1531, igniting the spread of the Christian faith across the native peoples of the Americas and beyond. To those devoted to her, Our Lady represents a protective mother who never abandons her children,

especially on their darkest days, and always leads them to her Son, Jesus.

Bishop Pham spoke of how the tilma “is very, very special” in his homily at the basilica, noting how it had survived, virtually undamaged, over the centuries.

Around 1785, a worker cleaning the frame accidentally spilled 50% nitric acid solvent directly onto the fabric. Instead of eating through it, the spill left only a minor stain. In 1921, a bomb hidden in a basket of flowers left under the tilma exploded and damaged the altar of the basilica, but the tilma was unharmed.

“We continue to see it as a living miracle for us in our world today,” Bishop Pham said.

The relic Bishop Pham received was transported from Mexico City to the border, where the Archdiocese of Tijuana safeguarded it. On the morning of Sept. 15, Very Rev. Msgr. Mario Nicolás Villanueva Arellano, the apostolic administrator, welcomed the San Diego delegation and led a prayer beside the framed relic, in an outdoor space of the cathedral.

“We’re sister dioceses, and Our Mother is passing through here,” the apostolic administrator said.

Then, the tilma was loaded into a

small van decorated with Our Lady’s image, and the delegation headed to the San Ysidro port of entry. About 3½ hours later, they crossed into the United States.

At the diocesan Pastoral Center, the staff greeted Our Lady with roses and sang the traditional Mexican hymn “La Guadalupana.”

“With hearts full of gratitude, we welcome the pilgrim image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas,” said Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido at the Rite of Acceptance in the chapel, where the tilma relic was deposited. “As she once appeared as a loving Mother to St. Juan Diego, may she now draw near to us and lead us ever closer to her Son, Jesus Christ.”

Bishop Pulido headed the 17-member San Diego delegation, which included Fathers Efraín Bautista, of Corpus Christi Parish; Edmundo Zárate, of St. Jude Shrine of the West Parish; and Chris Bongato, the diocese’s vicar for ethnic and intercultural communities.

Six members of the Vietnamese Catholic Community were a part of the delegation, including community and ministry leaders.

“We had heard about Our Lady of Guadalupe, but, personally, I did not know her history,” said one of them, Kha T. Tran, a vice chair in the community, who said he would continue to learn more about her. “It was an amazing experience and a blessing.”

The diocese is hosting a presentation in Vietnamese about Our Lady of Guadalupe at Good Shepherd Parish at 7 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 30.



UPLIFTING: Four priests, two each from the Archdiocese of Tijuana and the Diocese of San Diego, loaded the framed tilma relic into the van that would transport it from the cathedral in Tijuana to the diocesan Pastoral Center.

Information about the diocese’s initiative is found on the page sdcatholic.org/guadalupe2031.



YEAR IN REVIEW — **SYNOD** — YEAR IN REVIEW

LEONARDO ENRIQUE FONSECA

HOPEFUL: Sister Nathalie Becquart, a leading voice at the Vatican, spoke on Aug. 21 at St. Gregory the Great Church. She said the synodal process of listening, dialogue and reconciliation, guided by the Holy Spirit, has the power to transform parishes, dioceses and the world itself.

New Culture Flourishing Across Diocese

By Aida Bustos

“The Spirit is already alive here.”

That’s what a leading voice at the Vatican affirmed during a recent visit to the Diocese of San Diego.

You could experience the Spirit at work as parishioners, ministry leaders, clergy and more came joyously together over two days to reflect on the new culture flourishing in the diocese — and to celebrate.

The emerging culture is rooted in synodality, a process that calls on all faithful to a deeper life of communion, participation and mission in the Church.

“There’s a lot of excitement about the ways a more participatory Church shares decision-making and responsibility for the direction parishes and the diocese are going,” said Dr. Maureen Day, Ph.D., a local theologian, sociologist, Church scholar, and member of the Diocesan Council for a Synodal Church.

“There’s just a lot of hope and energy that this could help revitalize our Church in the San Diego area.”

The diocese has been on a synodal journey for 10 years. It began in 2016 with a consultation of parishioners about how the Church could strengthen marriage and family life, under

Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus

Official Prayer for the Synod

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path, nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity, so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever.

Amen.

then Bishop Robert W. McElroy, who implemented the resulting recommendations of the Diocesan Synod on Embracing the Joy of Love.

The journey continues under Bishop Michael Pham, who has made several organizational changes to encourage the growth of this culture across the diocese.

Dr. Day was among the 750 people or so who jammed into St. Gregory the Great Church in Scripps Ranch the night of Aug. 21 to listen to Sister Nathalie speak about re-imagining parish life in a synodal Church.

She’s uniquely positioned to do so, serving as the Vatican’s Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. This department oversees the implementation of synodal practices around the world, allowing her “to contemplate the Spirit at work in every place and time.”

She began her talk by showing the logo the Vatican developed for the three-year Synod on Synodality, which ended in 2024. It shows a group of people walking together of different colors, ages and abilities, children, men, women and a bishop.

“But the main character is the Holy Spirit,” she told the audience.

In a synodal culture, everyone is encouraged to participate in Church life, listen to one another, and discern a path forward together.

“Not this superficial listening, but this deep listening, experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit,” the sister continued.

“Do we believe that the Holy Spirit can speak through each of us, whatever our background, our age?” she asked. “In theory, yes, but in practice, most of the time, it’s not the case. Becoming a synodal parish is about becoming a Church in which we feel, we are, and we act as brothers and sisters in Christ with equal dignity.”

‘Vibrancy of Our Church’

The day after her presentation, Sister Nathalie addressed the diocese’s third annual synod convocation, which drew nearly 400 coordinators, pastors and ministry leaders from the 44 parishes participating in the initiative “Re-Imagining Parish Life and Leadership in a Synodal Church.” Last year, a total of 36 parishes had participated, up from 16 at the inaugural gathering in 2024.

Synod Continued on Page 5



Bishop Pham at Third Annual Convocation > AUG. 22, 2026



Sister Nathalie Becquart at Convocation > AUG. 22, 2026



Rhonda Hatcher-Malone at Convocation > AUG. 22, 2026

YEAR IN REVIEW — **SYNOD** — YEAR IN REVIEW**Synod** *Continued from Page 4*

“This is what we are all about — journeying together, walking together, participating together and being on mission together as Church,” Bishop Pham told the convocation, held at St. Thomas More Parish in Oceanside. “It’s so wonderful to recognize that and see the vibrancy of our Church in our diocese.”

Before being named bishop, then Father Pham served as pastor of Good Shepherd Parish in Mira Mesa and vicar for the Office for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities. In those roles, he fostered a culture of listening and collaboration among the ministries and cultures.

He supported the consultations, or synods, the diocese held in the last decade among the faithful. They consisted of small-group dialogues at parishes, schools and ministries and an electronic survey.

On the day after he was installed as bishop of San Diego, July 17, 2025, he appointed Father Billy Zondler as Vicar for Synodality.

Father Zondler began having virtual meetings with all the “re-imagining” pastors and coordinators to promote collaboration. Then, he started meeting with them in person at quarterly deanery meetings, where they could share their experiences, build relationships and promote a synodal culture with the other pastors.

At the diocese itself, Bishop Pham has implemented a synodal approach at all levels, including directors’ meetings and committee gatherings. After a prayer, participants reflect, listen to one another in a dialogue, and discern together a path forward, guided by the Holy Spirit.

This year, Bishop Pham adopted new parish pastoral council guidelines in a synodal Church, which superseded the ones from 2006. Pastors are reviewing these guidelines with their councils for implementation.

And he established a Diocesan Council for a Synodal Church to formally assess the current state of synodal efforts and to share their experiences. The 23-member council is made up of synod leaders, lay representatives and pastors from across the region.



JOYFUL: The third convocation celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Synod on Embracing the Joy of Love. Father Matt Spahr, from The Immaculata, and Kathy and Ron Medenwald, from St. Gregory the Great, spoke about its legacy, on Aug. 22. Sister Nathalie Becquart accompanied them.

‘It Is So Powerful’

Vi Salazar is a member of the Council for a Synodal Church and the Women’s Advisory Committee, which was established in late 2023 to study the role of women in the diocese and make recommendations on how to increase opportunities for them to participate in the mission of the Church.

She was impressed with how Sister Nathalie had used a Scripture passage (John 21:3-6) to illustrate a synodal Church in action, what the sister called “going from ‘I’ to ‘we,’ together in mission.”

The passage describes the resurrected Jesus appearing to the disciples while they are fishing. When they follow his command to cast their net on the right side of the boat, they catch an overwhelming number of fish, symbolizing that the disciples must rely on Christ’s direction rather than their own effort to succeed in their mission.

“In the Gospel, fishing is an action undertaken together: Everybody has their own particular task, different but coordinated with the others,” the sister said at the Aug. 21 presentation. “This is the synodal Church in action.”

Salazar, a young adult ministry leader in the Vietnamese Catholic community, has been a member of diocesan councils since 2021, amid the COVID pandemic. These councils organized

various consultations of the faithful, themselves utilizing synodal practices to discern their plans.

Salazar reflected on her own synodal journey since then.

Growing up in the Vietnamese culture, she said, “You could not really share anything about faith.

“We didn’t really get to ask like, ‘How do you feel?’ ‘What’s your hope for the Church?’ ‘Is there anything we can do to improve?’ None of that. So, when we started this process, I honestly did not know where it would go.”

Some four years later, she’s amazed at the impact the new approach is having.

At her own parish, Good Shepherd, “they are doing something based on our feedback.” She sees the same occurring at the diocesan level.

“Wow! It is so powerful that our voice is truly heard.”

As a young leader and a woman, Salazar said that she never imagined that the diocese would create a women’s leadership group.

“To be able to sit at a table with so many wonderful women from around our diocese is something that’s so inspiring to me. I have learned a lot along the way.”

‘Opening Hearts’

Teresa Moya, the synod co-coordinator at Sacred Heart Parish

in Brawley, attended the convocation. Her parish has participated in the re-imagining initiative for three years. She said she was moved by Sister Nathalie’s message about synodal spirituality.

Moya said that when people hear the word “synodality” the first thing that comes to mind is change. “And many of us like our routines, we don’t like change.”

Sister Nathalie gave the word a more profound meaning: “a path that the Church is leading us to, of walking together.”

“She told us that it was an authentic way to be in communion with God and with those around you, with your neighbors,” Moya said.

She said she has been surprised how the Holy Spirit has been working in her parish, which is made up of three church communities that historically have resisted working together.

“I have been surprised how the Holy Spirit has been opening people’s hearts, inspiring them to feel an openness and confidence to believe that God is moving us, even though we don’t have a complete vision yet of where we’re going.”

‘Path to Peace’

Sister Nathalie said that a synodal approach can transform more than parish communities, it can change the world itself at a time marked by conflicts, divisions, polarization and wars.

“We understand, more and more, why it’s important to engage in the path of synodality,” she said. “It’s not just to be a nice Church among us, it is because it’s really a path to peace.”

And that path can be undertaken by families, communities, countries and more.

“Perhaps without speaking too much of synodality,” she continued, “peace can be achieved through the processes of listening, dialogue and reconciliation. Synodality is not just another ecclesial program. It is the grammar of peace that the Church proposes to the world by first living it within herself.”



Father Billy Zondler, Vicar for Synodality > AUG. 23, 2025



Pastoral Offices Meet with “Re-Imagining” Parishes > MARCH 19, 2026



Dr. Mary Lyons, Women's Advisory Committee > JULY 20, 2026

YEAR IN REVIEW — IMMIGRATION — YEAR IN REVIEW

‘We Must Treat Everyone with Dignity’

By Aida Bustos

Even before he was installed as bishop of the Diocese of San Diego, Bishop Michael Pham was standing with immigrants. Whether leading prayerful processions through city streets, meeting with public officials, or listening in immigration court, his message has been the same.

“We must treat everyone with dignity and respect. We are one human family,” he said on June 20, 2025, during a prayer service on World Refugee Day, about a month before becoming the diocese’s seventh bishop. “We stand in solidarity with refugees and immigrants. We are all God’s children.”

After the service at St. Joseph Cathedral, he and about a dozen clergy members, deacons, religious men and women and other faith leaders traveled to the federal courthouse. Inside, they observed several immigration court hearings.

At the time, masked, heavily armed immigration agents often waited outside the courtrooms, arresting immigrants even if judges had continued their cases. The arrests are part of a massive deportation campaign being waged nationwide.

The clergy’s presence made an impact, however, and no arrests were observed during their 90-minute stay at the courthouse.

The visit would help lay the groundwork for a ministry Bishop Pham officially launched nearly two months later, on Aug. 4, 2025, enabling clergy and other volunteers to accompany immigrants to their immigration hearings, in collaboration with Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and the San Diego Organizing Project.

The Faithful Accompaniment in Trust & Hope (FAITH) ministry has trained 738 volunteers to serve at the courthouse as of September 2026, including 51 Catholic priests, 24 deacons, and 13 religious sisters, as well as clergy from other faith traditions.



CHARLIE NEUMAN

UNITED: Bishop Michael Pham and other faith leaders participated in a procession, called “Standing for All That Is Sacred,” on Jan. 25, 2026, through Barrio Logan streets where ICE agents had detained community members, calling for all immigrants to be treated with dignity and justice.

Last fall, Bishop Pham announced that Catholic Charities would partner with parishes to provide emergency funds to help vulnerable families to meet their basic needs amid the wave of deportations. The funds would give families time to get their footing as they figured out their next steps.

The bishop has continually raised the Church’s teaching that calls on the faithful to uphold the sacredness of all human life, which includes immigrants and refugees, as well as the infirm and elderly.

On Sept. 27, he co-led a procession at Balboa Park called “All Are Sacred,”

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Matthew 25:35

that included leaders from other faith traditions.

He often cited his own journey to the United States as a refugee from Vietnam, arriving as a teenager.

“Today, I stand as a leader of a Catholic Church, thanks to the opportunities (in the United States) that allowed me to contribute to society. I believe most refugees and migrants, whether documented or undocumented, come seeking opportunities for a better life. The majority of us who reside in this country make a positive contribution to society,” he said during the prayer service at St. Joseph Cathedral in June of 2025.

“We have to follow the law, but we have to treat each other with love and compassion,” he said. “We have to strive to live by the example Christ set for us.”



Clergy Visits Federal Courthouse

> JUNE 20, 2025



Immigration Prayer Vigil

> NOV. 12, 2025



“Prophetic Witness, Sacred Kinship” Event

> APRIL 1, 2026

Group Studies How to Strengthen Schools

By Denis Grasska

In August of 2025, the month after his installation as the seventh bishop of San Diego, Bishop Michael Pham established the Task Force for Schools.

Diocesan Superintendent Leticia Oseguera views the creation of the task force as representing the greatest impact that Bishop Pham has had on Catholic education in his first year at the helm.

“This is the big one,” she said, “and I think that the bishop is very proud of this work and excited for what it can mean for our Catholic schools.”

The task force came about as part of a process that began about three months earlier, when Bishop Pham was serving as diocesan administrator before being named bishop of San Diego.

At that time, Bishop Pham called for synodal dialogue sessions with principals and pastors on how to strengthen Catholic education in the diocese and transform local schools into “Beacons of Hope” — the overarching theme of those dialogues.

Oseguera noted Bishop Pham’s commitment to continuing the synodal approach that began under Cardinal Robert W. McElroy, consulting lay leaders first rather than simply imposing a diocesan policy from above.

She said that Bishop Pham was eager to hear from school leaders about “their hopes and dreams for our Catholic schools,” as well as their current challenges, and how diocesan support can help overcome those challenges.

Principals and pastors gathered separately in May of 2025 and together that September for dialogue sessions. On the same day as the latter session, the Office for Schools announced the creation of the task force.

“It was important to Bishop Pham that it wasn’t just a listening session, but that it turned into action,” Oseguera said.

The task force, which is composed of the Schools Office staff, two pastors, a representative of the University of San



LISTENING: Principals and pastors from across the diocese gathered on Sept. 11, 2025, at Our Mother of Confidence Church, for synodal dialogue sessions exploring how to transform local schools into “Beacons of Hope.”

Diego, and two Catholic elementary school principals, came up with short-term goals that are to be accomplished by the conclusion of the current school year and long-term goals to be completed within the next two to five years.

Of the long-term goals, Oseguera said, “Some of them are very ambitious.”

The goals fall under three broad categories, or “domains,” including: Mission & Catholic Identity, Governance & Leadership, and Academic Excellence. The goals were approved by Bishop Pham, who required that they be clear and specific. They were presented to principals and pastors this year on Aug. 4, the second of a two-day Leadership Summit held at Cathedral Catholic High School.

Oseguera said that feedback received during the summit was “very

“All your children shall be taught by the Lord; great shall be the peace of your children.”

Isaiah 54:13

positive,” with principals telling her that this was the first time that they felt that there was “a tangible progress towards improving all of our Catholic schools as a whole.”

Over the past year, the Office for Schools also made a significant change in its professional development opportunities — something that also came as a result of listening to the needs of educators.

The annual convocation, which had traditionally been held in late August, was pushed to October last year and moved a little earlier this year to Sept. 25.

The later date removed the event from the hectic weeks immediately preceding the start of a new school year, so that participating educators could better focus on the event, without being distracted or stressed by everything that had to be done before the first day of classes.

The convocation is now a full-day rather than half-day event, and is focused exclusively on Mission & Catholic Identity. Last year, for the first time, preschool educators were invited to participate; the approximately 1,000 attendees represented preschool through high school.



Dedication at St. Rita School
> SEPT. 12, 2025



School Safety Training
> NOV. 6, 2025



Principals' Day of Reflection at Catholic Charities
> MARCH 25, 2026

YEAR IN REVIEW — LAUDATO SI — YEAR IN REVIEW

Responding to the Cry of the Earth

By Denis Grasska

Christina Bagaglio Slentz, who leads the diocesan Creation Care Ministry, reflected on the passion for environmental stewardship that Bishop Michael Pham has demonstrated in his first year leading the diocese.

She said that the bishop, who came to the United States as a refugee from Vietnam, brings to his office firsthand experience with subsistence farming. This, she said, has given him an understanding of “creation as a gift and a life source.”

Over the past year, the Creation Care Ministry held two pilgrimages.

Three parishes collaborated on a Pilgrimage of Hope for Creation on Oct. 18, 2025. Participants walked the 2.5 miles between St. Charles Borromeo and Immaculate Conception churches, along the way handing out food and water to homeless individuals and picking up trash.

Another pilgrimage was held Nov. 14 to 16 in Imperial Valley, with more than 100 people from the dioceses of San Diego and San Bernardino participating. The weekend event began with a visit to the Catholic Charities Day Center in El Centro and concluded with a blessing of the Salton Sea.

In late fall of 2025, the diocese prepared its Laudato Si’ Action Platform plan for the year. It was the diocese’s third annual plan, but the first approved since Bishop Pham’s installation.

Among the action items included in the plan is that the diocesan Pastoral



PILGRIMAGE: Faithful from the San Diego and San Bernardino dioceses participated in the Imperial Valley Pilgrimage, Nov. 14 to 16, 2025, which ended with a blessing of the Salton Sea.

“The poor and the earth are crying out. Lord, help us protect life and prepare for a better future.”

Prayer from Laudato Si’ Encyclical

Center will take the necessary steps to qualify as a “St. Kateri Habitat” within

two years. Diocesan parishes are also being encouraged to pursue that designation, which requires completing at least two environmental action items, such as planting native trees, shrubs and wildflowers.

From Jan. 26 to 29, 2026, Slentz traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ inaugural Laudato Si’ Leadership Cohort as one of about 20 diocesan representatives. She said that the gathering presented an opportunity to foster greater participation in

the Laudato Si’ Action Platform.

On April 20, more than 350 students from across California, including about 45 from the San Diego Diocese, attended the Laudato Si’ Youth Advocacy Summit in Sacramento. Teens from Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (Barrio Logan) and both Mater Dei and Cathedral Catholic high schools visited their state representatives’ offices and made presentations on behalf of bills that aligned with Catholic Social Teaching.

“It was really exciting to have Bishop Pham and (Auxiliary Bishop Felipe) Pulido there to offer some words of encouragement to the kids” before they headed off to meet with legislators, Slentz said.

More recently, Bishop Pham proposed a new initiative, called “Common Home, Common Ground,” that calls upon every parish and school in the diocese to determine how they can exercise environmental stewardship through gardening and farming projects on their properties. For example, vegetables could be grown on their campuses and then donated to food banks. The initiative will begin in earnest this fall.

Bishop Pham celebrated the annual Season of Creation Mass on Sept. 5 at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Vista. He used the Mass for the Care of Creation, a new formulary approved last year by Pope Leo XIV.

YEAR IN REVIEW — CATHOLIC TEACHING — YEAR IN REVIEW

Respecting Life, from Womb to Tomb

By Aida Bustos

“Catholic teaching is rooted in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, who revealed himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” said Pope Leo XIV to the European Conference last Jan. 23.

But what is that rich treasure of teaching the Church has developed in the last 2,000 years? And how do we apply it to our modern world?

Bishop Michael Pham established a standing commission last spring to build awareness of the tenets of Catholic teaching and how they are being put into action at the diocesan and parish levels.

The Commission on Integral Human Development: The Dignity of Life from Womb to Tomb is co-chaired by Deacon Robert Ehnou, the director of the diocese’s Office for Life, Peace and Justice, and “Vino” Pajanor, CEO of



CONNECTION: Catholic teaching calls on the faithful to share their gifts with the most vulnerable. Last April, students from Mater Dei Catholic High School assisted the residents of a residential site operated by Catholic Charities for low-income community members.

Catholic Charities. The 19 members are a diverse mix of priests in leadership positions, diocesan directors and associate directors, religious women and ministry leaders.

The commission plans to promote the principles of Catholic teaching, such as the sacredness of all human life, the pursuit of justice and peace and the responsibility to care for the marginalized, and to highlight how the diocese, parishes and other Catholic organizations are bringing those principles to life in their work, projects and events.

Deacon Ehnou said the commission members used the synodal process of listening to one another and discerning a plan together. He said that fruits of their work would begin to come to light in the coming months, which will include a series of bilingual videos.

YEAR IN REVIEW — EVANGELIZATION — YEAR IN REVIEW

Welcoming All to Be ‘United in Christ’

By Denis Grasska

The Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion underwent a major change this year at Bishop Michael Pham’s insistence. This year, it was held on March 1, in the Jenny Craig Pavilion at the University of San Diego.

The annual diocesan liturgy is where those enrolled in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) process are presented to the bishop and declared ready to receive the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

This was the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that the Rite of Election was held as a single ceremony, attended by catechumens and candidates from all participating parishes. In preceding years, the diocese had held multiple ceremonies, rather than one massive gathering.

The change fittingly reflected Bishop Pham’s episcopal motto, “United in Christ.”

More than 4,670 people attended the Rite of Election, including 611 adult catechumens; 1,242 adult candidates; and 102 child catechumens and candidates from 76 local Catholic communities.

Trent noted that unity has been a hallmark of Bishop Pham’s leadership.

She cited the annual Pentecost Mass for All Peoples, a multilingual liturgy followed by a cultural food fair. First held in 2018, it was the brainchild of then-Father Pham, when he was Vicar for Ethnic and Cultural Communities. Nearly 2,000 people attended its most recent iteration on May 23.

“Ever since the first celebration, the Pentecost Mass has remained a joyful, faith-filled occasion,” said Trent. “The celebration embodies the Body of Christ in the Diocese of San Diego, where diverse cultures, languages, food and music thrive under the Holy Spirit, showcasing the richness of our communities.

“This is where true evangelization happens,” she added. “We see the Holy Spirit at work.”

The bishop’s emphasis on unity, as well as his promotion of synodal listen-



GROWING FAITH: Nearly 4,700 people attended the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion on March 1, 2026, at the Jenny Craig Pavilion at the University of San Diego. It was the first time this moving ceremony was held as a single event since the pandemic.

ing, could also be observed in another highlight of the past year: OECM’s push to make Masses and faith formation more accessible to families with special needs.

“We have seen and heard the need of families having a place where they can come and really be themselves and receive the sacraments,” said Trent, who noted that some families with special needs have felt unwelcome at the typical parish Mass.

For some of these families, she said, packed pews, loud music, incense and other elements can be barriers to participation.

“In a synodal Church, we listen,” said Trent. “We see, and we listen, and then we adapt.”

The office held two workshops — one in English on July 26, 2025, at St.

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20

Mary Magdalene Parish, the other in Spanish on April 25, 2026, at Holy Trinity Parish in El Cajon — that

provided practical tips for adapting liturgies and formation programs for this demographic. A “sensory-friendly Mass,” so called because it featured accommodations for worshippers with special needs, was celebrated after each workshop.

Those Masses, Trent said, enabled Catholics with special needs to be involved “not just as an attendee, spectator,” but as an active participant and to take on liturgical roles like lector.

“The goal of our office is to promote more of these events, more of these Masses throughout our diocese,” she said, describing the ones that have already been held as “a great achievement,” but promising “more to come.”



Commissioning Mass for Catechists > SEPT. 11, 2025



Pentecost Mass for All Peoples > MAY 23, 2026



Sensory-Friendly Mass > APRIL 25, 2026

YEAR IN REVIEW — VOCATIONS — YEAR IN REVIEW

Working to Strengthen Priest Formation

By Aida Bustos

Bishop Michael Pham is familiar with the diocese's priest formation program. He entered St. Francis Seminary at the University of San Diego in 1994, was ordained in 1999, and served as director of priestly vocations for two years, starting in 2001.

Twenty-five years later, now as the leader of the diocese, the bishop wants to strengthen that vocations program.

He formed a task force last December to review all aspects of the diocese's priestly formation program, with an eye to identifying weaknesses and offering recommendations to address them. This includes a thorough evaluation of recruitment efforts, who is discerning a vocation, current admission policies, and every element of the program itself.

"This effort represents an important step forward as we seek to strengthen our diocesan Church at this challenging time and ensure that we are faithfully and effectively forming the priests our people need — now and in the future," the bishop said in announcing the task force to the community.

The Priestly Formation Task Force hired a professional consulting firm, Philadelphia-based Avanti Advisors, to help gather data and assist with developing final recommendations.

The firm has spent this year gathering insights from all those involved in the program, including current seminarians and some who left the program, priests and deacons, and staff at parishes where seminarians were or will be assigned during their formation. This was done through a survey and interviews.

Father Peter McGuine, who co-chairs the task force, said the firm also sought input from the school that provides the program's theological formation, the Franciscan School of Theology.

He said the task force also is studying what happens after ordination.



DAVID MAUNG

WELCOME: Father Marc Gandolfo, diocesan director of priestly vocations, speaks at Explorer Day on Nov. 22, 2025, at St. Francis Center.

"Once a man is ordained a priest, is that the end of his formation?" he said in an interview. "And the actual answer is no. He continues to learn a lot, both officially and unofficially. So, we're looking at how we provide that formation."

The task force envisions its work will take about one more year to complete. Afterward, the members will present Bishop Pham their recommendations, and the data that was collected.

Meanwhile, the diocese's priestly formation program continues. Three seminarians recently joined the program, bringing the total currently in

"And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'"

Matthew 4:19

formation to 12.

Two are on track to be ordained transitional deacons on Dec. 5 at St. Michael Church in Poway, and as priests for the diocese on June 19,

2027, at The Immaculata Church.

The next Explorer Day will be Saturday, Nov. 14, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., at St. Francis Center. Those interested in exploring the vocation of priesthood are urged to speak with their pastor if they want to attend.

The event is held on the University of San Diego campus, where a young Michael Pham began the road to the priesthood, a road that would eventually take him to the summit of the diocese he has served for 27 years.



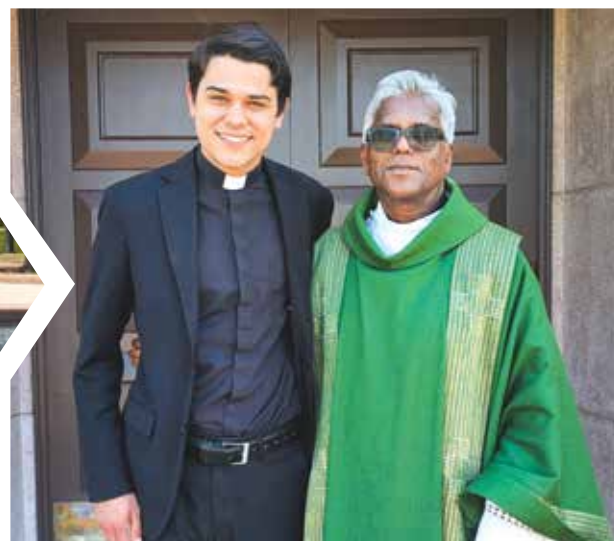
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Witness of San Lorenzo Ruiz Celebrated

By Aida Bustos



"How do we respond to the gift of Christ?"

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido said Pope St. John Paul II explored that question in 1981 in Manila at the beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino saint and martyr.

"We respond by the daily giving of ourselves to that gift," Bishop Pulido said. "The pope spoke of Lorenzo's witness as an example of what it means to be a Christian."

Bishop Pulido celebrated the annual diocesan Mass for San Lorenzo Ruiz on Sept. 12 at Mission San Diego de Alcalá, accompanied by Bishop Michael Pham; Father Peter McGuine, the parish's pastor; and about a dozen priests.

Filipino Catholics from across the region packed the pews of the 257-year-old mission, lifting their voices in traditional hymns. The Diocesan Commission for Filipino Priests organized the celebration.

San Lorenzo Ruiz was born in the Philippines in 1594. He learned the Catholic faith from Dominican friars, served as an altar boy, married and had a family. He was falsely accused of murder in 1636 and was forced to flee to Japan, along with Dominican and Japanese priests.

There, the rulers were persecuting Christians and arrested San Lorenzo Ruiz and the priests and subjected



CELEBRATION: Filipino Catholics participated in a procession after the annual diocesan Mass for San Lorenzo Ruiz to a nearby hall at Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá on Sept. 12.

them to extreme torture. He refused to renounce his faith to spare his life.

"I am a Catholic and wholeheartedly do accept death for God," he is known to have told his persecutors. "Had I a thousand lives, all these to him shall I offer."

He died at age 42 at the hands of his captors. He was beatified in 1981 by Pope John Paul II and canonized in 1987, making him the first canonized Filipino saint.

"Every time we come to Mass, we

witness Jesus giving himself to us in his body and blood," the bishop said in his homily.

"We have received so much from him," he continued. "We have received our life, our faith, our families, forgiveness," he continued.

"We can respond by giving of ourselves, by loving, by forgiving, by caring for someone who is hurting, by being faithful to our families, by standing firm in our faith when it is difficult."

To do that, he said, Christians can give their testimony in simple ways, such as offering a silent prayer before eating at a restaurant, talking to someone about God in their daily life, or inviting family members to Mass.

"I hope we all keep talking about God, even though sometimes our society tells us, 'I don't want to hear more about God.'"

He said that today, more than ever, "we need more witnesses like San Lorenzo Ruiz."

Ruling Benefits Catholic School Students

The Southern Cross



A ruling by the U.S. Department of Education has affirmed the rights of private school students with special needs.

Issued Aug. 3, it came in response to complaints filed by Leticia Oseguera, superintendent of diocesan schools in the Diocese of San Diego, and by Christopher Fisher, her counterpart in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

"The results are truly promising," Oseguera said in a message to local Catholic school leaders.

She explained that both the North Coastal Consortium for Special Education and the San Francisco Unified School District were found to be non-compliant in critical areas regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires equitable services for private school students with documented learning disabilities.

"These findings will spark significant changes ... statewide, paving the way for much better access to special education and related services for our Catholic school students," Oseguera said.

For example, it was determined that the required IDEA consultation conducted by the North Coastal Consortium and San Francisco Unified



VICTORY: A recent federal ruling paves the way for better access to special education and related services for Catholic school students.

did not meet federal requirements, because private-school representatives were not always afforded meaningful participation and due consideration before important decisions were made.

The ruling requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to complete major statewide corrective actions within one year.

Oseguera said that the diocesan Office for Schools had successfully worked with the San Diego Unified School District in recent years to ensure that Catholic school students who

had been determined to have special needs would receive the services due to them under IDEA.

Private schools do not receive federal funding directly, she explained. But, in collaboration with the local public school district, funds can be allocated for individualized tutoring, speech therapy, or other forms of assistance.

Because the Diocese of San Diego covers a geographical area encompassing many school districts, she said, the diocese attempted to come to a similar understanding with the others.

That's where the difficulties began.

Oseguera ultimately filed a complaint with the CDE against the North Coastal Consortium for Special Education, which encompasses 14 member school districts in North County San Diego, on Feb. 7, 2024. Her complaint alleged several IDEA violations.

Among other concerns, Oseguera said, private school parents were being required to "go through so many hoops" to have their children assessed for learning disabilities. Although the CDE found the consortium out of compliance, the corrective actions it ordered lacked substance and were not meaningfully enforced. The consortium also unilaterally determined that services would be consultative, without adequately considering private school representatives' requests for direct services.

Dissatisfied with the CDE's Oct. 7, 2024, decision and the limited correc-

tive action that followed, the diocese filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education on Dec. 18, 2024. The following month, the Archdiocese of San Francisco filed a similar complaint against the San Francisco Unified School District.

The U.S. Department of Education's decision responded to both of these complaints.

"This is a very important decision for our students and families," said Oseguera. "Every child deserves timely access to evaluation, and private-school leaders must participate meaningfully in decisions affecting the students we serve."

"This is a significant victory for California's private-school students, but the real measure of success will be what happens next," said John Elcesser, executive director of ADAC Advocacy, which partnered with the Diocese of San Diego and Archdiocese of San Francisco in this effort.

"The Department's decision," he said, "makes clear that meaningful consultation, effective child find (a term referring to the duty to locate, identify and evaluate children suspected of having disabilities), and accurate proportionate-share calculations directly affect whether students receive the services available to them under federal law."

"Our focus now is on ensuring these corrective actions produce lasting change," he said.

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Unpacking Faith: The Rosary Devotion

By Denis Grasska



The Catholic Church has traditionally dedicated the month of October to the rosary.

What is the rosary?

The rosary is a prayer typically recited with the assistance of a looped string of beads with a crucifix at the end. The faithful recite a series of prayers, predominantly Our Fathers and Hail Marys, while meditating on specific events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

What is a “decade”?

In rosary parlance, a decade is a group of 10 Hail Marys that is preceded by an Our Father. Each string of beads includes five decades. While praying a decade, one seeks to meditate on a particular “mystery” of the rosary.

What is a “mystery”?

First of all, there’s no need to call Sherlock Holmes or Scooby Doo. We’re not talking about that kind of mystery.

The mysteries of the rosary are best understood as important moments experienced by Jesus and Mary that are worthy of contemplation.

They come in four sets, each of which consist of five individual mysteries.

The Joyful Mysteries include: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth of Jesus, the Presentation, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. The Sorrowful Mysteries include: the Ag-



PRAYER: A set of beads helps keep count when praying the rosary.

ony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion. The Glorious Mysteries include: the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Assumption of Mary, and the Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven. The Luminous Mysteries include: the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist.

When do we pray each set of mysteries?

The Joyful Mysteries are typically prayed on Mondays and Saturdays, the Sorrowful Mysteries on Tuesdays

and Fridays, the Glorious Mysteries on Wednesdays and Sundays, and the Luminous Mysteries on Thursdays. On Sundays during the Advent and Christmas seasons, the Joyful instead of Glorious Mysteries are prayed; similarly, during the Sundays of Lent, the Glorious Mysteries are swapped for the Sorrowful.

When were the Luminous Mysteries introduced?

They were added to the three traditional sets of mysteries in October of 2002 by Pope St. John Paul II.

How often should we pray the rosary?

We can pray the rosary as frequently or as infrequently as we wish. There is no obligation to pray it. But, in her apparitions in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917, the Blessed Mother asked that the rosary be recited daily to obtain peace in the world.

How do I pray the rosary?

The necessary information is readily available from various sources, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at usccb.org/how-to-pray-the-rosary.

Are any local parishes named in honor of the rosary?

Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in Little Italy takes its name from the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, celebrated Oct. 7, which commemorates the Christian Holy League’s victory over the Ottoman Empire at the naval Battle of Lepanto on Oct. 7, 1571. The victory, which was against overwhelming odds, was attributed to the power

of the rosary.

Have any other miracles been credited to the rosary?

One example is the famous story of eight Jesuit priests who were living in a church rectory in Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, when the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan. They were only eight blocks — less than 1 mile — from the epicenter and yet received only minor injuries from the blast. Their rectory was among the few buildings in the area left standing and, after more than 200 examinations by doctors, none of the priests showed signs of radiation sickness.

One of the priests, Father Hubert Schiffer, who lived until 1982, reflected on their survival.

“We believe that we survived because we were living the message of Fatima,” he said. “We lived and prayed the rosary daily in that home.”

Is there any recent rosary-related news in San Diego?

As part of its Guadalupe 2031 initiative, a five-year preparation for the 500th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, the Diocese of San Diego has set a goal of reciting 1 million rosaries by the year 2031. The faithful are invited to submit their name, parish, ministry and the number of rosaries they prayed at sdccatholic.org/guadalupe2031/1-million-rosaries.

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100 Years of Welcoming Families and Faith

By Denis Grasska



The namesake of St. Didacus Parish isn't exactly a household name.

"St. Didacus' is not very familiar to many people," said Father Andrew Kunambi, the pastor, who admits that he had never heard of the saint before his first visit to San Diego in 2016.

Yet, it shouldn't be so unfamiliar — at least not for locals.

"If you know San Diego, then you have already known St. Didacus," Father Kunambi said.

"Didacus" is simply the Latin form of the name "Diego." The parish's patron saint, a 15th-century Spanish Franciscan brother, is the same San Diego for whom the city, county and diocese are named.

Located in the Normal Heights neighborhood, just off of bustling Adams Avenue, St. Didacus Parish is marking its centennial this year.

A series of events to celebrate the milestone anniversary began over the summer with three movie nights, a parish picnic and a spaghetti dinner. Other events are still to be announced.

On Saturday, Nov. 7, the feast day of St. Didacus, Bishop Michael Pham will celebrate a 10:30 a.m. Mass at the parish, which is currently home to 622 active registered families. Exactly one year later, on Nov. 7, 2027, the parish will conclude its centennial celebration with a Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido.

The centennial celebration "re-



CENTENNIAL: The exterior of St. Didacus Church is seen circa 1950, more than 25 years before the addition of its belltower. The parish is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

COURTESY ST. DIDACUS PARISH

flects the fruits of (the) evangelizing work of the pioneer missionaries and their successors," said Father Kunambi. It is "a time to thank God for the gift of faith and renew ourselves, to keep and live our faith in the current world as witnesses and good stewards of the Lord."

Fortuitously, the centennial anniversary coincides with the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of St. Francis, which is being observed throughout the Universal Church from Jan. 10, 2026, until the same date next year. Bishop Pham has designated St. Didacus Church as one of eight local pilgrimage sites, where the faithful can obtain a plenary indulgence during the jubilee year.

St. Didacus Parish was established in 1926, under its founding pastor, Father Thomas V. Murphy, at a time when the region was still part of the much larger Diocese of Los Angeles-San Diego.

Construction of the parish church and rectory was completed the following year, with the dedication ceremony held in October.

St. Didacus School, which is located within walking distance of the church on the opposite side of Adams Avenue, opened with about 160 students in September of 1939. The first graduating class received their diplomas on June 13, 1941. The school currently has 193 enrolled students.

Though the church has retained a traditional look, epitomized by its cruciform design and marble altar rails,

St. Didacus Continued on Page 19

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<https://sdcatholic.org/event/healthcare-professionals-mass-2026/>

St. Didacus *Continued from Page 18*

the intervening years have seen some changes to the church and its environs.

A belltower, for example, was added to the church in 1977. The parish hall was dedicated on Dec. 19, 1986. A prayer garden, located between the hall and the rectory, was dedicated in 2008 and enhanced 10 years later with the construction of a Divine Mercy shrine.

A bilingual community, St. Didacus Parish offered its first Spanish-language Mass on Sept. 16, 2003. Today, the 11:30 a.m. Mass every Sunday is celebrated in Spanish.

John Earl, 90, was introduced to St. Didacus Parish in 1942, when his parents enrolled him at the parish school.

The Earls were members of St. Patrick Parish in North Park. But, at the time, that parish didn't have a school of its own.

He attended St. Didacus School from first through fourth grade, before transferring to St. Patrick School. He made his First Communion at St. Didacus Church in May of 1944.

History repeated itself when Earl and his wife, Jean, were raising their own school-age children. The couple lived within the boundaries of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Hillcrest, but that parish's school had closed. So, they turned to St. Didacus.

They were parishioners of St. Didacus Parish from 1975 to 1988, while their children attended the school. They returned to St. John the Evangelist for about 30 years, before feeling drawn back to St. Didacus shortly be-



LIVING HISTORY: A wedding Mass is celebrated inside St. Didacus Church in the 1950s. Despite some changes, the church interior looks remarkably similar today.

fore the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We liked it so much here at St. Didacus," said John Earl, "that we came back and we've been here since."

Jean Earl, 80, recalled attending Mass at St. Didacus Parish on Thanksgiving Day about 10 years ago, before they had become parishioners again.

They had taken a pew near the front and watched as members of the Altar Society greeted and hugged one another. They soon discovered that such friendliness wasn't limited to those who knew one another well, but was also extended to newcomers.

"We were strangers, more or less," she said, explaining that it had been many years since she and her husband

had been members of the parish, "and we were getting warm smiles, and waves, and nods, and acknowledgments, and I thought, 'This is a friendly place still.'"

Michele Trevino, 81, has been a St. Didacus parishioner since 1973.

One of her children and two grandchildren graduated from St. Didacus School, where she served as a substitute teacher for about 20 years.

Trevino was asked to reflect on what it means that St. Didacus Parish has existed for 100 years as a faith community.

"What does it say to me? That everybody liked it, and it was friendly," she said. "In essence, why would we

not go somewhere else (if this weren't the case)? You know, you get a choice."

It's the sense of hospitality, she said, that has kept her at the parish all these years.

Trevino said, "St. Didacus was what I thought a church should be. ... Right away, it makes you feel at home."

Patricia SanJuan, 50, joined the parish more than 24 years ago.

She recalled seeking out the nearest Catholic church after moving to Normal Heights with her husband and their children.

While exploring the neighborhood one Saturday evening, they "stumbled upon" the parish and took a peek inside as parishioners were leaving, she said. She recalled being "greeted ... with a warm welcome" by the deacon.

"St. Didacus Parish community is special," said SanJuan, "because they make you their family, and they give you their hearts full of love."

The family have been regulars at the Spanish-language Mass ever since the parish introduced it.

SanJuan shared that all four of her children attended St. Didacus School, with the two oldest having graduated from there, and she hopes that all of them might someday be married in the parish church.

"St. Didacus is my home," she said. "Even when I go to other parishes, I feel like I'm missing a part of myself because this parish community is my family. The love that I have received from other parishioners feels like God's love through them. ... I have truly learned to love God at St. Didacus."

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When cell phones or iPads did not exist to keep

us bombarded constantly with texts, messages and notifications, we had more opportunities to connect with nature: to observe the trees, the earth, the sky. Universal wisdom is full of these observations.

Jesus constantly compares the Good News of the Kingdom with seeds, trees, earth. Nature is not just a poetic resource, it's a metaphor of our interior processes, of that which is born and develops from within toward the exterior.

Water is another element full of multiple meanings. To the Samaritan, Jesus is presented as the source of living water that satiates that thirst for the infinite and transcendence that we all carry within us.

Seeds carry an extraordinary potential for growth. It depends on multiple factors: the earth and the conditions of light, air and water that surround them. Each seed has its own rhythm. It passes through distinct phases, and its growth does not depend on our anxi-

Columnist

Ricardo Márquez



ety, nor our expectations.

We are also seeds. We come from an ancient tree: humanity. We carry the potential to become the "image and likeness" of the first Sower. We fall on distinct grounds — countries, cultures, families — and we receive distinct care, on which will depend, in good measure, our process of growth: to flourish, bear fruit and continue the cycle of life, or, on the contrary, to dry up, wither and interrupt the process of life we're called to live.

Today, I ask myself in all honesty: How am I caring for the seed of what I am and what I carry within me?

I share what I have come to discover and practice. There are two moments particularly important to care for this seed: morning and night.

In the morning, the seed is nurtured by gratitude for the gift of a new day. It orients toward God, like a sunflower seeking the light. I make explicit the day's intention: that my thoughts,

feelings and actions be expressions of gratitude toward God; that I can be an instrument of peace, reconciliation and hope; that I can make the ordinary an extraordinary offering.

And all of this before picking up the cellular phone to see how many messages I have.

Five or 10 minutes of this before we get up can help to center us; to choose, so to speak, the background music that we want to accompany us throughout the day. It's a way for us to turn our life into a prayer, to discover the greatness of God in each tiny detail of the day.

The repetition of this practice builds and strengthens new connections in our brain until it becomes a habit: a kind of daily watering of our seed. It's our way of caring for the ground and doing what we are called to do to prepare ourselves for the action of grace, that gift that is offered to us so the seed can grow, bloom and bear fruit.

At night, we need to prepare the seed for rest and repose. It's another simple movement of five to 10 minutes before going to sleep. It's a space to again contemplate the day — to again feel gratitude — perhaps one of the most important nutrients of our interior life — and to recognize our faults, wounds and limitations with compassion. We

can release them and put them before God, who never tires of loving and forgiving us.

From the experience of feeling loved and forgiven springs the urge to change and respond to the love that is received. Transformation is cultivated from love, not from fear.

Our brain starts to register these practices that, little by little, enrich the ground where the seed grows. And the seed continues advancing toward its destiny: to grow and produce fruits that nourish, that don't keep to themselves, rather are offered and shared.

The final experiences of the day — the readings, reflections, gratitude and the moments of intimacy with the Lord — reverberate during the night's sleep and prepare us to receive the new dawn.

In that way, night and day become small everyday sanctuaries: one to orient our life and the other to review it and place it before God. Between both of these times, our daily existence occurs; there, where our seed grows silently and where God continues to do his work.

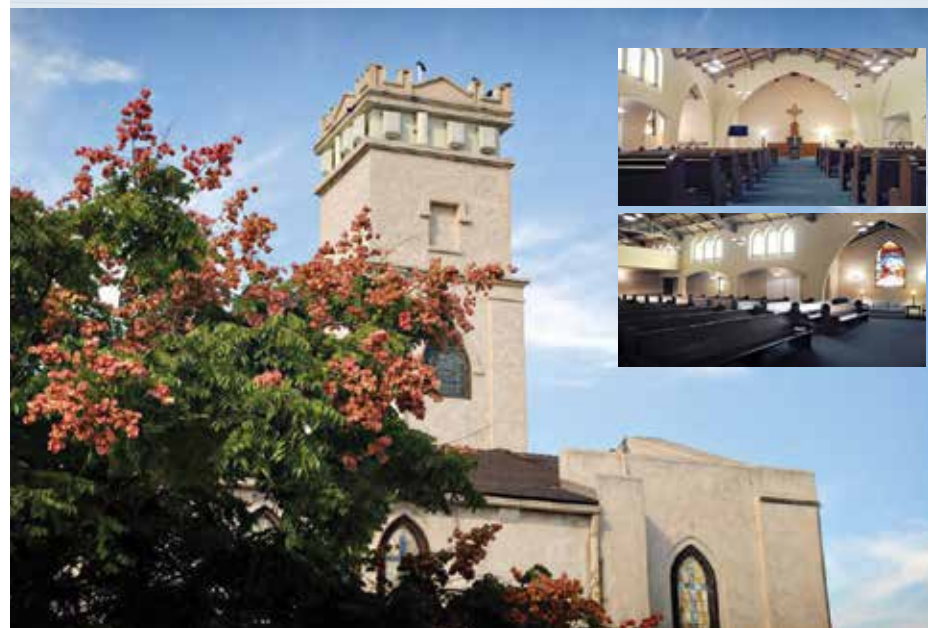
Take care of your seed! The decision is in your hands.

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

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Memory



INTO THY HANDS, O Lord, we commend the spirits of these beloved ones who are gone before us into the realm of thy eternal happiness and peace. AMEN



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CHAMPIONS: Representatives from the parishes and schools recognized for supporting Laudato Si' attended a reception after the Season of Creation Mass on Sept. 5 at St. Francis of Assisi Parish.

Celebrating Laudato Si' Action Heroes

By Christina Bagaglio Slentz, Ph.D.



Bishop Michael Pham led our annual liturgical celebration of the Season of Creation, using Pope Leo XIV's new Mass for the Care of Creation.

The Sept. 5 liturgy was generously hosted by St. Francis of Assisi in Vista, recognized this year with both a parish and a school Laudato Si' Action Award. A total of seven parishes and eight schools were recognized for taking action this past year, such as

enrolling on the Vatican's Laudato Si' Action Platform, starting gardens, and implementing sustainable infrastructure features.

The Mass also highlighted Bishop Pham's "Common Home, Common Ground" Initiative, which encourages us to renew our relationship with our sister, Mother Earth, by gardening and farming our Catholic land in an effort to sow beauty and feed our community. Attendees brought produce from parish, school and household gardens, which was taken to St. Mark Parish's food bank. The initiative's committee was also recognized with a Laudato Si' Award.



HONORED: The original founders of the diocesan Creation Care Ministry were honored with Lifetime Achievement awards.

Lifetime Achievement

This year, we also recognized the original founders of our San Diego diocesan Creation Care Ministry. Led by Father Emmet Farrell, this team of experts launched in 2018, animating creation care teams at parishes and schools, opening our hearts to ecological conversion and our ears to the entangled cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. They achieved what no other diocese had, the establishment of a formal ministry in the Office for

Life, Peace and Justice. Today, our diocese is known worldwide for their accomplishment. Well done, good and faithful servants!

To learn more about enrolling in the Laudato Si' Action Platform, go to laudatosiactionplatform.org or contact Christina Slentz at cslentz@sdccatholic.org. Reach out to her if you are interested in participating in the "Common Home, Common Ground" Initiative, as well. The team is here to help.

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News Briefs

New Directors at San Diego Diocese

There have been recent leadership changes at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

Sister Virginia Sturgeon, a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, was named the new director of the diocesan Office for Women Religious, effective Aug. 17. She succeeds Sister Kathy Warren, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, who stepped down in late May after nine years in the position.

John Prust, formerly director of the diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality, has been named the new director of the Diocesan Institute, effective Aug. 31. He succeeds Gerardo Rojas, who left in July after seven years in that role.

Wendy Baez, formerly the associate director of the Office for Family Life and Spirituality, has been named the office's new director, effective Aug. 31.

Birthline Holding Line-Dancing Fundraiser

"Line Up for Birthline," an evening of line dancing and fundraising, will benefit Birthline of San Diego.

Birthline is a local nonprofit focused on supporting pregnant women and families with young children.

The fundraiser will be held from 6 to 10 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 3, at St. Mary Magdalene Parish. The evening includes line dance lessons, food and refreshments, games, and an opportunity drawing.

Tickets are \$40 in advance or \$50 at the door. For information, visit birthlineofsd.org.

Bishop to Join Parish for St. Francis' Feast Day

Bishop Michael Pham will join the community at Immaculate Conception Parish in Old Town on Sunday, Oct. 4, to celebrate the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

The bishop will celebrate the 8:30 a.m. Mass, which will be followed by a reception in the parish hall.

For information, contact the parish at (619) 295-4141.

Parish Hosting Early Screening of 'The Chosen'

CHULA VISTA — All are invited to a free, early screening of the first

episode of the sixth season of "The Chosen," the popular TV series about Jesus and his ministry.

It will be held at 6:30 p.m., Friday, Oct. 9, at St. Rose of Lima Parish Hall in Chula Vista.

Attendees will have the opportunity to see the premiere episode a month before it streams on Amazon Prime.

For information, contact the parish at (619) 427-0230.

Weekend Helps Divorced, Widowed Move Past Grief

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

Held Oct. 9 to 11 at Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, the weekend will focus on healing and moving beyond grief in a supportive and caring environment with others that are going through and have gone through the same experiences.

For information, email beginningexperiencesd@gmail.com or call (858) 748-2273.

Women's Organization Celebrating 90 Years

IMPERIAL BEACH — The South Bay Deanery of Catholic Women invites you to join them in celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women.

A luncheon will be held on Monday, Oct. 12, at St. Charles Parish Hall in Imperial Beach, in honor of the 90th anniversary. There will be a Mass at 9:30 a.m., followed by program and luncheon.

Over the past 90 years, the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women has provided support for St. Francis Center for Priestly Formation.

RSVP by Monday, Sept. 21, to Karen Koehler at (619) 428-8397 or Vinnie Thoms at (619) 840-2040.

A check for \$25, made payable to "South Bay Deanery," along with the attendee's name, phone number and parish, can be mailed to: Pat Gojuangco, Treasurer, 1457 Autumn Hills Drive, Chula Vista, CA 91913.

St. Augustine High School Will Hold Open House

St. Augustine High School will

Briefs Continued on Page 23

October Is Time to 'Respect Life'

In the United States, the Catholic Church observes the month of October as "Respect Life Month."

The first Sunday of the month, Oct. 4 this year, is "Respect Life Sunday."

Ways to participate in this celebration include supporting a local pregnancy resource center (sdcatholic.org/life-peace-and-justice/culture-of-life/beginning-of-life) or signing up for vigil hours during the ongoing 40 Days for Life campaign (sdcatholic.org/40-days-for-life-locations).

The fall campaign of 40 Days for Life, which began Sept. 23, will continue through Sunday, Nov. 1.

With 40 Days for Life taking place on the same dates in communities across the globe, Catholics in the Diocese of San Diego will join millions of people worldwide in prayer

and fasting during the campaign.

The centerpiece is a continuous, peaceful prayer vigil for 40 days on the public sidewalk in front of clinics that provide abortions, with the aim of providing resources to women in crisis pregnancies and saving babies from abortion. Locally, such vigils will be taking place at nine locations in San Diego and Imperial counties, including Chula Vista, Clairemont, College Avenue, downtown San Diego, El Cajon, El Centro, Escondido, Mira Mesa and Vista.

A special 40 Days for Life commissioning Mass will be celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Felipe Pulido at 10:30 a.m., Sunday, Oct. 4, at St. Mary Parish in Escondido.

For information, visit sdcatholic.org/40-days-for-life-locations. And culture of life resources are available at respectlife.org.

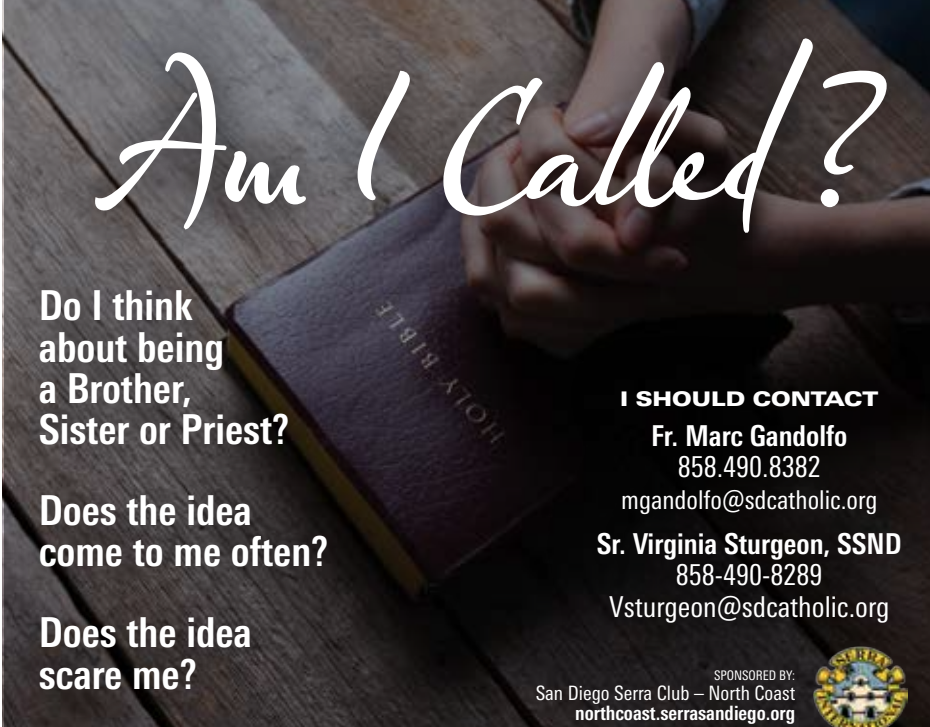




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Briefs *Continued from Page 22*

hold an open house from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Sunday, Nov. 8, on the all-boys school's North Park campus.

The schedule will include campus tours, 11 a.m. to noon; a formal presentation, 12:10 to 1 p.m.; and open tours, Q & A and BBQ, 1 to 2 p.m.

For information, visit sahs.org, call (619) 282-2184 or email psipper@sahs.org, bjohnston@sahs.org or zaceron@sahs.org.

All Invited to 'Awaken the Spirit'

LA MESA — The Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP) will hold its annual "Awaken the Spirit: The Power of Spirituality in Healing and Recovery" event, from 10 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Oct. 24, at United Methodist Church in La Mesa.

It will be a special morning of storytelling, connection and hope, featuring keynotes from Deacon John Roberts of Father Joe's Villages and Anna Marie Piconi Snyder, founder of the East County-based homeless ministry You Did It For Me, Inc.; inspiring stories of transformation from local leaders; and time to reflect and imagine a future shaped by belonging and possibility.

ISP invites people recovering from homelessness and addiction to encounter God's love, hope and healing through spiritual companionship that transforms lives. The practice is based on the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the 12-Step Program.

For information, call (629) 672-0788 or email mopanuco@icloud.com.

Women's Auxiliary Will Hold Fall Brunch

The Whispering Winds Women's Auxiliary will hold its annual fall brunch on Saturday, Oct. 24, at St. Gregory the Great Parish in Scripps Ranch.

The event will be a joyful morning of inspiration and fellowship for women united in faith in Christ. It will include a brunch program, from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., featuring guest speaker Karen Goodman. Brunch will be preceded by an optional 8:15 a.m. rosary. Check-in begins at 8:45 a.m.

The cost is \$45 for members and \$55 for non-members.

For information, visit whisperingwinds.org/womens-auxiliary, call (619) 504-7620 or email kesa1@cox.net.

Bishop Celebrating Mass For COLFS Gala

Culture of Life Family Services (COLFS) is celebrating 25 years of life-affirming service as the only Catholic-licensed community medical clinic in Southern California.

Its 17th annual "Pro-Life Is Good" Gala, will be held on Saturday, Oct. 24, at Paradise Point Resort and Spa in the Mission Bay area.

To begin the celebration, Bishop Michael Pham will celebrate Mass for gala attendees at 4:30 p.m. There will be a host bar and social at 5:30 p.m. Dinner and program will begin at 7 p.m.

Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood clinic director who became a well-known culture of life advocate, will be the keynote speaker.

Priest Assignment

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

Father Andrzej Galant, SChr, as pastor of St. Maximilian Kolbe Polish Mission, effective Aug. 20.

Tickets are \$300 per person. For more information, visit friendsofcolfs.org/gala or email gala@colfs.org.

YCP Continues Fall Line-up of Young Adult Events

The San Diego chapter of Young Catholic Professionals (YCP), which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, hosts regular events for young Catholics in their 20s and 30s.

Among the organization's recurring events is its Executive Speaker Series, where a Catholic speaker is invited to reflect on his or her faith and career. Attendees can enjoy beer, wine and appetizers, as well as time for networking.

Upcoming events include:

- Tuesday, Oct. 27: Fall Networking Happy Hour at Novo Brazil Brewing in Mission Valley

- Wednesday, Nov. 18: Executive Speaker Series with Mike Sweeney, a five-time Major League Baseball all-star

- Saturday, Dec. 5: Advent retreat

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

Popular Speaker Coming to St. Rose of Lima

CHULA VISTA — Paul J. Kim, a Catholic speaker, musician and come-

dian, has given talks throughout the United States and in 16 countries.

On Thursday, Nov. 5, he's coming to St. Rose of Lima Parish in Chula Vista. The event will begin at 6 p.m.

All are welcome to attend this free event. For information, contact the parish at (619) 427-0230.

Retreat Offers Healing After Abortion

The Rachel's Hope ministry will hold a healing retreat for Catholic (and Catholic-friendly) women suffering with guilt and shame after an abortion.

The professionally-led retreat will be held from Friday, Nov. 6, to Sunday, Nov. 8. A closing Mass and housing are included.

Confidentiality will be maintained. Group size is limited.

The cost to attend is \$120 per person; partial scholarships are available.

For information or to register, visit rachelshope.org, call (858) 581-3022, text (858) 752-9378 or email rachels_hope@juno.com.

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