

# THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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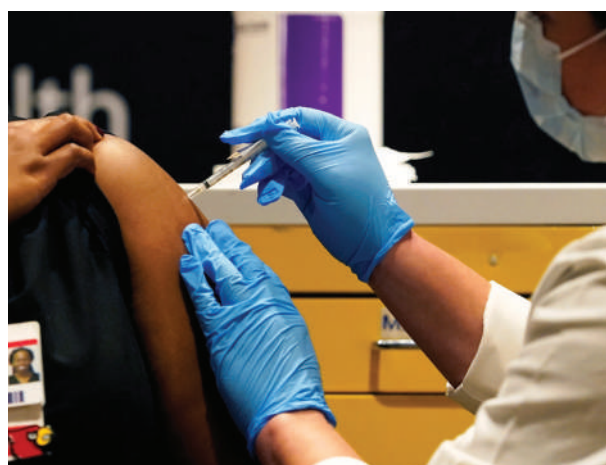


## 'Jewel of Little Italy' Restored

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JOHN GASTALDO

**ORIGINAL GLORY:** The community of the 95-year-old Parish of Our Lady of the Rosary has restored the ornate murals and paintings and the interior of the church to their original splendor.



## Moral Support

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San Diego Catholic schools may switch to distance learning for two weeks after break. **Page 5**

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# THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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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 98 parishes, 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 colored triangle indicates that we have more content related to a particular story in our digital edition, [thesoutherncross.org](http://thesoutherncross.org), including photos, videos, and at times an extended version.

THE SOUTHERN CROSS.ORG



## Lighting the Way

Filipino Catholics in the diocese began their celebration of the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines in 2021 with a vigil Mass on Dec. 14 at Mater Dei Catholic Church. The Mass launched Simbang Gabi, which means "Night Masses" in Filipino, a novena of services honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary as she awaits the birth of her Son. More information about this community is available at [sdccatholic.org/culturaldiversity](http://sdccatholic.org/culturaldiversity).

# Bishops Say Vaccines Against Virus Are Morally Acceptable

By Aida Bustos



The idea of participating in a clinical trial

of the Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19 interested San Diego Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan. A fellow priest told him there was an opportunity to do so.

First, the bishop had to make sure that there was no ethical problem with the vaccine. Stories swirled that a cell line from an aborted fetus had been used to develop it.

He discovered that the claim had been thoroughly researched by reputable organizations, which had concluded that it was morally acceptable to get the vaccine.

That made up his mind.

"I was happy to take part in the study," he said.

The vaccine has two steps. He received the first shot in November and the second one 21 days later. He was not told whether he received the vaccine or a placebo.

He's being closely monitored by Pfizer, a process that will last two years.



Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan

"So far so good," he said in mid-December, adding that he had no side effects from the shots.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration confirmed that the vaccine was 95 percent effective against the coronavirus, and approved it for emergency use on Dec. 11. The vaccine was administered in San Diego County starting on Dec. 15.

The federal agency was poised to approve a second vaccine, developed by Moderna, days later.

The bishops' conferences in California and the U.S. issued

statements affirming that it was acceptable for Catholics to take these vaccines.

"We want to reemphasize that the origins of the vaccines are morally acceptable from a Catholic perspective and their advancement fosters the common good," the California Catholic Conference said in a statement. "We also affirm that those who are most vulnerable must have a privileged place in their distribution and allocation."

This is how Bishop Dolan sees it: "Catholics have a responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters in need. And one way we can do that is by getting vaccinated."

He urged everyone to continue to take basic steps to prevent the spread of the disease.

"The sooner we move to everyone wearing a mask and a good number of people getting the vaccine, the closer we are to being able to defeat the virus."

Updated information about COVID-19 is available from these three levels:  
[sandiegocounty.gov/coronavirus/](http://sandiegocounty.gov/coronavirus/)  
[covid19.ca.gov/](http://covid19.ca.gov/)  
[cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://cdc.gov/coronavirus)





# Caravan Caps Week of Pro-Life Events

By Denis Grasska



The ninth annual San Diego Walk for Life has had to make some big changes to comply with COVID-19 safety rules.

But the event's organizers have decided to roll with them – literally.

The centerpiece of the annual pro-life gathering, a prayerful walk along a half-mile route in Balboa Park, will be replaced this year by a caravan of cars festooned with life-affirming messages that will circle the block in downtown San Diego where the County Administration Building is located.

With the procession led by a mobile ultrasound vehicle from Silent Voices, a pregnancy care center in Chula Vista, the caravan is scheduled to take place from 1-1:30 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 16. Participants will simply merge into the caravan as it travels clockwise around the block bounded by Ash Street, North Harbor Drive, Grape Street and Pacific Highway.

The caravan will be the conclusion of a weeklong hybrid event – another significant change for the San Diego Walk for Life, which previously had been a one-day affair that included speakers, musical entertainment, and exhibitor booths.



**COMMITTED:** The Jan. 18, 2020 San Diego Walk for Life attracted faithful from all ages.

This year's event will run from Jan. 11 to 16 and include webinars, a concert and Masses celebrated by two of San Diego's bishops.

As of press time, because of another surge in COVID-19 cases in December, the coordinators of Imperial Valley's Walk for Life were uncertain whether they would be able to host an event this year.

Roger Lopez, an active member of the pro-life community for more than 15 years, is overseeing the caravan portion of the San Diego Walk for Life.

"I'm very happy that we came

up with an alternative because it would be very sad to see the continuity broken," he said.

Those interested in participating are asked to register at [sandiegowalkforlife.org](http://sandiegowalkforlife.org). After signing up, caravan participants will receive a link to a Zoom call so that they can join in prayer with the other drivers and passengers. The caravan will be livestreamed.

"It's something different," said Maria Valencia, associate director of the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice, with a focus on the culture of life. "I'm glad that

we can have this event with the circumstances that we are living."

Valencia, who heads the San Diego Walk for Life Planning Committee, said, "We want to take this opportunity to join as a faithful community to celebrate life, to pray for life and, at the same time, to publicly stand up for the more vulnerable, the unborn, as we commemorate the *Roe v. Wade* anniversary."

The theme of this year's Walk for Life is "Never Alone: Meeting Their Needs at Every Turn." Various aspects will be explored in a series of related events. (See schedule below.)

On Saturday, Jan. 16, before the car caravan, both Bishop Robert McElroy and Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan will celebrate outdoor bilingual Masses at 10 a.m. – Bishop McElroy at The Immaculata Parish on the campus of the University of San Diego and Bishop Dolan at Cathedral Catholic High School.

Those attending one of the Masses in person are asked to use a face mask, bring a chair and wear blue clothing in a show of solidarity.

The liturgies on Jan. 16 will be livestreamed at [sdcatholic.org/walkforlife](http://sdcatholic.org/walkforlife). Event information: [sandiegowalkforlife.org](http://sandiegowalkforlife.org)



## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

### Monday, Jan. 11

7-8 p.m., Webinar: "A Place for Every Child." Presented by Noah Homes and Adoption Center of San Diego.

### Tuesday, Jan. 12

7-8 p.m., Webinar: "Stronger Together." Presented by Birth Choice and Culture of Life Family Services.

### Wednesday, Jan. 13

7-8 p.m., Webinar: "Equipping the

Church to Serve Their Needs." How the Church can help parents choose life. Presented by Delaiah Luna from Silent Voices.

### Thursday, Jan. 14

7-7:45 p.m., Virtual concert: "An Evening with Ryan Ellis"

### Friday, Jan. 15

7-8 p.m., Webinar: "El Poder Divino de la Gracia." Talk by Astrid Ben-

nett-Gutierrez, executive director of Los Angeles Pregnancy Services (LAPS), on human life and dignity. (Spanish)

### Saturday, Jan. 16

10-11 a.m., Mass with Bishop Robert McElroy, at The Immaculata Parish (attend outdoor Mass or view livestream)

10-11 a.m., Mass with Auxiliary

Bishop John Dolan, at Cathedral Catholic High School (attend outdoor Mass or view livestream)

10-11 a.m., Evangelical prayer service/sermon, at Memorial Bowl & Park in Chula Vista

1-1:30 p.m., Car caravan at County Administration Building in downtown San Diego.

## Welcome to Our New Look!

With this edition, we're beginning to update our newspaper's content and design.

We will continue to present the news about our diocese and the diverse people who bring our faith to life, as we have for more than a century.

We will be introducing new formats, however, such as the Q & A feature, which will present each month a remarkable man or woman with a religious vocation.

We're expanding the use of photography and design to better capture the power and

beauty of the life of our diocese.

Many stories will carry colorful icons we're introducing to highlight where you can find more content online, such as photos and videos, and additional information about the subject of the story.

On top of many pages you will find the web addresses of the diocese's pastoral offices whose work we're featuring in that space. These offices offer a wealth of services and programs to meet your needs at all stages of your spiritual life.

One thing has not changed in the 109 years we have published this paper: Our commitment to provide quality, useful and interesting news for the Catholic community in San Diego and Imperial counties.

As always, we invite your comments by phone at (858) 490-8266 or email, [socross@sdccatholic.org](mailto:socross@sdccatholic.org).

Thank you for reading us in print and online at [thesoutherncross.org](http://thesoutherncross.org), which brings you the latest news about our faith.

We wish you a healthy, blessed year.



# Years in Classroom Yield Great Blooms

By Denis Grasska



When Rosalie Wisniew began teaching at St.

Didacus Elementary School in the mid-1980s, the school hadn't yet acquired the eight or nine Apple Macintosh computers that would mark the humble beginnings of its computer class.

By the time she retired this past June, after 11 years at Cathedral Catholic High School, all of her students were using iPads instead of printed textbooks.

Over her three and a half decades in Catholic education, primarily teaching science and computers, Wisniew has seen a lot of change.

Technology advanced exponentially and has been increasingly integrated into classroom instruction. Thanks to new educational standards, science classes are more hands-on than ever. But one constant has been the Catholic faith, which has guided Wisniew throughout her career.

She made a point to "bring God's world into what I do," she said, showing her students that faith and science are not incompatible.

"There are six kingdoms of life that you study" in biology, she said. "But, basically, the most important kingdom of all ... is the kingdom of God."

She is emblematic of the teachers across San Diego's Catholic



**DEEP ROOTS:** Rosalie Wisniew proposed the creation of a garden at Cathedral Catholic High, where she worked for 11 years. Below, she taught science and computers for 23 years at St. Didacus School.

**"Watching my students grow into beautiful, smart, talented, gifted and amazing young adults has been one of the greatest adventures of my life."**

— Rosalie Wisniew

schools, professionals who provide instruction in the academic subjects but also weave in values such as love, compassion and service into their lessons, and who model that behavior every day.

Wisniew, who holds degrees in microbiology and zoology from San Diego State University, had worked as a microbiologist for the Food and Drug Administration before joining the faculty of St. Didacus School in 1985 as the

eighth-grade science teacher.

At the time, her career path hadn't seemed to be leading toward the classroom.

"It just kind of, I would say 'evolved' – that's a good word, 'evolution.' That evolved into teaching," said Wisniew, who was already a school parent at the time.

Ultimately, all eight of her children would attend St. Didacus School. Her oldest child, Gregory, entered kindergarten in 1974 and the youngest child, Anthony, graduated from eighth grade in 2001. From there, the children headed off to either St. Augustine High School, the alma mater of her husband, Jerry, or the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, her own alma mater.

Wisniew taught for 23 years at St. Didacus School, where her subjects included both science and computers, as well as a stint as the school's librarian.

In 2008, she left St. Didacus and joined the faculty of Cathedral Catholic High School, where she taught biology, anatomy and physiology, and served as moderator of the Gardening Club.

One of her lasting legacies on that campus is the 2,834-square-foot St. Francis of Assisi Garden, which was established in 2012 and includes dwarf fruit trees, assorted vegetables, edible flowering plants, and butterfly and hummingbird host plants. Wisniew proposed the creation of the garden, which has been used by the Gardening Club and serves as a living lab for biology, environmental science and physics classes.

"I'm going to miss the students, because teaching is a lot like gardening," said Wisniew, who describes gardens as places where there is always work to be done and growth taking place.

"Watching my students grow into beautiful, smart, talented, gifted and amazing young adults has been one of the greatest adventures of my life," she said. "Students truly brighten up my life with a ray of light and energy that can't be found in any bottled energy drink."

Christine Dean, principal of St. Didacus School, was the school's new kindergarten teacher in the early 1990s and saw Wisniew as a seasoned colleague.

"I just looked at her as if that's the kind of teacher I wanted to be," Dean said.

What advice does Wisniew have for current and future generations of Catholic educators?

"No matter how busy we are, we need to find time for prayer."

Read more about the career of Rosalie Wisniew at [thesoutherncross.org/01214](http://thesoutherncross.org/01214).



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# Schools Responding to Surge

By Aida Bustos



A longer Christmas break away from the classroom?

That's what some principals of San Diego Catholic schools may implement for their campus come January amid the stunning spike in positive COVID-19 cases in the county. If they take that route, all students at their schools would learn from home for at least the first two weeks of the year, starting on Jan. 4, allowing time for the surge to ease.

It would be the latest change for the schools, which began distance learning just two days after the governor ordered all schools to shut their doors last spring to slow the initial surge of coronavirus cases.

"This isn't March," said John Galvan, the director of San Diego's Catholic schools. "We're in a much better position."

Teachers have learned so much in the intervening nine months to serve their students, either at home or in the classroom, the director said. In fact, many teachers have adopted the "high-flex" model of instruction since the school year began in September, delivering lessons both in-person and online at the same time.

That's given students who were learning from school the ability to switch to distance learning at a moment's notice, such as when they have to quarantine if they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive. As the number of positive cases soared in November and December, more and more students have had to make that change, the director said.

Principals will continue to be in close touch with school

Director of Schools

**John Galvan**

families, letting them know about any changes.

Even as he reacts day-to-day to news about the coronavirus, the school's director has his eye on the future, "when we can breathe a sigh of relief when the vaccinations are made available."

"What's all this going to look like when we come out of this?" he asked. "What are the new opportunities? How can we do things more efficiently? More effectively?"

Educators have become experts in meeting via Zoom, for instance, making it easier to meet with many people and more often. The Schools Office is having greater engagement with key constituencies, he said, which seems paradoxical.

He gave the example of a regular meeting with school administrators that typically draws about 100 people.

"Yesterday we had about 200 attend via Zoom."

He said he's having weekly meetings with superintendents that never happened before.

"It's really expanding our network," he said. "It's exciting as much as I'm exhausted right now."

More information is available at [sdcatholicschools.org](http://sdcatholicschools.org); and on the page [sdcatholic.org/CSW](http://sdcatholic.org/CSW) for Catholic Schools Week activities.



**CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK  
IS JAN. 31 TO FEB. 6**

Catholic Schools Week is the annual celebration of Catholic education in the United States. The theme of this year's week, Jan. 31 to Feb. 6, is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence. Service."

This week helps to showcase what makes Catholic schools the right choice for parents.

Schools typically observe the week with Masses, assemblies and other activities for students, families, parishioners and community members. Many of these activities will be modified this year due to the pandemic.

To celebrate this week, the Schools Office is sponsoring a coloring contest for kindergarteners and an essay contest for fifth-graders. The office is introducing the Seton Award for high school juniors. The winner will receive a \$500 college scholarship.

Applications for Catholic school are accepted year-round and financial aid is available for qualifying families. Many schools are offering prospective families virtual tours or scheduling tours after school, one family at a time.



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# Support Group for Divorced Catholics

By Denis Grasska



The diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality will be presenting a 10-week virtual support group for divorced and separated Catholics.

Janelle Peregoy, an associate director at the office, will be facilitating the group along with members of St. Brigid Parish's divorced and separated ministry team.

The weekly meetings will be conducted via Zoom, on Thursdays, Jan. 28-April 8, from 7-8:30 p.m.

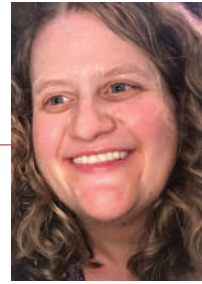
The support group will utilize a recovery program called "Divorced Catholic." Each participant will receive a copy of the book "Divorced. Catholic. Now What?: Navigating Life After Divorce," and a prayer journal. Each meeting will include the presentation of a brief video based on that week's chapter, followed by discussion questions and personal sharing.

Peregoy promised that the group would provide "a safe, confidential space" and would be "rooted in prayer ... really emphasizing that we're people of faith, sharing this journey together."

Peregoy, who leads the diocesan ministry for divorced and separated Catholics, used the phrase "divorce triage" to explain the essence of her job. She regularly fields calls from divorced and separated Catholics and directs them to the parish-based programs that would best serve their needs, but she typically doesn't engage in

**Associate Director of Office  
for Family Life and Spirituality**

**Janelle Peregoy**



direct ministry to this hurting demographic.

For that reason, the upcoming support group represents a unique venture for her and for the Family Life and Spirituality Office.

"It's really exciting," said Peregoy, who explained that she is especially glad to be able to facilitate alongside the "incredible team" from St. Brigid's and its leader, Lino Camacho.

Plans for the support group developed after an earlier event hosted by her office, titled "Surviving the Holidays," was held for divorced and separated Catholics in mid-November, also via Zoom. That event was a collaboration with Peregoy's Divorced Advisory Committee, which is composed of all the parish team leaders who have active divorce ministry programs.

"We just knew afterwards that we really tapped into a need," said Peregoy, who shared that various parishes have continued to offer virtual support groups in Spanish since the pandemic began, but she is unaware of any English-language support groups.

In the early days of the pandemic, Peregoy said, "Many of our ministries assumed a 'wait

and see' before resuming their work." But, nine months in, she said, it has become more critical that this assistance and accompaniment not be postponed indefinitely.

In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns have only served to exacerbate the pain that many divorced and separated Catholics are feeling, she said.

Some are feeling isolated, other divorcing couples have the added stress of being forced to quarantine together, and newly single parents are having their lives further complicated by new challenges like distance learning for their children.

Though Zoom is an imperfect medium, Peregoy said, a virtual support group is far better than allowing these challenges to continue unaddressed.

She added that one positive aspect of the online format is that there are no geographical limitations to participation.

Peregoy said her hope for the upcoming support group is the same as her hope for all such groups, whether virtual or in-person, and that's that divorced and separated Catholics receive the message that "they are loved, we as a Church love them, and they have so much to offer the rest of us."

For bilingual information about support for divorced and separated Catholics, contact Janelle Peregoy at (858) 490-8292 or [jperegoy@sdccatholic.org](mailto:jperegoy@sdccatholic.org).



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# Parish's Creative Focus on Family Life

By Denis Grasska



Last January, Santa Sophia Parish began an entire year dedicated to the theme of "Marriage and Family Life."

But after many of its planned activities were curtailed by the coronavirus, the parish has decided to carry over that theme into the new year.

The year was divided into quarters, each with its own theme, including: Family Prayer, Marriage, Parenting, and Healing. Four teams of parishioners were tasked with organizing events and activities for the quarters.

But, because of the pandemic and lockdowns, only the first quarter was able to proceed as planned. One of the planned events in the second quarter was salvaged by transitioning to a virtual format. The final two quarters were postponed entirely.

"We need to wait and see when things are going to open up, and we might revisit and change some of the programs," said Father Devdas Masillamony, pastor of the parish, which is home to more than 1,400 families.

By all accounts, however, the first quarter dedicated to Family



**DEDICATED:** Nahme and Heidi Chokeir are two of the leaders who organized Santa Sophia Parish's year-long theme of "Marriage and Family Life."

Prayer was a rousing success at the parish.

One of the highlights was the introduction of a prayer card for families, composed by the Santa Sophia Stewardship Council. Some 1,000 cards, with a depiction of the Holy Family on the front, were printed and distributed to parishioners and inserted at the back of each hymnal, so that parishioners could recite the prayer both at home and as a congregation just before the final blessing at each weekend Mass.

The prayer proved so popular that an additional 1,000 cards

had to be ordered, said Kareen Georgee, a parish staffer who led the team organizing the Family Prayer activities.

Families also continued reciting the prayer at home during the three months when public Masses were suspended to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

Monthly flyers were prepared for January, February and March of 2020, featuring suggested family activities and highlighting important feast days.

Plans for the second quarter dedicated to Marriage were drastically changed with the onset

of the pandemic. Still, about 20 parish couples participated in an all-day marriage-enrichment program via Zoom. It was organized by Heidi and Nahme Chokeir, parishioners who are actively involved in Marriage Encounter. Some of the participating couples wrote testimonies for the parish bulletin, indicating how helpful the program was for their marriage and how timely it was during this period of lockdown and isolation.

Georgee said the marriage-enrichment program was so well-organized and beneficial for so many that the parish might offer it again in the future.

Some of the activities initially planned for the second, third and fourth quarters will be held in 2021.

The yearlong "Marriage and Family Life" theme was inspired by a diocesan synod held on the same subject in 2016. Afterward, the parish had been one of five pilot parishes entrusted with implementing the synod's proposals.

Father Masillamony and Georgee commented that parishes have many resources and parishioners have a desire to help. They encourage pastors, staff and the laity to find creative ways of using their talents to reach others.



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# 31 UPCOMING EVENTS

## BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Time to put away the Christmas tree and take down the decorations! The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which recalls Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist as the beginning of His public ministry, marks the end of the Christmas season, which began on Christmas Day.

**WHEN:** Sunday, Jan. 10,

Mass times vary

**WHERE:** Your local parish

## MENTAL HEALTH MINISTRY

NAMI San Diego (National Alliance on Mental Illness), in collaboration with St. Gregory the Great Parish's Mental Health Ministry, is offering an educational program for families and friends of individuals who experience mental illness. The eight-week virtual course is free and open to parishioners and members of the community. For more information, contact St. Gregory the Great Parish at (858) 653-3540 or visit [www.stgg.org](http://www.stgg.org).

**WHEN:** Mondays, Jan. 11-

March 1, 5:30-8 p.m.

**WHERE:** Offered virtually

## VIRTUAL 'SPRING FORWARD'

The Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministry, in partnership with the Office for Schools, welcomes Jesuit Father Robert Spitzer to the diocese's Spring Forward Conference. The annual

event, offered this year via Zoom, serves as the kick-off for a new year of catechetical ministry. Father Spitzer, president/co-founder of the ministry Credible Catholic, will address parish and school catechists on the subject of "Faith & Science." In a culture that often sees faith and science as contradictory, the diocese hopes that catechists will come to better understand and be equipped to explain how faith and reason together reveal the glory of God. To register: visit [sdcatholicdisciples.net](http://sdcatholicdisciples.net).

**WHEN:** Saturday, Jan. 16, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

**WHERE:** Offered virtually

## DAY OF PENANCE AND PRAYER

For Catholics in the United States, the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, which established a constitutional right to abortion, is observed as a day of penance and prayer. "The General Instruction of the Roman Missal," no. 373, states: "In all the dioceses of the United States of America, Jan. 22 ... shall be observed as a particular day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life."

**WHEN:** Friday, Jan. 22, all day

**WHERE:** Nationwide



**SPEAKER:** Father Robert Spitzer will headline the annual "Spring Forward Conference" on Jan. 16.

## DIOCESAN PROGRAMS

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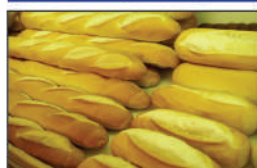
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**Dear Friends and Family of Catholic Charities,**

*As fear and sickness spread through Imperial Valley, so did faith, food, and a blueprint to feed the hungry. With the COVID winter approaching, this forgotten corner of California needs another miracle.*

In the harrowing fight against hunger, however, there was a miraculous reprieve. Since the crest of the first coronavirus wave, Catholic Charities' Emergency Food Distribution Network Plus (EFDN+) has provided 312,981 pounds of food or 260,818 meals to Imperial County along with the infrastructure to unite eight different ministries in feeding the thousands of residents facing food insecurity.

EFDN+ is our response to the economic hardship brought on by the pandemic. We were able to quickly organize a connected food distribution network because we had envisioned one all along. The pandemic simply accelerated the need and, in turn, the launch. The community of El Centro has always been a focus of Catholic Charities and the amazing people who live there working hard to support their families. Our model for the EFDN+ is we will feed everyone who comes to us.

**"You see people in need, and you want to help," said Father Mark Edney of El Centro Catholic. "You don't recite a Bible verse. You don't talk politics. You simply help. It's the most basic human response."**

Struggle is ingrained in the geographic and socioeconomic fibers of Imperial Valley, where one in four residents live in poverty. Hope and helping each other is also ingrained in the footprint of the "Valley" where the communities work hard to support each other especially now as the pandemic has hit the community so deeply.

From the moment the coronavirus arrived locally, Imperial Valley was destined to become an epicenter due to its remote location, limited resources, and the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on communities of color. Bordering Mexico, Imperial County is mostly Hispanic and largely agricultural. Its migrant farmworkers had to decide between risking their lives and losing their paychecks. Both choices further fueled the crisis.

**Food Distribution Takes Shape**

The Imperial Valley Catholic Charities team received a boost from the USDA's Farmers to Families Food Box program as well as donations. When the truckloads of food came in, the challenge became clear: getting the food into the hands of the hungry throughout the sprawling county, one of California's largest by land area.

**"Catholic Charities made it possible for us to receive the trucks and distribute the food not just in El Centro, but also to Holtville, Brawley, Heber, and other towns," Edney said.**

**Francisco Cabrera, Director of Religious Education at El Centro Catholic, agreed. "Catholic Charities gave us the tools to do the job," he said.**

Yet, a liftgate truck is nothing without someone who can operate it. Who knew that would be Deacon Sergio Hernandez of El Centro Catholic?

The Knights of Columbus brought the manpower to make the logistics manageable. Everyone worked together sharing their time and talents to make the food distribution model work and work well, helping those who were hungry and desperate, trying to survive.

Countless volunteers showed up, defying 115-degree heat and facing the fear of contracting the coronavirus.

Dr. Victor Jaime, Vice President of the Imperial County Board of Education, brought his entire family to help feed the hungry. Christ Community Church joined, too.

**"It was a brave act of charity by so many," Edney said. "Imperial County is faithful. Imperial County is resilient. Imperial County is together. We always have been."**

All of the necessary pieces fell into place as the food distribution grew from 30 to 100 workers in just a few weeks. What took six to 10 hours for a small, scrappy team would reduce to just two to three hours with an army of good Samaritans.

**Solace, Security, Solidarity**

As EFDN+ ramped up, the people, sadly, poured in. They were tired. They were sweltering. They were hungry. Many of them were new to being on the receiving end. Deacon Domingo Enriquez of El Centro Catholic recalled a heart-wrenching interaction. The volunteer next to him, while handing out food, confessed:

**"I lost my job and I've been out of work. I have no check and no money; do you think it would be okay if I got some groceries today?"**

The deacon, brought to tears, implored the man to take food. It was a reminder of how close each person is to poverty.

**"There's no distance or status here," Edney said. "There's no stigma. Poverty is not an embarrassment."**

In the most impoverished neighborhoods, the lines for food stretched around the parishes. With danger and destitute all around, the churches are where people feel safe and where they know they will be fed.

**We Need More Neighbors**

When will things get back to normal? That is the question that weighs on all of us. In most places, the question breeds hope. Hope that a vaccine is close and faith that if we can just make it a few more weeks 2021 will be here and we do not have to look back on 2020. But in the Imperial County, it is different. Here, life is not easy and normal is not always a good situation. When the pandemic subsides, poverty will still be present. For Catholic Charities and its EFDN+ partners, the need is pure and simple:

**"The world doesn't need more pastors or priests or worship leaders," said Pastor Chris Nunn of Christ Community Church. "The world needs more neighbors."**

As we prepare for a difficult winter, will you be a neighbor to an entire county in need? To donate in support of Catholic Charities' Emergency Food Distribution Network Plus and other programs serving the most vulnerable in our communities, visit [ccdsd.org/giving](http://ccdsd.org/giving).

*Appaswamy V. P.*

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Chief Executive Officer



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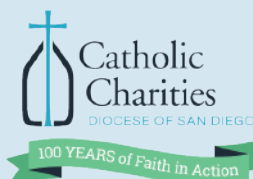
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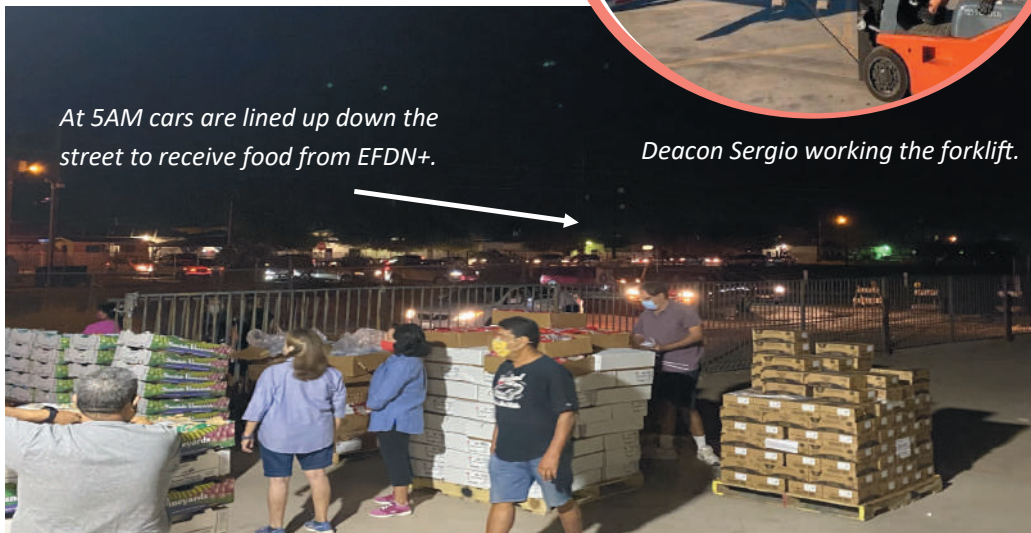
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*At 5AM cars are lined up down the street to receive food from EFDN+.*

*Deacon Sergio working the forklift.*







PHOTOS BY JOHN GASTALDO

## \$2.4-Million Project Restores Splendor

By Denis Grasska



After a \$2.4-million restoration, the small Catholic church nicknamed "The Jewel of Little Italy" is now more stunning than ever.

Our Lady of the Rosary Church, which will celebrate its centennial in 2025, has long been recognized for its artistic beauty. Ornate murals depicting biblical scenes like the Crucifixion and the Last Judgment, as well as paintings of figures like the Twelve Apostles, adorn the walls and the ceiling.

A 2017 article in the *National Catholic Register* included Our Lady of the Rosary as fourth among "5 of the Most Beautiful Churches in California."

Still, 95 years have taken their toll on the church, built to serve the Italian immigrant community and modeled after the churches of their homeland.

Barnabite Father Joseph Tabigue, the parish's pastor since 2011, said cracks had formed in the church's ceiling, its vibrant frescoes by Venetian painter Fausto Tasca had darkened with decades

of dust and grime, and the red carpeting installed in the 1960s had never been replaced.

The restoration work began Jan. 7, 2020, and concluded in early October, said Father Tabigue. When one sees the final result, "your jaw just drops."

In early October, the pastor decided to let parishioners get a glimpse of the interior of the church after outdoor Masses, where they were being held due to health restrictions. Finally, the parish began to celebrate its Masses inside the church. Just three Sundays

Our Lady of the Rosary is located at 1668 State St., San Diego, 92101, web [olrdsd.org](http://olrdsd.org).



later, the doors closed once more due to the spike in cases.

Patricia J. Kaszas, a 72-year-old parishioner who served as the project liaison, said the parish knew as early as 2013 that the church would need to be restored.

She explained that, if nothing had

— Continued on Page 11



**ITALIAN BEAUTY:** The founders of Our Lady of the Rosary wanted the church's interior to reflect the artistic traditions in Italy. Renowned painter Fausto Tasca, from Venice, was hired to paint murals to cover the sanctuary walls and ceiling, including "The Crucifixion" above the altar, and to design the stained-glass windows.



been done, Tasca's paintings likely would have been "lost forever."

Maria Sardina, who was baptized at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in 1948 and has been a parishioner ever since, said that the church's appearance, "although always beautiful, became very tired."

"Over the years," she said, "a Band-Aid approach was taken for repairs – a little paint here and there – but not a total makeover."

The goal of the restoration was to return the church to its original glory while also making a few upgrades, including electrical rewiring and the installation of two air-conditioning units, an improved sound system and some marble flooring, including an entryway marble inlay of the Jerusalem Cross. Also, a new confessional room with custom stained-glass art from Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son" was designed.

Among other things, old varnish was removed from the paintings, which were meticulously retouched. The canvases for some of them had been peeling off the ceiling and needed to be reattached. The pews were removed and re-stained to their original darker color; the old wooden flooring beneath them was also taken up, refinished and rein-

surpassed its capital campaign goal of \$2.5 million, meaning that it has not incurred any debt for the restoration. There were more than 800 generous donors.

Father Tabigue said that many answered the call, and he is grateful.

The pastor explained that, just as the church originally served as a welcoming home for Italian immigrants, he hoped the newly restored church might be a home for contemporary Catholics, where they can find "peace, and consolation, and the spiritual things that we all are searching for."

See photo gallery  
of the restoration at  
[thesoutherncross.org/012110](https://thesoutherncross.org/012110)



**"The most striking change from the restoration was a treasure underneath 90-plus years of dirt."**

— Luke Vinci

stalled. Terracotta-colored stripes that had once adorned the arches and columns throughout the church, but had been painted over in the intervening decades, were reintroduced.

Luke Vinci, 41, served as fundraising chair for the restoration.

"The most striking change from the restoration was a treasure underneath 90-plus years of dirt," he said, referring to the restored artworks. "What appeared to be gray in many cases on the art is now white or sometimes a vibrant blue."

Sardina said that some of the smaller details in the paintings, including depictions of angels and saints, were rediscovered.

"The paintings and the stories they tell can now be fully enjoyed."

Planning for the restoration started in 2012. Fundraising officially began on Oct. 7, 2018, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The parish



**VIBRANT:** The artwork, nearly 100 years old, was painstakingly cleaned and restored to its original glory. Father Joseph Tabigue has led the parish since 2011.



# Working Together to Lift Young Adults

By Roman Flores

Two sisters are leading a new generation of faithful in this desert region.

The Wong sisters have been involved in ministry from a young age thanks to a Catholic upbringing from their catechist parents. Brianah, 27, is the Imperial Valley Young Adult Ministry coordinator and Summer, 24, is the young adult leader at St. Anthony of Padua Parish in the city of Imperial.

Their parents have led retreats, youth groups, faith formation, and life of Christ plays in Calexico since the sisters were very young. The sisters have gone from being altar servers, choir members and youth ministry helpers to becoming youth and young adult leaders in their own right.

As their family-led Bible studies in Imperial started in 2013, the sisters began to meet with a small group of young adults from St. Anthony Church. What started as simply Catholic friends gathering in fellowship has become the Imperial Valley Young Adult Ministry that the sisters lead together.

"Our mission statement is basically to make people feel like they



**DEDICATED:** Brianah Wong, the Imperial Valley Young Adult Ministry coordinator, addressed the Advent Retreat in Brawley on Nov. 14.

belong and we have a place for them to gather to have an encounter with Christ," Summer said.

Though unable to pinpoint an exact start date, Brianah credits the beginning of the ministry, in part, to networking with Patrick Rivera after the annual Young Adult Mass in August 2017 at The Immaculata Church. Rivera directs the diocesan Office for Young Adult Ministry.

"I took (the Mass) as an opportunity to connect with other young

adult groups and the diocese to let them know that we have young adults in the Valley and that we're active," she said.

While attending Northern Arizona University, Brianah discerned that the Holy Spirit was calling her to serve in young adult ministry in the Imperial Valley, where her sister had continued to be involved in the ministry and connecting with Catholic friends in smaller groups. Brianah reconnected with Rivera

in April 2019 and began further developing the Valley's fledgling Young Adult Ministry.

Even amidst the pandemic, the ministry has held weekly Bible studies via Zoom.

Brianah said that, while she longs for the return of in-person activities, the Zoom format has allowed more people to participate in the Bible studies and other on-line events, even from outside of the Valley, averaging 10 to 20 people weekly.

"Brianah and Summer always seem to be two steps ahead in the direction we want to go. They were way ahead of the curve," said Rivera, who praises their "true servants' hearts."

"In a world where more people see millennials or young adults as being take-take-take, I would say Brianah, Summer and their entire family are more give-give-give," he said.

Anyone who knows the sisters already knows that to be true.

You may contact the Imperial Valley Young Adult Ministry by email at [ivyaministry@gmail.com](mailto:ivyaministry@gmail.com) and follow it on Instagram @ivyaministry.



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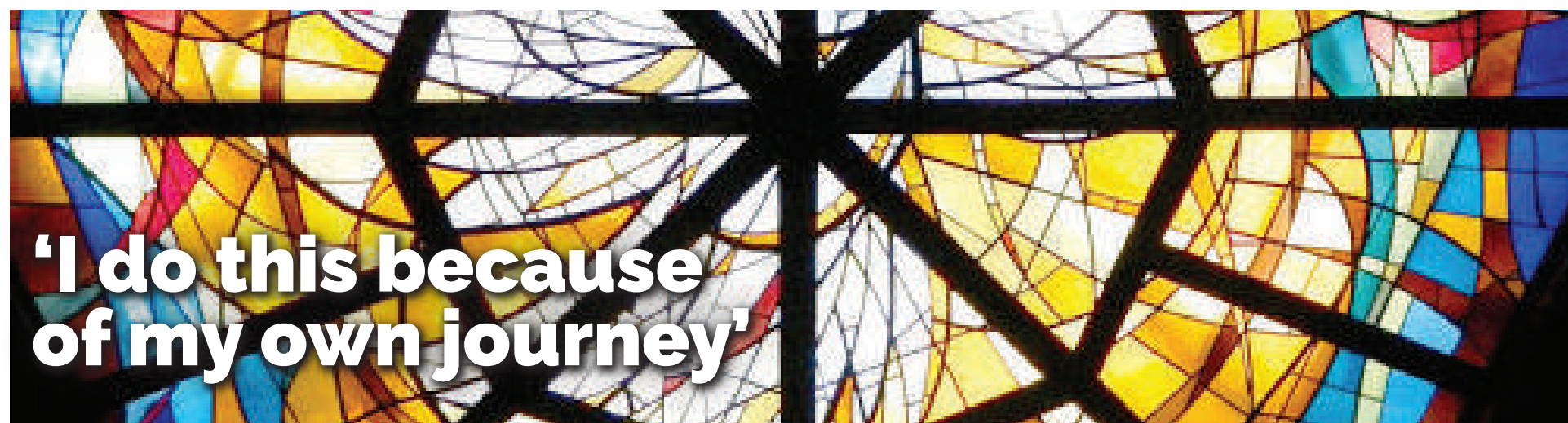
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Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan, 58, is working to raise awareness about suicide. It's a subject he knows intimately: Two siblings took their own lives, as did the spouse of one of them, and a third sibling attempted it. He co-edited a pastoral handbook just published, "Responding to Suicide," to assist Catholic ministry leaders. A companion workbook for survivors of suicide will be published in January.

**Question: Why was it important for you to lead the effort to raise awareness of mental illness in the Church, especially suicide?**

**Answer:** I do this because of my own journey through this reality. I had shared my story as a priest in retreats and in Masses. And now that I'm a bishop I felt it was important to let people know that even someone in the Church hierarchy, like a bishop, has people in their lives who have died by suicide, and that they are not alone in this. Suicide affects everybody, at every stage in life. (A total of 429 people died by suicide in San Diego County in 2019.)

Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan co-edited "Responding to Suicide," published by Ave Maria Press; available at [avemariapress.com](http://avemariapress.com). The Office for Family Life and Spirituality offers information about mental health at (858) 490-8299; email [wadsit@sdccatholic.org](mailto:wadsit@sdccatholic.org).



**An Interview with:**

**Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan**



**Q: How have attitudes changed in the Church about this subject in the last 40 years or so?**

**A:** We are hearing more about the science of psychology. We're able to trust it in a way we weren't able to decades ago. Now, we're able to respond to a mental disorder in a more holistic way. It's no longer "black or white, where you either fix your problem or there is no place in the Church for you."

**Q: How did fellow priests and bishops respond when you raised the issue of suicide?**

**A:** It was a learning moment for them when I was able to share with them my story.

Thankfully, the California bishops wrote a pastoral letter that addresses mental illness two years ago that gave me an opening to having more discussions about it.

**Q: You talked to Pope Francis about this issue during a visit by the U.S. bishops last January. What did you tell him?**

**A:** I urged him to write a letter to the faithful about this issue, similar to what the California bishops had done. I told him, "The people need to hear from you." And he said he would do it.

**Q: How do you want your book to be used?**

**A:** Our goal is to communicate to Catholic leaders that tending to people with a mental illness is not a program a parish can offer, it's an approach, an attitude. If pastors have an appreciation for the science of psychology, and not dismiss it in favor of judgment, the way we address people with mental disorders will be better.

**Q: What would your message be to the people in the pews at this difficult time?**

**A:** I would let them know that they are valued and loved. And to trust the science of psychology. Faith and reason lead to the same goal: to strengthen our relationship with God.

**Q: Who should our faithful contact if they are having a mental health issue?**

**A:** They should check with our diocese's Office for Family Life and Spirituality, which coordinates our mental health ministries at the parishes.

**Q: How do you take care of your mental health?**

**A:** I work on all parts of my life that are essential: General-spiritual, physical well-being, emotional-relational and academic-intellectual. All of these make up the spiritual being, not just prayer. If all of those plates are spinning, you're probably going to be in good shape.

See extended interview with Bishop Dolan at [thesoutherncross.org/012114](http://thesoutherncross.org/012114)



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**HOMILIST:** Deacon Robert Booth, right, will participate at the special Mass on Jan. 17.

## Special Mass Jan. 17 to Honor Dr. King's Legacy



Bishop Robert McElroy will celebrate on Sunday, Jan. 17, the second annual Mass to promote Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Call to Service."

The diocesan Commission for African American Catholics is organizing the Mass, which will be livestreamed (Check website for time.). Deacon Robert Booth will deliver the homily at the Mass, concelebrated by Auxiliary Bishops John Dolan and Ramón Bejarano.

The president of the commission, Jo Hart, said the Mass is a call to reflect on the lived reality that Blacks, Latinos and other non-Anglo minorities continue to experience daily. She cited the killing of

George Floyd and the overwhelming impact of the pandemic as two examples of this reality.

Catholics are challenged to live out the Gospel of equality for all of God's heirs, she said.

"The Catholic Church is a universal Church. It's not just for people who look like you, who live in your neighborhood."

Hart is part of the diocesan committee organizing forums examining racism in the Church and proposing ways to root it out. She invites everyone to participate in the Mass and the forums to respond to Dr. King's "Call to Service."

See details about the Mass on Sunday, Jan. 17 on [sdcatholic.org/events](http://sdcatholic.org/events).



## Forum on Jan. 27 to Focus on Asians

By Aida Bustos



The virtual series of forums exploring racism in the Church and recommending ways to root it out continues in the new year.

A forum planned for Wednesday, Jan. 27, will explore the experience of Asian Catholics, a diverse population that includes immigrants from several countries and territories and native-born.

And on Feb. 10, a forum will explore the experience of migrants and refugees.

The forums will start at 6:30 p.m. and will be held via Zoom. They will feature remarks from speakers followed by small breakout sessions where participants can share their stories and ideas of how to tackle racism.

These will be the fourth and fifth in a series, called "My Church, My Story," the diocese has hosted since late summer. They are organized by a committee formed by the diocesan Office for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities.

The committee issued an initial report that includes recommenda-

tions for individuals, parishes and the diocese itself to implement to begin to dismantle racism.

"While many people recognize that racism and discrimination are evil, it became apparent that few of us understood the lived experience of all groups that have experienced those evils," said Jim Moore, a committee leader. "One purpose of the additional programs is to shed light on the experience of all people who have been marginalized, excluded or harmed by racism."

He said much needs to be done.

"Until all people feel the respect and dignity of equal treatment by individuals, parishes and the diocese, we will continue this work," said Moore, co-chair of the pastoral council at Mission San Luis Rey Parish. "The focus of the series may evolve over time, while we strive to achieve the Gospel message to love one another."

Details about the upcoming forums, videos of past speakers, the initial report, and other resources are available at [sdcatholic.org/racism](http://sdcatholic.org/racism).



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**MAN OF THE YEAR:** Pope Francis proclaimed yearlong celebration for St. Joseph.

# Pope Proclaims Year to St. Joseph

By Junno Arocho Esteves

**VATICAN CITY —** Marking the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph being declared patron of the universal Church, Pope Francis proclaimed a yearlong celebration dedicated to the foster father of Jesus.

In an apostolic letter “Patris Corde” (“With a father’s heart”), Pope Francis said Christians can discover in St. Joseph, who often goes unnoticed, “an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble.”

“St. Joseph reminds us that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all,” he said in his letter, published on Dec. 8.

As Mary’s husband and guardian of the son of God, St. Joseph turned “his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of himself, his heart and all his abilities, a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home.”

The Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican tribunal that deals with matters of conscience, issued a decree Dec. 8 stating that plenary indulgences will be granted to Catholics not only through prayer and penance, but also through acts of justice, charity and piety dedicated to St. Joseph.

Among the conditions for receiving an indulgence are a spirit detached from sin, receiving sacramental confession as soon as possible, receiving Communion as soon as possible and praying for the Holy Father’s intentions.

Catholic News Service

# Focus on Eternal Life, Cardinal Urges

By Cindy Wooden

**VATICAN CITY —** Anyone who thinks eternal life will be boring should ask a couple in love whether they want that love to endure forever, said the preacher of the papal household.

Human beings are “finite beings capable of the infinite, mortal beings with an innate yearning for immortality,” said Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, offering an Advent meditation to Pope Francis, leaders of the Roman Curia and Vatican employees.

In his reflection Dec. 11, the cardinal said Jesus’ birth was the moment “eternity burst into time” and His death and resurrection opened eternity to all who believe.

Preaching about eternity is an essential aspect of evangelization, he said, because it responds to that human desire for meaning and for unending love. But also, he said, it is a reminder to Christians that the focus of their lives should be striving for holiness on earth so that they can enjoy eternal life with God in heaven.

“Imagine this situation: A person receives an eviction notice and must move soon. Fortunately, he immediately is given the possibility of a new home,” the cardinal said. “But what does he do? He spends all his money to modernize and decorate the house he must leave rather than furnishing the one he’s going to. Wouldn’t that be foolish?”

“All of us will be ‘evicted’ from this world,” he said, “and we resemble that foolish man if we think only about embellishing our earthly home without being concerned for the good works that will follow us to our new home after our deaths.”

Unfortunately, the cardinal told the pope and Curia officials, too many Christians seem to be losing sight of the promise of eternal life, which diminishes their “capacity to face suffering and life’s challenges with courage.”

Like St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Ignatius of Loyola taught, he said, “in every situation and before every obstacle,” Christians should ask themselves, “*Quid hoc ad aeternitatem?*” essentially, “What does this mean in the light of eternity?”

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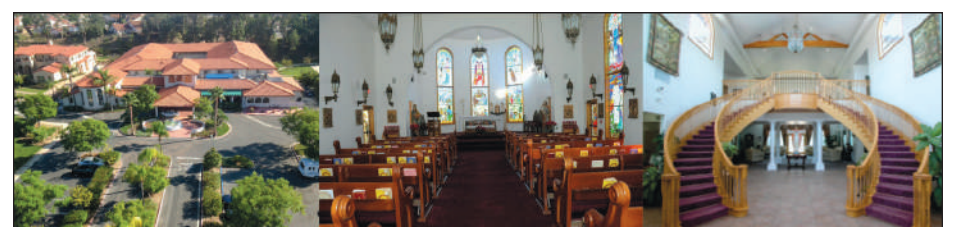
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# The light of Christ shines in our jails and prisons



By Robert Ehnou, PhD



I was released from federal prison in 2015 after two and half years in custody. I left prison with little hope for any kind of meaningful professional future. I was most fortunate to be re-admitted into a PhD program at the University of San Diego upon my release.

My doctoral research centered on restorative justice and prisoner reentry and reintegration. My incarcerated experience gave me an informed perspective into the challenges and often the tragedies experienced by those who are

locked up and invisible to most of the rest of the population in our country.

I completed my graduate work in 2018, and I was blessed to be hired by the Diocese of San Diego to manage and resource the diocese's prison and jail ministry programs. Today, I am the director for the Office for Life, Peace and Justice at the diocese.

The office seeks to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ through ed-

More information about the diocese's prison ministry program is available by phone at (858) 490-8324, email at [rehnow@sdccatholic.org](mailto:rehnow@sdccatholic.org), and on the page [sdccatholic.org/restore](http://sdccatholic.org/restore).



ucation, advocacy, and support for marginalized individuals and communities throughout the diocese. The office's mission is centered on Catholic social teaching's recognition of human dignity and the sanctity of life for all persons from conception to natural death, welcoming the immigrant and caring for the prisoner. The office supports and provides resources to parishes to build upon their own social ministry programs.

Much of my day-to-day work is focused on managing and supporting the Catholic religious programming and services in the 25 jails, prisons and detention centers in San Diego and Imperial counties.

With a team of more than 20 chaplains and more than 400 volunteers, the diocese brings the Gospel and the "face of Christ" to the 26,000 men and women currently incarcerated within the diocesan boundaries.

Our incarcerated Catholic population collectively is the largest parish in our diocese! Our ministry also includes a vibrant inmate pen pal program. We are building our capacity with several local nonprofits to create a reentry ministry for our returning citizens.

Prison and jail ministry, of which I was a recipient from 2013 to 2015, is a profound experience for those who are called to join in this unique work. Most volunteers begin in prison ministry believing they will be saving wayward souls and bringing the Gospel to the darkest place — prison. The volunteers in our ministry are most surprised that they often encounter Christ in the men and the women they meet inside the jail and prison walls.

As many chaplains and volunteers have shared with me, they receive far more from the inmates and detainees than they are ever able to give in return. Jesus has a unique way of reaching each of us, and it has been my own experience that His light shines brightly in many of the men and women who have had the misfortune of being incarcerated.

God is good — all the time!

*Robert Ehnou, PhD, is the director of the Office for Life, Peace and Justice.*

See additional perspectives on [thesoutherncross.org/perspectives](http://thesoutherncross.org/perspectives).



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**EXPANDING REACH:** Raul Caro, founder and director of St. John Paul II Catholic Radio, broadcasts from the radio apostolate's studio in El Centro. His organization plans to extend into San Diego County.

## JP2 Radio to Begin Station in San Diego

By Denis Grasska

Since it began broadcasting five years ago, St. John Paul II Catholic Radio has borne much spiritual fruit and fostered Catholic community in the Imperial Valley.

"We get letters all the time," said Raul Caro, the radio apostolate's founder and director, referring to the listeners who have shared that they have a better understanding of the faith and are closer to God as a result of the Catholic programming that airs 24 hours a day on KCJP 95.7 FM in El Centro and K227BN 93.3 FM in Brawley.

Caro may soon be receiving similar feedback from Catholics in San Diego County. His new station, KFSD 1450 AM, is expected to start beaming Catholic content from a radio tower in Escondido, beginning in the first half of February 2021.

St. John Paul II Catholic Radio (JP2 Radio) covers most of Imperial County and can be accessed online at [jp2radio.com](http://jp2radio.com).

The new station will expand its reach to an additional million potential listeners. During daytime hours, the signal will carry to most of San Diego County.

San Diego County already has Catholic radio programming, courtesy of Relevant Radio, which can be heard on KCEO 1000 AM. Caro believes that JP2 Radio has something to offer, based on the community-minded approach that it has cultivated in the Imperial Valley.

"Rather than be another syndicated network feed, we try to be more of a local, community radio station," said Caro. "That's what our real goal is."

JP2 Radio, an apostolate of the Lay Brothers of the Poor, is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation supported by listeners.

**St. John Paul II Catholic Radio plans to begin broadcasting in San Diego County in February on KFSD AM 1450. The organization has two stations in the Imperial Valley, 95.7 FM in El Centro and 93.3 FM in Brawley. For more information, visit [jp2radio.com](http://jp2radio.com).**



Before JP2 Radio made its debut in El Centro, Caro said, Catholic events in the Imperial Valley were "few and far between." But then, the radio apostolate began hosting an annual dinner in 2015 and an annual winter conference in 2016. These events drew between 400 and 500 people from throughout the region, fostered community, and provided opportunities to hear popular Catholic radio personalities, like Patrick Madrid, Jesuit Father Mitch Pacwa and Dr. Ray

Guarendi in person, he said.

"We've done a lot of little things like that that made a big difference," said Caro, who expressed hope that the station might be able to accomplish similar things in San Diego County.

Caro said that his radio operation prides itself on being independent, broadcasting curated content from three Catholic radio networks – EWTN, Ave Maria and Relevant Radio – picking what he believes to be "the best blend" of programming. Ultimately, he would like to establish a physical studio in San Diego County and is seeking community partners to produce San Diego-specific content.

Steve Beuerle, who with Caro serves as co-director of IHS Media, the nonprofit that was formed to purchase the San Diego-based radio station, agreed that the station will be "much more local" and "much more live."



Director Angelo Libutti

## Film Blends Faith, Science

By Denis Grasska

Catholics believe that, during the Mass, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Throughout history, the truth of this teaching has been demonstrated in extraordinary ways.

For example, in 750 A.D. in Lanciano, Italy, when a doubting priest recited the words of consecration, the host and the wine physically changed into human flesh and blood. The relics of this miracle have baffled scientists.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager who was beatified in October, created a website documenting a long list of such phenomena around the globe and dating from the early centuries of Christianity to as recent as seven years ago.

The young blessed's work provides the foundation

for a documentary tentatively titled "Eucharistic Miracles." The film, which is scheduled to be released on June 3, will include interviews with experts in the Church and the scientific community, live-action dramatizations of Eucharistic experiences in the lives of the saints, and Hollywood-quality special effects.

Veteran director Angelo Libutti wants to make a film that reaches a diverse audience, including "lukewarm" Catholics, Christians who do not accept Catholic teaching about the Eucharist, and those who trust science but are skeptical about faith.

The scope of the film will be determined by the results of a crowdfunding campaign at [christianchannel.com/crowdfund-films](http://christianchannel.com/crowdfund-films), through Jan. 4.

For Libutti, his film has a message needed now. "If people know all this information, they will all get back to Christ, because now, we have science on our side, too."



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