Lighting the Way

Family Time
Couple urges other Catholics to support foster parents. Page 3

Special Vocation
Religious sister is an attorney who represents detained asylum-seekers. Page 6

Setting Course
Diocesan committees get to work planning consultation of faithful. Page 8

Keeping the Faith
Diocese’s programs and services are a click away.

P.O. Box 81869
San Diego, CA 92138-1869

TELEPHONE: (858) 490-8266
E-MAIL: socross@sdcatholic.org
WEB: THESOUTHERNCROSS.ORG

TRADITION: The Filipino community will hold its Simbang Gabi vigil Mass, with its procession of star-shaped lanterns, on Dec. 14 at Resurrection Church in Escondido. Last year’s celebration was held in Chula Vista. See how other communities are celebrating Christmas on Pages 12 to 15.
The Tenderness of God’s Grace

The season of Christmas has so many joyful and beautiful dimensions — the recognition that God has entered into human history in order to redeem us; the perception that, in these days, our world is marked by a special sense of unity and peace; the blessings of family gatherings that reflect and deepen the unique grace that families constitute in our lives.

But a particularly profound source of joy and thanksgiving in this time of Christmas lies in the profoundly tender grace that God revealed to us in the birth of His Son. God could have chosen to redeem the world without ever entering into human history, without suffering on the cross, without knowing the hardships that accompany every human life on this earth.

But God chose to enter fully into our human existence, to be born as a child in vulnerability and in innocence, in the humblest of circumstances and without acclaim or public visibility. This is the God of tenderness and grace, who comes to us in our own moments of vulnerability and suffering, understanding both the beauties and the struggles of our humanity because Jesus experienced them fully when He walked on this earth.

And, in that tender love, we find the greatest embrace and joy of this Christmas season, for the accompaniment that God offers to us on our earthly pilgrimage is without reservation or limit. It is the embrace of the God who has loved us from the first moment in our mother’s womb and will love us until the end of time.

So let us rejoice in all of the graces of this Christmas season. But let us focus most on this one: that the birth of Jesus Christ is the surest sign of an unbreakable bond of tender and deeply personal love that God has established with us forever more.

May God bless you deeply in these days.

Families Ask About Vaccine Rules

The Southern Cross

More than a year and a half into the pandemic, many things are back to normal. Traffic is back. Schools are open. And people are returning to work.

The problem, though, is that it really isn’t back to normal. COVID-19 is still a serious health problem. It kills about 3,300 Americans every three days and by the end of 2021, some 800,000 Americans will have died. People are still asked to physically distance and wear masks. And parishioners are still worried about their health or the health of their friends and loved ones. So where do things stand in Catholic schools at the end of 2021?

Diocesan policies on COVID-19 safety have been determined by three basic principles:

- Adherence to Catholic moral teaching;
- Protecting the health of our students, faculty and staff; and
- Respect for the law.

“In our schools, we practice physical distancing, healthy hygiene, and require students to wear masks indoors,” said Catholic Schools Director John Galvan. “As a Church, we encourage, but don’t require, vaccination for faculty, students and their families, and we follow all applicable health laws and guidelines.”

In October, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that sometime in the future, state health authorities would mandate vaccines for K-12 students. This announcement has been a source of confusion, but there is no public health order.

Starting in August, state health authorities required that all teachers and staff in public, private and charter schools be vaccinated or tested on a weekly basis to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. However, there is no current federal, state or local mandate that students must be vaccinated in order to attend school, “and the diocese will honor and respect any family’s request for a personal belief exemption,” explained Galvan. “It’s the law.”

Under current law, students in public, private and charter schools are required to receive 10 specific vaccinations before they can attend school in person. These vaccinations cover measles, mumps, polio and seven other childhood illnesses. For these 10 vaccines, there are no religious or personal belief exemptions. Only medical exemptions are allowed.

That same law, however, allows state health authorities to add vaccines, there are no religious or personal belief exemptions. Only medical exemptions are allowed.

That same law, however, allows state health authorities to add vaccines to the required 10, but if they do so without legislative approval, the newly required vaccines must allow for a personal belief exemption. Moreover, a state mandate may only cover vaccines that have received full approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), not an Emergency Use Authorization.

“If state health authorities eventually issue a vaccine mandate, barring legislative approval, the diocese will honor and respect any family’s request for a personal belief exemption,” explained Galvan. “It’s the law.”

Could the Legislature change the law? Yes, but the Legislature is out of session and will not return to the Capitol until Jan. 3, 2022. Removing the personal belief exemption immediately would require a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature, something hard to do, given the political situation in Sacramento. Even then, it would be hard to mandate and carry out before the 2022-23 school year begins next August.

COVID-19 remains a major health risk, but things are improving. Three-quarters of all San Diego County residents ages 5 and older now received at least one dose of vaccine and supplies are plentiful.
Foster Parenting Is ‘Such a Pro-Life Ministry’

By Denis Grasska

Max and Jaclyn Hulburt, both 31 years old, have been happily married for seven years.

Since late 2016, they’ve had eight children and one grandchild. None of these have been their biological children. But, for foster parents like the Hulburts, that doesn’t make a difference.

And, even though they couple has adopted three of their foster children — in 2017, 2019, and in September of this year — that doesn’t mean that the others have a lesser claim to their love.

“Every kid that’s been in our house, they have been our children, 100 percent, none more than the rest,” Max Hulburt said.

The Hulburts, who are members of St. Thomas More Parish in Oceanside, struggled with infertility before turning toward adoption.

Max Hulburt explained that, once it’s determined that a foster child will be placed for adoption rather than being reunited with a biological parent or relative, the child’s foster parents are given the first choice to adopt.

In December 2016, the Hulburts became licensed foster parents after six months of training. They were licensed on a Friday and, the following Monday, welcomed their first foster child.

Their shortest placement, the first one, lasted only one month; the longest was almost a year. Their foster children have ranged in age from a two-week-old to a pregnant 17-year-old, who gave birth to the Hulburts’ “foster grandchild” while living with them.

One source of disappointment for the Hulburts, who are lifelong Catholics, is that the Catholic Church isn’t more involved in foster care.

Jaclyn, whose younger sister was adopted through the foster care system, can recall the subject coming up in her three decades as a church-going Catholic or her 12 years of Catholic education.

Max, whose father is a deacon at St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach, said that, despite being plugged into the local network of foster families, he doesn’t know any other Catholic foster parents. For him, that’s a shame because foster parenting aligns so well with the Church’s pro-life convictions.

“It’s such a pro-life ministry,” he said. “Every kid that’s been in our house, they have been our children, 100 percent, none more than the rest.’

Their story touched the hearts of some of the attendees, who banded together as a “care community” made up of families from North County parishes. Its members have provided the Hulburts with dinner once a week and have helped in other ways, including watching the children while Jaclyn cooks dinner, decorating Halloween cookies with them, and surprising the kids with occasional gifts.

Janelle Peregoy, associate director of the Office for Family Life and Spirituality, is a member of the care community.

She said, “None of it is rocket science … but it’s a very strong way of just letting the foster family know that, we support you, we support this pro-life activity, and we, as a community of faith, want to make sure that you thrive in that.”

The “unfortunate reality” is that about half of all foster parents will give up the ministry in their first year, she said, “so, anything that the larger Church community can do to support a fostering family is critical.”

The adoption of their three children — two daughters, who are now 4 and 2 years old, and a now 3-year-old son — has made the Hulburts a multi-ethnic family. Max is white, Jaclyn is white and Hispanic, and all three of their children are Black. (Their youngest daughter is also of Cuban heritage.)

The Hulburts celebrate their children’s cultural backgrounds in several ways. Because one child’s family is from the South, Jaclyn does a lot of Southern-style Black cooking. The family also annually celebrates Juneteenth, a holiday observed on June 19 that commemorates the emancipation of slaves in the United States. They are also intentional about having books and art in their home that feature Black faces.

According to Promises2Kids, a San Diego-based nonprofit that responds to the needs of foster children, there are about 2,858 children in foster care in San Diego County alone.

Max Hulburt said he and his wife receive emails almost daily about children needing placement with a foster family.

However, after “a crazy year” that included the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the adoption of a third child, he said the couple is taking a break from foster parenting to focus on their three adopted children.

But, whether or not they welcome any more foster children into their home, Jaclyn is confident that they will “always be involved somehow” with the foster care system, maybe even as members of a care community providing support to another foster family.

“Once you’re aware and you’re in this world (of foster families), it’s very hard to turn a blind eye to it.”
Brother Dominic Smith, OSA

Two Augustinian friars will soon be one step closer to priesthood.

Bishop Robert McElroy will ordain Brothers Emmanuel Isaac and Dominic Smith to the transitional diaconate Dec. 18 at St. Patrick Church in North Park. Their priestly ordination will be this June in Los Angeles.

Born in a small Catholic village in Pakistan, Brother Isaac grew up in a devout family where the rosary was prayed every evening. His father was a catechist at local parishes, while he and his brothers were altar servers at daily Mass. He also attended a Catholic school run by the Dominicans.

“Not only desiring to be a priest, he traces the call back to his youth, when he “felt something divine about Mass” and found the moment when the priest elevates the chalice and paten after the consecration to be “the most spiritually attractive” part of the liturgy. Not only desiring to be a priest, but also a member of a religious order, he decided to enter the Order of St. Augustine. He was drawn to the Augustinians by their communal life. Reading St. Augustine of Hippo’s autobiographical work “The Confessions” also contributed to the appeal.

“I remember clearly that I always wanted to be a priest,” said Brother Isaac, 36.

He traces the call back to his youth, when he “felt something divine about Mass” and found the moment when the priest elevates the chalice and paten after the consecration to be “the most spiritually attractive” part of the liturgy.

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Brother Emmanuel Isaac, OSA

Brother Smith, 44, was born in San Diego, but spent most of his life in Riverside.

He had felt an attraction to the priesthood since his high school days, and various friends and relatives over the years had told him that he would make a good priest. But he didn’t take the idea too seriously at first.

About 20 years ago, while he was praying before the Blessed Sacrament at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Riverside, a woman tapped him on the shoulder, handed him a prayer book with a diocesan phone number, and suggested that he consider the priesthood.

He called that number about a week later, but said he “got cold feet” and hung up the phone as soon as someone answered.

Eventually, he worked up the nerve to seriously discern a priestly vocation. He entered the Augustinian pre-novitiate in 2015. He made his first vows the following year and professed his perpetual vows on Nov. 20, 2021.

As his diaconal ordination approaches, he is “excited and … also ready.” After seven years of formation, he feels that “it’s time for me to get to work.”

Humbled by God’s call, he notes that, as part of the ordination ritual, the bishop will ask his religious superiors if he has been found worthy for ordination.

“I don’t think that I’m worthy to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ,” said Brother Smith. “I think that that’s a gift and that God’s mercy being extended to me and, in turn, I’m invited to extend God’s mercy to the people that I serve.”

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The Southern Cross

December 2021

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Fund Aids Religious with Retirement Challenges

The Diocese of San Diego will hold the Retirement Fund for Religious collection Dec. 11-12.

The parish-based appeal is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office in Washington, D.C. Proceeds help religious communities across the country to care for aging members.

Last year, the Diocese of San Diego donated $328,903.65 to the collection. In 2021, the Carmelite Monastery of San Diego, Prince of Peace (Benedictine) Abbey, the Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (Eudists) received financial support made possible by the Retirement Fund for Religious.

Hundreds of U.S. religious communities face a large gap between the needs of their older members and the funds available to support them. Historically, Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests served for little to no pay. There were no 401(k) plans or pensions. As a result, many communities now lack adequate retirement savings.

At the same time, healthcare expenses continue to rise, and an increasing number of older religious require specialized services. The retirement office data shows that 26,330 women and men religious in the United States are older than age 70. The total cost for their care exceeds $1 billion annually.

Only 5 percent of the religious communities providing data to the office are adequately funded for retirement.

To help address this deficit, the U.S. Catholic bishops initiated the Retirement Fund for Religious collection in 1988. Distributions are sent to each eligible order’s central house and provide supplemental funding for necessities, such as medications and nursing care. Donations also underwrite resources that help religious communities improve eldercare and plan for long-term retirement needs.

Nationwide, the 2020 appeal raised $20.7 million, and funding was distributed to 321 U.S. religious communities, which typically do not receive diocesan funding but rather are financially autonomous and thus responsible for the support and care of all members.

Franciscan Sister Kathy Warren, who directs the Diocese of San Diego’s Office for Women Religious, spearheads the collection in the diocese.

She said it is fitting that this is the first special collection held in the new liturgical year, which begins with the Advent season.

“The retired religious constitute a group of people in the Church who have made a significant contribution and whose witness value is a sign to the call to holiness extended to each of the baptized,” she said. “Their lives of service have been remarkable and nourish a vibrant life in the Church.”

Since the Retirement Fund for Religious collection was launched 33 years ago, the Diocese of San Diego alone has contributed more than $9.1 million.

Among the religious communities that benefit from the collection are the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, whose Province is based in Bonita.

Its provincial, Sister A. Rebeca Zuro, said the collection has been “a blessing” for her community, which includes almost 20 sisters over the age of 70.

The province isn’t fully funded for the retirement needs of its members, but it is working toward that goal.

“We need to take care of them because we are standing on their shoulders,” Sister Zuro said of her community’s older members.

The province recently purchased a building about four blocks from its provincial headquarters and remodeled it to serve as an independent and assisted living residence for the community’s aged members.

Blessed Sacrament Convent, as the new residence is known, opened in August and is home to four sisters ranging in age from their early 70s to late 80s. The center has space to house seven residents.

Sister Warren said she continues to be amazed by local Catholics’ generosity to the Retirement Fund for Religious collection.

“Especially in these difficult times, it would have been understandable that the collection would reflect the struggles,” she said. “But that was not the case last year. Truly, we have people—people who live the Gospel, people who are generous and cheerful givers. God bless each and everyone who holds the retired religious in prayer and/or makes a donation.”

RECIPIENTS

The Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament marked the 115th anniversary of the founding of their congregation with a Mass on Oct. 12, 2019, at Corpus Christi Church in Bonita.

The parish-based appeal is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office for Women Religious, spearheads the collection in the diocese.

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More information about the collection is available at retiredreligious.org.
Lawyer Brings God’s Love to Most Vulnerable

By Denis Grasska

Interview with Executive Director, Southern California Immigration Project:
Sister Elizabeth Lopez, SSS

Sister Elizabeth Lopez is an attorney who practices immigration law, and a member of the Sisters of Social Service.

Sister Lopez is executive director of the Southern California Immigration Project, a San Diego-based nonprofit law center that she founded in 2015 to provide pro bono legal services to survivors of human rights violations.

In 2018, she fulfilled a lifelong dream of entering religious life. She professed her first vows on Pentecost of this year. Sunday, May 31, 2020, and renewed them on Pentecost of this year.

Question: How did you become an attorney?

Answer: While I was an undergrad at the University of Southern California, I worked at the law school and took paralegal classes. I got a job as a paralegal while I was still in college.

The attorney I worked for told me they needed people with a strong interest in law school after all. But I just hated it. So, I decided to go to law school.

Question: What吸引 you to the Sisters of Social Service?

Answer: I found that really intriguing. Lawyers, and just all different professions. I really liked the Sisters of Social Service because I didn’t feel they were really “runny.” They were professional women. They were doctors, social workers, lawyers, and just all different professions. I found that really intriguing.

Our charism, through our dedication to the Holy Spirit, is bringing God’s sanctifying love to the most vulnerable. Being an immigration attorney, clients are the boss, and you are their “servant.” Also, justice itself means to be right with God or to live right with one another and with creation.

What attracted you to the Sisters of Social Service?

Answer: Probably at age 7. Our family had been close to the Immaculate Heart Sisters in our parish. They were good, strong role models, and I really felt called.

But, as you get older, other things compete for your attention. At different times in my life, I found myself bargaining with God: “Okay, God, if I pass the bar, then I’ll get married. But, if I don’t pass the bar, I’ll become a nun.”

I ended up getting married. It wasn’t until I got divorced in 1997 that I said, “That’s it, I’m going to follow through with this dream of being a sister.” It had never gone away. The “Hound of Heaven” never stopped pursuing me. However, as a divorced woman, I had to get an annulment to enter religious life.

What does the Southern California Immigration Project do?

Answer: We represent detained asylum-seekers from Africa and members of the LGBTQ community who are fleeing persecution in their home countries. (The organization) was created because there wasn’t any nonprofit that steadily offered direct representation to detainees in the Imperial Valley. The Imperial Regional Detention Facility houses more than 700 people, so there are 700 unrepresented people out there. We do some work in Otay Mesa, but the majority of our cases are still in Imperial.

What have you found most rewarding about your legal work?

Answer: Probably just the fact that I’m able to truly change someone’s life. When I was handling police brutality or employment law cases, I could get my clients money. But ultimately, that didn’t fill the void or fix the wrong that had been done to them. With immigration law, I’m able to give them a place of safety and security where they can live their life to their full potential.

One of my clients told me once that I had helped not only her, but her entire family. She meant that, by winning her asylum case, she was able to stay here in the United States, go to school, find someone to marry and have kids. This wouldn’t have happened if she had stayed in her home country.

Does faith come up in your conversations with clients?

Answer: It definitely does. Most of them are Muslim, but they have a very strong faith. They’re constantly using the word “insallah,” which means “It God wills it.” So many times, they’ll say, “I’m not worried. It’s God’s will and, whatever happens, I’ll be fine.”

What role does spirituality play in your work?

Answer: I’m always aware that my clients may never share their story with anyone else in the detail that they tell it to me. It’s pretty heavy sometimes, but I hold them in prayer while I’m working on the case. And I definitely pray a lot before trial.

I always say that the Southern California Immigration Project is a faith-based organization. It’s not because there’s any church giving money to us. It’s not because there’s any church giving money to us. It’s because there’s a lot of Muslim, but they have a very strong faith. They’re constantly using the word “insallah,” which means “It God wills it.” So many times, they’ll say, “I’m not worried. It’s God’s will and, whatever happens, I’ll be fine.”

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Simbang Gabi

Lighting the Way to Christ
Handog ay Ilaw Patungo kay Kristo

Dec. 14, 2021
6:30 p.m. • LIVE STREAM ALSO AVAILABLE
Resurrection Church, Escondido

DIOCESAN VIGIL AND COMMISSIONING MASS
Bishop Robert McElroy, main celebrant, with
Auxiliary Bishops John Dolan and Ramón Bejarano

Simbang Gabi (Filipino for “Evening Masses”) is a Eucharistic and Marian novena in the company of Mary as she awaits the birth of her Son, Jesus. All are invited to join the Filipino Catholic Community for the 2nd Annual Diocesan Vigil and following masses held in our parishes.

Schedules are subject to change; contact the parishes listed or a nearby Catholic church for updates.

San Diego – North
Good Shepherd (Mira Mesa)
8200 Gold Coast Drive, 92126
Dec. 15-23, 5-50 a.m., except Dec. 19 at 5 p.m.
(858) 271-0297; goodshepherdparish.net

St. Michael (Poway)
15546 Pomerado Road, 92064
Dec. 16-23, 6:15 a.m., except Dec. 19
(858) 487-4755; smpoway.org

Mission San Luis Rey (Oceanside)
4070 Mission Ave., 92057
Dec. 16-23, 6:30 p.m.
(760) 757-3250; sanluisreyparish.org

Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (Rancho Peñasquitos)
13541 Stoney Creek Road, 92129
Dec. 15-23, 7 p.m., except Dec. 18-19
(858) 484-1070; Olmcfilipinotraditions@gmail.com

Resurrection Parish (Escondido)
1445 Conway Drive, 92027
Dec. 14-22, 7 p.m., except Dec. 18-19 at 8 p.m.
(760) 747-2322; resurrectionchurch.org

St. Mark (San Marcos)
1147 Discovery St., 92078
Dec. 16-23, 4:30 a.m.
(760) 744-1540; stmarksatholicchurch.org

St. Mary (Escondido)
1170 S. Broadway, 92025
Dec. 14-22, 7:30 p.m., except Dec. 18-19 at 8:30 p.m.
(760) 745-1611; stmaryp.org

San Diego – Central & East
Mission San Diego de Alcalá
10818 Mission San Diego Road, 92108
Dec. 19, 4 p.m.
(619) 283-7319; missionsandiego.org

St. John of the Cross (Lemon Grove)
8086 Broadway Ave., 91956
Dec. 15-23, 6 a.m.
(619) 466-3209; sjcparishlg.org

St. Joseph Cathedral (Downtown)
1535 Third Ave., 92101
Schedule TBD
(619) 239-0229; sdcathedral.org

St. Michael (Paradise Hills)
2643 Homedale St., 92139
Dec. 15-23, 7 p.m., except Dec. 19 at 6 p.m.
(619) 470-1977; Sm.liturgy@gmail.com

St. Rita (Southeast San Diego)
5124 Churchward St., 92114
Dec. 15-23, 6:30 p.m.
(619) 264-1365; stritadaoconnect.com

San Diego – South
Corpus Christi (Bonita)
450 Corral Canyon Road, 91902
Dec. 15-23, 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 19
(619) 482-3954; corpuschristicatholic.org

Mater Dei (Otay Ranch)
1571 Magdalena Ave., 91913
Dec. 15-23, 6 p.m., except Dec. 18-19 at 5 p.m.
(619) 656-3735; materdeicv.org

Most Precious Blood (Chula Vista)
1245 Fourth Ave., 91911
Dec. 15-23, 6:30 a.m.
(619) 422-2100; preciousbloodchurch.com

St. Charles (South San Diego)
990 Saturn Blvd., 92154
Dec. 15-23, 5 a.m.
(619) 482-3954; saintcharles.org

St. Mary (National City)
Parish Center-707 E Ave., 91950
Dec. 15-23, 5 p.m., except Dec. 18-19 at 5 p.m.
(619) 474-1501, liturgy@stmarynationalcity.org

St. Pius X (Chula Vista)
36 E. Naples St., 91910
Dec. 15-23, 7 p.m., except Dec. 18 at 5 p.m.
(619) 420-9193; saintpiusx.org

St. Rose of Lima (Chula Vista)
293 H St., 91910
Dec. 16-23, 6:30 a.m.
(619) 427-0230; strosencv.com

For information on this event and other Filipino Catholic activities, contact Charlotte Fajardo at CFajardo@sdcatholic.org or (858) 271-0207, ext. 1204.
The Catholic Church is inviting 1.3 billion faithful around the world to offer their insights, challenges and prayers to shape the Church in the future.

In October, Pope Francis began that three-year process, which goes by the formal name of Synod on Synodality. Locally, two San Diego Diocesan Synod Commissions will guide the process, one in San Diego County and the other in Imperial County, given the distinct characteristics of each region. The commissions include lay ministry leaders, priests, religious women, Catholic school principals and university educators.

A “synod,” an ancient Greek word that means “traveling together,” is a gathering. In the Catholic Church, a synod brings a distinct group together, usually bishops, to discuss an issue and make recommendations to the pope. This synod is different than previous ones that have focused on a single topic, such as family life or young adult ministry. This one asks the faithful to examine the Church’s culture and see to what extent it engages the faithful in decision-making at all levels — that’s what makes this synod so important.

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The synod will be carried out in three phases in the diocese. In Phase 1, October 2021 to August 2022, the diocese will lay the foundation for the process and begin to engage the faithful. In February, small groups will gather in guided sessions at parishes to examine questions about how the local Church listens to its faithful and to what extent involves them in its decision-making. Afterward, small groups from service organizations, movements, cultural communities, young adult groups, among others, will hold these sessions.

Those living on the margins of society will be invited to participate, including refugees, newly arrived immigrants, the homeless and formerly incarcerated, as well as those who have left the Church.

In Phase 2, August/September to October 2022, synod commission members will analyze the insights that came from the small group sessions and from data gathered through a diocese-wide survey. The members will propose strategies to strengthen the faithful’s participation in the governance of parishes and the diocese.

In the final phase, October 2022 to May 2023, the diocese will implement a plan to deepen the voice of the faithful in the Church at all levels.

The synod process will be shared every step of the way through the diocese’s media in English and Spanish: the webpages sdcatholic.org/synod and sdcatholic.org/sinodo; its publications The Southern Cross (print) and thesoutherncross.org; and its social media (Facebook @DioceseSanDiego; Instagram @SDCatholics, and YouTube under SDCatholics).

This will be the third synod held in the San Diego Diocese since Bishop McElroy arrived six years ago. He implemented the proposals that resulted from the first two synods, which had significant impact on the life of the Church locally.

The 2016 Diocesan Synod on Embracing the Joy of Love transformed the way the diocese prepares couples for marriage and serves today’s families, with all the challenges and opportunities they face.

In 2019, the diocese held a synod focused on how to engage young people in the life and mission of the Church. By year’s end, the diocese had begun to implement the 30 proposals that resulted from that synod, called “Christ Lives! A Time of Dreams and Decisions.”

Follow the diocese’s synod on the webpage sdcatholic.org/synod.
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CELEBRATING
ALL
STAGES
OF
LIFE

10TH ANNIVERSARY

JANUARY 15, 2022, 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM
Waterfront Park [1600 Pacific Hwy. San Diego, 92101]
Community - Inspiring speakers - Live music - Exhibitors - Raffles

Activities for all ages
www.sandiegowalkforlife.org
Contact: 858-490-8324
#SDW4L

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
SHAWN CARNEY
Author & CEO, President and Co-Founder of 40 Days for Life
IN THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Dear Friends and Family of Catholic Charities:

Everyone deserves a second chance. And this holiday season, everyone is getting that second chance.

Yes, you, too, are being gifted with a second chance — to embrace family, to treasure moments, to appreciate blessings, and to have perspective. It is a second chance to do the things you love and be with the people you cherish. You have shown fortitude and can now live with gratitude.

As part of your new outlook on life, will you help save someone else’s? For those in need, comfort appears unattainable. For those on the brink, happiness becomes indescribable. Let us open up our hearts, having all now been through the unthinkable.

Catholic Charities exists to give hope. To welcome the stranger. To be the Good Samaritan. We share our stories to show how profound a fresh start can be. Lizbeth and her two young daughters experienced indescribable trauma. They had done nothing wrong, yet Lizbeth found herself in dire circumstances with no home, no job and no money.

When she entered House of Hope, Catholic Charities’ 24-hour women’s shelter in El Centro, with her two little ones by her side, Lizbeth was inconsolable. Her resilience is beyond admirable as she settles into her own apartment as a single mother.

Lizbeth was one of four people we visited with in person, at length, to hear their stories of starting new lives with the help of our services, staff, and volunteers.

Jaimeson had lost her will to live before meeting a furry friend and being accepted into Catholic Charities’ Rachel’s Women’s Center in San Diego. Shakib recalls treacherous cliffs and a seemingly unreachable light in the distance when he and his family fled Afghanistan. Steve climbed mountains as well, overcoming a lifetime of alcohol and drug abuse.

Throughout the holidays, we are featuring each powerful story, one at a time, culminating with a heartfelt message from two of our volunteers. Jim and Craig have boots on the ground in our Emergency Food Distribution Network Plus (EFDN+) that began as a pandemic response and became a permanent program. Since March 2020, Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego has coordinated the distribution of 1.5 million+ meals, by 1,200+ volunteers, over a span of 23,000+ hours, making us the largest partner to food banks. That is the impact achieved in just one of our programs.

Food. Housing. Employment. Safety. How do we meet the vast and critical needs in our communities? With kindness, compassion, understanding, and generosity. If you have these qualities in you, put your faith into action with us.

Every donation is a second chance in the making. Donate today using the envelope included or by visiting ccds.org/donatenow.

Sincerely,

Appaswamy "Vino" Pajanor
Chief Executive Officer
In the spirit of Christmas, everyone deserves a second chance. And this holiday season, everyone is getting that second chance— to embrace family, to treasure moments, to appreciate blessings, and to have perspective. It is a second chance to do the things you love and be with the people you cherish. You have shown fortitude and can now live with gratitude.

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Sincerely,

Put your Faith into Action this Christmas season and help the most vulnerable. You can be the difference in someone else’s life.

We welcome you to give through any of the above 12 secure ways.
Christmas Gala Builds Young Adult Community

By Denis Grasska

Call it an early Christmas present: The Young Adult Christmas Gala is returning, a year after the pandemic forced the cancellation of last year’s event.

The gala, affectionately known by many young adults as “Catholic Prom,” will be held on Saturday, Dec. 11, at St. Gabriel Parish in Poway. It will begin at 6:30 p.m. and end around 11 p.m.

The Christmas gala includes dinner and dancing for Catholics ages 18 to 39, as well as the presentation of the diocesan Office for Young Adult Ministry’s annual Fiat Award. The Fiat Award takes its name from the Blessed Virgin Mary’s response to being the mother of God. (“Fiat” is Latin for “Let it be done.”) The award recognizes a young adult who has served “diligently, prayerfully and with a servant’s heart” at the parish, diocesan or regional level.

This year’s recipient is Brianah Wong, young adult ministry coordinator for the Imperial Valley.

Excitement about the gala could be seen in how quickly the event sold out. Registration opened at 3:30 p.m., Nov. 1, and by the following morning, more than 100 tickets — at $45 per person or $80 per couple — had been purchased. By Nov. 7, all 235 tickets were gone.

For Patrick Rivera, who steps down as director of the Office for Young Adult Ministry on Dec. 1 after six years in that role, this will be the last gala organized under his watch.

He describes the gala as the premiere young adult Catholic social event of the year, one that attracts young adults from throughout the diocese and builds bonds of community among them.

Pamela Poe, associate director of the Office for Young Adult Ministry, said it was “disappointing” when her office had to cancel last year’s gala. She recalled receiving messages from several young adults who felt the same way.

“I’m really excited about it coming back and just that return to normalcy and the ability to bring everybody back together,” said Paige Toulon, 29, who attended her first gala before moving to San Diego six years ago and has been a regular attendee.

“Just seeing those familiar faces again … will be a huge boost for a lot of people,” she said.

In addition to being this year’s Fiat Award winner, Wong will also be a first-time gala attendee. She has already caught the excitement over the event.

“For me, it just feels like family is going to get together and we’re going to celebrate the work of the Lord with a big dance, and food, and dressing fancy,” she said. “It’ll be fun.”

The office has handed out the Fiat Award every year since 2015. Rivera said it’s appropriate that the award is presented during Advent, a season of preparing for the coming of the Lord, since the award recognizes a young adult who is “continually preparing the way of Christ into the hearts of others.”

Brianah Wong is someone who has been doing that arguably better than most people throughout all of the last two years of COVID, as well as just within the Imperial Valley prior to that,” he said. “When we sat down and talked about it, we couldn’t think of anyone else who better exemplified Mary’s ‘fiat’ than her.”

Rivera said Wong has “contagious Christian joy.” Poe describes her as “consistent and dedicated.”

“She is a young adult who is ‘continually extending a hand that we know is from Christ, and to invite others into that healing, and into that love, and into that happiness,’ said Wong, “that keeps me humble and that keeps me driven in the ministry.”

SPRING FORWARD 2022
"The Eucharist and Social Justice"

St. Mary’s Catholic Church
9:30 AM-3:00 PM
795 La Brucherie Rd
El Centro, CA 92243

"Engaging our Catholic way of doing theology, that is, integrating Bible, tradition, Church teaching, and modern day experience, or the "signs of the times", our day will be spent on contemplating what it means to be a eucharistic people, called, blessed, and broken for a hungry world. Through videos, storytelling, hymns, and other teaching techniques, together with time for prayer and contemplation, we will explore how this sacred "breaking of the bread" empowers us to grow in becoming missionary disciples sent to proclaim the good news in word and action in our part of the Lord’s vineyard.”

Presenter:
FR. EDUARDO FERNÁNDEZ, SJ
Father Fernández teaches pastoral theology and missiology at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley. He publishes, directs workshops and retreats, and assists at local parishes.

For more information or to register please visit our website:
https://www.sdcat.org/events/imperial-valley-yam ayudar hacia adentro/registro o contact Clara Arias at 655-490-8232 or
series@sdcat.org

4.5 Renewal credit hours will be granted to those with current Catechetical Certification!
The Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Robert McElroy, accompanied by Auxiliary Bishops John Dolan and Ramón Bejarano and Filipino clergy. It serves as a commissioning for the Simbang Gabi novena Masses that will continue through Dec. 24 in parishes across the diocese.

Simbang Gabi (Filipino for “evening Mass”) is a devotional novena of Masses practiced by Filipino Catholics in anticipation of the solemnity of the birth of the Savior and in honor of His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“It’s a rich cultural tradition brought to the Philippines in 1668 by Spanish missionaries from Mexico, that has been preserved through the centuries by Filipino faithful,” according to Charlotte Fajardo, from the diocesan Office for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities.

The Mass on Dec. 14, at 6:30 p.m., will begin with a procession into the church of representatives from parishes and religious communities hoisting parols, star-shaped lanterns representing the star of Bethlehem that guided the Three Wise Men to the manger of Baby Jesus.

“It is an expression of shared faith and hope, the triumph of light over darkness and Filipinos’ goodwill during the Christmas season,” according to Fajardo. “The parol is a reminder of God’s presence among us, that Jesus, the Light of the World, brings life and light to all who accept Him.”

Just before the end of the Mass, the bishop will initiate a candle-lighting ceremony, bless the parols and the full community, then send them forth as a symbol of their mission to light the way to Christ. The parols will be returned to the parishes to be incorporated into their community’s celebrations.

Last year’s Simbang Gabi Vigil Mass coincided with the beginning of the 500th anniversary celebration of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines, and the theme “Gifted to Give.” In response to the theme, “proceeds and donations from the event will be given to diocesan seminarians,” according to Yola Marie Arguilla, chairperson for the Diocesan Commission for Filipino Catholics, which is organizing the Mass.

San Diego parishes with Filipino-American communities have been celebrating Simbang Gabi since the late 1970s. The tradition shares Filipinos’ legacy of faith with their families and members of their parishes to inspire them to receive in their hearts the gift of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.
Christmas is the opportunity to remember and renew the presence of the mystery of God in our history. Jesus’ humble birth is the foundation of all the lights and advertising that scream for our attention this time of year.

With Jesus, the idea and the experience of the mystery of God changes totally. That is why the question is existentially radical: “Who do you say that I am?”

To the believer, God is not a distant being, or an impersonal energy of the universe; He’s a person who makes Himself present as a child, grows among us, gives us good news, dies and resurrects, opening our conscience to a new reality that changes the meaning of our lives. Death does not have the final word; love, justice, respect and compassion help us to build relationships that allow us to experience beforehand what we are destined to live after our passing for eternity.

How can we open spaces for celebration, reflection and prayer to connect with this meaning of Christmas?

Advertising pushes us to think about lights, decorations and gifts. Parents and families have to make a conscious decision to explain the meaning of what we celebrate. We are privileged to pass on the faith in the earliest years of our children, who learn by modeling how we make the sign of the cross, how we pray and sing together, how we join our hands to give thanks at meals. All of these actions and rituals are silent lessons of faith and love.

First come these experiences, and later reflections and explanations about their meaning. On the road to educating about the faith, it’s easier to construct over something built rather than letting the first years slip by.

Faith is the gift that we receive in the home to be able to open our minds and hearts to those mysterious realities that reason can spend years contemplating.

With words and actions, parents and elders transmit that there is something beyond, something greater than ourselves, a Father Creator who loves us, a God who makes himself present in Jesus, and His Spirit who accompanies us.

Faith is a decision that allows us to look at reality with different eyes, to see the light of hope beyond pain and limitations; faith is the free option of trusting and entrusting ourselves to the unconditional love of God who reveals Himself as a baby born in a manger.

Today, I dare to echo an ancestral proclamation from the people of Israel: Listen, families and peoples; love God with all of your heart, with all of your soul and all of your strength. Let us pay attention to Jesus’ message of fraternity, peace and justice. To have a life and an abundant one, let’s pay attention to the signs of the times and of the inspirations of the Spirit in the community to care for, heal and reconcile. And don’t ever stop repeating to our children — at home, in the domestic Church, when we get up, at the dinner table, and when we go to bed — that we should not be afraid in these confusing times because the Creator of the Universe made Himself one of us in Jesus to remind us forever that He loves us and that nothing that He created will be lost. That is to be reborn. That is Christmas.
Guadalupe Procession to Make Joyous Return

By Ilana De Lara

For more than 50 years, the San Diego Diocese’s Hispanic Commission has organized a colorful, joyous procession and Mass to celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe.

This year’s event will be held on Sunday, Dec. 5, in a new location, San Diego’s North Park neighborhood. The procession begins at 11 a.m. at Bird Park, at 28th Street and Redwood, and ends at St. Augustine High School, at 3266 Nutmeg St. Bishop Robert McElroy will celebrate a bilingual Mass there at 1 p.m., accompanied by Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano.

The procession will include theme cars, Aztec dancers, musical groups, and charros on horseback — “all of those things that are so popular in our Mexican towns,” said Luis Enrique Barajas, president of the commission.

After the Mass, the diocese will pay tribute to the late Auxiliary Bishop Gilberto Chávez, who died in March of 2020, as the pandemic was taking hold.

COVID-19 restrictions led to the cancellation of last year’s procession, with the diocese only able to celebrate a Mass. This year, organizers are eager to resume what had grown to become one of the largest annual celebrations in the diocese.

Many groups from one end of San Diego County to the other joyously participate in the procession, carrying their brightly colored banners. Folkloric dancers of all ages also participate, marching to lively drum music.

“Some groups begin to line up at 7 a.m. in the morning,” said Guadalupe Barajas’s husband, one of the organizers. “We invite all parishes, schools, movimientos, apostolates, Latino groups, and other multicultural commissions to join us in this event, which we’re preparing with dedication and love,” Barajas said. “Our Mother is not only for Latinos, but for all races, cultures and languages.”

In fact, Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patron saint of the Americas and of Filipino Catholics.

“We represent diverse cultures and traditions. But, at the end of the day, we are united by the love for la Virgen de Guadalupe. It’s very important for us to be close to her, to recognize that she is the Blessed Mother of God and intercedes for us with Him in all of our needs,” said Eduardo Alvarado, Lupita’s husband, one of the organizers.

After the procession, the faithful will convene in the gym of St. Augustine High, around 12:30 p.m. Just before the Mass starts at 1 p.m., each participating group will process into the building, hoisting their banner to share their faith.

Community to Say Goodbye

After the Mass, the organizers will pay tribute to the late Auxiliary Bishop Chávez, who pioneered a ministry that recognized and celebrated Latinos’ native culture and spirituality in the diocese and across the nation. He died on March 15, 2020, as pandemic restrictions were being implemented, forcing his funeral Mass to be closed to the public.

“He was one of the first to support us, especially in the guadalupana celebrations,” Barajas said, noting that Bishop Chávez was the founder of the Confederación.

When he was installed as auxiliary bishop in 1974, only five parishes offered Masses in Spanish, he said. During his 33-year tenure in that post, the number of participating parishes grew to 47.

“Now, there are Masses in Spanish virtually everywhere.”

In addition to the tribute, organizers will host a fiesta in the school’s garden, complete with mariachi music and traditional food shared by the participating groups. For its part, the Confederación Guadalupana will offer tamales and “chambarro,” a sweet beverage that’s traditional for the time of year.

More information about the Our Lady of Guadalupe Procession and Mass on Dec. 5 is available by phoning (858) 490-8232 or visiting sdatholic.org/guadalupe2021.

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OFFICE FOR EVANGELIZATION & CATEchetical MINISTRY

CATEchetical MID-YEAR CONFERENCE

SPRING FORWARD 2022

"United in the Breaking of the Bread"

President:

ValLimar Jansen

Is a highly regarded inspirational catechetical speaker, singer, composer and recording artist. She is also a leader of worship & prayer and a workshop presenter at conferences across the US.

Join us for our Spring Forward Catechetical Conference as we partake in song and prayer as we deepen our reflection on the Eucharist. As one community, one Body of Christ, we gather to share in the mission and to reflect on the significance of the Source and Summit.

Holy Trinity Parish
9:30am - 3:00pm
405 Ballard St, El Cajon, CA 92019

4.5 Renewal credit hours will be granted to those with current Catechetical Certification!

For more information or to register please visit our website: https://www.sdatholic-disciples.net/events/san-1922 or contact Clara Arias at 858-490-8232 or carais@sdcatholic.org

Cost $25

Saturday, January 22, 2022
El Centro Homeless Day Center Hopes to Open in December

EL CENTRO — The Catholic Charities El Centro Homeless Day Center, currently under construction behind the Catholic Charities building on the east side of El Centro, has a target opening date of Dec. 18.

Appaswamy “Vino” Pajanor, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of San Diego, said “most of the major work has been done” on the new modular building.

He said Catholic Charities hopes to have a certificate of occupancy for the building by Dec. 15 to have it open in time for El Centro Catholic’s “The Embrace,” which will be held on Dec. 18. The Embrace is an annual event to care for the homeless and help needy families.

Pajanor said the work that still needs to be completed includes connecting sewer lines, some plumbing, and stabilizing rebar to be laid to reinforce the foundation of the almost 5,000-square-foot building.

“We’re hoping, by Thanksgiving, most of the work will be done,” he said, “and, sometime by mid-December, we would have the certificate of occupancy. That’s our target right now.”

Parish Hosting ‘Fair Trade’ Shopping Event

LA MESA — Shoppers at an upcoming event at St. Martin of Tours Parish will be making a positive difference in the world with each purchase.

Fair trade gifts, home décor, clothing and jewelry from a variety of vendors will be available for sale from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 5, in the parish’s upper parking lot. Attendees also can enjoy fair trade coffee, tea, ice cream and chocolate.

Fair trade supports fair wages, healthy working conditions, education, environmental sustainability and community projects in developing countries.

For more information, call (619) 368-8210.

Women to Welcome Advent with Mini-Retreat

The Whispering Winds Women’s Auxiliary is hosting an Advent Mini-Retreat. The free event will be held on Wednesday, Dec. 1, in Mission San Diego de Alcalá Parish’s St. Francis Chapel. It will begin with a social at 6 p.m. The program itself will run from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Laurie Mikolaycik will lead the retreat. Letty Peck will lead the music.

For more information, call (619) 929-4660 or email anniekorn@gmail.com.

Poway School Staging ‘High School Musical’

POWAY — Theater-lovers are invited to check out St. Michael School’s upcoming performance of Disney’s “High School Musical Jr.” This version of the hit musical was designed for younger performers. The casting and music director said she’s thrilled that the school’s performing arts department is staging a “musical that a lot of people will be familiar with.”

For more information, call (858) 490-8324 or email info@sandiegowalkforlife.org.

Walk for Life Turns 10

More than 2,000 people of diverse cultures and faiths are expected to attend the 10th annual San Diego Walk for Life on Saturday, Jan. 15, 2022.

The event will take place from 8:30 a.m. to noon at Waterfront Park in downtown San Diego. This year’s theme is “Celebrating All Stages of Life.”

The schedule includes a line-up of inspiring speakers. Shawn Carney, president and co-founder of 40 Days for Life, will deliver the keynote. Other speakers will include Bishop Robert McElroy; Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano; Dr. George Delgado, medical director of Culture of Life Family Services; and registered nurse Debbie Brandel.

This year’s event will also include live music by Santiago Fernández, one of the Catholic Church’s leading Spanish-language liturgical composers; pro-life and pro-family exhibitors; and raffles.

Between 10:30 and 11:30 a.m., participants will walk a half-mile route around the San Diego County Administration Center, beginning at the corner of Harbor Drive and Grape Street, carrying pro-life signs and banners.

Last year, to slow the spread of COVID-19, the San Diego Walk for Life was held as a car caravan, which culminated a week of virtual workshops. An estimated 150 vehicles participated in the caravan, which looped around Waterfront Park. Previously, the event had been held every year in Balboa Park.

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will include students in kindergarten through eighth grade.
Performances will take place at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 4, and at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 5, at St. Michael Parish’s Holy Family Center in Poway. Tickets are available for $10 each at showtix4u.com/event-details/57838. For more information, email theater@smspoway.org.

**Vatican Highlights Mental Health**
SCRANTON, Pa. — As his prayer intention for the month of November, Pope Francis called on the Catholic Church to “pray that people who suffer from depression or burnout will find support and a light that opens them up to life.”

The Holy Father requested these prayers in a video via the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network, made with the guidance and support of the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers.

With its president, Deacon Ed Shoener of Scranton, and its chaplain, Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan of the Diocese of San Diego, the association has guided parishes through the process of creating a mental health ministry to provide spiritual support for those struggling with mental health issues.

Bishop Dolan and Deacon Shoener are co-editors of two books, “Responding to Suicide: A Pastoral Handbook for Catholic Leaders” and a workbook titled “When a Loved One Dies by Suicide.” The former was named the Association of Catholic Publishers’ 2021 “Resource of the Year” and a first-place winner in the Association of Catholic Publishers’ 2021 Excellence in Publishing Awards; the latter received a second-place in the Excellence in Publishing Awards.

More information about the San Diego Diocese’s Mental Health Ministry is available from Deacon Bill Adsit at (858) 490-8299 or wadsit@sdcatholic.org.

**New Young Adults Event**
CORONADO — All young adults ages 18 to 39 are invited to a young adult holy hour and Vigil Mass for Life at 6 p.m., Friday, Jan. 14, at Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado.

The diocesan Office for Young Adult Ministry will host the event in collaboration with the Office for Life, Peace and Justice and the organizers of the annual San Diego Walk for Life, which will take place the following day from 8:30 a.m. to noon at Waterfront Park.

The holy hour with worship music will begin at 6 p.m., followed by a 7 p.m. Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano. Confession will also be available during the holy hour. The event will conclude with a young adult social.

For more information, email yamsd@sdcatholic.org or call (858) 490-8263.

**Are you a Catholic Mom Who Likes Catholic Books?**
The Moms’ Catholic Book Study has been going strong for more than 25 years. In addition to spiritual reading, the group offers fellowship. It meets at 10 a.m., every Wednesday during the school year, at St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

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Help Light and Life 70X7and the Knights of Columbus with their Life-Saving Mobile Ultrasound Initiative
By Roman Flores

EL CENTRO — The city’s faithful and Catholic Charities plan to team up for “The Embrace” on Dec. 18, an event that gives the homeless and needy families in the region a touch of Christmas.

El Centro Catholic, which has hosted this event for the past five years, assists the homeless of Imperial County by providing free haircuts, showers, toiletries, and a hot holiday meal. In addition, the community helps needy families by giving Christmas gifts for their children.

Coordinators said they hope to hold the part of the event that serves the homeless at Catholic Charities’ El Centro Homeless Day Center on Dec. 18, its tentative opening day. The center will be located behind the organization’s existing building on 250 W. Orange Ave.

“It doesn’t have to be fully completed but it would be a good day to introduce the homeless to the day center,” said Father Mark Edey, the pastor for ECC and a Catholic Charities’ board member.

If the day center does not open by that date, The Embrace will be held as its previous location, the St. Mary Parish Center. In that case, the event would serve both the homeless and needy families at the parish center as in years past.

The Embrace is an outgrowth of the work that El Centro Catholic’s Homeless Ministry has been doing for more than a decade by providing a weekly meal and spiritual nourishment, said Richard Enriquez, one of the event’s coordinators and the founder of the ministry.

He said ECC needs donations for The Embrace, including personal hygiene products/toiletries, new clothes, new toys for children, food gift cards, and monetary donations. All can be dropped off at St. Mary Catholic Church and Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. Monetary donations by personal check can be made out to either parish and should include “for Embrace” in the memo line.

The Creation Care Ministry of the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice will hold a one-hour information night about “Laudato Si,” Pope Francis’ 2015encyclical on caring for creation, and the Vatican’s new Laudato Si’ Action Platform, a global grassroots movement to reduce environmental damage and to create a more just world.

The free session will be held from 7 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 9, at the diocesan Pastoral Center. Light refreshments will be provided.

Registration is required by Monday, Dec. 6, at sdccatholic.org/event/information-night-and-qa-laudato-si-and-the-vaticans-action-platform. The event will also be livestreamed.

The ministry invites parishes and schools to develop Creation Care Teams, and supports them with bilingual presentations and resources.

The ministry developed a diocesan Creation Care Action Plan, which invites individuals, parishes and schools to launch their own environmentally friendly projects. More information is available at sdccatholic.org/creation.

WARM GIFT: On Dec. 14, 2019, around 1,500 people enjoyed a Christmas celebration that was part of The Embrace at St. Mary Parish’s church hall.

Learn About ‘Laudato Si’ Action Plan’

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Pope Plans Visit to Cyprus and Greece

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis’ planned trip to the eastern Mediterranean in December will focus on migration. Catholic-Orthodox relations and promoting peace in a region known more for its vacation spots than its ongoing political tensions.

The Vatican announced Nov. 5 that Pope Francis would visit Nicosia, Cyprus, Dec. 2-4 and Athens and Lesbos, Greece, Dec. 4-6.

The pope had made a one-day visit to migrant and refugee camps on the Greek island of Lesbos in 2016, but this will be his first visit to the Greek mainland.

The Moria refugee camp the pope visited was the largest refugee camp in Europe until it burned down in September 2020; a temporary camp was set up nearby and continues to host thousands of migrants and refugees.

While migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean and landing in Italy, Spain, Greece and even Malta make headlines, significant numbers continue to make headlines, significant numbers of them end up in Cyprus. As of Oct. 31, according to the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, 464 migrants had reached Malta since Jan. 1 while 1,545 had reached Cyprus.

Lasting peace, a true sense of kinship and greater Christian-Muslim dialogue are expected to be topics during the pope’s visit to Cyprus, which has been divided between the Greek Cypriots in the South and Turkish Cypriots in the North since 1974.

The theme for the pope’s visit to Cyprus is: “Comforting each other in faith,” highlighting the importance of comforting and encouraging one another, which are “essential dimensions for dialogue, encounter and welcome and are salient characteristics of the life and history of the island,” the Vatican press office said.

The theme for the pope’s visit to Greece is: “May we be increasingly open to God’s surprises,” a quote from the pope himself.

Explaining the theme, the Vatican press office said, “As Greece feels the effects of the pandemic and the recent financial crisis, the motto expresses the hope that the pope’s visit will bring a ray of light for the future of Greece, a country of deeply rooted faith and an illustrious past.”

Retired Pope Receives Copy of First Contract

BERLIN — The German publishing company Verlag Herder GmbH has paid tribute to retired Pope Benedict XVI, 94, as its most loyal and oldest living author.

The German Catholic news agency KNA reported that, during a recent visit to the Vatican, publisher Manuel Herder presented the retired pope with a copy of his first author’s contract from 65 years ago.

On Nov. 8, 1956, the then-29-year-old theologian signed a contract to work on the “Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche” (“Encyclopedia for Theology and the Church”). His contribution included an article on the “resurrection of the flesh.”

Herder said that, during his visit, the retired pope had shown great interest in the theological works he had brought with him.

“He laughed and said with amusement, ‘If you bring me so many books, you must also bring me the time to read them.’”

The retired pope also was pleased to receive a copy of his first publishing contract, said Herder. He added that Pope Benedict had been “very, very awake and absolutely in good spirits.”

During the conversation, it also became clear that the retired pope followed current developments in theology and the Church very closely, Herder told KNA.

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