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Whatever the Supreme Court decides, Church committed to serving mothers and children. Page 3

Young Leaders
Diocesan youth leadership camp returning to Whispering Winds. Page 7

Holy Orders
Two to be ordained to priesthood, nine to permanent diaconate. Pages 12-15
Diocese Names Schools Director

Leticia Oseguera is the Diocese of San Diego’s new Superintendent of Schools, effective July 1.

Oseguera currently serves as principal of Mater Dei Juan Diego Academy, the only TK to eighth grade Catholic dual-language school (English and Spanish) in San Diego County. In March, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) named her one of 13 recipients of its 2022 “Lead. Learn. Proclaim Award.”

As the new head of the diocesan Schools Office, Oseguera will succeed John Galvan, who is stepping down to serve as the NCEA director of catechetical assessments.

In a letter to pastors and principals, Bishop Robert McElroy said that he was “delighted” to announce Oseguera’s appointment. He noted the partnerships she had developed with the University of San Diego, Boston College and the San Diego County Office for Education.

Oseguera told The Southern Cross that she “will always be a teacher at heart.” But after 14 years in the classroom, she got involved in school leadership out of a desire to support more students. Her new position is just the next step. “I love solving problems, finding solutions to complex issues, supporting teachers, supporting students,” said Oseguera, who has 19 years’ experience in education, including five as principal of Mater Dei Juan Diego Academy in Chula Vista. “Becoming superintendent provides me the opportunity to continue to serve Catholic schools while making a larger impact.”

“I want to ensure that our schools are not only surviving, but that they are thriving. …I want to make a difference.” Oseguera already has the respect of her predecessor. After she had won the NCEA award, Galvan described her as “a consummate professional with high standards of excellence” and a “humble and hard worker who loves her school community and lives her Catholic school call to mission with integrity.”

Originally from a small town near the city of Zamora, Michoacán, Mexico, she immigrated as a child to San Diego with her parents. She holds master’s degrees in Education and in School Administration. Before serving as principal of Mater Dei Juan Diego Academy, Oseguera was on the faculties of the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, San Ysidro High School and South Hills High School in Los Angeles.

She lives in Chula Vista with her husband, Alex, and their two children. Reflecting on her goals as superintendent, she said, “The ultimate goal is for each and every school in our diocese to have a successful and thriving program. The question should always be, How can we be better? How can we deliver academic excellence in a faith-filled environment? That is how we continue to make a difference in the lives of our students, by providing them with the highest-quality education, surrounded by our Catholic values, our Catholic faith.”

Catholic School Wins National Recognition

The U.S. Department of Education has named St. Martin of Tours Academy in La Mesa as one of the 2022 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools award honorees.

The school, which serves 220 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, is the only winner from San Diego County and one of four in California. The school joins 26 other schools, five districts, and four postsecondary institutions across the country being honored for innovative efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, improve health and wellness, and ensure effective sustainability education.

In 2015, St. Martin of Tours Academy became the first Catholic elementary school in the nation to be declared a Fair Trade School, offering events and curriculum related to fair trade practices, and replacing products on campus for global sustainability.
CA Bishops Oppose Pro-Abortion Amendment

The leak of a draft U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a case affecting the future of Roe v. Wade and abortion in the United States was met with an immediate response when California’s governor and legislative leadership announced their intent to create a state constitutional amendment protecting the right to an abortion.

California’s bishops, represented by the California Catholic Conference (CCC), quickly announced that they would oppose such an amendment while reaffirming their long-standing commitment to advocate for children and families. San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy is president of the CCC’s board of directors.

In partnership with a wide coalition of people and organizations opposed to abortion, the Conference plans to launch an informational campaign in June to mobilize Catholics in support of families, especially women facing difficult or unexpected pregnancies.

The day after the draft was published, Gov. Gavin Newsom called for an amendment to California’s Constitution to protect abortion rights permanently. Two-thirds of legislators in the Senate and the Assembly will likely approve the amendment, which would then go to voters as a ballot measure in November.

The amendment would “destroy lives, families, and significantly limit the ability of the Catholic Church in California to protect the unborn,” the state’s bishops said in their statement. “This is the moment for the Church and its 12 million Catholics (in California) to engage with their communities to actively and publicly oppose this amendment and fulfill our baptismal responsibility to protect life at every stage and at every opportunity.”

Maria Valencia, who leads the Culture of Life ministry at the San Diego Diocese, urged community members to contact lawmakers directly to oppose the amendment and the more than 20 bills that have been introduced in the state Legislature to expand publicly funded abortion services.

The faithful can sign up to receive “Action Alerts” from the CCC, which provides information on pending legislation and an easy way to contact lawmakers.

Even though U.S. Chief Justice John Roberts has acknowledged that the leaked document is authentic, it is important to remember that the draft is just that, a draft, and that the case in question is not yet decided.

The court is expected to release its decision and final opinion in late June or early July. The case, Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, challenges the constitutionality of a law Mississippi adopted in 2018 that bans most surgical abortions after the first 15 weeks of pregnancy. The case is seen as a test on the court’s landmark ruling in Roe v. Wade, which broadly legalized abortion nearly 50 years ago.

If the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade in the Dobbs decision, the issue would be returned to the states, which would decide whether abortions would be allowed in their state. No change is expected in California, given the current make-up of the Legislature.

Regardless of what lawmakers do, the Catholic Church will continue to advocate that life begins at conception and support policies and services that assist pregnant women in making life-affirming choices, Valencia said.

The CCC organized the “Born Ready” campaign as a response to the expected ruling overturning Roe. The campaign builds on a statement the California bishops issued in January, committing to a vision of support for women, children, and families.

The multi-media, bilingual campaign will propose ways parishes and individual Catholics can take action. These range from using social media to raise awareness of resources in the community that help pregnant women, to donating motel vouchers to a local pregnancy center, to throwing a baby shower for moms at church.

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Views About Abortion Often Contradictory

WASHINGTON — How to make sense of Americans’ attitudes toward abortion? It isn’t easy.

In polls, many respondents will give answers that contradict each other. A Gallup poll in 2019 — Gallup has polled regularly on abortion since 1975 — found that 92% of Americans believed that using birth control was “morally acceptable,” but their support for abortion, by contrast, was more mixed. The Catholic Church teaches that both are morally wrong.

But the year before, Gallup found that 65% of Americans believed abortion should generally be illegal during the second trimester of pregnancy — but in the same survey, 69% said the Supreme Court should not overturn Roe v. Wade.

FiftyThirtyEight, which analyzed abortion polls, “found that a large majority of Americans support abortion in the first trimester, but that support tends to drop in the second trimester.”

In an ABC News-Washington Post poll conducted in late April, 54% of Americans want the court to uphold Roe, nearly twice as many as the 28% who want to see it struck down. Also, an ABC poll offering only a yes-or-no choice found that 57% of Americans opposed a ban on abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, while 58% opposed a ban after six weeks.

If abortion weighs on the mind of pregnant women, talking about it seems to be just as difficult for all Americans. Hannah Hartig, a research associate on the U.S. politics team for the Pew Research Center, calls it “cross pressure.”

Pew has been polling regularly about abortion since 1995.

“Some 33% of adults say human life begins at conception, and so a fetus is a person with rights,” Hartig told Catholic News Service in a May 16 phone interview. But a comfortable majority of respondents also say that the decision on whether to have an abortion belongs to the woman.

“So, on one hand you can look at them and think that they’re contradictory,” she said, but it isn’t necessarily the case because of this cross pressure.

Results of Pew’s polling on abortion, issued May 6, show a starker partisan divide than had existed in the past.

Since 2007, Republicans who say abortion should be legal in all or most cases went up from 37% to 39%. Among Democrats, the percentages went up from 63% in 2007 to 81% in 2022. In 2012, the percentages of Americans either for or against abortion came together the closest they’d been, but support for legal abortion has never fallen below 50%.
**Sweet Event to Celebrate Region’s Families**

By Denis Grasska

This year, it will be easier than ever to participate in the World Meeting of Families. Unlike in years past, when participants had no option but to pack their bags and book a flight to attend an international gathering, Pope Francis has asked all dioceses to also organize their own local events. These diocesan-level events will coincide with the international gathering held June 22 to 26 in Rome, which will be scaled back and invitation-only this year due to ongoing concerns about the spread of COVID-19.

The San Diego Diocese will be hosting a celebration on Saturday, June 25, at the diocesan Pastoral Center. The event will run from noon to about 3 p.m. and will include lunch, family activities, and a Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop John Dolan. All families, as well as members of marriage and family ministries active in the region, are invited.

John Prust, director of the diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality, likened the diocesan event to “a family picnic.” Tacos and churros will be on the menu. There will be a bounce house for the kids, and lawn games for both the young and the young at heart. “I’m personally looking forward to bringing my family,” said Janelle Peregoy, an associate director of the Family Life and Spirituality Office, adding that the bounce house and churros will be on her own family’s to-do list.

Participants also will have the opportunity to watch video footage from the World Meeting of Families in Rome, beginning at 1 p.m. “In essence, Pope Francis is our keynote speaker,” quipped Peregoy. The local event is expected to include opportunities to sing praise-and-worship music, pray a family rosary, and visit a ministry fair of marriage and family organizations. Mass will be celebrated at 2 p.m., with Bishop Dolan presiding. The bishop said it is “a good event whenever we can recognize the value of family as, really, the core of our Church.”

“Family is absolutely essential,” he said. “That’s where faith begins, where mercy and forgiveness begin, it’s where charity begins, it’s where prayer and communication with God begin.”

The World Meeting of Families, which is organized by the Vatican’s dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, was first held in Rome in 1994. Since then, it has been held every three years, with one exception: The 2021 gathering was postponed until this year because of the pandemic. It has been held in various countries, most recently in Philadelphia (2015) and Dublin (2018).

For Prust, attending the event in Dublin was an “awesome” experience. But he was surprised at the time that there were fewer families in attendance than he had expected when compared to the many priests and bishops who were there. “The reality is that very few families have the time or money needed to travel halfway across the world for the event,” he said.

Prust expressed hope that the idea of holding diocesan- and parish-level events in conjunction with the World Meeting might develop into a tradition.

Ricardo Marquez, associate director of the Family Life and Spirituality Office, reflected on the expected fruits of the World Meeting at both the international and diocesan levels.

Acknowledging that the world is experiencing a “crisis” when it comes to families, he said the event shows that Church knows “we have to do something.” He hopes that one of the takeaways from the event will be a realization that the participating families are “not alone,” that they are part of a larger community.

Marquez also hopes that the fun experienced by the children that day will be “seeds for the future,” providing Catholic youth with a positive experience of the Church that will contribute to lifelong participation.

**Bring Your Rosary to Parishes’ Movie Nights**

By Denis Grasska

The diocese wants to take you out to the movies.

In collaboration with two parishes, the Office for Family Life and Spirituality is providing opportunities for Catholics to watch “Pray: The Story of Patrick Peyton.”

The documentary film, which was released in late 2020, recounts the life of Venerable Father Patrick Peyton (1909-1992), a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross whose canonization cause is underway. He was widely known as “The Rosary Priest” for his tireless promotion of the rosary, which included leading rosary rallies worldwide. The film will be shown at 7 p.m. on Saturday, May 28, at Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado and on Saturday, June 18, at Mission San Luis Rey Parish in Oceanside. It will be presented in English with Spanish subtitles.

At Sacred Heart Parish, the screening will take place in the parish center. At Mission San Luis Rey, it will be held in St. Michael’s Courtyard, next to St. Francis Hall, in case of inclement weather, it will move indoors. Because it’s just not a movie night without concessions, snacks will be available.

Born in Ireland, Father Peyton emigrated to the United States, where he realized his vocation and ultimately arrived at a place where he was evangelizing millions, said Janelle Peregoy, an associate director of the Family Life and Spirituality Office. Part of the enjoyment of the film comes from “the momentum that builds as he grows in his own faith and his own sense of spiritual purpose.”

Father Peyton was the founder of Family Theater Productions, which produced radio, television and film dramas featuring some of the biggest stars from the Golden Age of Hollywood. The same organization also produced “Pray: The Story of Patrick Peyton.”

“The story of Father Patrick Peyton is inspiring and uplifting. We wanted to share this movie with our parishioners in hopes that they too will be inspired to serve humbly and walk with great faith,” said Natalie Bjarra, coordinator of youth and young adult ministry at Mission San Luis Rey Parish, whose youth group will run the snack bar for the night.

John Prust, director of the Family Life and Spirituality Office, recalled watching “Pray” for the first time and, at its conclusion, feeling inspired to pray the rosary with his wife. In a move that would make Father Peyton proud, Prust said that after the movie fades to black, attendees will be invited to pray a decade of the rosary together “right then and there” and will be encouraged to make family prayer a regular practice in their homes.

**MOVIE NIGHTS:** Holy Cross Father Patrick Peyton talks with actor Bob Newhart in this undated photo. The documentary film “Pray: The Story of Patrick Peyton” will be shown at two local parishes.

**FAMILY FUN:** Local Catholics can get into the spirit of the World Meeting of Families with a special event June 25 that includes Mass, lunch and fun activities, like a bounce house.
By Denis Grasska

When the World Meeting of Families convenes in Rome, a Catholic couple from San Diego will be among the presenters.

Dr. Christauria Welland-Akong and her husband, Michael Akong, will share their expertise on the issue of domestic violence during a panel discussion June 24.

The couple’s biggest challenge will be taking a wealth of knowledge accumulated over a quarter-century and compressing it into a 15-minute speaking slot.

Welland-Akong has been a licensed clinical psychologist for the past 25 years. With her husband, she is the co-founder of Pax in Familia (Peace in the Family), an international Catholic ministry dedicated to the prevention of abuse within Catholic and other Christian families.

The World Meeting of Families, which the couple will attend as invited speakers for the Diocese of Rome and as delegates of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, will take place from June 22 to 26.

In their presentation, she said they plan to discuss how widespread domestic violence is, why it occurs, how to identify it, common misconceptions about it, and how it affects both victim-survivors and abusers.

Most importantly, their presentation will reflect on how Catholic communities can provide “an effective and compassionate pastoral response” to those who have experienced domestic violence, said Welland-Akong, who previously delivered a 45-minute speech at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in 2015.

Michael Akong, a practitioner of Oriental medicine and acupuncturist, said he and his wife are “honored” to be part of the upcoming World Meeting of Families and “to share our knowledge and provide some ideas … to reduce violence in the family and to help families have a closer spiritual connection as well.”

The couple has traveled to many countries to make presentations on domestic violence at episcopal conferences as well as at individual parishes.

Welland-Akong said that statistics show that one out of every three women will be a victim of domestic violence at some point in their lives, and she noted that men are not immune from being victim-survivors either. Because domestic violence can be a taboo subject, she said, many victim-survivors suffer in silence.

First exposed to the effects of domestic violence while serving as a social worker in Mexico City from 1976 to 1982, Welland-Akong said she was “blown away” by the widespread suffering she encountered there.

“It really shocked me. I was not prepared for it. … I really felt helpless,” she said.

Not only were resources unavailable, she said, but there were priests who unhelpfully advised women to view their abuse as a “cross” they had to carry, suggested that they might have done something to anger their spouses, or ruled out marital separation as an option.

The experience inspired her to go back to school. In 1999, she earned a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology, with a specialization in Family Therapy, from the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego.

In 2014, Welland-Akong and her husband founded Pax in Familia, which offers workshops, conferences, online courses and educational materials. The organization seeks to integrate the Church’s pastoral ministry and psychological knowledge.

“It might seem obvious that domestic violence is incompatible with Gospel values. But, she said, the Church hasn’t spoken out as forcefully as it might have on the subject.

While domestic violence isn’t any more prevalent among Catholics, she said, it regrettably doesn’t seem to be less frequent either and it “undermines everything that the Catholic family is supposed to be about.”

She said that, even today, the topic of domestic violence rarely comes up in homilies. Yet, priests and bishops have “the moral authority” to change hearts and minds when they do speak about it.
All Invited to Juneteenth Mass

Dr. Constance Carroll, the former chancellor of the San Diego Community College District, will share a historical reflection at this year’s Juneteenth Freedom Mass on June 19.

Juneteenth celebrates the day enslaved people in Texas learned that they were free, marking the end of slavery in the United States.

Bishop Robert McElroy will celebrate the annual Mass, which will be concelebrated by Auxiliary Bishops John Dolan and Ramón Bejarano.

All are invited to the Mass, which will be at 10 a.m. at St. Rita’s Parish, 5124 Churchward Street, San Diego CA 92114.

Dr. Carroll is a long-time member of that parish, located in Southeastern San Diego.

The Juneteenth Mass is organized by the Diocesan Commission for African American Catholics, which works to share their history, faith traditions and concerns with the broader Catholic community.

“We want to share that this is where we come from, this is how far we have come,” said Rick Stewart, the commission’s chair, “although sometimes we feel like we’re going backwards.”

African Americans “add to the tapestry of life in this country, like all peoples who contribute to that tapestry.”

Experience What Unity Feels Like

Step into the diocese’s Pentecost Mass and experience unity among all peoples. In fact, that’s the name of this event: Mass for All Peoples, to be held on Saturday, June 4, at Cathedral Catholic High School.

The event brings together Catholic cultural communities present in the diocese, with roots in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. Their members wear native attire, speak different languages and express their faith in distinct ways. But they are united by their love of God.

It all begins at 10 a.m. outside of the school’s gym, where a variety of music will be presented. A procession of cultures is at 10:45, to be followed by the Mass at 11 in the gym, with Bishop Robert McElroy. It’s a joyful feast of colors, sounds and faith traditions.

A literal feast follows, starting around 12:15 p.m. in the school’s plaza, where the communities will share their traditional foods and perform music and dances.

Everyone is welcome to attend this family-friendly event.

For details on the Pentecost Mass and festival, visit sdcatholic.org/pentecost.

END OF THE YEAR RETREAT

June 9, 2022

Mission San Luis Rey
4070 Mission Ave., Oceanside, CA

$25.00

Scan QR code to register!

This retreat is an invitation to expand your consciousness for listening to God in your life, to be more conscious about listening to oneself, to take care and love oneself thus to do the same toward the other and the creation.
Adios Zoom: Hello ‘Awe-Inspiring’ Camp Emmaus

By Denis Grasska

This year, it’s back to normal for Camp Emmaus.

The Diocese of San Diego’s annual youth leadership camp is returning to Whispering Winds Catholic Camp in the Cuyamaca mountains as a multi-day, overnight experience.

“It’s three years in the making,” Maricruz Flores, director of the Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, said of the camp, which will be held from June 20 to June 24.

Though it was never canceled, even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Camp Emmaus was retooled significantly in the past two years to prevent possible spread of the coronavirus.

In 2020, it was presented as a series of six online sessions conducted through the videoconferencing app Zoom. Last year, it was held in person, but as separate day camps at two sites — Mission San Luis Rey Parish in Oceanside and St. Catherine Labouré Parish in Clairemont.

Plans for a return to Whispering Winds for the first time since 2019 began in earnest around the start of the new year, said Flores, whose office sponsors the annual camp for high school students who currently serve or have been asked to serve as members of the core teams of their parish youth groups.

Pat Clasby, who leads youth ministry at St. Patrick Parish in Carlsbad, has been the coordinator of Camp Emmaus since it began in 2003. He admits that the prospect of bringing it back as an in-person, overnight event this year left him “a little choked up.”

But back-to-normal doesn’t mean pretending that a global pandemic and its psychological, emotional and spiritual effects never happened.

“What we’ve seen in our parishes this year tells me teens will be happy to be together, but also unsure how to react at times,” said Clasby, who will be bringing about 20 youth and two or three adult chaperones from his parish.

Flores acknowledged that “a lot of issues” have come up in the lives of the teens this year, but as keynote speakers, witness talks, sacrament of reconciliation, as well as discussions, skits, games and an ice cream social.

Some flexibility will be required.

Emerging from two years of the virus, Flores said, participants will be free “to talk a little bit more about mental health or their emotions throughout the pandemic” if they need to, and leaders will accept that teens may be more reticent at times.

About 170 teens are expected to attend this year’s camp, where the theme will be “Living Justice, Proclaiming Peace.”

The schedule includes Masses, communal prayer, and opportunities for Eucharistic adoration and the sacrament of reconciliation, as well as keynote speakers, witness talks, time for both large- and small-group discussions, skits, games and an ice cream social.

Workshops will be offered on four separate tracks: first-timers, veterans, young adults and musicians.

Clasby said there are several things that make Camp Emmaus such a special event. He said organizers offer “a number of different ways to experience our faith at camp” and “empower the youth to take ownership of leading many of those experiences.”

“Any of these experiences on their own are nice, but when shared in community over the course of a week with peers from around the diocese, it tends to be an awe-inspiring experience,” he said.

Nicky Knuff, the youth minister at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, is a Camp Emmaus alumnus. Attending the camp three times as a teen showed him that “the Church is bigger than one’s local parish,” and it played “a monumental role” in helping him to discover a calling in ministry.

“I’m a big believer that we can do good things by ourselves, but we can do great things with one another,” he said. “We are made for relationship. We are made for community. We aren’t like Camp Emmaus can only reach very hard to maneuver through a global pandemic as best we can, but things like Camp Emmaus can only reach (their) full potential when we’re all together as one.”

Registration for this year’s Camp Emmaus will close on Friday, June 3. The cost to attend is $325 per person; scholarships are available. Youth register through their parish youth ministry.
Organizations that serve marginalized communities continued to hold synod sessions with their populations at prisons, sites that serve the homeless and refugee assistance offices in May. Meanwhile, parishes and schools began to wind down their sessions for youth.

All reports from these sessions are due by June 15 to the diocese’s synod team, which continues to analyze the data submitted since March. A team of researchers from the University of San Diego is assisting the team members in this part of the synod.

The diocese will submit a report that summarizes the information from the sessions to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops by the end of June.

Bishop Robert McElroy plans to share that report with the Catholic community over the summer. The second listening phase of the consultation is to begin in the fall, when a survey will be circulated widely.

Two commissions, in San Diego and Imperial counties, are helping to guide the diocese’s consultation. Their members are to meet in June.

Visit sdcatholic.org/synod for the latest information about this consultation in the diocese, part of a worldwide invitation to Catholics to share their experiences with the Church. The findings will be used to strengthen the Church at all levels.
By Denis Grasska

Seven people, including six formerly incarcerated men and women who have successfully reintegrated back into society, will share their firsthand experiences with the criminal justice system at a special event on Saturday, June 11.

The event, “Restoring Humanity: A Speaker Showcase on Restorative Reintegration,” will begin at 2 p.m. at the University of San Diego and will be live-streamed at sdcatholic.org/reentry.

Each of the participating speakers has received months of training from the Phoenix-based organization Amplify Voices to prepare their presentations and shape their messages. According to its website, “Amplify Voices serves individuals historically oppressed, misunderstood or silenced, who want to use their voice as an instrument of change.”

The upcoming event is co-sponsored by the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice and USD’s Center for Restorative Justice.

Dr. Robert Ehnow, director of the diocesan office, attended an Amplify Voices event in Phoenix in March of 2021, which included talks by victim-survivors of human trafficking. It was “a very powerful event,” he said, and inspired him to reach out to the organization with the idea of putting together a similar event where formerly incarcerated men and women could tell their stories.

The seven speakers for June 11, each of whom will speak for about 10 minutes, were selected with great care by the Life, Peace and Justice Office and the Center for Restorative Justice. Six were paroled after decades behind bars, and at least half had originally received life sentences. The seventh speaker will provide a family member’s perspective; her husband, also a speaker, and two brothers have been in prison.

The formerly incarcerated speakers have not only reentered society, but in some cases have become active members of the community.

Ehnow noted that one speaker, a former member of the West Coast Crips, now serves on the City of San Diego’s Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention; another speaker is a fellow parishioner of Ehnow’s at Sacred Heart Parish in Coronado, where he is an active member.

Four of the speakers are from the San Diego area. Among them is Ernest Garcia, who previously shared his story with The Southern Cross for a feature story on Rise Up Industries. In an interview in late 2018, Garcia shared how serious problems in his family life — his mother’s struggle with mental illness and his father’s reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism — led him to join a gang.

“I think I embraced the violence, even the harm that came to myself, because I just didn’t want to face what was going on in my home at the time,” he said.

At age 17, Garcia was sentenced to 75 years to life for the murders of three rival gang members. Because of his continued violent behavior, he spent 18 years in solitary confinement. But, while still in prison, he began to reevaluate his life and abandoned gangs entirely.

Ehnow noted that many people have strong negative feelings about those who have been in prison, especially for those who have been given life sentences. He said the upcoming talks present “an opportunity to change hearts and change minds,” which is best done, not through statistics but when people are able to tell their personal stories.

He hopes the takeaway will be that “these are God’s children, they made a mistake, they were held accountable for that mistake, and now they’re reintegrating” into the community.
The Diocese of San Diego is mourning the loss and celebrating the legacy of its fourth bishop, Robert Brom, who died in his home May 9 at age 83.

“Bishop Brom was pastor, teacher and servant leader of the Catholic community in San Diego and Imperial counties for 23 years,” said Bishop Robert McElroy.

He said, “Bishop Brom’s deep love for our parishes and pastoral vision were complemented by a keen administrative capability in guiding San Diego through years of joy and hardship.”

Bishop McElroy presided over the late bishop’s funeral Mass on May 17 at St. Thérèse of Carmel Church in Carmel Valley. It was concelebrated by several bishops, including Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, Archbishop and former San Diego Auxiliary Bishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco, and Bishop Kevin Vann of Orange, as well as San Diego’s own auxiliaries, Bishops John Dolan and Ramón Bejarano.

“We know that Bob Brom lived in the light of faith,” Bishop McElroy said shortly after the Mass began. “He was a pastor who cared for the souls with whom he was entrusted. He was a shepherd who labored ardently to tend to the flock. He was a teacher at heart, seeking to bring the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who had never heard it at all. He was a leader on so many levels.”

Msgr. Steven Callahan, pastor of St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach, worked alongside Bishop Brom for years. As the homilist, he recalled that, after his first meeting with the late bishop, he recognized him as a man who “knows who he is, and where he’s going, and what he’s about, and what his mission is.”

He shared some favorite expressions of Bishop Brom’s, including “The Church either thrives in its parishes or it does not thrive at all,” “You shape your environment and your environment will shape you,” and “If Heaven’s so great, why wait?”

Of the latter, he said, “He meant it. It wasn’t a joke. … There was a longing in Robert Brom’s heart for the freedom of the children of God, awaiting — in the words of the Book of Revelation — a new heaven and a new earth. And while there’s definitely sadness in our hearts that he cannot be with us in the body, those are overtaken by our feelings of joy for him and the communion he now shares with our loving God, what he experiences, the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

The legacy of Bishop Brom, who retired in September 2013, includes the construction of many local churches and two high schools.

In his homily, Msgr. Callahan quipped that, “if Bishop Brom had not been a bishop, he could’ve made a fortune as a designer.” He noted the “meticulous care” with which Bishop Brom had approached the construction and renovation of parish and diocesan properties.

“He wanted people who use these places, whether for worship, or formation, or education, or ministry, to experience them as God’s dwelling place, where people could experience God dwelling with us.”

Bishop Brom led the diocese when the sex abuse scandal reached the local Church.

“Jesus in the Gospel tells Peter that, later in life, he’s going to be led where he doesn’t want to go,” said Msgr. Callahan. “That became a reality for Bishop Brom when the sex-abuse scandal began to break in 2002. He was led by the Lord where he would rather not go, and he responded as a shepherd,” accompanying victims and helping “all of us to grapple with the enormity of this scandal and the harm it did to the Church and to the victims.”

Under Bishop Brom’s leadership, in late 2007, the diocese reached an almost $200-million settlement for sex abuse committed by diocesan clergy.
In retirement, Bishop Brom continued to make time for the Catholic inmates at Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in Otay Mesa, where he celebrated Easter Masses and heard confessions.

David Brom, the youngest of the five Brom siblings, believes that prison ministry was what the bishop found most fulfilling in his retirement.

“He deeply valued the time that he spent with the inmates, and they valued the time that they could spend with him,” he said. “One of the things of which he was proudest in retirement was cards of appreciation that were signed by all the inmates for the time that he spent there with them.”

Bishop Brom also continued his connection with the Missionaries of Charity. In the early 1990s, he accompanied Mother Teresa in her search to establish a convent in the San Diego Diocese. He celebrated the convent’s first Mass in 1992 in the San Diego neighborhood of Southcrest, and, in March of 2017, celebrated a Mass at the sisters’ new 8,000-square-foot convent.

Robert Brom was born Sept. 18, 1938, in Arcadia, Wis., to Henry and Lucille Brom. In an interview that appeared in The Southern Cross on July 24, 1989, his mother recalled his youthful practice of pretending to celebrate Mass on the front porch of the family home.

He was ordained on Dec. 18, 1963, as a priest for the Diocese of Winona, Minn. He was appointed bishop of the Diocese of Duluth on March 25, 1983, by Pope St. John Paul II and was consecrated and installed on May 23, 1983.

His episcopal motto, taken from 1 Corinthians 1:12, is “Ego sum Christi,” which is Latin for “I belong to Christ.”

“I think there was a reluctance on his part to become a bishop, in part because he liked being among the people, he liked being a pastor, he liked communicating with the everyday Catholic and the everyday person,” recalled David Brom. “At the same time, he recognized that he had a gift and he could serve in that capacity and still be pastoral.”

After serving for six years as bishop of Duluth, Bishop Brom was appointed coadjutor bishop of San Diego on April 22, 1989, meaning that he would automatically succeed Bishop Leo Maher upon the latter’s retirement.

He became the fourth bishop of San Diego on July 10, 1990.

In that capacity, Bishop Brom made parish pastoral visits five times to all of the diocese’s approximately 100 parishes. David Brom said his brother frequently visited Catholics in the Imperial Valley, so much so that he was sometimes characterized as “the hermit bishop” because of the amount of time he spent in the desert.

Many of the parishes founded by Bishop Brom’s predecessors underwent major development during his years as diocesan bishop. This includes the construction of several new church buildings. When he retired, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in Rancho Peñasquitos was nearing the end of construction on its new church.

Bishop Brom also oversaw the development of two new high schools. Cathedral Catholic High School, which carries on the legacy and traditions of the University of San Diego High School, opened in 2005 in Carmel Valley. Mater Dei Catholic High School, a successor to Marian Catholic High School, opened in 2007 in Chula Vista.

From the beginning of his ministry in San Diego, Bishop Brom believed that the diocese’s many ethnic and cultural groups enriched the Local Church. At a press conference on the day he became San Diego’s bishop, he expressed his desire that the cultural groups receive “a proportionate amount of our attention and resources with additional services.”

With the authorization of Bishop Brom, the diocesan Office for Cultural Diversity was established. The office serves communities representing African American, Chinese, Filipino, Spanish-speaking and Vietnamese Catholics, among others. And it was Bishop Brom who upgraded the Ecumenical Commission to a diocesan office and became the first bishop in the country to appoint a vicar for ecumenical and interreligious affairs.

“When you start something, you don’t see the fruit maybe until later,” said Guzmán, reflecting on how multicultural events like the fifth annual Pentecost Mass for All Peoples, scheduled for June 4 at Cathedral Catholic High School, can be seen as the result of seeds that Bishop Brom planted.

Guzmán recalled Bishop Brom as a humble man.

“Even though he was a bishop, he was not . . . walking in the sky,” he said. “He always wanted Christ to be the one who shines, not him.”

“‘There was a … longing in Robert Brom’s heart for the freedom of the children of God . . .’”

Msgr. Steven Callahan
Two Roads Lead to Priest Ordination in June

By Denis Grasska

Bishop Robert McElroy will ordain Bradley D. Easterbrooks and Guillermo Hernandez to the priesthood June 24 at St. Gabriel Church in Poway.

As students at the Pontifical North American College, the American seminary in Rome, the men were ordained to the transitional diaconate last September at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

Deacon Easterbrooks, 37, will be assigned to Holy Trinity Parish in El Cajon this summer and, then, will return to Rome for another year to earn an advanced degree in Dogmatic Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Deacon Hernandez, 30, will serve as associate pastor of St. Jude Shrine of the West Parish for the summer, before finishing a licentiate in Fundamental Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University for the next year.

Originally from Carlsbad, Deacon Easterbrooks was baptized as a Catholic, attended St. Patrick School and even received his First Communion in the Church Fathers and became convinced that the Eucharist truly is the Body and Blood of Christ. As a third-year law student, he entered the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process and received the sacrament of confirmation.

After passing the bar exam, Deacon Easterbrooks joined the U.S. Navy's Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG). He was stationed in San Diego, where he began attending Our Lady of the Rosary Parish on the North Park neighborhood. He identified as a non-denominational Christian until about mid-way through law school at Pepperdine University in Malibu. While seeking to deepen his faith life, Deacon Easterbrooks began reading the Church Fathers and became convinced that the Eucharist truly is the Body and Blood of Christ.

He attended St. Mary's School in Barrio Logan and St. Augustine High School in North Park. He attended St. Augustine High School in Barrio Logan and St. Augustine High School in North Park. He speaks both English and Spanish.

Path to Priesthood: Deacon Guillermo Hernandez, left, and Bradley D. Easterbrooks, right, are seen at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

As a firefighter, your job is to save lives; as a priest, it is to save souls," he said. "I will never forget when my mom told me about the back of a firefighter's shirt she saw, in church actually, that read, 'We fight where the devil dances.'"

It was the notion of sacrifice and service that attracted Deacon Hernandez to the priesthood.

"The fact that a man sacrifices himself and gives up marriage and family life to devote his life to Christ and His Church is truly moving and inspiring," he said. "I always wanted to be a man of service and do something exciting, and that is what has attracted me to this vocation."

As his ordination day draws near, Deacon Hernandez is awed by the ministry of which he will soon be a part, which includes the ability to transform bread and wine into the Eucharist and to forgive others' sins.

"It is a true gift that I find myself crying about when considering how someone so unworthy could work such marvels," said Deacon Hernandez, who says his classmates from Our Lady's School would say that they always knew he would be a priest.

But, for Deacon Hernandez himself, priesthood didn't always seem like a certainty. He also had been attracted to the idea of becoming a firefighter and, after high school, even entered the San Diego Fire Department's cadet program for a short time.

However, those two paths are not as divergent as they might appear.

"As a firefighter, your job is to save lives; as a priest, it is to save souls," he said. "I will never forget when my mom told me about the back of a firefighter's shirt she saw, in church actually, that read, 'We fight where the devil dances.'"

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Rituals of Ordinations, Down to Handkerchief

By Denis Grasska

It’s entirely possible for a faithful Catholic, who observes all of the precepts of the Church, to go through life without ever attending an ordination liturgy.

And for those who have attended one, they might do so without fully appreciating the rich symbolism that permeates the ritual prayers and actions. The Southern Cross recently asked Father Eltrain Bautista, the bishop’s master of ceremonies, to reflect on some of the highlights of an ordination liturgy and the meaning behind them.

One of the first noticeable differences between an ordination Mass for new priests or deacons and the typical Sunday Mass comes after the Gospel reading, when those who are about to be ordained are asked to come forward. As their names are called, they respond, “Present.”

The bishop is asked to ordain the men, which he agrees to do after receiving affirmation that those who oversaw their formation have found them worthy.

Father Bautista said the theological significance of this moment is that it’s God, through the Church, who has called these men to ordained service.

After the homily, candidates for ordination make a series of promises, including of obedience to the current bishop and his successors.

While the intercession of the angels and saints is invoked upon the proceedings through the singing of the Litany of the Saints, the bishop kneels and the candidates prostrate themselves before the altar.

Prostration symbolizes “laying down one’s life for the service of God and His Church,” Father Bautista explained.

When the litany concludes, each candidate approaches the bishop and kneels at his feet. The bishop lays hands on their heads and recites the prayer of ordination.

The laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination comprise the essential form of holy orders, which is required for validity, Father Bautista said.

He likened this moment to a scene recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, in which the Apostles converse to appoint a successor to Judas, laying their hands on him and invoking the Holy Spirit over him.

Another significant moment comes when the newly-ordained, standing in front of the sanctuary, dresses in his new liturgical vestments for the first time. At diaconal ordination, this means receiving the stole and dalmatic; at a priestly ordination, the dalmatic is removed and replaced with a priest’s stole and chasuble.

Father Bautista explained that the investiture, performed in front of the entire congregation, recognizes that a significant change has occurred: A layman has just become a deacon, or a transitional deacon has become a priest. He said the newly-ordained are assisted in the vesting process by a priest, typically one who played an important role in their vocational journey.

At a diaconal ordination, the newly-ordained deacon kneels before the bishop, who places the Book of the Gospels in his hands. “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become,” the bishop says. This is an acknowledgement of the fact that, through the sacrament of holy orders, a deacon is empowered to proclaim the Gospel and to preach at Mass.

There is a corresponding moment during a priestly ordination, when the newly-ordained priest kneels before the bishop, who anoints his hands with the blessed, perfumed oil called “chrism.”

Subsequently, after drying his hands, the priest kneels at the bishop’s feet again; placing the paten and chalice in the priest’s hands, the bishop says, “Receive the oblation of the People of God.” Upon ordination, the priest is able to offer the sacrifice of the Mass.

The handkerchief with which the priest wipes the chrism from his hands is later returned to the priest. Traditionally, the priest will give the handkerchief to his mother, who will be buried with it, said Father Bautista, who shared that the priest’s father says, “they should go at least once in their lives because it’s a beautiful experience.”

“Laying on of Hands”

“Anointing”

“Getting Dressed”

“If people have never been to (an ordination Mass),” Father Bautista said, “they should go at least once in their lives because it’s a beautiful experience.”

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Distinct Paths Lead Nine Men to Serve as Deacons

By Denis Grasska

TIMOTHY B. CLARK
St. Sophia Parish, Spring Valley

During his junior year of high school, Timothy B. Clark accepted an invitation to attend a Catholic youth group and Mass.

“I immediately felt at home,” said Clark, who would become Catholic at the Easter Vigil in 1998 at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Vista.

At the time, the parish had four deacons, and the sight of them got Clark thinking even then about diaconal ministry.

In 2014, during a Christmas vacation in Italy, Clark was in Assisi, walking in the snow with his two oldest daughters. He heard a clear voice ask, “What are you waiting for?”

Clark knew who was asking, and he knew what He was asking about: becoming a deacon.

“I have never heard the voice of God like I did that day,” said Clark, who has been a chemistry professor at the University of San Diego for the past 11 years.

He is confident that answering God’s call will bring him “to the greatest sense of fulfillment.”

“The deacon has the opportunity to connect the people of the parish to a deeper sense of the spiritual life by bringing family life and their ministry of charity into homilies and interactions with parishioners,” he said.

Clark and his wife, Nicole, have been married for 21 years and have seven children. They have been members of Santa Sophia Parish in Spring Valley for eight years.

DAVID GONZALEZ
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, San Ysidro

“I would love to say I have been a devoted Catholic for my whole life,” said David Gonzalez, “but that isn’t the case.”

However, he began attending Mass regularly 29 years ago and, since then, has made up for lost time.

His parish became more than simply a place to fulfill his Sunday obligation. He and his wife joined a couples’ movement, which led to involvement in other ministries and also to his discerning a vocation.

Gonzalez, who has worked in the printing business for more than 25 years, said his call to the diaconate was “more like a series of calls.”

The first call came when a deacon spoke to the coordinators of the couples’ movement and Gonzalez felt a desire “to be like him some day.” Later, group members would refer to Gonzalez as “Future Deacon.”

Still later, while Gonzalez was taking video of a parish visit by late Bishop Cirilo Flores, the bishop’s master of ceremonies asked “out of nowhere” whether he had ever considered becoming a deacon; to Gonzalez, it was like “the voice of God asking me.”

Gonzalez denies that he is special: “I just heard a call, recognized the call, and answered that call.”

He and his wife, Elvia, have been married for 29 years and have two daughters. They have been members of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish in San Ysidro for 22 years.

WAYNE HEFFNER
St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Vista

When Wayne Heffner is ordained to the permanent diaconate, it will mark the conclusion of a vocational journey that began 25 years ago.

He was only 42 years old when he first felt called to serve the Church as a deacon. At the time, he was working six days a week at a full-time job, and he had young children at home.

The then-director of the diocesan Permanent Diaconate Office looked at that situation, recognized that it would be hard for him to balance the demands of ministry on top of his professional and family responsibilities, and suggested that he wait.

And so he did.

“I didn’t think it would be this long of a wait, but now it is in God’s time and not mine,” said Heffner, who is now 67. He retired in 2014 after 42 years as a meat manager, and his three daughters have all married.

“ar to serve as a deacon is to emulate the servant of all, Jesus Christ … to be Christ to all I meet and serve as He would love and serve them,” Heffner said.

“I am looking forward to serving my Lord in whatever way He calls me to do.”

Heffner and his wife, Denise, have been married for 42 years and have three daughters. They have been members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Vista for 34 years.

Victor Garcia
St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Vista

Ten years ago, Victor Garcia suffered a hemorrhagic stroke that left him with the left side of his body weakened and his memory faulty.

“Months later, I had a miraculous healing and was completely restored. I believe God was preparing me to serve Him in a special way,” said Garcia, who retired in 2009 after having managed a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise for 35 years.

In retirement, he became a daily Mass-goer. One day, the pastor shared that he had been praying for vocations to the diaconate and believed that Garcia had one.

Garcia and his wife prayed about it and ultimately decided to trust that, if it was God’s will, He would “open doors.”

One challenge that Garcia faced during the formation program was that he had never gone to school in English before and he struggled with the Church terminology. Yet, the Lord opened that door, as well.

During formation, Garcia said, he grew spiritually and in self-knowledge through being assigned to a different ministry each year, such as jail, hospital and hospice ministry as well as service to the poor.

“It is such an honor to be used by God to serve His people,” he said.

Garcia and his wife, Monica, have been married for 45 years and have three children. They have been members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Vista for 34 years.
J. CARLOS MORALES  
St. Francis of Assisi Parish, San Diego

J. Carlos Morales is the foreman of a small landscape-maintenance company in North County and has worked there for three decades.

So, when describing his vocational journey, it is fitting that he turns to horticultural imagery.

Morales said the “beautiful seed of the diaconate” was first planted in his thoughts about 20 years ago. Though he always aspired to find a way to help his community, doing so as a deacon wasn’t always part of the plan. He admired those who dedicated their lives in service to God, but the idea of joining their number struck him as “almost impossible.”

In 2005, he made an unsuccessful first attempt to pursue a vocation to the diaconate; he only got as far as requesting information about the process. Twelve years later, he decided to speak with his pastor and, with that, began “this process of formation that does not end with ordination, but instead it is a lifetime process.”

Morales said the acceptance and the prayers of the community have been a great support to him during his formation.

“Knowing that one has a community is important and essential,” he explained. “What would a deacon be without a community to serve?”

Morales and his wife, Gloria, have been married for almost 34 years and have two children. They have been members of Christ the King Parish for 24 years.

JAIME ROQUE  
St. Michael Parish, San Diego

For a long time, Jaime Roque didn’t particularly distinguish himself as a member of St. Michael Parish in San Diego, where he has been registered since 1987. He described himself as an “invisible parishioner,” explaining that he wasn’t someone his fellow parishioners knew.

Then, tragedy struck: In late 2015, doctors said his wife might have as little as three weeks to live. While God granted him another 13 months with her, he said, “That extension wasn’t for her. It was for me to get to know Him better.”

Roque began saying yes to the invitation to get more involved at his parish, including as sacristan, lector and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion.

“The church became my second home, serving in four or five Masses every Sunday,” said Roque, a veteran of the U.S. Navy and later a civilian employee for the Navy who retired in early 2020.

Eventually, when asked to consider the diaconate, he decided to say yes once again.

“I can say that I wasn’t really close to God (earlier in life), but I was so blessed because He did not give up in calling me to serve Him.”

Roque and his late wife, Corazon Arasula, were married for 33 years and have one daughter. He has been a member of St. Michael Parish in San Diego for about 35 years.

TED ROTUNDA  
St. Peter the Apostle Parish, Fallbrook

Ted Rotunda has prayed regularly, but for much of his life, the conversation was one-sided.

“I always had an active prayer life, but it consisted mainly of talking to God, and never really listening to Him,” he said.

In 2015, influenced by a recent retreat, he began incorporating silence into his daily prayer routine and, in that silence, sensed God calling him to the diaconate.

Rotunda resisted, not fully understanding the role of a deacon and feeling that he wasn’t “holy enough.” But the call persisted and, after some research, he discovered that the heart of the diaconate was service — something that he was already committed to living as a husband, father and physician.

When he finally told his wife about his “yearlong spiritual wrestling match with God” and that he felt called to be a deacon, she said God had been telling her the same thing for over a year.

“I am incredibly grateful to God and His Church for the opportunity to serve others as an ordained minister,” said Rotunda, who is a practicing emergency medicine physician with 25 years of clinical experience. “I am equally grateful to my family … for accompanying me on this journey and for the sacrifices that they have all made.”

Rotunda and his wife, Sherry, have been married for 28 years and have two children. They have been members of St. Peter the Apostle Parish in Fallbrook since 2001.

DANIEL SANCHEZ-GARCIA  
St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Vista

Daniel Sanchez-Garcia was nourished by the Word of God when he was still in utero.

When his mother was pregnant with him, she read the Bible every night. As he grew up, she continued to share its stories with him.

“I can say that my faith in God has always been my anchor, and it has guided my path to God and to the invitation to become a (member of the) diaconate,” said Sanchez-Garcia, who has worked as a handymen for about 33 years.

When he first felt God calling him to the diaconate, he didn’t tell anyone. However, about a year after Sanchez-Garcia first sensed a call, his pastor invited him to consider entering the formation program.

“I requested time, so I could pray about it, to see if it was God’s will,” he said. “I prayed for 40 days, and God answered my prayers. God’s will be done.”

He sees it as the deacon’s role “to serve his parish and his community in the needs of his brothers and sisters in and outside of his parish.” He looks forward to continuing to teach Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults classes, but is open to serving wherever God wills.

Sanchez-Garcia and his wife, Julie, have been married for 32 years and have three children. They have been members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Vista for about 19 years.

GREGORY SETTELMAYER  
Our Mother of Confidence Parish, San Diego

Gregory Settemayer already was attending Mass regularly and was even involved in ministry to the homeless, but a Cursillo weekend convinced him that he had yet to “practice my faith to the fullest.”

Settemayer began meeting regularly with his fellow Cursillistas and, through that involvement, was led to become a prison ministry volunteer at R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility in Otay Mesa and to bring the Interfaith Shelter Network program to his parish.

“I am ready for whatever You want me to do next in my life,” Settemayer prayed one Sunday after receiving Communion. Seemingly in response, Deacon Scott Wall stopped the Settemayers on their way out of the church, saying that he wanted them to meet with the director of the Office for the Permanent Diaconate. Initially “somewhat reluctant,” the couple accepted that invitation.

“I have come to realize God doesn’t call the righteous but the sinners, and He shows us the path in His time and in His manner,” said Settemayer, who works for the U.S. Navy as a civilian in a research/development command and, in late February, retired from the U.S. Navy Reserve. “So, by the grace of God, the door to ordination has been opened for me to be a servant of Christ.”

Settemayer and his wife, Suzanne, have been married for 27 years and have four children. They have been members of Our Mother of Confidence Parish since 1996.

Nine men will be ordained as permanent deacons at a Mass to be celebrated by Bishop Robert McElroy on June 18, 10 a.m., at St. Thérèse of Carmel Church.

The Mass will be live-streamed through sdcatholic.org.
Two El Centro Parishes Merge

By Roman Flores

EL CENTRO — Years in the making, El Centro’s two Catholic parishes have now officially united under a new banner: “Our Lady of the Valley.”

The diocese’s Presbyteral Council approved the merger on May 10, the diocese announced. The decision combines St. Mary and Our Lady of Guadalupe, their respective chapels, and St. Mary’s School into one parish under the name, Our Lady of the Valley. The name replaces “El Centro Catholic.”

“The idea is it’s one parish with two campuses, or three if you include the school,” said Father Mark Edney, the pastor of the unified parish.

Father Edney said both churches will remain open and Mass times will not change, but there will be documents establishing a new parish jurisdiction, in Church and civil law.

“Day-to-day, people aren’t going to notice much difference because we’ve already been doing everything together,” he said.

The merger “gives the Catholic people of El Centro a stronger identity and mission, which is to be a force for good in their family and community,” he said.

“It enables us to join forces, have greater numbers of volunteers and helpers, combining our human and financial resources to advance our mission,” he added.

The unification means the pastoral and finance councils for each church will combine into one pastoral council and one finance council for the new parish, Father Mark Edney said.

Since these councils have a limited number of seats according to diocesan policy, fewer individuals will be involved in the new parish’s leadership. Each new council, however, will have equal representation from individuals who previously served in each of the former church councils.

Father Edney said the two churches had been holding joint events, RCIA, confirmations, First Communions, and catechesis (religious education for children) since he became pastor of El Centro Catholic in 2015, with some programs being unified as early as 2013. Many joint events ended with the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020, however.

“We’ve worked on this a long time, and it’s been very noticeable that people feel comfortable going from one church to another,” he said. “I think it’s a good sign of unity in a divisive world.”

Some parishioners agreed that the merger was an opportunity to come together.

Juan Cortez, who attends Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, said she hopes that the merger doesn’t lead to fewer Masses in Spanish, however.

Currently, each church offers one Sunday Mass in Spanish. Additionally, Our Lady of Guadalupe offers a bilingual Sunday Mass at 5 p.m. and one Spanish-language weekday Mass at 5 p.m. on Fridays.

“I don’t understand much English, only a little bit,” she said in Spanish. “There are a lot of people here who don’t know English, and during the week they don’t come because there is only one Mass in Spanish.”

Cortez said she hopes there will be more offerings in Spanish at Our Lady of Guadalupe. If that were to happen, she said more Spanish-speakers who have left to attend other churches would come back.

Yvonne Burgun, who has attended St. Mary’s for a long time, saw the upside to the merger, “but you still get some people wanting it to be the way it was.”

“It makes us stronger,” she said of the merger. “You kind of have to get used to it.”
Where do we learn how to relate to one another? To express ourselves? Where do we experience protection, security and love for the first time? Where do we face feelings of abandonment, sadness and fear for the first time? Where do we hear about God, about what is transcendent, about the great mystery?

In the heart of the family, we learn by modeling, repetition of behaviors and time. That’s what builds habits, customs and beliefs in the newly born. The routines at mealtimes, breastfeeding, baths, bedtime, prayer. Those first expressions, the tone of voices, the joy or tension in the air. Everything affects and shapes this new human being.

It’s only by having the opportunity as adults to examine the history of our life that we can recognize how these first experiences have marked it. Without being aware of how radically key our role is as fathers and mothers at the beginning of our children’s lives, we continue to repeat and transmit unhealthy behaviors and values that dominate societies of our time: individualism, separation, isolation, apathy, injustice and war.

If we feel the crisis in our world, it’s because the family also is in crisis. To recognize this reality and not deny it gives us an opportunity to see the potential that family offers to renew humanity. That’s the central message of Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation “The Joy of Love.”

During the week of June 22 to 26, we’re invited to join the celebration of the 10th World Meeting of Families. On this occasion, due to travel restrictions and the pandemic, it will be celebrated simultaneously in Rome and in all local Churches across the globe. In our diocese, we will celebrate families with a special event on Sunday, June 25, at the Pastoral Center.

This event has an explicit pastoral intention: to recall, re-energize and revive family life. It’s a call to transform ourselves and to act. It’s not a formality to check off on our calendars; rather, it’s an invitation to come together and support one another in the task of valuing, reviving and protecting family activities. We must do these concrete activities regularly, such as prayer, attending Sunday Mass, visiting the grandparents, going on picnics, and volunteering to distribute food. If we fail to adequately prepare ourselves to do them, we will set ourselves up to fail, and that’s not an option in the hard reality that we live in.

We have to begin by recognizing the fear and anxiety that we feel in our family life, the disappointment and frustrations that accompany us. We have to create an environment of trust and fraternity to be able to share what is in our hearts. Support and prayer groups can help us in this process. These Marriage and Family Life ministries already exist in our parishes and at the diocese, we don’t have to invent them.

When we recognize and see with compassion what’s happened to our family life, and what we yearn for, we begin to feel an inner peace. It’s not about pretending to be something we’re not, nor doing something we don’t believe in. We draw strength from our weakness because we accept that we cannot change alone. From the depth of our abyss, we cry out to the Lord, asking for His guidance and strength, turning ourselves over to His mercy. That is the gift of faith that our parents gave us in our families.

We can begin today. We can begin to consciously nourish the human and spiritual formation of our families. We can seek help, tapping into the ministries that serve our community. We can humbly open ourselves up to the love of our God, expressed through Jesus and present in the Holy Spirit, which is unconditional.

**Changing World Starts Today with Your Own Family**

**Associate Director, Family Life & Spirituality**

**Ricardo Márquez**

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**In the heart of my Mother, the Church, I will be love.**

–St. Therese of Lisieux
Hispanic Ministry Leaders Seek to Build Bridges

WASHINGTON — More than 400 Hispanic ministry leaders participated in the 6th National Catholic Congress Raíces y Alas, which had as a theme “Prophetic Voices: Being bridges for a new era.”

They gathered April 26 to 30 to discern and develop pastoral initiatives to serve the growing, diverse, Latino Catholic population. An estimated 40 percent of Catholics today are Latino in the United States, while more than a majority of Catholics ages 18 to 29 are Hispanic. About two-thirds of the faithful at the San Diego Diocese are Latino.

Participants focused on four priority areas: family, young adult ministry, social justice and pastoral formation.

On “Advocacy Day,” they met in person or virtually with their state’s senators to lobby for comprehensive immigration reform and call for a bipartisan solution.

Five from the San Diego Diocese attended: Bishop Robert McElroy; Chancellor “Marioly” Galván; Rodrigo Valdivia, vice-moderator of the curia; Aida Bustos, media director; and Leo Fonseca, social media manager.

TESTIMONIAL: Participants in the National Catholic Congress Raíces y Alas held a press conference April 27 at the Capitol to pray for immigrants and call for immigration reform.

ADVOCACY DAY: Chancellor “Marioly” Galván, right, from the San Diego Diocese, met the staff of California Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

SPECIAL MASS: Linda Arreola, senior advisor at Catholic Relief Services, served as a lector during a Mass on April 27 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Am I Called?

Do I think about being a Brother, Sister or Priest?

Does the idea come to me often?

Does the idea scare me?

I SHOULD CONTACT
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Corpus Christi Procession to Kick Off Eucharistic Revival
The Diocese of San Diego is planning a Corpus Christi procession on Sunday, June 26, led by Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano.

The procession with a consecrated host will begin at 4 p.m. at Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Little Italy and end at St. Joseph’s Cathedral.

Corpus Christi, also known as the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, is a feast held to celebrate the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The upcoming procession represents the local launch of the U.S. bishops’ nationwide Eucharistic Revival. The revival was inspired by a shocking Pew survey that revealed widespread ignorance among Catholics about the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist. The results showed that 69 percent of self-identified Catholics believed that the bread and wine at Mass are not transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, but are merely symbols.

The three-year revival, which will include a variety of local and national events, will conclude with the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in 2024, which is expected to bring together tens of thousands of U.S. Catholics.

Last fall, the San Diego Diocese launched its own initiative to promote the Eucharist at all of its parishes. It included special homilies and a detailed explanation of the rituals of the Mass, all delivered in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

More information about the National Eucharistic Revival can be found at eucharisticrevival.org.

‘Summer Sips Social’ to Support Trafficking Survivors
Children of the Immaculate Heart, a San Diego-based nonprofit that serves survivors of sex trafficking, will host its “Summer Sips Social” fundraiser on Saturday, June 11.

It will be held from 6:30 to 9 p.m. in the courtyard at St. Ephrem’s Maronite Catholic Church, located at 750 Medford St. in El Cajon.

Deacon Marvin Threatt of Christ the King Parish will deliver a talk on the theme “A New Awakening in the Holy Spirit,” and a special guest speaker will talk about trauma recovery.

The evening also will include live music, heavy appetizers, desserts, and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Proceeds from the event will benefit Children of the Immaculate Heart’s plan of sex trafficking, will host its “Summer Sips Social” fundraiser on Saturday, June 11.

Students Reflect on Vocations in Essay Contest
For the last 25 years, Serra International–San Diego, in conjunction with the Diocese of San Diego, has sponsored an eighth-grade essay contest on vocations.

This year’s 10 winners were: Lilly Awad, St. John the Evangelist; Giovanna Barroso, The Nativity School; Faith Beltran, St. Gregory the Great; Jameson Brown, School of the Madeleine; Kisha Encarnacion, St. Kieran; Aidan Guerrero, St. Rita; Charlie Sawaya, St. Columba; and Anna Williamson, Good Shepherd.

Along with their relatives, teachers, principals, and friends, the winners were invited to an awards presentation May 5 at the diocesan Pastoral Center. Each winner received a certificate and an engraved Bible.

For more information about Serra International–San Diego, email Dianna Pacheco at Diannapach@hotmail.com and visit Serraus.org or Serraisernational.org.

Do Prison Ministry from Home with Correspondence Course
Do you feel called to prison ministry, is it possible to answer that call from the comfort of your own home?

Volunteers are needed for a ministry that involves sharing their life experience anonymously with men and women in California prisons who are seeking to restart their lives. Volunteers guide incarcerated individuals as they are enrolled in correspondence courses on parenting, anger management, and 12-step addiction recovery.

For more information, email eereichert@gmail.com or call (619) 203-8973.

Anti-Death Penalty Poetry Contest Open to Young Catholics
Young Catholics are invited to enter the Catholic Mobilizing Network’s Justice & Mercy Poetry Contest.

Catholics ages 18 to 30 are invited to submit an original poem about the injustice of the death penalty. Winners may receive up to $1,000 in cash, and the first-place winner will be invited to read his or her award-winning poem at the Catholic Mobilizing Network’s 13th anniversary celebration on Oct. 10, 2022, at the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See in Washington, DC.

Submissions will be accepted until Tuesday, May 31, and are limited to one poem per person. Formal, rhyming or free verse poems are welcome.

For more information, visit catholicsmobilizing.org/poetry-contest or email emma@catholicsmobilizing.org.

Faith and Fun
The San Diego Diocese’s deacons invite the community to help pack meals for impoverished children and families during the Million Meal Event they are hosting the weekend of June 11 and 12 at Cathedral Catholic High School.

The packing will be done in three uplifting, fun sessions, each about two hours long. The deacons invite parishes, organizations, and families to bring teams of volunteers. The meals will be sent to Casa de los Pobres in Tijuana and to the Philippines and Africa. Call Deacon Mike Daniels for more information at (858) 361-1240; you can register at sdcatholic.org/millionmeals, where you can also make a donation.
450+ San Diego families helped every year.

You make it possible.

It’s not up to somebody else. Now more than ever, you have the power to make a real impact. Your ongoing support means a roof overhead and food on the table for hundreds of families in need. Help our neighbors leave homelessness behind.

SIGN UP FOR MONTHLY DONATIONS TODAY.
neighbor.org  |  (619) HOMELESS (466-3537)

Father Joe’s Villages