

THE SOUTHERN CROSS

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On Holy Ground

Pages 10-11

PILGRIMAGE: Transitional Deacon Christopher Bongato and eight other seminarians from the Diocese of San Diego took a three-week trip to the Holy Land in January, including to Jerusalem. The deacon shares this journey, in which the Gospel stories came to life for him, with the paper's readers.



Synod Survey

Sacramental life of the Church gets highest score in diocese's synod survey. **Page 3**



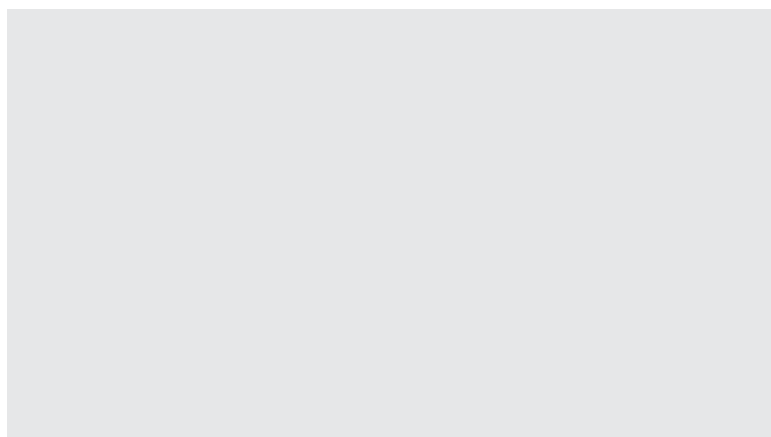
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Christ the King Church's weathered bell tower demolished. **Page 7**



Having a Ball

Team sports an invaluable part of Catholic education. **Page 8**





Welcome, Lent

Stations of the Cross, 40-day prayer vigil for the unborn, and caring for the environment among ways local Catholics are observing the Lenten season.

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The Diocese of San Diego runs the length of California's border with Mexico and serves more than 1.3 million Catholics in San Diego and Imperial counties. It includes 98 parishes, 49 elementary and secondary schools, Catholic Charities and various social service and family support organizations throughout the region. It also includes five historic sites, the most well known of which is the Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá, the first mission established in California by St. Junipero Serra in 1769.

MORE FOR YOU

This colored triangle indicates that we have more content related to a particular story in our digital edition, **thesoutherncross.org**, including photos, videos, and at times an extended version.



Diocese Considering Bankruptcy

The Southern Cross



Cardinal Robert W. McElroy has announced that

the San Diego Diocese may consider filing for bankruptcy to ensure that its assets are used to equitably compensate survivors of clergy sex abuse for the terrible wrongs done to them.

He made the announcement in a letter sent to pastors on Feb. 9 (see below). He met with them that same evening, along with members of parish finance councils.

The cardinal noted that, in 2019, the Legislature passed and the governor signed AB 218, a bill that revived all claims involving the sexual abuse of minors and created a three-year window for filing a lawsuit, Jan. 1, 2020, to Dec. 31, 2022. This was the third time the Legislature had voted to reopen the statute of limitations. A fourth bill has been introduced this year.

The law applied equally to individuals and institutions and to public and private organizations. This includes schools and universities, youth organizations, state and local governments and to all religious organizations, including the Catholic Church.

During that three-year window, about 400 lawsuits were filed against the diocese. The oldest claim involves an accusation from 1945. Two-thirds of the claims involve allegations that took place roughly 50 to 75 years ago, between 1945 and 1975. None of the accused priests are currently in ministry; only three are still alive.

No claims involving diocesan priests are alleged to have taken place in this



STAFF MEETING: Cardinal Robert McElroy announces that the diocese is considering bankruptcy.

century.

"This reflects the reality that the Church has taken enormous steps to root out the sexual abuse of minors in its life and to promote the protection of minors," Cardinal McElroy said in the letter.

"Still, the diocese must face the staggering legal costs of responding to these new lawsuits," the letter said.

In 2007, the diocese entered into a Master Settlement Agreement with 144 survivors — all that were before the court at the time — for \$198 million, an average of nearly \$1.4 million per person. If the 400 or more claims in 2023 were settled for a similar amount of money, the cost would exceed \$500 million."

The diocese simply does not have the assets to go to trial or settle the new claims, making bankruptcy a likely option to pursue, the cardinal said.

The cardinal said that a filing for Chapter 11 reorganization bankruptcy would be made solely by the diocese and would not include the parishes and Catholic schools, whose assets are held in their own individual cor-

porations.

To protect themselves from future lawsuits, however, parishes may want to contribute to the cost of a diocesan settlement. If the diocese chooses bankruptcy as an option, parishes (and parish schools) will have their own attorneys to represent their interests, separate from any attorneys hired by the diocese.

Donations to the Annual Catholic Appeal (ACA) are for specified purposes, specifically Catholic schools, faith formation, Catholic Charities and clergy formation and support. All ACA contributions are maintained in a separate ACA-designated bank account to only be used for their designated purposes.

The Catholic Community Foundation of San Diego and Catholic Charities are separate corporations and will not be affected by a diocesan bankruptcy.

A decision on a potential diocesan bankruptcy won't be made until this summer.

Cardinal Robert W. McElroy, bishop of the Diocese of San Diego, issued the following letter on Feb. 9 to pastors:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Three years ago, the California state Legislature lifted the statute of limitations for lawsuits regarding the sexual abuse of minors. This provided three years for individuals to come forward with legal claims that they had been sexually abused. As a result of this change in the law, the Diocese of San Diego has received approximately 400 suits seeking monetary damages for alleged acts of sexual abuse by priests, religious and laity in the diocese. The majority of these suits concern actions that took place more than half a century ago.

One important aspect of these lawsuits is that none of them claim sexual abuse by any priest of the Diocese of San Diego currently in ministry. This reflects the reality that the Church has taken enormous steps to root out the sexual abuse of minors in its life and to promote the protection of minors.

Still, the diocese must face the staggering legal costs of responding to these new lawsuits. In 2007, the diocese paid out \$198 million to settle 144 claims of abuse that been brought during an earlier lifting of the statute

Diocese of San Diego

Robert Cardinal McElroy



of limitations. This depleted most of the assets of the diocese. Even with insurance, the diocese will not be able to pay out similar sums now. This challenge is compounded by the fact that a bill has now been introduced into the Legislature that seeks to eliminate the statute of limitations entirely, leaving the diocese vulnerable to potential lawsuits forever.

For all of these reasons, we may be facing a moment where the diocese enters into bankruptcy in the coming months. Bankruptcy would provide a pathway for ensuring that the assets of the diocese will be used equitably to compensate all victims of sexual abuse, while continuing the ministries of the Church for faith formation, pastoral life and outreach to the poor and the marginalized. It would also provide a fund for future claimants of sexual abuse who have not filed a claim. Finally, bankruptcy would pro-

vide a conclusion to the tide of lawsuits covering alleged abuse as long as 75 years ago.


The parish assets have been held in recent years by individual parish corporations, and before that they were held by the diocese in trust for each particular parish community. Almost without exception in other diocesan bankruptcies, parish assets have remained separate. At the same time, parishes in a diocese undergoing bankruptcy typically contribute some limited monies to the funds for claimants.

The sexual abuse of minors by priests and the way it was handled in the life of the Church constitute the greatest sin of our Church in the last century. We must and will continue to protect minors with ever deeper vigor, provide healing resources to those who have been abused, and use our diocesan assets to compensate those who were victimized. And we will never forget the harm that we have done.

I ask your prayers for our diocese, our parish communities, and especially all victims of sexual abuse in the coming months. May God's grace be with us profoundly in this challenging time.

Diocese Releases Results of Synod Survey

By Aida Bustos

 The San Diego Diocese has released the results of the electronic survey it conducted last fall in San Diego and Imperial Counties as part of its consultation of the faithful.

A total of 27,670 answered at least one question in the survey, with 22,000 completing it. That’s a sufficiently large sample size to provide a valuable demographic snapshot of parishioners and their views and faith practices in the diocese, according to the two professors who analyzed the results.

The sample allows “Church officials to tailor interventions and programs to the area of greatest need,” the professors wrote in their report. “In an era of diminishing resources, this information should prove enormously helpful.”

The survey was the second part of a listening phase the diocese held last year as part of a worldwide, multi-year consultation of Catholics, called a synod.

The diocese began the action phase in January. Using the synodal process, pastors are to use the findings from the listening phase, including the survey results for their particular parish, to develop goals that they can implement in the short term to revitalize their community.

The goals of the synod are to promote a culture in the Church of listening to one another respectfully, of inclusiveness and participation, and of rootedness in the Eucharist and the Word of God, according to Cardinal Robert W. McElroy.

To foster that culture, the diocese held 1,100 small-group sessions at parishes, schools and other sites across the diocese last spring where participants expressed their joys, disappointments and hopes for the Church.

Eight themes emerged from those sessions, which engaged around 11,000 individuals:

- The Sacramental Life of the Church
- Community Life
- Priestly Ministry
- Issues of Youth and Young Families
- Church as a Pathway to God
- Anger at the Clergy Sexual Abuse Scandals
- Synodal Statements
- Inclusiveness and Acceptance vs. Doctrinal Strength

To hear from more people and to understand their views more profoundly, the diocese conducted an electronic survey from Sept. 6 to Nov. 29 in English, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Two professors from the University of San Diego with expertise in designing surveys and analyzing data, Fred Galloway and Robert Donmoyer, helped the diocese in this process.

For the survey, they developed three related statements for each of the eight themes and asked respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. They calculated an overall score for the three related statements; this be-

The Five Survey Statements with the Highest Average Score	
<i>1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree</i>	
Participation in the celebration of the Sacraments (such as Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick) is an important part of my life.	MEAN 3.46
The cover-up conducted by some bishops, rather than individual cases, was most disappointing.	3.30
Participating in my parish community draws me closer to God.	3.28
I feel welcomed and included in my parish community.	3.25
The Church needs to communicate with the Gospel in contemporary ways to youth and young adults.	3.23

The Five Survey Statements with the Lowest Average Score	
<i>1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree</i>	
If I stopped participating in my parish I would be missed.	MEAN 2.60
Individuals should be excluded from the sacraments based on their moral conduct.	2.62
The Church listens.	2.70
Inclusiveness and acceptance in the Church are more important than strictly following the Church’s rules.	2.72
My parish does a good job of drawing younger people into a greater faith in God.	2.79

came their score for that theme.

In addition, the survey asked demographic questions and questions involving some aspect of their faith.

The professors conducted a series of regression analyses that looked at the extent to which the demographic factors collected in the survey might explain variation in the themes.

They summarized takeaways from their analysis in a report, which the diocese released on March 1. (It’s published online at sdcatholic.org/synod.)

Who took the survey?

Of 27,670 individuals who answered at least one of the survey questions, 89% took the survey in English, followed by 10% in Spanish and 1% in Vietnamese.

From a gender perspective, women were overrepresented among respondents compared to men (60.1% vs. 37.3%) and were also a bit older than the survey’s male respondents, with the average age for women at 52 and for men 49.

The sample was also well educated, with almost 73% of respondents having at least some college and slightly less than one in four having earned a graduate degree.

Most respondents were also married (59.1%), with 22.2% never married and 13.4% either widowed, divorced, or separated.

From a racial and ethnic perspective, the two largest groups of respondents were White (38.3%) and Hispanic (33.6%), followed by Filipino at 11.1%, Vietnamese at 3.1%, Multiracial at 2.6%, Other Asian at 1.6%, and Other at 1.2%. The other four categories (Native American or Alaska Native, Black

or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern or North African) had 1.0% or less representation.

Nearly 96% of respondents considered themselves Catholic. More than two-thirds of respondents (67.8%) reported attending Mass weekly, while 9.7% reported attending Mass daily. There was a strong preference for attending Mass in person, with 87.7% of respondents selecting that choice versus 12.3% of respondents who preferred Mass virtually in the future.

When asked to rate their relationship with God and then the Church on a ten-point scale where higher numbers are associated with stronger feelings, their relationship with God was somewhat stronger than with the Church (7.12 versus 6.96).

Key Findings

The results provided valuable information church leaders can use to respond to areas of greatest need, the report said. In fact, pastors will have results specific to their parish.

The data from the survey is a rich base of information that can be analyzed in countless ways in the future.

The scores for all eight themes were narrowly clustered around the number representing “agreement,” which suggested that most respondents agreed with the statements that made up the themes.

Despite this overall agreement, some scores were higher than others. For instance, the two highest scores were for the Sacramental Life of the Church and Community Life themes, both largely involving personal decision-making.

“The respondents found immense

grace in the sacramental life of the Church and in the deep sense of community and shared belonging they find in their parishes and organizations,” Cardinal McElroy said in a letter announcing the survey results.

In contrast, the two lowest-scoring themes involved things controlled by the Church, such as listening, achieving a deeper level of participation from members, and balancing inclusiveness and acceptance with doctrinal strength, the professors wrote.

The lower score for the Inclusiveness and Acceptance vs. Doctrinal Strength theme suggested that respondents felt strongly on both sides of the debate, the report said.

That did not surprise Cardinal McElroy.

Inclusion “is a very difficult, polarized area within our own society and it’s true within the life of the church,” Cardinal McElroy said Feb. 3 on the “Jesuitical” podcast.

Several statements stood out to the professors for their inferential value.

“While respondents felt welcomed in their parish community and enjoyed participating in events that brought them closer to God, survey participants’ responses suggest more work is needed to draw younger people into the Church,” the professors wrote.

One way to do this, according to survey participants, is to communicate the Gospel in more contemporary ways.


When respondents were asked if they could change one thing in their parish, 29.9% selected helping to spread the faith, followed by 23.4% who chose outreach to the marginalized. In order, the next three responses were about making their parish more welcoming (20.5%), better homilies (13.6%), and less emphasis on money (12.6%).

The regression part of the analysis revealed several factors that helped explain some of the variation in the scores of the themes. For example, age was a factor for all eight themes, with older parishioners generally having more traditional values than younger ones.

From a racial and ethnic perspective, Hispanics, Filipinos, and Vietnamese consistently displayed the same attitudes as older parishioners with one important exception: They supported more inclusion and acceptance rather than siding with the relative importance of Church doctrine.

And the professors generally found that the more educated a respondent was, the less likely they were to agree with the statements involving the sacramental life of the Church, community life, church as a pathway to God, issues of youth and young families, priestly ministry, and synodal statements, and more likely to agree with anger at the clergy sexual abuse scandals and the importance of inclusion and acceptance vs. doctrinal strength.

Find the complete analysis of the survey findings at sdcatholic.org/synod.



Stations of Cross Events

The Southern Cross



On Good Friday, April 7, there will be two opportunities for

families to gather outdoors in downtown San Diego for a unique observance of the Stations of the Cross, opportunities that also allow them to witness publicly to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

The 30th annual Good Friday Walk with the Suffering will be held that morning, and the 18th annual Good Friday Pro-Life Stations of the Cross that afternoon.

The Walk with the Suffering will commence at 8:30 a.m. It will begin and end at the San Diego Rescue Mission, located at 120 Elm St. Free parking will be available at the San Diego Rescue Mission's parking structure on Second Avenue.

Costumed students from Cristo Rey San Diego High School will act out the various stations. The three-hour event will include stops at nine sites, where representatives from different organizations that serve the needy will lead prayers and offer reflections on issues that cause suffering in San Diego. Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano will be among those leading prayers.

"The purpose of the walk is to help us reflect and pray for those who suffer because of poverty, human trafficking, lack of access to health care, hunger,

lack of affordable housing, and other issues," explained its coordinator, Rosemary Johnston.

She said the event is "a great form of evangelization" because people see the public display and are reminded what day it is.

The Good Friday Pro-Life Stations of the Cross, led by Bishop Bejarano, will begin at noon that same day. Participants will meet at 11:45 a.m. and depart from the east side of St. Joseph Cathedral, at the corner of 4th and Beech, walking in procession toward the Edward J. Schwartz Federal Building at Front and Broadway.

"The Pro-Life Stations of the Cross reflect on parallels of the suffering and execution of Jesus, who was innocent, with the suffering and death of the innocent unborn, who are made in the image and likeness of God, through abortion," said the event's organizer, Roger Lopez. "We pray for compassion for the innocent unborn and their mothers who suffer from abortion."

The procession will include the Knights of Columbus color guard, altar servers, clergy, Bishop Bejarano, and hundreds with Catholic and pro-life signs.

For more information on the Walk with the Suffering, call (619) 384-6852 or email jnstn.rsmry@gmail.com.



For information on the Pro-Life Stations of the Cross, contact the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice at (858) 490-8323.

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Workshop on Dating and Marriage on March 11

By Denis Grasska

An upcoming workshop on dating and marriage, led by certified relationship coaches Raphy and Sara Feolino, will be held on Saturday, March 11, at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish.

The event will run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., with a social to follow.

The Feolinos, who are married and live in Las Vegas, are the co-founders of Journey to Marriage, an organization that seeks to prepare couples for holy and healthy marriages. They are also the hosts of the podcast “Journey to Marriage — Catholic Dating & Relationships,” which can be heard on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

This will be the Catholic couple’s second speaking engagement in the Diocese of San Diego, following a well-received installment of Theology on Tap last October.

Hosted by the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, the workshop will be open to all young adults, ages 18 to 39, both single and married.

The Feolinos will deliver three talks during the workshop. The first will invite attendees to visualize the type of person they need to be to build the future and relationship they want. The second will explore what healthy communication looks like. The final talk will address conflict-resolution



ATTENTIVE: Young adults listened with rapt attention to relationship coaches Raphy and Sara Feolino during a Theology on Tap presentation Oct. 25 at Good Shepherd Parish. The couple will lead a dating and marriage workshop March 11 at St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish.

and the setting of boundaries.

Maricruz Flores, director of the Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, said the interest in a workshop like this became apparent when the Feolinos’ Theology on Tap presentation filled to capacity the parish hall at Good Shepherd’s.

“A lot of people, especially those who are single, were affirmed that they’re not alone in ... trying to figure out their vocation,” Flores said of the earlier event.

She said that she and her team observed young adults taking notes and

listening with rapt attention as the Feolinos spoke.

“I think that’s the longest we’ve stayed after an event, because everybody wanted to talk to Raphy and Sara,” Flores said.

Brilema Perez, associate director of the Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, said that a record-setting 200-plus young adults attended that Theology on Tap session. She said the upcoming workshop is a follow-up to that event and will tackle the same topic in more depth.

After the workshop, there will be an

opportunity for singles to “meet and mingle” over hors d’oeuvres and wine, she said. At the social, attendees will be able to apply lessons learned at the workshop to a real-life situation, “to practice having a conversation (and) getting to know others.”

The cost to attend the workshop is \$35 per person or \$60 per engaged or married couple. Lunch will be provided.

To register for the Dating and Marriage Workshop, visit sdccatholic.org/event/dating-and-marriage-workshop.



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Watch a brief
video about
the program



Teen STAR Workshop Offers Innovative Sex Ed

By Denis Grasska



Teen STAR helps youth and young adults “come to terms with their emerging sexuality and fertility” and to make “responsible decisions.”

Founded by Dr. Hanna Klaus, Teen STAR is an acronym for “Sexuality Teaching in the context of Adult Responsibility.” The developmental curriculum has been taught to middle and high school students in more than 30 countries since 1980 and may soon be coming to San Diego.

The diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality is hosting a four-day workshop for anyone interested in being trained as a Teen STAR instructor. The training will be held March 16 to 19 at John Paul the Great Catholic University’s Student Life Center in Escondido.

“Our kids are bombarded with contradictory and confusing messages about what it means to be human, while at the same time not receiving adequate body education and awareness,” said John Prust, director of the Office for Family Life and Spirituality, explaining the need for something like the Teen STAR curriculum.

He noted that one of the challenges teens face is learning to accept themselves.

“A big part of that acceptance is coming to terms with one’s body and what it might tell us about God’s dream

for us and our lives,” said Prust. “In other words, how we are being called to love one another the way God loves us through these incarnate bodies God has given us.”

He expressed hope that Teen STAR will take root in San Diego.

“By training a batch of instructors, I hope that Teen STAR can become another important tool in our family life education toolbox,” he said. “Teen STAR has tremendous potential to impact the lives of our youth for the better, but the only way to find out is by giving it a shot and seeing if/how the Holy Spirit has a

plan for it in San Diego.”

Deacon Santiago Molina, of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Fla., is executive director of Teen STAR USA. He said the program fills a need by offering “a more holistic — and holy — view of our bodies and who we are” than young people can find in the media.

“We include the five major factors that make the human person: physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual,” he said.

Deacon Molina will be one of the presenters at the workshop, where he will be joined by Sally Ivers, a Teen

STAR board member, and Suzanne Spence, Teen STAR’s Western Regional Rep. He said that participants can expect a “pretty intense” schedule that will include presentations, discussions, videos and group interaction. At its conclusion, attendees will be prepared to teach the curriculum in youth groups, confirmation classes, schools and other settings.

Spence gave a presentation on Teen STAR during the Diocese of San Diego’s Family Life Education Curriculum Fair last September at Our Mother of Confidence Parish. She contrasted the curriculum with other programs that promote chastity.

Many are based on “telling teens what or what not to do,” said Spence, a registered nurse by profession. But Teen STAR embraces “a personal growth model” through which students come to recognize the value of sexuality in the process of learning about themselves.

“I most hope that the introduction of Teen STAR in San Diego will usher in a new era of understanding, respect for, and communication in the area of human sexuality between parents and educators with the teens under their care,” she said. “I want others to experience a growing confidence in our young people to ‘handle’ this new-found information to make good decisions in the area of sexuality ... despite the many challenges they face. As a Teen STAR instructor, I have seen it for myself.”

MORE INFORMATION

Find information about the program at teenstar.org.

The cost to attend the training is \$300. Scholarships are available.

For additional information and registration, visit




[sdcatholic.org/
event/
teen-star-training](http://sdcatholic.org/event/teen-star-training)

18th Annual Good Friday

Pro-Life Stations of the Cross

April 7, 2023
12:00-1:15 p.m.

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Parish Tower Gone with the Wind (and Rain)

By Denis Grasska



Recent storms accelerated the deterioration of

Christ the King Church's bell tower, and it had to be demolished.

The pastor, Father Tommie "T.J." Jennings, was alerted by a staffer in early December that the cupola atop the 60-foot bell tower was noticeably tilting away from the 75-year-old church.

A general contractor, Grace Builders, Inc., inspected the damage Dec. 27 and determined that the cupola was about 4 inches out of plumb. The situation worsened and, with neighbors now voicing concern, the parish had the contractor return on Jan. 4; the cupola was an additional 3 inches out of plumb.

Another inspection on Jan. 6 revealed that the problem was not limited to the cupola; the entire tower was beyond repair.

"They went up in there and brought me a piece of wood, and it just crumbled in my hand," Father Jennings said.

From Jan. 4 to Feb. 3, yellow caution tape restricted access to much of the area around the tower.

For parishioners' safety, all parish Masses were relocated, beginning on Jan. 5. The 8:30 a.m. Sunday Mass and weekday Masses moved to the parish hall, while the more heavily attended Spanish-language Sunday Masses were celebrated under canopies in the parking lot. The church reopened for Masses on Feb. 4.

Traffic on 32nd Street, between



UP AND AWAY: The cupola atop Christ the King Church's bell tower, damaged by age and inclement weather, was removed Jan. 27. The rest of the tower was demolished from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2.

COURTESY CHRIST THE KING PARISH

Commercial Street and Imperial Avenue, was shut down on Jan. 26 and 27 for the removal of the cupola, which was taken down Jan. 27 with a crane and boom lift.

"There were people with tears in their eyes when they saw the cupola being removed, because it's so much a part of the identity of this area and this church," Father Jennings said.

Demolition of the remaining tower took place from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2.

The final cost, from the initial inspection of the cupola to the removal of all debris, is expected to be about \$48,000.

Christ the King Parish plans to launch a capital campaign to fund the construction of a new bell tower, and it is continuing to raise money to pay off the demolition.

Father Jennings said that, according to estimates, the cost of a new tower will exceed \$100,000.

In addition to the construction of the new tower, Phase 2 will also include repairs to the exterior of the office building, the floor of the parish hall and the courtyard, as well as a remodel of the restrooms.

Online donations at ctksandiego.org can be earmarked for "Tower Reconstruction."

Amidst recent challenges, Father Jennings has maintained his sense of humor.

He recalled with a chuckle that, prior to the demolition, he had invited Cardinal Robert W. McElroy to visit "the Leaning Tower of CTK (Christ the King)," dubbing it "the eighth wonder of the world" and saying that he would charge \$10 for admission.



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Team Sports Pick up at Catholic Schools

By Denis Grasska



Not all learning happens inside the classroom.

Some of it takes place on the soccer field, on the basketball court, and on both sides of a volleyball net.

“Our mission as Catholic schools is to educate our children in mind, body and spirit; sports encompass all three,” said Mike O’Neal, coordinator of two of the three diocesan sports leagues for local Catholic elementary school students.

O’Neal, who is also a P.E. teacher at the School of the Madeleine, coordinates both the Catholic Sports League of San Diego and the Center City-South Bay League. In addition, there is a North County Parochial League, directed by Marc Clevenger.

Student-athletes throughout the diocese are wrapping up the winter sports season, which begins in January and ends between late February and mid-March, depending on the sport.

In both the Catholic Sports League of San Diego and the North County Parochial League, that means girls soccer and boys basketball, both for grades 5 through 8, and pee-wee soccer for kindergarten through fourth grade. The Center City-South Bay League is offering girls volleyball and boys basketball, both for grades 5 through 8, and pee-wee soccer for kindergarten through fourth grade.

The pee-wee division is subdivided by grade level. Fifth- and sixth-



GOOD SPORTS: Catholic school students, like these from St. Pius X School in Chula Vista, have many opportunities to participate in team sports.

graders play on their school’s junior varsity team, and seventh- and eighth-graders on varsity.

O’Neal said it’s difficult to “put an exact number on how many kids participate.”

“If you look at just the (Catholic Sports League of San Diego) pee-wee soccer division, we have 86 teams this year,” he said, “and, with nine players playing on the field at a time for a team, that alone is almost a thousand participants.”

Kristin Klant, principal of Santa Sophia Academy in Spring Valley, said that about 55% of her school’s students are on a team. When the fall and spring seasons are taken into account, the percentage of participating students rises to 70% and encompasses

football, softball, basketball, volleyball, soccer and track.

How does participating in team sports benefit students?

“It improves physical and emotional wellness,” said Klant. “Additionally, kids work on important character traits such as work ethic, teamwork and preparation that translates to success in the classroom.”

Clevenger, who spent 25 years as a P.E. teacher and athletic director at St. Michael’s School in Poway, described sports as “an integral part of a Catholic school education.”

He said, “I would even go so far as to say that parochial sports are one of the pillars of the Catholic school experience. ... Memories made on the field and on the court last a lifetime.”

Diocesan school sports were suspended in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and remained unavailable into the following year.

Ron Smith, athletic director at Mater Dei Catholic Elementary in Chula Vista, recalled the COVID-related hiatus as “a challenging time.”

“Students’ energy did not decrease because of the pandemic, and all of the skills and excitement that sports and athletic competition bring was put on hold,” he said. “This culminated in anxieties, restlessness and disappointment.”

“I could see how much the return of sports meant to the students because of the high level of excitement for athletics,” he continued. “We went from about 40% of our students participating in sports to about 60%. Our numbers are the highest they have ever been, and the excitement to be around sports has never been higher since my time starting.”

For the winter season, Mater Dei has 32 boys altogether on the junior varsity and varsity basketball teams, 48 girls playing junior varsity and varsity volleyball, and 91 children in pee-wee soccer.

Describing team sports as “one of the greatest mediums for socialization and mental health,” Smith said, “After our experience with the pandemic and intentionally separating, sports have given us a wonderful gift in creating connections, common visions, and supportive communities that uplift each other.”

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VIA DOLOROSA: Franciscans lead pilgrims, including the San Diego seminarians, at the Stations of the Cross in Jerusalem.

Story and photos by
Deacon Christopher Bongato



"We're finally going."

For two years the Diocese of San Diego, where I serve as a fourth-year seminarian, had been planning a trip to the Holy Land for those preparing to enter the priesthood. But the COVID-19 pandemic, political tensions in the region, and the ceremony in Rome to install Bishop Robert W. McElroy as cardinal delayed that pilgrimage several times.

That changed on Dec. 28, when the nine seminarians in our theology program and four directors who lead our formation took off for the three-week trip. We would visit holy sites for two weeks and then have a weeklong retreat, returning Jan. 21.

I experienced a mixture of relief, joy and excitement as our plane took off

for Tel Aviv. The Franciscan Pilgrimage Program organized the trip, which was led by Father Noel Muscat, OFM.

One of the appeals of attending the diocese's St. Francis Seminary, instead of one out of town, is having the opportunity to visit the Holy Land and Rome.

For me and most of the seminarians, this was our first trip to the Holy Land. Simply put, the Gospel came alive for us during that journey. In fact, many people call the Holy Land itself "the Fifth Gospel."

In particular, four sites inspired me to see my faith with new eyes: the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Sea of Galilee, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

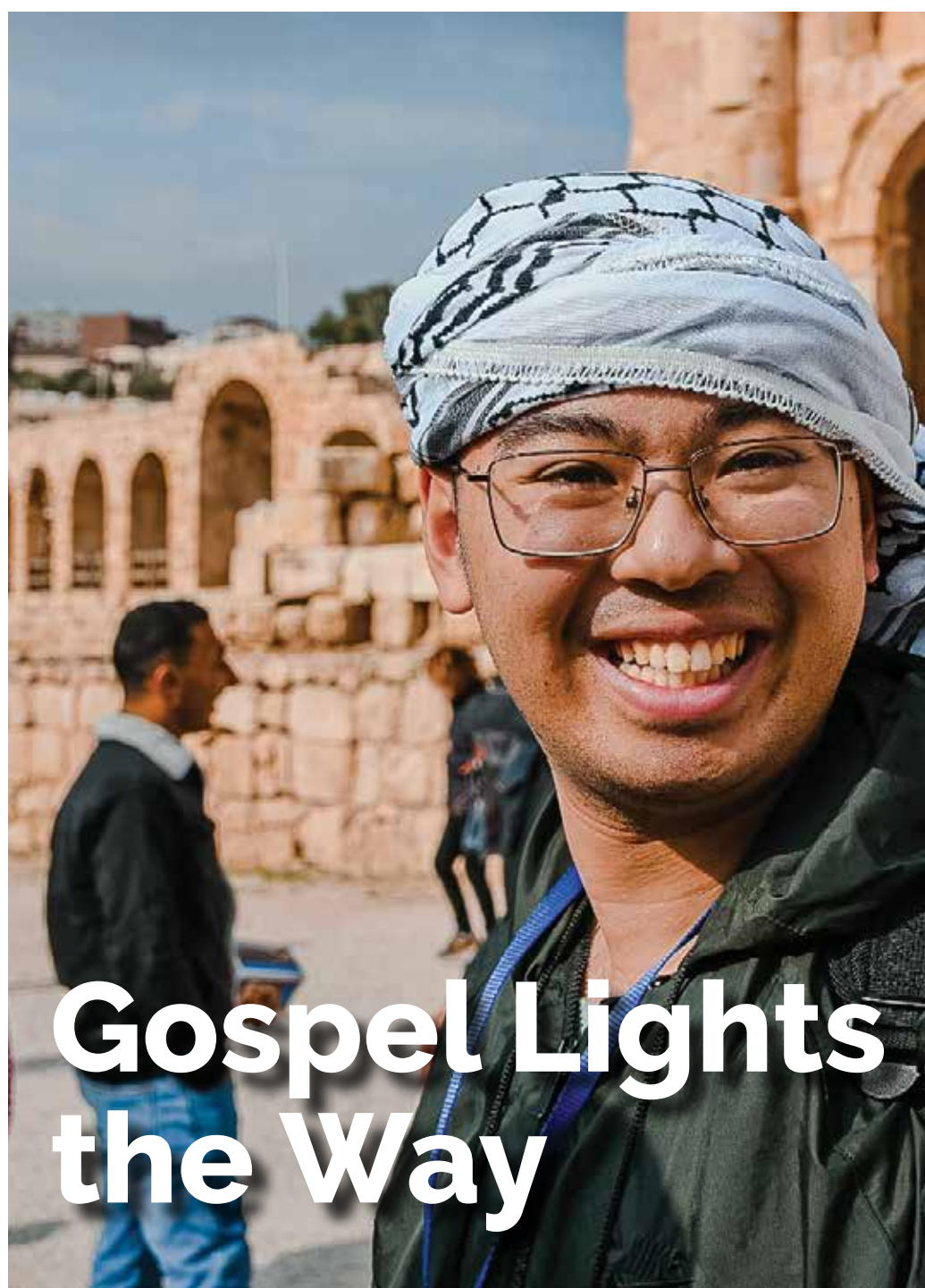
On Dec. 31, our group traveled by bus to the Church of the Annunciation, where a plaque inside a grotto on the main level of the church reads "Verbum caro HIC factum est" (The Word was made flesh HERE).

Masses are held there throughout the day. I had the opportunity to serve as a deacon at one of them. In the middle of the ceremony, the enormity of the message hit me, "The Word was made flesh HERE."

We were surrounded by many images of the angel Gabriel greeting Mary, depicted from the perspective of different cultures, all accentuating the point that Jesus entered into our humanity.

We were able to more deeply contemplate this moment later that night as we went around the church in a candle-lit rosary procession, praying the Joyful Mysteries. Jesus' life was just beginning to unfold in front of us as we moved with jet-lagged feet but open hearts.

On Jan. 2, we found ourselves at the Sea of Galilee, where we know Jesus crossed many times, called many people, preached, and performed many miracles. In comparison to other places, where grand churches were built over holy sites, the Sea of Galilee and the surrounding area have been mostly



Gospel Lights the Way

THRILL: Nine seminarians from the San Diego Diocese, including Deacon Evan Bui, experienced the joys of

preserved as it was in Jesus' time.

While on the boat in the middle of the sea, I could picture what the disciples and Jesus would have seen: the waves rocking the boat and the green hills beyond the water. In the middle of our boat ride, it became a bit more overcast, and the sea rougher.

Our large, sturdy boat navigated the waves with no problem, but I pondered how small the boat of the disciples must have been and the fear they must have felt amidst the bigger waves.

I looked up at the sky while laying down at the bow of the ship. I pictured Jesus in this same position, as He was during the Gospel account of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. I reflected on what His presence must have meant to the disciples then, and what His presence means to our Church and our own lives now.

How much peace do we have knowing Jesus is in the boat? For me, among the rocking waves, I felt the most peace I have felt in the longest time.

We visited — and experienced — so many memorable places.

We stopped at Cana, where Jesus performed His first public miracle, turning water into wine for a wedding feast. Some of us even picked up some wine nearby.

We traveled to Jordan, where we visited the capital of Amman; the ancient city of Petra; and the River Jordan, where we prayed in the space where Jesus was baptized. We visited Jericho, the Palestinian city on Israel's West Bank. We had the opportunity to swim in the Dead Sea, bordered by Jordan and Israel. We explored the



HONOR: Father Matt Spahr celebrates Mass at the Church of the Annunciation with Father Eric Tamayo, Deacon Christopher Bongato, and Father Noel Muscat, OFM.

MATTHEW VASQUEZ



visiting the Holy Land. Here, they explored an ancient site in Jerash, home to Greco-Roman ruins in Jordan

archaeological site of Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found nearby, and the town of Bethany. We attended Mass at many of these sites.

Our time in Petra and the desert terrain of Wadi Rum felt like a grand adventure in the movies as we trekked through landscapes featured in “Lawrence of Arabia” and “Indiana Jones.”

We traveled by 4x4 Jeep on ancient roads that were barely roads at all, but our tour guides knew where to go. They knew where to stop for shade and even for a break for tea. We stayed one night at a Bedouin camp, which allowed us to appreciate the beauty of the night sky and its importance for navigation, especially while traveling in the desert.

In Bethlehem, we arrived at the Church of the Nativity early in the morning. Since we just ended the Christmas season, the nativity was fresh in our minds as we said Mass in the Chapel of the Manger, which marks where Jesus slept as a newborn. We took our time to pray for families, as well as those who may have had trouble in childbirth, to hold on to the tenderness of Baby Jesus.

The last city we visited was Jerusalem, from Jan. 10 to 15, home to so many important landmarks. We were able to join a procession led by the

Franciscans through the Via Dolorosa, reliving the Stations of the Cross. Although we walked through loud marketplaces, we quietly contemplated how so many pilgrims had walked the same path and how much love Jesus has for His people.

Between sightseeing and praying, we had an amazing opportunity to meet with the Latin Patriarch of the city, His Beatitude Pietbattista Pizzaballa. In a private audience, he explained to us the faith situation in Israel.

The patriarch shared the work being done in his diocese to serve the Catholic faithful, who represent less than 2% of the population there. And he told us about the work being done carefully and diligently to promote interreligious dialogue.

This conversation allowed us to more deeply understand the complex political and religious situation in the region, even among the different Catholic Rite Churches or Orthodox Churches that maintain the holy sites (such as Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Armenian Rite).

One place this was apparent was at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which encompasses Calvary, or Golgotha, where it is said Jesus died on the cross, and the tomb where He was buried and resurrected. Although not noticeable at first glance, parts of the Holy Sepulchre are maintained by different Christian churches.

During the day, it's packed with so many people that we could barely squeeze in a few moments at these holy sites. At night, however, groups of between 30 to 50 people are allowed in. We were able to join one of these groups and had an amazing opportunity to pray for four hours. Although it may seem like a long time, to me it didn't. I prayed for all those who asked me to pray for them back home.

Three of my brothers and I were ordained transitional deacons in December. I'm sure we all said a prayer of thanksgiving for the joy of this vocation we have been called to, as well as a prayer for strength in the midst of hardship to move forward to become holy priests. I have contemplated Jesus' death and resurrection many times, but this made it so much more real for me.

I think from all that we learned, saw and experienced in the Holy



RITUAL: Father Noel Muscat, OFM, and Sister Kathy Warren make the sign of the cross with the water from the River Jordan.

Land, what matters most to me is how much more Christ revealed Himself in my heart.

We got to know Jesus more intimately and understand His true calling for us as we traveled to the places where He ate and slept, where His disciples ran in fear, and where they ultimately followed Him.

The pilgrimage was a chance to live the Gospel stories firsthand. I was able to hear Jesus' call to me, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of Men.”

Chris Bongato is a transitional deacon in the Diocese of San Diego. He is expected to be ordained to the priesthood this June.

See a photo gallery
of this trip at
[thesoutherncross.org/
pilgrimage](https://thesoutherncross.org/pilgrimage).



PILGRIMS: Seminarians and their formation leaders explored Wadi Rum. From left to right, Deacons Evan Bui, Matthew Vasquez and Marc Gandolfo; Father Noel Muscat, OFM; seminarians Brian Frulla and Kyle Schanzenbach; Father Garrett Galvin, OFM; seminarian Anthony Jimenez; Laura Martin-Spencer; seminarian Sean Embury; Sister Kathy Warren; Father Matt Spahr; seminarian Jesse Lopez; Father Eric Tamayo; and Deacon Christopher Bongato.

National Competition for Hymn About Eucharist

The Southern Cross



From 13th-century St. Thomas Aquinas to contemporary

singer-songwriter Sarah Hart, many have tried their hand at writing a hymn about the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic Revival Musical Competition, recently launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Evangelization and Catechesis, is giving others a chance to join their ranks.

"The mystery of the Eucharist is expressed particularly poignantly through the beauty of poetry and music," said Marilyn Santos, associate director of that secretariat. "Congregational song unites us as a community and reminds us that we are one Body of Christ."

Catholic composers, poets and songwriters may submit creative entries in a hymn-writing category and a theme song category to give a fresh voice to the truths of the Catholic faith.

Award-winning submissions will be featured at the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, used in liturgies and events marking the ongoing Eucharistic Revival in dioceses nationwide, and receive a \$2,500 cash prize.

Submissions will be accepted through April 21; the entry fee is \$25. Entries can be in English, Spanish or other language. They will be evaluated for poetry, musicality, creativity,



theological and doctrinal soundness, beauty, appropriateness for liturgical use, and expression of the mission of the Eucharistic Revival. Especially sought are texts expounding on the doctrine of the Real Presence of Jesus and expressing Catholics' unity as the Body of Christ.

A panel of expert judges will choose a winner for each category to be announced on June 9.

The National Eucharistic Revival, which began last June on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, is a multi-year

initiative by the U.S. bishops to reinvigorate devotion in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. A highlight will be the National Eucharistic Congress, held July 17 to 21, 2024, which is expected to draw more than 80,000 Catholics.

"The Musical Competition is just the beginning of a number of initiatives on the horizon for the Revival in 2023 that celebrate the beauty and mystery of the Eucharist," said Tim Glemkowski, executive director of the National Eu-

charistic Congress, Inc., an organization established to plan the 2024 event in Indianapolis. "Beauty is the mark of a loving God, and we are excited to see creative expressions from talented Catholic artists that embrace the beauty of Christ and give new light, color and voice to the truths of our faith."

The revival was prompted by a shocking Pew Research Center Survey released in August 2019, which showed that only one-third of U.S. Catholics believe that the bread and wine at Mass are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Noreen McInnes, who directs the Office for Liturgy and Spirituality in the Diocese of San Diego, said the national revival is important because it seeks to help Catholics understand "what a gift and a blessing the Eucharist is in our lives, (and) to make sure that it's revered and appreciated."

Noting that the San Diego Diocese is home to many talented liturgical musicians, McInnes said she would be happy to see a local Catholic win the competition.

"I would encourage everyone to sit down and give it a try," she said. "The Holy Spirit inspires ... all of us."

Does she plan to take her own advice? Yes.

"I'm going to try to write something. It's a wonderful opportunity to make time to pray and reflect on the Eucharist."

For information and guidelines, visit eucharisticcongress.org/musicalcompetition.



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Parish Ready to Hit High Note with Choir Concert

By Denis Grasska



The St. Thérèse of Carmel Choir has been rehearsing for its spring concert since last summer.

It is that important.

Previously an annual parish tradition, the concert hasn't been held since the scheduled 2020 concert was canceled in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Father Christopher Tozzi, pastor, said the cancellation was "a heavy blow" to the parish, but the upcoming concert is generating "a lot of excitement ... that we're getting back to our 'normal.'"

The choir, accompanied by a chamber orchestra and a guest organist, will perform French composer Gabriel Fauré's "Requiem in D minor, Op. 48." The concert will begin at 3 p.m., Palm Sunday, April 2, in the parish church and will be followed by a reception in the plaza.

There is no cost to attend, though a free-will offering will be accepted.

"We're very excited to be bringing back our parish tradition of spring concerts, and I know the choir is really looking forward to it," said the choir's director, Catherine Marshall, who has served as the parish's director of music since November 2021.

The all-volunteer choir, which can be heard every Sunday at the 9 a.m. Mass, is an impressive group.

Marshall, who also directs the par-



BEAUTIFUL MUSIC: The St. Thérèse of Carmel Choir, seen in this file photo, will perform Gabriel Fauré's "Requiem in D minor, Op. 48," on April 2 — its first spring concert since the pandemic.

ish's youth and young adult choir and its children's choir, noted that presenting Fauré's Requiem at a professional level "is, musically, very difficult for your average music ministry."

But the choir, which first performed it in 2008 at its inaugural spring concert and again in 2011, is up to the challenge.

Many in the choir have degrees in music, and various members have sung with the San Diego Master Cho-

rale, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Santa Fe Pro Musica, and the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, and at such venues as Carnegie Hall; the Queen's (now King's) Chapel of the Savoy, London; and the Vatican.

"They're a great group, and they're very serious musicians," said Marshall, who earned a bachelor's degree in Music from UC Santa Barbara and will complete her master's at San Diego State University this spring.

Father Tozzi said the choir "has always striven for — and achieved — nothing short of professional quality." He described it as "a gift ... that we want to share, not only with our parishioners, but with the entire community."

In addition to its musical talents, the St. Thérèse of Carmel Choir is notable for its diversity. Collectively, its 30-plus members hail from about 10 different countries, speak 13 languages, and are accomplished in their professions.

The choir members include a university professor, two medical doctors, two lawyers, two airline pilots, an internationally renowned cancer researcher, and an international wine judge.

A requiem is a musical work intended to accompany a Requiem Mass, or Mass for the dead. Marshall said that Fauré's is "very much focused on mercy, and consolation, and a peaceful depiction of the afterlife." For concert-goers, she said, the performance will serve as "a peaceful entry into Holy Week."

She hopes that the audience will leave with a positive experience of a type of music that's "not what people ... are listening to on a daily basis."

"Every time people experience this type of beauty, it can be kind of surprising in a way that draws them closer to the Lord."

For more information, contact the parish office at (858) 481-3232.



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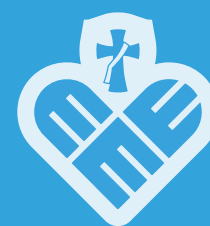
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Tireless 'Warriors' Pray to Save Just One Life

By Denis Grasska



The 40 Days for Life campaign's website proudly states that 22,829 lives have been saved, 132 abortion facilities have closed, and 247 abortion facility workers have quit their jobs as a direct result of the campaign.

But for those on the campaign's front lines, those who participate in the continuous prayer vigils held for a period of 40 days twice a year, just one life saved, one mind changed, or one heart touched can be enough of a reward.

The spring campaign began on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 22, and will run until Palm Sunday, April 2. People around the world are taking part in prayer vigils in front of neighborhood abortion facilities, including at eight locations in San Diego and Imperial counties. (For the nearest location or to sign up for hours, visit 40daysforlife.com.)

Vicki Whitmire, campaign coordinator for the El Cajon location, has been involved with 40 Days for Life for more than 12 years, after first hearing about it in a pulpit announcement at her parish.

Reflecting on the experiences she has had as part of the campaign, she recalled an encounter with a young woman, who was crying as she left the Planned Parenthood facility. The woman told her that she was pregnant but didn't think she would keep the



PRAYER LIFE: Supporters of the pro-life cause participate in a local prayer vigil for 40 Days for Life in this file photo. The spring campaign runs from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday.

baby. Whitmire gave her a smile and a hug and said, "You are a mom!"

"Through her tears, she smiled and laughed," Whitmire said.

After a brief conversation, Whitmire convinced the woman to come with her to a nearby crisis pregnancy center, where she was able to hear her baby's heartbeat and speak with a nurse

about getting the help she needed.

Whitmire recounted another memorable experience: As she was praying outside the clinic, a large pick-up truck "aggressively" veered off the road; the driver jumped out and approached her. She braced herself for something terrible, but then the unex-

pected happened.

The man knelt down near her pro-life sign and prayed aloud, "God, I am a sinner. I have done many bad things in my life like this. I ask you to hear the prayer of this woman and save the babies." Whitmire began to cry; the man, crying as well, got to his feet and gave her a hug.

"Without saying anything else, he left just as soon as he came," she said. "It was an amazing affirmation."

Stella Seebold has been a "prayer warrior" in front of the El Cajon Planned Parenthood since 2018, when a few older parishioners asked her for a ride to the abortion facility to pray.

Seebold felt inspired by the dedication she saw among 40 Days for Life participants.

"I was touched by their passion for defending and witnessing of their faith," she said. "Some ladies had mobility issues, but they still came."

Over the years, Seebold has found the 40 Days for Life community to be "a close-knit pro-life family ... that cares (for) and loves the mother and her baby."

She recalled an incident about two years ago, while she was praying outside Planned Parenthood. A woman approached her, saying that her daughter was on her way to get an abortion.

"(I) just really prayed hard that the pregnant daughter would change her mind," said Seebold. "I continued to

Save Continued on Page 15

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Save *Continued from Page 14*

pray for her and wondered how she is doing. A few weeks later, the same woman came to talk to me and said her daughter is keeping her baby. During the next (40 Days for Life) campaign, the woman stopped by and was joyfully talking to one of the prayer warriors about her grandbaby."

Eduardo and Alma Reyes are the coordinators of the Escondido-based 40 Days for Life campaign. They have served in that role since the fall of 2021.

Their connection with 40 Days for Life began about two years earlier through Alma's volunteer work with Lamb of God Maternity Home in Escondido. She and her husband would attend 40 Days for Life prayer vigils, ready to share the maternity home's open-adoption resources with any women who might be persuaded not to choose abortion.

After doing this for a while, Alma Reyes said she and her husband felt God "knocking" at their hearts to start a 40 Days for Life campaign in Escondido.

One of the beautiful things she has experienced at 40 Days for Life is that it's not only Catholics participating, but members of Protestant denominations as well.

"It's just been wonderful to see the Body of Christ come together," she said.

Alma Reyes said that pregnant women have changed their minds about having an abortion after seeing people praying outside, perceiving that as "their sign from God telling them to choose life."



SHOW OF SUPPORT: Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano prays the rosary in front of an abortion facility, alongside participants in a 40 Days for Life campaign.

"Sometimes we're standing out there, it seems like we're not making a difference," she said, "but when we get a comment like that, it's like, wow! We don't know whose life we're touching, but what we know is there's been an impact when we get that kind of feedback."

Reyes has this message for those who might be considering joining 40 Days for Life: "We're all tools in God's toolbox, and it's on us to let Him use us to save a life. ... Come out and pray on the sidewalk, because you never know when God is going to use you."

Recalling St. Teresa of Avila's fa-

mous quote that Christ has no hands or feet on earth now but ours, Whitmire said, "God really does need us on that sidewalk to be His witness of love, showing the world that the lives of babies and moms matter so much that we are willing to take time out of our busy day to stand here — in the hot, cold, rain — for whatever it takes to save just one life and change just one heart."

For more information,
visit 40daysforlife.com.



Guest to Visit '40 Days for Life'



EL CAJON — The public sidewalk outside the Planned Parenthood-El Cajon Health Center is one of eight local sites where prayer vigils are being held as part of the 40 Days for Life campaign.

Ramona Treviño, outreach director for the 40 Days for Life national organization, will be visiting the location at 12:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 8. The abortion facility is located at 1685 E. Main St., El Cajon 92021.

Treviño was the manager of a Planned Parenthood in Sherman, Texas, until 2011, when the prayers and public witness of a 40 Days for Life campaign inspired her to leave her job. Her resignation resulted in her former center going out of business. She is the author of "Redeemed by Grace: A Catholic Woman's Journey to Planned Parenthood and Back."

The spring campaign of 40 Days for Life began on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 22, and will end on Palm Sunday, April 2. Millions of people around the world are engaging in prayer and fasting during the same 40-day period, the centerpiece of which is a continuous, peaceful prayer vigil in front of a local abortion facility.

For more information about 40 Days for Life, including nearby vigil locations and how to sign up for a time, visit sdcatholic.org/40daysforlife.

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Single-Use Plastics—the Thing to GIVE UP This Lent!



By Christina Bagaglio Slentz



Each year, Lent offers us the opportunity to change our habits by sacrificing something or by committing to doing something positive. The real challenge, however, comes with Easter as we are invited to new life: Do we return to our old ways, or do we become something more? And perhaps most importantly, how does this change our relationship with Jesus, who has redeemed us?

Creation Care Ministry is calling all Catholics in our diocese this year to give up or reduce use of what are known as “single-use” plastics. We’re hoping that this habit sticks! How might this transform your relationship with the Lord? Read on to learn about the harmful impact plastic pollution is having on the most vulnerable and how your actions can make a difference while enriching your faith life.

Pervasive Plastics and the Limits of Recycling

Let’s first acknowledge that plastic, a human-made material, was created to do good, and there are still many good things made of plastic, such as airbags, medical equipment and bike helmets. Unfortunately, more than half of the plastic produced is used only one time, hence the name, “single-use plastics,” or SUPs.

While “rigid” plastic labeled with the “chasing arrow” symbol is accepted by many waste-collection services in the San Diego region, much of the recycling process does not happen here. Instead, about one-third of U.S.-collected plastics is exported, predominantly to developing Asian markets, where this work is not well regulated. The result is overflowing landfills, which pollute the water and release harmful gases into the air. These landfills are overtaking the marginalized places where the poorest in these countries struggle to live.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, plastic use has more than doubled since 2000, with only 9% of plastic waste recycled in 2019. Some 19% was incinerated, a process that releases greenhouse gases as plastic is made from fossil fuels. While 50% went to “sanitary landfills,” the remaining 22% was dumped into uncontrolled sites or sent to informal burn pits, jeopardizing the health of those living nearby. On

Purchasing Is a Moral Act

Because plastic decomposition takes almost half a millennium, there really is no such thing as throwing plastic away — it must go somewhere. Recognizing some plastic has become quite necessary and some plastic is NOT recyclable, every purchase we make that includes plastic carries a consequence, calling for careful discernment. Pope Benedict XVI argues, “It is good for people to realize that purchasing is always a moral — and not simply economic — act. Hence the consumer has a specific social responsibility, which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise.”



There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting that directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or carpooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity that brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.”

— Pope Francis, “*Laudato Si*”

many of the small island states, where plastics are dumped, expanding landfills combine with sea-level rise, eliminating livable terrain and pulling trash out into our oceans.

As we shift away from oil and gas, fossil fuel companies are expected to increase their plastic production. Experts predict plastic waste that finds its way into our waterways will double and possibly triple by 2040. When plastic breaks down in the ocean, marine life is endangered, often becoming entangled in the pieces. As this process continues, plastic becomes even more pervasive as decomposition takes over

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400 years, causing significant damage to God’s creation. Scientists have found microplastic remnants in our soil, water, air and even humans. In fact, in June 2022, the National Institute of Health published a study finding microplastics in human breastmilk, affecting the lives of our tiniest sisters and brothers!

What Can You Do?

This Lent, RE-volutionize your habit, starting simply with single-use plastics. Here are some suggestions for giving up SUPs:

- **RE**turn to old ways: Much of what we can do is what our grandparents and great-grandparents did all the time!
- **RE**fuse single-use plastics whenever possible. Take cloth bags to the grocery store for bagging produce.
- **RE**duce purchasing plastic items or items with excessive plastic packaging. Try to buy whole foods and cook from scratch.
- **RE**use when you can’t avoid.
- **RE**peat this message to your friends and family.
- **RE**sist SUPs in restaurants or other establishments and explain your preference for non-plastic items such as to-go boxes, straws, cups, etc.

During Lent, we are called to **RE**pent, or **RE**think. We cannot change the past, but we are always called to become something new. Pope Francis says when we do these little daily actions “for the right reasons,” out of love for our brothers and sisters and in an effort to care for the gift of creation, we demonstrate “an act of love which expresses our own dignity.” Taking on a sacrifice or special commitment during Lent is meant to draw us closer to Jesus by inviting Him into our everyday life. Why not use the pervasiveness of plastic as a ubiquitous reminder of our call to be in relationship with our Lord?

sdcatholic.org/creation



Send pictures of your family or parish taking on this “Giving Up SUPs Challenge” to cslentz@sdcatholic.org. We will post them on our Facebook and Instagram accounts.



Day Center for Homeless Opens in El Centro

By Sharon Burns



EL CENTRO — The “grand opening” is still months away, but Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego's new day center is already serving homeless men and women in this city.

The day center had a soft launch on Feb. 15 and, six days later, Catholic Charities CEO Appaswamy “Vino” Pajanor and others from the diocese traveled from San Diego to tour the facility.

Catholic Charities broke ground on the day center on Aug. 30, 2021, but its opening was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and supply-chain issues.

The organization has operated homeless shelters in Imperial County for decades, said Pajanor, who became aware in recent years of the “the lack of a day center for the unsheltered or unhoused, for both men and women.” He explained that homeless individuals sometimes “are not ready to move from being unsheltered to being sheltered in permanent housing.”

“We welcome people as they are,” he said. “The day center is a place where they can come and see what Catholic Charities has to offer. This



WELCOMING: Catholic Charities opened a day center in El Centro that will provide wraparound services for homeless men and women, the only one of its kind in the Imperial Valley.

is open to all, just like being Catholic means being universal, the day center will also be universal.”

The 4,997-square-foot modular building is located just behind Catholic Charities' offices at 250 W. Orange Ave. It is now open seven days a week, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Within its first week, it had already served 24 homeless individuals.

The center is the first of its kind in

the county. At the day center, homeless individuals can eat, do laundry, take a shower, use the restroom, and receive wraparound services. These include case management, through which referrals are given to address specific needs, such as mental health, assistance in finding a job, substance-abuse services and disability benefits.

Pajanor calls the day center a “one-stop shop” and a respite from the heat

or cold. He said it will “create a relationship, (get) a conversation going, that allows (people) to think about what they can do to get away from the streets.”

When someone enters the building, he said, there is an intake desk for them to sign in and record what services they need, giving Catholic Charities a “snapshot” of what they are looking for. As an example, Pajanor said, a client might need a driver's license or training for a particular field.

The day center building was made possible through a partnership with Imperial County and funding from a \$5-million Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) grant, Pajanor said. Funds also came from Imperial County and the City of El Centro.

However, there are financial gaps that still need to be filled, he said. Both volunteers and donations, including clothing and food that is reaching its “best by” date, are welcome.

“We are trying to leverage all the time and talent ... from the good souls here in Imperial County,” Pajanor said.

More information about the day center is available by phoning (619) 323-2841.



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News Briefs

Men Invited to Join 'Rosary Crusade'

The Men's Rosary Crusade began in Poland, when a Polish priest led the men of his parish onto the public streets to pray the rosary and give witness to their faith.

It quickly spread throughout Poland and to many countries, including Ireland and Australia.

The Men's Rosary Crusade came to San Diego last August. All men are welcome to participate at 9 a.m., every first Saturday of the month, at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Laurel Street in Balboa Park. The rosary intentions are for reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the conversion of America, for families and for the unborn.

The next gathering will be on Saturday, March 4.

For more information, email sdrosarycrusade@gmail.com or call/text (619) 909-3194.

'Eucharistic Transformation' Coming to Two Parishes

The Diocesan Commission for Filipino Catholics and the parishes of St. Mary's (National City) and Good Shepherd will present "Eucharistic Transformation" with Father Jerry Orbos, a priest of the Society of the Divine Word.

Father Orbos will celebrate the 5 p.m. vigil Mass, Saturday, March 4, in St. Mary's Ortmann Center (located at 707 E Ave., National City 91950). He will also celebrate

the noon Mass, Sunday, March 5, at Good Shepherd Parish.

Following both Masses, there will be meditation and songs by Fatima Soriano; an inspirational talk by Father Orbos; catechetical ministry for the sick, including Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, a general healing prayer over the people, and imposition of the brown scapular; and a book signing.

The event is being offered in honor of the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines and the U.S. bishops' National Eucharistic Revival.

For more information, contact Yola Arguilla (St. Mary's) at (619) 245-3285 or Cenon Crisostomo (Good Shepherd) at (858) 774-0169.

Retreat Offers Healing After Abortion

The Rachel's Hope ministry is offering a professionally-led After-Abortion Healing Retreat for Catholic and Catholic-friendly women.

It will be held from Friday, March 10, to Sunday, March 12, at the diocesan Pastoral Center. There will be a closing Mass.

The cost to attend is \$60; partial scholarships are available. The group size is limited. Confidentiality will be maintained. Housing is available, if needed.

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

Briefs Continued on Page 19

Priest Assignments

The following has been announced by the Office of the Cardinal: **Father Lucio Castillo, OMI**, as associate pastor of Most Precious Blood Parish, effective Feb. 1.

Father David McNamara, CSsR, as associate pastor of St. Michael Parish, Poway, effective Feb. 1.

Father Jesús Valenzuela, FSSP, as associate pastor of St. Anne Parish, effective Feb. 15.

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2023

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- MINISTERS OF THE WORD
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Saturday, November 4, 2023

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

Saturday, April 29, 2023
Saturday, July 29, 2023
Saturday, November 11, 2023

SACRISTAN TRAINING

Saturday, April 29, 2023
Saturday, November 11, 2023

Scan to register



Registration: www.sdcatholic.org/workshops

Briefs *Continued from Page 18*

Rachel's Vineyard ministry is offering "A Time for Mercy," a post-abortion healing retreat, from Friday, March 10, to Sunday, March 12.

Open to women and men, the retreat offers a safe place to renew, rebuild and redeem hearts broken by abortion. Rachel's Vineyard retreats are confidential and non-judgmental, offered in the Catholic tradition.

Early registration is recommended, as space is limited.

For more information, visit atimeformercy.org, call (951) 325-7702 or email RVTemecula@verizon.net.

Parish Holding Taizé Prayer Service

Holy Family Parish in Linda Vista will hold a multicultural Lenten Taizé prayer service from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., Saturday, March 11.

The meditative hour, held in a candlelit environment, will focus on healing and hope. It will include singing, Scripture and silence.

For more information, contact the parish at (858) 277-0404.

Theology on Tap Goes North

CARLSBAD — The diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry will present a new series of Theology on Tap.

It will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. on Thursdays, March 16 to 30, at St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Carlsbad.

The catechetical program brings together young adults, ages 18 to 39, for food, fellowship and a talk by a Catholic speaker.

The theme for the upcoming series is "Common Good, Common Home" and will focus on various areas of Catholic Social Teaching.

The scheduled talks will be given by: Dr. Victor Carmona, associate professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego, March 16; a panel discussion on the Culture of Life and dignity for all people, March 23; and Deacon Jim Vargas, president and CEO of Father Joe's Villages, March 30.

Admission each night is \$15, which includes street tacos and craft beer.

For more information, call (858) 490-8260.

Men Invited to 'Explore' Vocation

The Diocese of San Diego is hosting an Explorer Day for men who are interested in exploring a possible vocation to the priesthood.

The event will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday, March 18, at St. Francis Center for Priestly Formation, located on the campus of the University of San Diego.

To attend, pick up an application at your parish office or call Father Eric Tamayo at (619) 291-7446.

IVC Presenting 'Evening of Gratitude'

The Ignatian Volunteer Corps, a

Jesuit organization that provides community nonprofits with talented and experienced volunteers, will hold its annual Evening of Gratitude on Sunday, March 26, at St. Catherine Labouré Parish.

The evening will start with Mass at 4 p.m., followed by a dinner and awards presentation.

This year's honorees will include Jesuit Father Gregory Boyle, best-selling author and founder of Homeboy Industries, who will receive the 2023 Madonna Della Strada Award. The award is presented to a person or organization reflecting the Ignatian values of direct service to the poor and engaging in work that is dedicated to creating a more just society.

Lucy Howell, an IVC San Diego volunteer with multiple nonprofits, will receive the Sheila O'Malley Vision and Dedication Award. Named after the late Sheila O'Malley (1949-2016), it honors individuals who envision the growth of the IVC to serve people in need.

Registration details and payment options will be available at ivcusa.org/SanDiegoEOG2023.

All attendees will receive an autographed copy of Father Boyle's latest book, "The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness."

For more information, contact Curran Gaughan, IVC San Diego Director, at cgaughan@ivcusa.org or (858) 822-9814.

Working for the Church

Employment opportunities with the diocese are posted throughout the year.


Associate Director, Youth and Young Adult Ministry

The associate director works alongside the director of the diocesan Office for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, which supports parish youth and young adult ministry programs and leadership as they strive to meet the needs of youth (ages 14 to 17) and young adults (ages 18 to 39). Requirements include a bachelor's degree in Theology, Religious Studies or equivalent (master's preferred), and three to five years' experience in youth, young adult, or campus ministry.



Variety of School Positions


Schools across the diocese have many positions available, from principal to support staff.

For a more detailed description of these positions at the diocesan Pastoral Center, as well as other open positions at local parishes and schools, visit sdcatholic.org/diocese/administration/human-resources/employment.



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



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