



Faith Lifts Hoops Star

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ANDY HAYT

GIVING GLORY: SDSU Aztecs forward Aguek Arop is quick to thank God for His role in the team's journey to the national championships. Arop says that his Catholic faith is "the number-one thing" in his life.



Rome Sweet Home

Cardinal McElroy visits Rome parish entrusted to his care. **Page 2**



Great Expectations

Eighth-graders reflect on middle school, while looking forward to next step. **Pages 10-11**



Two in a Million

Fun and rewarding food-packing event to be held for second year. **Page 13**



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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.



When in Rome: Cardinal Takes Possession of Rome Parish

HOMEcoming: Cardinal Robert W. McElroy speaks with young members of the parish of St. Frumentius, his titular church in Rome, before formally taking possession of the church April 23.

By Cindy Wooden



ROME — Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego

apologized to a group of children in Rome for having forgotten most of the Italian he had learned as a student in their city.

But his promise to them, and their pledge to him in return, to build a relationship of prayer and mutual support were sealed with high-fives and a formal blessing, neither of which required the aid of a translator.

A short time later April 23, Cardinal McElroy formally “took possession” of their parish church, St. Frumentius, as his titular church in Rome, sealing his cardinal’s identity as a member of the clergy of Rome. In ancient times, the cardinals who elected popes were pastors of the city’s parishes.

“Today I come to you as a stranger, but on a deeper level, a brother through one faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ,” he told parishioners — in Italian and English — during his homily at Mass.

Just before completing the brief ceremony and celebrating Mass, Cardinal McElroy told *Catholic News Service* that, while serving as a member of various dicasteries of the Roman Curia is a concrete way for a cardinal to serve the universal Church, having a titular parish gives him a real connection with the Diocese of Rome.

Like many parishes in the Diocese of San Diego, “this parish has a significant outreach to the poor and marginalized,” the cardinal said. The outreach includes supporting a school and other projects in Mozambique, sponsoring a refugee family from Iraq, running a food bank, operating a nursery school for poor families, assisting victims of domestic abuse and operating a phone service to check on

elderly residents of the neighborhood and provide assistance when needed.

In his homily, Cardinal McElroy told parishioners he was pleased when Pope Francis assigned him the parish last August because it is “a vibrant community of faith.”

The parish in northern Rome, some 6,300 miles from San Diego, was established in 1968, and the church building was completed in 1985. It is named after St. Frumentius, a fourth-century bishop in Ethiopia, who was born in Lebanon.

Cardinal McElroy told parishioners that when he was in Lebanon in April, he visited the saint’s birthplace where there now is a shrine.

Father Marco Vianello, current pastor of the parish, concelebrated the Mass with Cardinal McElroy as did Rome Auxiliary Bishop Daniele Salera, who was pastor of the parish until being named a bishop 11 months ago.

Catholic News Service



United in Christ

Around 230 people, including 86 youth, converged in Calexico on April 22 for the diocese’s Imperial Valley Conference, at Vincent Memorial Catholic High School. They heard from a keynote speaker and attended workshops in English and Spanish, including two led by Victor Carmona, a theology professor at the University of San Diego.

Visit thesoutherncross.org/ivc2023 for details.

Athlete's Faith Is 'Number-One Thing In My Life'

By Denis Grasska

For many, the San Diego State University men's basketball team's season was nothing short of miraculous.

"God has been with us and stuck with us through it all," Aztecs forward Aguek "A.G." Arop acknowledged, reflecting on a historic season that saw the team make it to the NCAA Men's Tournament national championship game for the first time.

During those heady days, the 23-year-old's faith kept him grounded.

"It's the number-one thing in my life," said Arop, who will earn a master's in Homeland Security this December. "If it wasn't for my Catholic faith, I don't know where I'd be."

But it wasn't always that way.

Born in South Sudan, Arop was 1 year old when his family fled their war-torn homeland. After three years in Egypt, they were granted asylum in the United States. They settled first in Houston, Texas, before relocating to Omaha, Neb.

Arop's parents, both converts from Islam, instilled the Catholic faith in their children.

As a fourth-grader, Arop was enrolled at a Catholic elementary school, something that he credits with having "laid the foundation for my faith."

By high school, however, basketball had displaced church attendance as his priority and was taking up an increasing amount of his time. When he arrived at SDSU in the fall of 2018, he said, "I wasn't active in my faith at all."

At first, he excelled at collegiate basketball. But he was sidelined by a hip injury during his freshman year, which required surgery and a lengthy rehab. The next year, not long after making a full recovery, he injured his shoulder.

He coped with the disappointment by heading down "a dark path, mentally (and) spiritually," embracing a hard-partying lifestyle that made him feel good at first but was "really killing my soul."

Arop reconnected with his faith in early 2020, after accepting a fellow Catholic's invitation to Mass and Eucharistic adoration. He had "a big epiphany" at adoration, where he came to believe more deeply in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist.

Only a few weeks later, the COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdowns. But the period of social distancing turned out to be "a blessing" for Arop, who explained that it "took away all the distractions" and allowed him to focus on his faith.

"I grew a lot in the pandemic," said Arop, who in March of that year developed the habit of praying a daily rosary.

In early 2021, he found his basketball career threatened by yet another health challenge: He was experiencing



FRIENDS & FAMILY: Father Pedro Rivera, right, director of the SDSU Newman Center, is seen with Arop and Aleuliny Arop, parents of SDSU Aztec forward Aguek Arop, before the semifinal game in Houston April 1.

vertigo. Now, guided by his faith, he took his situation to prayer and discerned that God was asking him to give up basketball.

"It wasn't easy, (but) I was really able to let go of basketball, give it to Him completely. Then, He gave it back," Arop said, explaining that just prior to this historic season, he felt that it was God's will for him to take up the sport again.

Looking back, he perceives the divine wisdom behind it all.

"My worth was too tied into (basketball)," he said, and God wanted "to reorder my life and make sure that He was first."

Arop credits his successes during the recently concluded season to the fact that "everything was in its right place."

"He thought basketball was over for him and then, eventually, realized that God just wanted him to put God first, family and friends second, and basketball third," said Father Pedro Rivera, director of the SDSU Newman Center, who traveled to Houston to watch SDSU play in the national semifinals and national championship games April 1 and 3.

Jamie Cleaton, campus minister at the SDSU Newman Center, remembers "sitting, and praying, and talking" with Arop as he contemplated retiring from basketball two years ago.

"Aguek's story is a lot like the (biblical) story of Abraham, where he was asked to put his most precious thing on the altar and had to be willing to



AGUEK AROP

sacrifice it," he said. "But then, the Lord really showed His faithfulness and gave that back to him."

And not only was basketball restored to him, Cleaton said, but Arop's first season back on the court just happened to coincide with the team's championship run. He said that "has the Lord's fingerprints all over it."

Arop hasn't been as active at the Newman Center this year as he was last year, when he served as its co-president, but he continues to be a familiar face at daily Mass and adoration.

The involvement of one of their own made this year's historic basketball season even more exciting for the

Newman Center community, which held tailgate parties before some of the games. More than 20 members of the community, including Cleaton and Father Rivera, were in Houston for the championship game.

"Knowing A.G., and ... the journey he's been on, and to see this team make a run this year like they did," said Cleaton, "we all just felt very grateful that we got to share in it and witness it."

Father Rivera noted how, during his various media interviews, Arop "always thanks God and realizes that God is a big part of why he is where he is today, not just as a basketball player, but most especially as a man of faith."

"He definitely wears his faith on the sleeve," said Father Rivera, who shared that Arop's teammates had affectionately nicknamed him "The Pope."

"(One reason) that I'm glad that the season is over ... is that now we see him more at adoration and daily Mass," he said, "and it's good for the younger students here at the Newman Center to see ... that you can be quote-unquote famous like him and still be a good, practicing Catholic" who puts God first.

Arop said he is now "completely done with basketball" and has "no desire" to play at the professional level. As for what he'll do in the future, he is currently trying to figure that out.

"I trust God will lead me where I am meant to be."

PHOTOS COURTESY FATHER PEDRO RIVERA

Parishes Working to Respond to Faithful's Views

By Aida Bustos



Last fall, the diocese surveyed the faithful to

gather their views about what was most important to them in their faith, their parish and the greater Church. In April, pastors received information on how their own parishioners answered those questions.

Cardinal Robert W. McElroy has asked the pastors to use that information, along with the results of the small-group sessions held at their parishes last spring, to implement at least two initiatives or changes to address the concerns their parishioners had expressed.

The concept of inviting all community members to share their views, Church leadership listening to them, and then working together to bring about change is at the heart of a worldwide consultation, or synod.

Pope Francis launched that initiative in 2021, and the formal process is to conclude next year at the Vatican. However, the work of the synod — creating a welcoming, participatory culture at all levels of ministry — is to continue, with the goal being the renewal of the Church.

The San Diego Diocese began the action phase of the synod in January,



LISTENING: Imperial Valley Synod Commission members, including Father Mark Edney, pastor of Our Lady of the Valley Parish, and Jeanette Montaño, shared their views with members of the diocesan Pastoral Council on April 4 at St. Mary's Church in El Centro.

with pastors developing plans for their parish to respond to the needs identified by their parishioners.

Some parishes have already made changes. At Guardian Angels Parish in Santee, for instance, Father André Ramos agreed to have a Children and Youth Mass once a month, where youth serve as lectors, ushers, and sing in the choir. That's led to greater attendance at Mass by families and children.

One of the themes parishioners

will explore in the coming months as part of the synod is how they can become a Eucharistic community. That's a focus of the Catholic Church in the United States, which launched the National Eucharistic Revival last year "to renew the Church by kindling a living relationship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist."

Last fall, parishes across the diocese highlighted the Blessed Sacrament during a program presented at every parish. Later this year, the

faithful will be invited to gather at their parish, school or ministry to share their experiences when participating in the Eucharist.

At the diocesan level, several members of the diocese's Pastoral Council traveled to El Centro on April 4 to meet with the diocese's Imperial Valley Synod Commission. Cardinal McElroy chaired the meeting, held at St. Mary's Church, also attended by Auxiliary Bishop Ramón Bejarano.

The idea was to review together the results of the survey and for the council members to listen to the commission members' experiences, concerns and joys in serving the faithful in the Valley. Several council members proposed having their individual parishes work with Valley ones to jointly address the priorities expressed in the synod survey.

At the end of what he described as a "fruitful and enriching conversation," Cardinal McElroy announced that the two groups would aim to meet in person once a year to listen to one another.

More information:
sdcatholic.org/synod
and sdcatholic.org/sinodo.



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Sisters Deliver Compassion with No Borders

By Iliana De Lara



"A border is a transformational location, where you see with a different lens."

Sister Suzanne Jabro, CSJ, works tirelessly to make sure as many people as possible experience that transformation.

She is the founder and coordinator of Border Compassion, an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization that provides humanitarian aid to a shelter in Mexicali for immigrant families struggling to survive.

"You are there to learn," she said. "You are there to let them know that you care and that they are not alone."

Mexicali is across the border from Calexico, about three hours east of San Diego, and jammed with asylum-seekers. They arrive at the shelter exhausted and hungry. Many have endured months of grueling travel only to discover that crossing the border was not as easy as they had been told.

Sister Jabro invites faith communities, schools and nonprofits to participate in "Cross Over" events to visit the shelter, called Posada del Migrante, and help its residents.

In recent days, the shelter housed more than 300 people, mostly young families from Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Mexico. All said they fled their homes to escape violence, poverty and climate disasters. They planned to apply for asylum in the U.S. Some had waited for months to



JOYOUS: Sister Adriana Rebeca Zuro, SJS, joined the festivities for children at La Posada del Migrante in Mexicali on March 18 as part of a visit coordinated by Border Compassion.

talk to a U.S. immigration agent.

Last October, Sister Jabro invited religious women serving in the Diocese of San Diego to assist the migrants.

Many set out to collect donations for the shelter and invited family members, parishes and congregations to join the effort. They raised \$7,000 to cover food for the shelter and \$8,000 worth of humanitarian items, such as clothing, supplies, blankets and backpacks, according to Sister Jabro, all to be delivered in a Cross Over event on Feb. 23.

Sister Kathleen Warren, OSF, director of Women Religious at the dio-

cese, noted that 25 people planned to participate that day. A winter storm did not allow for travel across the mountains from San Diego to Mexicali, however.

The visit was rescheduled for March 18. This time, the San Diego group members were able to share a day with the shelter families. The orders represented included Poor Clare Sisters, Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, Sisters of Mercy, Religious of the Sacred Heart, Sisters of Providence, and Franciscans. The Blessed Sacrament sisters — who live in San Diego and Imperial counties and have a school in Mexicali — helped to coordi-

nate donations among all the entities.

The visitors served the residents a special meal and threw a fiesta for the children, complete with piñatas.

"It is a joy to have them visit," said Elizabeth Gallardo Hernández, the shelter's director. "There are people who have been here for seven months and are waiting for them."

Gallardo said the shelter would not be standing if it were not for Border Compassion.

"About 80% of the donations we have come from them," she said in a phone interview.

Members of the organization, a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, have been going to the shelter since 2021.

"Before, we couldn't offer (migrants) food; now, we can provide them with breakfast, lunch and dinner," the director said. "Before they came, we didn't even have electricity."

The sister reflected on the impact the visits have on the visitors and residents.

"When we leave, we are tired, and we carry a lot of their story and the pain. They, on the other hand, are exhilarated, their load is lighter."

Border Compassion seeks donations to help families at a shelter in Mexicali. Information:
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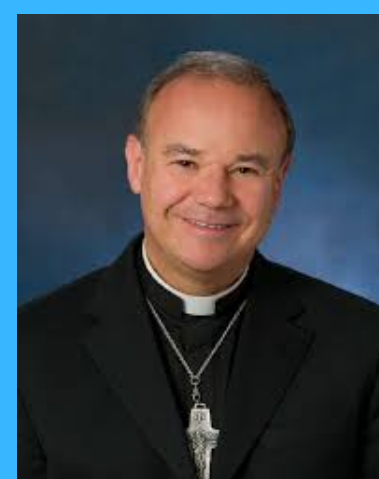
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All Invited to Joyous Pentecost Celebration

By Aida Bustos



The San Diego Diocese is inviting all faithful to its annual Pentecost Mass for All Peoples, "a beautiful visual expression of the universality in our local Church."

That's how Marioly Galván, the diocese's chancellor, describes the event, to be held on Saturday, May 27. The Mass, which has drawn more than 2,000 faithful in previous years, will be held at a new location, the spacious gym at San Diego Miramar College.

Cardinal Robert W. McElroy will again celebrate the Mass, which brings together more than 20 cultural Catholic communities present in the diocese. These include African, African American, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Hispanic, Indian, Irish, Italian, Native American, Samoan, Ukrainian and Vietnamese.

Afterward, there is an outdoor festival, complete with exhibits sharing the cultures' history and rites, a sampling of traditional food, and live entertainment.

"We are united in Christ, and we celebrate the birth of our Church ever so fervently more than 2,000 years later," said Galván.

The Mass opens with a vibrant procession of cultures, each represented by a handful of their members wearing their native attire. The liturgy features the faith traditions of various peoples,



FEAST: The diocese's cultural communities share their traditional fare at a festival after the annual Pentecost Mass for all Peoples, which this year will be held on May 27 at San Diego Miramar College.

accompanied by a choir composed of members from many cultures.

This year, the Mass will highlight neophytes, the newest members of the Catholic Church who were baptized at Easter Vigil.

"They have been invited to partake of this experience and grow ever more profoundly in the richness that our Church offers to all members," said Galván.

The Church worldwide is participat-

ing in a synod, or consultation, of the faithful. As part of that, all Catholics are encouraged to meet their neighbors, particularly those who may be of a different culture or background. Galván noted that the Pentecost Mass is a joyous setting for those encounters.

The organizers have invited the four transitional deacons who are to be ordained to the priesthood on June 2. With roots in Italy, Latin America, the Philippines and Vietnam, they

are a testament to the support their communities gave them to pursue a vocational life.

The diocese's Office for Ethnic and Intercultural Communities organizes this event, and members of the cultural communities provide all the logistical support, sweating the last detail.

The Pentecost Mass was previously held in Cathedral Catholic High School's gym. This was not an option this year because the date coincided with graduation.

The organizers moved the event to Miramar College's roomy Hourglass Field House & Gym, which has all seating on one level. The college, at 10440 Black Mountain Road, is conveniently located just off I-15, between the Carroll Canyon and Mira Mesa Boulevard exits. The site has ample parking and a San Diego Transit center on campus.

The event is free and begins at 10 a.m. with a Call to Worship; the Mass is at 11 a.m., with the cultural festival to follow after noon. Everyone is invited to wear attire from their cultural roots.

"The coming together of cultural communities ... is a testament that we are bound by the same love that Christ Jesus has for every single one of us," Galván said. "Our solidarity is palpable, the joyful sound of children, youth and adults gathering to celebrate together truly gives us hope."

For more information, email adiaz@sdccatholic.org or call (858) 490-8306.



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NICHOLAS ASKER*Santa Sophia Academy*

Sixth grade was not the best learning experience. Most of the time, we were on the computer. When you're at home in pajamas, it's not easy to focus. When we finally got to go in-person in seventh grade, it was amazing. It was way easier to learn in the classroom than online. And now my final year in middle school is eighth grade. I was very happy that the virus died down and we were able to have a normal year.

One of the important lessons I'm taking with me throughout my nine years of Catholic education is to be good to your neighbor. If you're nice to everyone, you will make great friends that will last a lifetime. Another thing I'm taking into high school is to believe in God and trust His plan and whatever happens was meant to happen.

GIAVANNA MERAM*Santa Sophia Academy*

I have been at Santa Sophia Academy for two and a half years, and it has been the most memorable time of my life. I had to move from Michigan to California on Dec. 26, 2020. It was one of the most challenging things I have ever done because I was moving across the country during COVID-19 and everyone was on Zoom. It was very hard for me because I like being in-person and getting taught in school, not on a computer.

The most important lessons that a Catholic school taught me are that, even though I will no longer be attending a Catholic school, I will not turn away from God in any way and will stay close to Him in high school. I am also taking the lesson to not change yourself if someone doesn't like how you look, because God created you like this, and you should not change anything about yourself because you are beautiful not only on the inside but also on the outside.

LANDON SALEM*Santa Sophia Academy*

From my three years at Santa Sophia Academy, my best learning experience was that we need to keep God as our number-one priority. He gives us guidance for our future and why we should listen to His word. God loves us and, for us to be successful in high school, we have to strive to follow His word.

In high school, I'm looking forward to freedom. In middle school, I felt like a little kid. Like people say, "You are who you surround yourself with." If I'm surrounded by little kids, I start to feel like one. In high school, my brother always tells me how much freedom he has and I get shocked. For the past three years, I've been in this small bubble and I can't wait to see what high school will bring to my life.

ANNIE MURPHY*The Nativity School*

I was at a different school and learned online until April of my sixth grade, so I didn't fully experience middle school until the seventh grade.

Now I go to church at least once a week with my class, something I never did at my old school. I am able

to participate in service activities for others. I'm also able to have deep discussions in religion class about my faith with others. The most important Catholic lesson I have learned is the truth about why Jesus died on the cross and that He rose again to save us. I will take this lesson with me to high school, knowing enough about it to share it with others, and always defend my faith to anyone.

JASER ALCARAZ*Good Shepherd School*

I would describe my middle-school experience as a rollercoaster. During the three years, there were many ups and downs of emotions – downs being distance-learning and COVID-19, not being able to see friends and teachers, and ups being winning awards, like honor roll and Disciple of Christ, and really realizing that hard work always pays off.

The most important Catholic school lesson I'm taking with me to high school is to respect the diversity and dignity of each human being. It is very important to respect everyone, even if they are different, because my actions show what kind of person I am, and it is important to be a good Catholic and to be more like Jesus.

What I am looking forward to in high school are extracurriculars and the community. I am excited to meet new people and make new friends, as well as connect with people who have similar interests to me and build deep relationships.

KENDALL BARRY*The Nativity School*

My middle school experience at Nativity School was mind-blowing. A lot of things I thought would never happen happened, and a lot of things I thought would happen didn't. In sixth grade, we were supposed to go to Catalina. But, because of COVID, we were not allowed to go. Instead, we had a week of a camp at our school, which was just as fun.

Middle school can throw a lot of curveballs at you that you always have to be ready for. A couple important Catholic school lessons I am bringing with me to high school are to always try to do your best and never give up.

ANNA SCHUMACHER*St. Michael's School*

At first, middle school was hard and confusing, because during sixth grade, when we were online some weeks and in-person the others, it was not easy to get used to. However, I enjoyed sixth grade because it felt like my friends and our class were in our own little bubble, and even though we didn't get to do things like go to sixth-grade camp, we made the best of it and still had a lot of fun. In seventh grade, when we went back to switching classes, having sports again, and not wearing masks outside, it was a huge relief because it felt like school was a little bit more normal.

Some lessons that I have learned over my years in middle school are: God will be there for you if you ever need Him, especially if you are



Online

Around 1,000 Catholic elementary experiences — and counting.

stressed or going through something; sometimes, it can feel like everything is ending, but trust that God will create a lot of new beginnings.

BROOKLYN CHOUINARD*School of the Madeleine*

In sixth grade, I attended online school. It felt like it was me against the world. Fortunately, I had my family with me the entire time, so somehow we survived. The next year, instead of returning to my old school, we decided it would be best to move back to my parents' hometown to be near family. I would attend the parish school where I was baptized.

I had attended a Catholic school before COVID, so I wasn't that lost socially. Seventh grade was difficult. Now, don't be fooled, I had friends, but I missed my home. A part of me missed online school. Not having to try socially, and just be accepted. Today, I realize one thing; my middle-school experience was brown — a mix of colors or, in my case, emotions, that form said color.

The most important lesson I learned in Catholic school was how to be compassionate, how to care for other people and put their needs above your own. This is one lesson I will take with me to the grave.

To be completely honest, I am looking forward to having a fresh start in high school. Everyone starts off on equal footing, and you don't have to catch up because it is everyone's first year.

JAKE MILLARD*School of the Madeleine*

Attending a Catholic school has been an enriching experience that

has taught me valuable lessons that I will carry with me into high school. One of the most significant lessons that I have learned is the importance of service and compassion towards others. My education has also instilled in me strong values and ethics, such as honesty, respect and responsibility. These values are integrated into every aspect of my education, from interactions with my peers to my academic coursework.

MARIA DE SANTI*Sacred Heart Parish School*

Being in a Catholic school is a great experience. Being in middle school, we are responsible for setting up and breaking down the choir supplies, teaching the younger students about the Mass, and growing deeper in understanding our faith. I have learned to love and grow through my parish and school. I trust and respect all of my friends and classmates. I have friends in different grades. I love working in groups, playing games, and being on sports teams together. However, the most important Catholic school lessons I am taking with me to high school are caring for others, understanding of faith, and good morals.

In high school, I am looking forward to meeting new people. I believe that it is important to have a good social network of friends and people I trust. I want to excel in everything I do, whether it be sports or academics.

MIA LANGHAM*Sacred Heart Parish School*

I feel that, when you go to a Catholic school, you have this whole different experience that other kids will never



80 eighth-graders will graduate from San Diego elementary schools starting in May. A few share their and lasting lessons from their Catholic education.

have. I don't think of my classmates as fellow students, but more as brothers and sisters. I've grown so close to them that it will be hard to leave them soon when we part ways to lead our own paths, in different high schools. There are so many lessons I've learned at school, but if I had to pick one, it would be that no matter if someone is different, it is so important to respect others and have kindness towards others. To me, this means that if someone wears their hair differently, dresses differently, acts differently, or even is a different religion, it is important that all people know we all are equal. No matter what. When I go to high school, I think I'll be most excited for all the experiences the future holds for me.

ISABEL NOVAK

Good Shepherd School

I would describe my middle-school experience as eventful. I came from a public school during the middle of COVID. At my old middle school, I was still online, so when I came to Good Shepherd, I went straight into in-person learning. There, I had the opportunity to learn more about my faith and practice it more because I wasn't as knowledgeable and comfortable with my faith as I am now. As the restrictions loosened up, I am glad I got to participate in activities like the MCA Mass and going to camp.

One of the most important lessons I'm going to take with me into high school is being open about my faith. At Good Shepherd, I was able to practice my faith openly and, as citizens of America, we are able to openly practice our religions so I will continue to do that.

SIENA KROKEL

St. Pius X School

My seventh- and eighth-grade Catholic middle-school experience allowed me to focus on classwork and interacting with my classmates. I think I was able to learn more effectively and have far more fun with my friends and classmates than I did in the sixth grade, when we went to school almost exclusively online. The online classroom had many distractions and technical glitches, which made the entire experience boring and frustrating. Going to school online for the sixth grade was one of the most un-fun things I ever had to do.

Two of the Catholic middle school lessons I will take with me to high school include the benefits of teamwork and the value of a strong relationship with God. A strong relationship means that He is with me to help guide my decisions to ensure I am being the best student, friend and classmate that I can be.

AJA ANTONIO

St. Kieran Catholic School

As a student who has been at St. Kieran for 10 years, maturing from elementary to middle school was quite an experience. Throughout my time in middle school, I have been taught to do hard things with God's help. Middle school is generally a hard stage in life because you are in between being a teenager and a kid, and I think that Jesus was able to help me through that because He was able to guide me through it and made me who I am today, here, and graduating soon to high school.

There are two key things that I will

take with me these next four years. One is the love of your neighbor. Nowadays, it is shown on social media that many high school kids show hatred and resentment for each other, while we should all just forgive and love everyone. Another lesson I will take with me along my high school journey is to always rely and pray to God. I will always pray to God when I am going through tough times in my schoolwork and life.

NICHOLAS MCKINDLEY

St. Kieran Catholic School

This is my last year at St. Kieran School, and it has been an amazing experience. The teachers are amazing, and I learn so much about God and education like math, science, history, etc. I have been at this school for years, and they have shaped me into the person I am today. They have taught me many things, and they encouraged me to take up altar-serving, and I absolutely love it. Very valuable lessons have been taught to me, good and bad, that I will take to high school and even past that.

I will never forget one of God's greatest commandments: "Do to others as you would want done to you" and "love your neighbor as yourself." I'm looking forward to learning new skills, making new friends, and playing sports in high school. I think they will be very exciting years in my life. I want to share with everyone what I know about God and hope that they will follow in Jesus' footsteps as well.

ISABELLA ASTIAZARAN

St. Charles Catholic School

There are many great things I've learned in a Catholic school. One of the most important is that God is always with me. The transition from a school of around 130 people to a school with over 1,000 can be really hard, especially when you have to make new friends. So when I find it a hard time transitioning and finding friends, I need to remember that God is always here with me and I need to trust in Him.

DIEGO HERRERA

St. Charles School

In sixth grade, many people had the option to stay home or go to school with a mask because COVID was contagious. I chose to go to school. COVID made me appreciate school more because it made me realize how important it is to be able to interact with other people and not be locked up in your house. I actually missed my teachers, my friends, and being at school. Seventh and eighth grade have been so much better, but I have to say that eighth grade has been the most fun. We were able to go on our retreat, to the Museum of Tolerance, and do all the activities that eighth-graders normally did before COVID.

One of the most important Catholic school lessons that I will be taking with me to high school is to always be accepting of others despite our differences, to always choose the right path and make positive choices, to be kind and respectful to others, and

most importantly, to always pray and trust in God.

ISABELLA SKYE VARGAS

St. Charles School

The ultimate lesson I learned in my middle-school years is how to trust in God. I struggled with this so much in sixth grade: having to trust in God to be able to come back to school and for the health of all of my classmates and people around the world. Ultimately, I felt ignored and unheard by God. I thought as though it was punishment, but I realize now that God has a plan. He knows what He is doing and how it will positively influence us. For example, having the inability to trust in God's plan led me to stress about my high school choice. My teacher and parents helped me to let go and to be at peace with whatever God decided for me. I knew He would put me where I belonged, and do the best for me. This lesson is the one I will forever take with me.

ELAINE O'CONNOR

St. Katharine Drexel Academy

Middle school at a Catholic school was really different than I expected, since I went to public school for elementary school. I didn't think I would be going to such a small school, but it ended up being better because the school community was closer together.

I think the most important Catholic school lesson I've taken away is that community is always important. Being in the small-school environment and going to church has always involved a community of parents, friends and people who have known each other for a long time. This has taught me that I should be a part of a community and always have people to count on.

FRANKIE PIRRONE

St. Katharine Drexel Academy

A couple lessons that I have learned during my middle-school years is to always be yourself, no matter what; forgive your enemies or someone that has done you wrong; be nice to everyone; and don't get into people's business.

TAYAH LEWIS

St. Kieran Catholic School

Catholic education is very important to me, so I feel extremely blessed to have been able to attend Catholic school since preschool. At St. Kieran's, I have had so many great opportunities and experiences that strengthened my faith in drastic ways. The most important thing I learned from my 11 years in Catholic school is that your faith can help you through anything, that it's your greatest superpower. I've been taught that you can use your faith to help others in ways that could change their lives. Going into high school, I am excited to create new memories and continue to grow in my faith. Catholic school has been extremely important in shaping me into the person I am today, and I can't imagine where I would be without it.

Read all of their comments at thesoutherncross.org/8thgraders.

'I Had No Desire to Go Back to Make More Money'

ST. BRIGID PARISH

By Denis Grasska



Deacon Mike Daniels has served at St. Brigid Parish since his ordination to the permanent diaconate in 2007.

A longtime supporter of Catholic education, the 74-year-old is a member of the board of directors of Cristo Rey San Diego High School and recently served as its interim president. From 2002 to 2020, he served on the board of directors and in various volunteer positions for Nativity Prep Academy.

Deacon Daniels is also one of the lead organizers of the Million Meal Event (sdcatholic.org/millionmeals), a service project launched last year by the diocese's deacons. This year, participants aim to pack 1.5 million meals over two days, June 10 and 11, at Cathedral Catholic High School.

Question: What influence did the Catholic faith have during your formative years?

Answer: Both of my parents were very committed Catholics. My brothers and I went to Catholic school, where we were immersed in the Catholic faith. My mother would embrace whatever liturgical season it was and find a way to bring it into our home.

St. Brigid Parish,
Pacific Beach

Deacon Mike Daniels



My brothers and I practiced our faith into our 70s.

What is your professional background?

After earning a bachelor's degree in business from Seattle University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Southern California, I worked for the department store chain May Company. Then, I joined our family's art supply business, H.G. Daniels Company, where I worked from 1975 until I sold the business in 1998.

Why did you sell the business?

I was diagnosed with lymphoma, and my doctor recommended that I sell the business. My doctor was very positive, but my impression was that my chances of surviving were 50-50. It was a pretty rugged time in my life, with chemo, and radiation, and all of that.

How did your faith sustain you as you battled cancer?

I really don't know how people survive these things without faith. Your faith goes from being cultural to being real when you're in a crisis situation,

and that's what happened for me. Knowing what I know now, if I had to choose between having the cancer and not having the cancer, I'd choose to have it, because the faith formation that I got through it was life-changing.

How did your call to the diaconate come about?

After recovering from my illness, I had no desire to go back to work to make more money. I had a desire to serve, probably out of thanksgiving for still being alive. Something was formed in me when I was sick that led me to the diaconate. The call was something that just wouldn't go away, but it took five years before I entered formation, which then took another five years to complete.

What attracted you to the notion of becoming a deacon?

When I felt the call, it was during a time — like the present — when the Church was being challenged in the legal world over clergy sex abuse. Rather than running away from that and rejecting the Church, I went the other way. I felt that, if we were going to fix this problem, good Catholics needed to step up. I entered the diaconate with the hope that I could be a positive force for the Church.

What have you found most rewarding about diaconal ministry?

The word "deacon" means "servant," and I enjoy being a servant to the Church. But I think the most impactful thing has been how my prayer life has deepened.

Prior to the diaconate, my prayer life was active, but there was no regimen to it. Once you become a deacon, you're part of the Catholic clergy and are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Since ordination, my wife and I have prayed it together daily. I wish more people were trained to do the Liturgy of the Hours, because I think it's a very rich experience. I went from a person who prayed sporadically to one who spends several hours a day in prayer with his wife.

What recommendations do you have about how to discern one's vocation?

For me, the call to the diaconate came out of prayer and then intensified through prayer. If you feel some kind of a call, the first place to go is to your knees, because you really need God to help you discern what that call is. If you think you're called to a religious vocation, but you're not praying about it, it's just not going to happen.

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Event Packs a Ton of Fun, Faith in 2-Hour Shifts

By Denis Grasska



When the diocese's deacons launched the Million Meal

Event last year, Deacon Mike Daniels said there was "a lot of pushback" from those who thought the project's goal was too ambitious.

Could they really raise \$250,000 to purchase the required lentils, rice, vitamins and spices? Could they enlist 3,000 volunteers to combine the ingredients into enough food packets to provide 1 million meals for impoverished people in Mexico, Africa and the Philippines? Could that many meals be prepared in just one weekend?

The answers to those questions turned out to be yes, yes, and yes.

Encouraged by that success, the Million Meal Event is not only returning for a second consecutive year, but the deacons are raising the stakes. Their new goal is to pack 1.5 million meals — a challenge that will require raising \$375,000 and signing up 4,000 volunteers.

The Million Meal Event will be held on Saturday, June 10, and Sunday, June 11, once again on the campus of Cathedral Catholic High School. About 150 work stations will be set up, where volunteers will work in two-hour shifts in assembly-line fashion to produce individual food packages, each containing enough for six meals.

There will be three food-packing shifts — two on Saturday and one on



ASSEMBLY REQUIRED: Participants in last year's Million Meal Event are all smiles June 10 as they prepare food packages. The joy-filled event will be held again this June 10 and 11.

Sunday. Volunteers are also needed for set-up and breakdown of the event.

Deacon Daniels, who serves on the planning committee, said the Million Meal Event is special because it not only ensures that "a lot of people get food," but also gives lay Catholics a chance to "put their faith into action" and make a genuine impact on the

lives of the poor.

Though participants work hard to accomplish their collective goal, that work isn't burdensome.

"It's a party," said Deacon Daniels. "Joy was flowing (at last year's event). We had a good DJ there ... and people were dancing while they were working."

Julie Gabbard, whose husband is a

deacon at St. Rose of Lima Parish in Chula Vista, participated last year.

"It was just joy. I mean, I left on Cloud Nine," she said. "If we could bottle it up and pass it out, I would, because it was Church-in-action, and it was just great to see San Diego parishes come together."

St. Brigid's parishioner Amanda Asaro participated alongside her husband; their daughters, then ages 10 and 7; and a few members of her older daughter's Girl Scout troop.

"The event was much larger and more lively than I had expected, and we had a really good time," said Asaro, who saw the event as "a great way to teach kids ... to give back to their community."

"(Our kids) have a lot that we can provide for them," she said, "and I want them to know that there's other children in the world ... that aren't as fortunate."

Matthew Korniczky, a junior at Cathedral Catholic High School, also participated in last year's event.

"I am so glad that I got out of my comfort zone and volunteered," he said. "I was hesitant at first, but it was really fun, really rewarding, and I plan to volunteer again this year."

He said, "It was such a fun event ... and it felt fulfilling to know that I was directly helping feed those in need around the globe."

To sign up or to donate, visit sdccatholic.org/millionmeals.



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A Month of New Life

By Christina Bagaglio Slentz



Bring flow'rs of the rarest, bring flow'rs of the fairest, from garden, and woodland, and hillside, and vale; our full hearts are swelling, our glad voices telling, the praise of the loveliest rose of the dale!

The Queen of May

Worldwide, the month of May features generally mild conditions, with temperatures in the mid-60s to mid-70s from San Diego to Australia, Russia to Spain, South Africa to Buenos Aires. This gentility perfectly frames the month of Mary, “the loveliest rose of the dale,” as the May crowning song proclaims. Moving with the heavenly bodies of our solar system, the Easter Season of our liturgical calendar joyfully flows into May, lending celebratory accompaniment to the First Communions, confirmations and graduations of our earthly lives. This year, we will observe both the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost during the month of May, before concluding with the Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church on May 29 and the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the last day of May. “Our full hearts are swelling,” no doubt!



Pope Francis' Letter

During this month of new life springing forth in the northern hemisphere and in the Church, Pope Francis released his second encyclical, “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” in 2015. The word “encyclical” comes from the Greek, meaning “circular,” as originally these special letters were forwarded to bishops and local Churches, who would copy and forward them on and on until the entire Church had received the message. Today, encyclicals are posted to the Vatican website, in multiple languages for all to read instantaneously. Papal encyclicals are not necessarily “infallible,” but contain important guiding principles, which should be taken very seriously and should challenge us all to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. “Laudato Si’” means “Praised be to you,” echoing the lines of St. Francis’ song of praise, “Canticle of the Sun,” a meditation on the goodness of the created world as a reflection of God. Pope Francis chose this title to announce the heart of his message: We are called to respect the earth and honor God through our engagement with creation. The pope addresses this letter to “every living person on this planet,” expressing great urgency in the face of our current climate crisis, which especially threatens our poorest and most vulnerable sisters and brothers and therefore demands our action as Christians.

Every year, during the month of May, we celebrate “Laudato Si’ Week” in commemoration of the release of this encyclical and to remind us of this call to care for our common home. You might take this month to read “Laudato Si’,” a letter from the pope to YOU! A QR code linking you to the Vatican’s page, where you can download and read the encyclical, is here on this page, or you may contact the diocese’s Creation Care director, Christina Slentz, at cslentz@sdccatholic.org



sdccatholic.org for a free hardcopy. The Creation Care Ministry has also created a study guide to facilitate your reading, a QR code for which is also included on this page. Here is a summary of the encyclical, drawn from the Laudato Si’ Movement, a sneak peek at what you will find:

- “Chapter One: What Is Happening to Our Common Home?”
- “Chapter Two: The Gospel of Creation”
- “Chapter Three: The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis”
- “Chapter Four: Integral Ecology”
- “Chapter Five: Lines of Approach and Action”
- “Chapter Six: Ecological Education and Spirituality”

Another way to engage with the message of “Laudato Si’” is to watch the film, “The Letter,” co-produced by the Vatican and The Laudato Si’ Movement and created by the award-winning filmmakers of “My Octopus Teacher.” “The Letter” introduces four “voices” that speak to our current environmental crisis: the voice of our youth, the voice of science, the voice of indigenous peoples, and the voice of the poor. Key representatives of these four “voices” journey to Rome and meet with Pope Francis. Appropriate for all ages, “The Letter” offers a strong moment for at-home catechesis and is free to watch at theletterfilm.org/watch. If your parish is interested in a screening, contact Creation Care Ministry, and we will help you organize a showing.

Laudato Si’ Action!

In the final chapter of “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis lifts up the Blessed Mother Mary, Queen of All Creation, observing, “Completely transfigured, she now lives with Jesus, and all creatures sing of her fairness” (LS 241). The pope enjoins us to pray that she “enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom.” Similarly, Catholic teaching instructs us to see, then discern and finally, act. The Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development invites us all to take creation care action via the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, or LSAP, which you can find online at laudatosiactionplatform.org. Creation Care Ministry is here to help you take part in this annual cycle of reflecting and planning new creation care steps to lessen our harmful impact upon the earth and all life. Our goal is to encourage 25 parishes, schools and/or families to register for the LSAP by Laudato Si’ Week, May 21 to 28. Come for a pizza lunch and our Hands-On LSAP Workshop on Wednesday, May 24, 11 to 12:30 p.m.; register at sdccatholic.org/LSAP.

You are also encouraged to sign up to stay in touch with Creation Care SD at bit.ly/JoinSDCathCreationCare. We will keep you abreast of local environmental happenings and global Church initiatives. Together, we will journey in the light of hope, and in this month of May in particular, we pray for Mary’s accompaniment. How dark without Mary life’s journey would be!



sdccatholic.org/creation




Send pictures of your family or parish illustrating Care for Creation to cslentz@sdccatholic.org. We will post them on our Facebook and Instagram accounts.



Parish Lifts Family, One Moment at a Time

By Iliana De Lara

 If Easter Sunday is special for Catholics, it's a day the Canseco family of San Diego will never forget.

The Canseco brothers are extraordinary. The young men have disabilities that had precluded them from receiving the sacraments of initiation. That changed on April 9. After months of preparation and adjustments made by everyone involved in the process, the brothers received the sacraments from Father Pedro Navarra at a private ceremony at St. Joseph's Cathedral.

Victor Manuel and Elías Antonio are 23-year-old twins who both have autism, although Victor's is more severe. Juan, 21, and Miguel, 15, are dyslexic and have speech delays. The twins received their First Communion, while Juan and Miguel were baptized, and received their First Communion and confirmation.

Candelaria "Candy" Gómez met María Angélica Rubio, the young men's mother, when she began to work at the family market. At one point, the mother told her that she was looking for someone to teach her sons catechism. She did not know that Gómez had previously served as a catechist at the cathedral, which happens to have a formation program for individuals with special needs.

Gómez immediately contacted Alicia Gutiérrez, the director of Spanish-language ministry and faith-formation



WELCOME! Miguel, Juan, Elías and Víctor Canseco, left to right, received the sacraments of initiation on Easter Sunday at St. Joseph's Cathedral, accompanied by their catechist, Candelaria Gómez.

at that parish. "At the cathedral, all children are welcome, regardless of their disability," Gómez said. "I'm grateful that Alicia supports special-needs children and always makes sure that catechists have all they need to teach them."

Gómez explained to her the young men's situation, including that Juan's work schedule conflicted with regular class times.

"That's not a problem," Gutiérrez told her, and proceeded to organize classes for the brothers on days and times that worked for them. What's more, she invited Gómez to be their instructor.

Their mother recalled that Gómez assured her that her sons would indeed receive their sacraments.

"Candy was great with us. She

helped us so much," she said. "She even helped Victor to learn how to receive Communion."

Gómez began teaching the young men in private classes once a week last September.

"We began to modify the classes little by little," the catechist recalled. "First, they lasted 30 minutes, then 45. We increased the time according to what they could tolerate."

There were other accommodations. "Victor doesn't speak," she added. "With him, we had special practices so he could learn."

One of those was how to receive Communion. The mother recalled the moment he received that sacrament.

They had practiced days before, she said, but Gutiérrez would not actually give him the Host, but rather would

pretend to give it to him. "On the day of his First Communion, he received it with joy. He knew to incline toward the altar and to bring his hands together to receive the Host," said the mother, her voice full of emotion.

Elías gets stressed and nervous when there are a lot of people around or it's noisy. The instructor would patiently take the time to explain the things the young man did not understand.

The diocese also made adjustments. Given their situation, the young men could not receive their sacraments along with other catechumens and candidates at the Easter Vigil. They could not tolerate that long of a Mass.

The diocese granted permission for them to receive them during a private ceremony the following day.

The mother said that Víctor had woken up angry on the day of the ceremony and was having a tantrum just before they entered the church.

"When we stepped inside, something calmed him down; he began to listen to the song and started applauding," the mother said.

"He knew to bow before receiving the Host, as if it was something divine to him. It was so beautiful that I just have to say, 'Thank you, my Lord.'"

Some parishes offer formation classes for special-needs individuals. Please check with your neighborhood parish or phone the Office for Evangelization and Catechetical Ministry at (858) 490-8232.





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Building Transformed into a 'Real Church'

By Denis Grasska



A \$5-million renovation at Ascension Parish has turned a multipurpose building into a proper church.

"The space has been completely transformed to the point that it's hard for people ... to remember how it used to be," said Bonnie Curtis, the parish's director of evangelization and a member of the building committee.

The new church was dedicated by Cardinal Robert W. McElroy on March 25 during a Mass attended by about 400 parishioners.

For much of its history, Ascension Parish has gathered for worship inside a 19,640-square-foot multipurpose building that also houses the parish office. Between January of 2022 and March of 2023, the worship space underwent an extensive renovation.

The worship space was "completely gutted, taken down to the studs," Curtis said.

During that time, Masses were temporarily held in the parish hall.

A 35-foot tower topped by a cross was erected in front of the church's main entrance. The large, copper double doors at the front entrance are also new; the exterior features an artistic depiction of the Beatitudes, while the other side is adorned with



DEDICATION: A dedication Mass was held March 25 at Ascension Parish.

an image of the Blessed Mother.

The church's ceiling was raised, and a massive stained-glass depiction of Christ ascending to Heaven was installed in the sanctuary, behind a new limestone altar adorned with a mosaic of the Lamb of God and a matching ambo with a mosaic depicting the traditional symbols for the four Gospel writers: a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle.

Elements of the original multipurpose room, including its two skylights, were incorporated into the new design.

Don Trexel, a member of the building committee, noted that one

of the skylights shines down upon the new baptismal font. Curtis said the other skylight provides light for the new stained-glass depiction of the Ascension.

"(The renovation) enhances one's faith, and it also enhances one's desire to be present in this worship area," Trexel said.

Curtis, whose husband is one of the parish's deacons, was 14 years old when her family moved to Tierrasanta in 1981, the year after the parish was established. Her parents decided that the family would worship elsewhere.

"They wanted to be someplace where it was a 'real church,'" she said, explaining that Ascension was holding its Sunday Masses at a local elementary school at that time.

When she and her husband returned to Tierrasanta in the late 1990s, Curtis initially felt the same way as her parents had, but she ultimately fell in love with the parish community.

The multipurpose building, which was dedicated in November 1985, underwent a series of minor renovations over the years. These included the installation of additional stained-glass windows in the mid-1990s and the replacement of chairs with pews in the early 2000s.

But even with those changes, Curtis said, it still didn't feel like a permanent church.

Masses were celebrated on a portable altar, and the nave could be sectioned off to serve as classroom or meeting space.

Father Edwin Tutor, pastor of Ascension Parish since 2014, described the renovation as "a graced moment," noting that "the parish had been waiting for this for a long time."

He said that, while parishioners had grown in faith as they prayed in the multipurpose building, there had been a "longing to worship in a true worship space, in which their spirits can be lifted up and they can be reminded of God's glory."

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Let Us Bring Light Where There Is Darkness



Jesus' death was shameful, humiliating, a

disgrace. The spirit that inhabits us needs time and an openness to mature in the faith to gain a new perspective and come to understand and feel that, from that disgraceful act, was born a new hope and sense of life.

The injustice, abuse and humiliation that one good and just person was subjected to happened 2,023 years ago. The question for us today is if that same situation continues to be repeated today. That is not merely remembering the Crucifixion, but connecting with the emotions that surrounded that moment, emotions of frustration, rage, sadness and helplessness. Jesus, fully human as well as divine, His mother, and His disciples traveled these emotional paths. Conflicting emotions of pain and forgiveness, despair and love, fear and courage.

If we listen to the cries of the current world and see the complexities of

Columnist

Ricardo Márquez



an interconnected reality, we equally can feel shameful; we can see that we're not on a righteous road, that we have made social and political decisions leading us to war, hunger, destruction and death.

When the motivations that guide our actions are a quest for power, prestige and money, the fruits of distrust, violence and division can be seen. By these fruits, we can know the seeds planted in society, communities and families. Otherwise, it's difficult to understand where these human beings are coming from who are discouraged, aggressive, and capable of buying weapons with the approval or ignorance of their parents, to shoot children, teachers and innocent adults.

Paradoxically, in this precise moment, the seeds of goodness, of kindness, of compassion and love are

also at work. They make less noise and don't make the news. In this precise moment, there are persons helping the injured at roadside accidents, people embracing refugees at borders, volunteers who organize to distribute food, people who promote the protection of life, individuals who propose laws to control the poisons spewing into the air and sea, and communities of distinct religions praying for us to transform our hearts and cultivate hope.

The struggle between good and evil has been a "mystery" that human beings have always tried to unravel. The question of "Why does evil exist?" continues to trouble our hearts and minds. The clearest concept we have developed is that, in the end, these actions are a matter of personal choice, an exercise of our free will.

Good and evil are within us, and part of the reality that surrounds us; that's why we have to make decisions constantly. The light that is lit in our Easter liturgy, the light of Christ, symbolizes the life of a Christ who has resurrected; that light passes to each

of us and to everyone in the community. That light is fragile and can be extinguished by any stiff wind. It's up to us to protect it, and to feed it so it can illuminate.

What do we choose to do? Do we choose to illuminate where we are, or do we choose to complain and curse the darkness that surrounds us? It takes time to wake up; let us ask in our prayers and in the silence of our intimacy for the grace to "see," "hear," and "feel" as Christ did.

Let us pray for the grace of being aware and thankful disciples of Jesus who is the Light and who came to breathe new life into relationships, grounding them in fraternity and justice, and love and respect among all.

In every action we take, simple as it may be, in every act of service that we do, in every smile and healing hug we give, that is where the miracle of the Resurrection is occurring; that is where the light we received is shining, where we experience and are agents of the passage from darkness toward the light.

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

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News Briefs

Exhibit Teaches Students About Eucharistic Miracles

Students at the School of the Mad-eleine recently had the opportunity to learn about Blessed Carlo Acutis and more than 80 Eucharistic miracles that he researched and documented.

The free exhibit, which has made stops at various local parishes since 2021, is part of the legacy of Blessed Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager who compiled information about many Eucharistic miracles throughout the centuries before his death at age 15. Eucharistic miracles include occasions on which consecrated bread and wine physically changed into human flesh and blood in a manner that has baffled scientists.

To bring the exhibit to your parish or school, email jkernpt@gmail.com or call (760) 460-1203.

Birthline Invites You to ‘Love Another Mother’

Following its successful debut last year, Birthline of San Diego County will host its “Love Another Mother” campaign in honor of Mother’s Day.

Tax-deductible donations of all sizes are welcome at birthlineofsd.org by clicking on the “Love Another Mother” donation button. Donations to the campaign must be received by Monday, May 1.

Every \$200 donation will sponsor a Mother’s Day gift, including a \$50 shopping gift card to Walmart, a spa-at-home gift bag of toiletries, and a living plant for the home, and a festive brunch.

Bishop to Celebrate ‘Blue Mass’ for Law Enforcement

Bishop Ramón Bejarano will celebrate a Blue Mass for those who protect and serve our San Diego communities, including all law-enforcement officers, corrections officers, firefighters, and first-responders.

Hosted by the diocesan Office for Life, Peace and Justice, the Blue Mass will be held at 8:30 a.m., Sunday, May 7, at The Immaculata Church, on the campus of the University of San Diego. At the conclusion of Mass, the bishop will offer a special blessing for all members of law enforcement and first-responders in attendance. A reception will follow. All are welcome.


Visit sdcatholic.org/lpj, call (858) 490-8375 or email rehnow@sdccatholic.org.

Father Joe’s Villages Launches Online Thrift Store

Father Joe’s Villages launched a new online thrift store April 24. Online shoppers can peruse available items at my.neighbor.org/shop.

The online store represents an expansion of the organization’s retail operations from its brick-and-mortar stores. Items on sale include gently used clothing, jewelry, entertainment, household goods, accessories, electronics and other items, with all the revenue funding the organization’s programs and services for homeless individuals and families.

Briefs Continued on Page 19



Father Joe’s Villages to Get \$4-Million Grant

The San Diego City Council voted unanimously April 11 to award Father Joe’s Villages a \$4-million Community Development Block Grant to build a new affordable-housing development to help alleviate the homelessness crisis.


The grant will be used to fund land-acquisition costs for the future housing community, which will be located at 17th and Commercial Streets and is expected to be completed in 2026. It will provide 107 units of affordable housing in proximity to Father Joe’s Villages’ comprehensive services.

This community will bring Father Joe’s Villages closer to its goal of providing 2,000 units of affordable housing in San Diego through the Turning the Key initiative. Other communities, such as St. Teresa of Calcutta Villa (pictured), have already helped hundreds of individuals, families and veterans leave homelessness.

As the crisis grows, housing remains a critical component to supporting the health and safety of the homeless.

“The growing homelessness crisis in San Diego is, at its core, a housing issue,” said Deacon Jim Vargas, president and CEO of Father Joe’s Villages. “Together, we can address this crisis head-on with new affordable housing and by offering communities like this, which represent a tangible hope for the most vulnerable among us.”

NARRATIVE IMAGES PHOTOGRAPHY



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Briefs *Continued from Page 18***'Silver Rose' to Journey Through San Diego**

The Running of the Silver Rose of Guadalupe, a pro-life event sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, will wind its way through the Diocese of San Diego from May 13 to 21.

The event was started in 1960, by Knights of Columbus Council 2312 in Monterrey, Mexico, as a way of expressing gratitude to Our Lady of Guadalupe. A natural rose, blessed by a bishop, was transported in a relay from London, Ontario, through the United States, to Monterrey.

In the decades that followed, the natural rose was replaced first by a bronze rose and later by the current silver rose, and the event expanded to include multiple routes. There are eight routes this year; the one that includes San Diego began on Feb. 25 in Hawaii and, like the other routes, will end in Mexico on Dec. 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

At 2 p.m., Saturday, May 13, the rose will be transferred from the Orange Diocese Chapter of the Knights of Columbus. The rose will travel to a succession of diocesan parishes, where prayer services will be held. California-based Knights will then present the rose to their counterparts in Arizona, who will carry on the Running of the Silver Rose.

Visit kofc.org/silverrose. Learn how to participate by emailing americanaztec@sbcglobal.net or calling (760) 213-1535.

Lecture Series Ongoing at St. Thérèse of Carmel

Catholic Answers, one of the nation's largest lay-run apostolates, and St. Thérèse of Carmel Parish in Carmel Valley are teaming up to present the monthly "On Fire for the Faith" lecture series.

Next up will be "How the Eucharist Makes Sense of Everything Else" (May 19) with Catholic apologist Joe Heschmeyer. The evening will begin with wine and cheese at 6:30 p.m., followed by the lecture at 7 p.m. A free-will offering will be accepted.

Call (858) 481-3232 or email parishoffice@stocsd.org.

Scholarship Gala Celebrates JPCatholic's 20th Anniversary

ESCONDIDO — John Paul the Great Catholic University will hold its annual Scholarship Gala on Saturday, May 20, at Vintana Wine + Dine Restaurant in Escondido.

This year's gala will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the school, which was founded in 2003. It will begin at 6 p.m. with a cocktail hour, followed by dinner and student entertainment from 7 to 9 p.m.

Tickets range from \$500 to \$2,500 per person and can be purchased at jpcatholic.edu/events/scholarship-gala/2023.php. Proceeds will support the Student Scholarship Fund. A silent auction will precede dinner. Dress is cocktail attire.

Women's Retreat to Be Held in Julian

The Whispering Winds Women's Auxiliary Spring Retreat, "More to Your Story," will be held May 19 to 21 at Whispering Winds Camp in Julian.

It will be led by Paula Mascari Bott,

director of ministry development and programs at Whispering Winds, and will include a Sunday Mass.

The cost is \$230, which includes lodging and meals. Active WWA members are eligible for a discounted rate of \$200. For a partial scholarship, call (619) 977-7403 or email chrisvillalobos5@gmail.com.

Register at whisperingwinds.org/camps-retreats/womens-retreat.

Retreat Offers After-Abortion Healing

Rachel's Hope will hold an after-abortion healing retreat for Catholic (and Catholic-friendly) women.

It will be held Friday, May 19, to Sunday, May 21, at the diocesan Pastoral Center; Mass will be included. The cost to attend is \$60; partial scholarships are available.

Visit RachelsHope.org. For questions or to register, call (858) 581-3022, text (858) 752-9378 or email rachels_hope@juno.com.

Mass to Be Celebrated for Mental Health Awareness

A Mental Health Awareness Mass will be celebrated at 11:30 a.m., Sunday, May 21, at The Immaculata Church on the campus of the University of San Diego.

The celebrant will be the parish's pastor, Father Matthew Spahr.

Hosted by the diocesan Office for Family Life and Spirituality and the Mental Health Ministry Network of the Diocese of San Diego, the liturgy will be followed by a mental health resource fair in the courtyard. All are welcome.

Visit sdcatholic.org/event/mental-health-awareness-mass.

Priest Assignments

The following assignments have been announced by the Office of the Cardinal, effective July 1:

Father Anthony Stanonik as pastor of St. Richard Parish, Borrego Springs

Father Danh Van Pham, SVD, as pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish

Father Gabriel Afeti, AJ, as parochial vicar of Resurrection Parish, Escondido

Father Christopher Bongato as parochial vicar of St. Martin of Tours Parish, La Mesa

Father Evan Bui as parochial vicar of St. Thomas More Parish, Oceanside

Father Manuel Del Rio as parochial vicar of St. John of the Cross Parish, Lemon Grove


Fathers Bradley Easterbrook and **Abel Barajas** as parochial vicars of St. Mark Parish, San Marcos

Father Marc Gandolfo as parochial vicar of Our Lady of Grace Parish, El Cajon



Father Guillermo Hernandez as parochial vicar of St. Jude Shrine of the West


Father Andres Ernesto Torres as parochial vicar of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Vista

Father Matthew Vasquez as parochial vicar of Good Shepherd Parish



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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