



SSS Grapevine

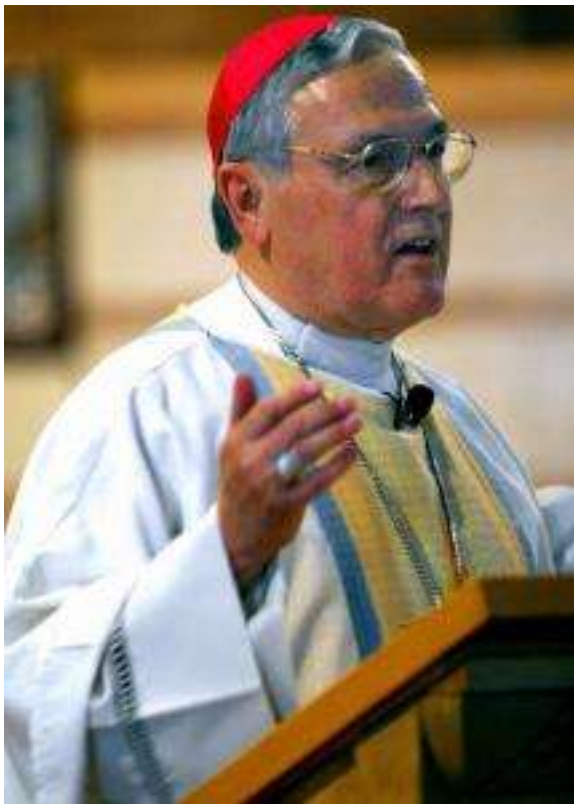
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Reconnecting with Our History in the Southwest USA!

By John Thomas Lane SSS, *Provincial*

The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (SSS) first came to the southwestern United States in 1948 with the mission to start a Blessed Sacrament Shrine in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Our first priests began this shrine and were quickly applauded for their pastoral



Bishop Donald E. Pelotte SSS

zeal and interactions with the lay people to start the Nocturnal Adoration Society, Blessed Sacrament Honor Guard, People's Eucharistic League, and what we would later call the modern-day Associates. Our little chapel on Gold Street was dedicated in 1950. At the invitation of the archbishop, who saw many nearby parishioners of Saint Charles Borromeo attending the shrine, when the local hospital chain requested to buy our property to expand their medical complex, the SSS expanded to take on this parish nearby. The SSS administered Saint Charles from 1966 to 2009 with this land and pastoral swap. *(We built our own building on the property of Saint Charles and dedicated it in 1968.)* The Servants of the Blessed Sacrament would also minister in this parish from 1990 to 1997. The Associates of the Blessed Sacrament have continued the Eymardian mission since 1948.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II selected the first USA bishop from the SSS, Provincial Superior and president of the Tekakwitha Conference, Father Donald E. Pelotte SSS. The pope chose Bishop Pelotte to be the first native American bishop of the Navajo Nation and Diocese of Gallup (*New Mexico, the only diocese that spans two states, also with Arizona*). Bishop Pelotte was first co-adjutor of the diocese and assumed leadership in 1990 as the third bishop of the diocese. He served until his tragic fall and later death in 2010. (*He is buried in Gallup's cathedral crypt.*) I had the pleasure of knowing him and his twin brother, Father Dana G. Pelotte SSS, and served with them and vacationed with them. When Father Dana died in 2014, this author needed to distribute their trust. Most of the trust went to Bishop Pelotte's causes, for which he worked tirelessly while a bishop. One such jewel for him was the Native American Catholic school founded in 1902 by Saint Katherine Drexel. Saint Michael's Indian School (*SMIS*) is the only Catholic school still in operation, founded by Mother Drexel. It is located in Saint Michaels, Arizona, just across the border with New Mexico, with the spelling different because the city took on the name from the school and the private land owned by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. (*The school was founded before Arizona was a state!*)

When I distributed the funds to this school from Bishop Pelotte's trust, the administration, led by school president Dot Teso, wished to contact me and show their gratitude and appreciation. Through our gratitude lunch in 2015 and brainstorming, Dot and I began a special adoption relationship with Saint Paschal Baylon (SPB) Youth Group and Life in the Eucharist (LITE) retreat team, and our very own Associate Evamarie Cross (*who is also the Youth Minister and Kindergarten teacher at SPB*). Our SPB parishioners donated hymnals to the school chapel in 2017. We discerned how we could work together and share our Eucharistic charisms.

Subsequently, SPB has returned for service projects, tutoring, and retreat work for years. Chris and Tom Anderson return each summer to administer a college preparatory service for high school students. Unfortunately, with flying phobias and Easter break college visits this year, our retreat team could not return to SMIS and their K-12 grades, 347 students' campus. Instead, SPB students raised funds through a "penny war," wrote letters to create pen pals, and weaved prayer shawls from SPB's parish ministry, which we delivered to SMIS. Mona Grigsby-Suarez, our Co-Director of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing (CEE), and I represented the SSS and SPB to continue our bond of friendship and mutual sharing of Eucharistic charism.

With the death of Pope Francis, our vocation retreat talks were altered a bit. We spent time reflecting with the Middle School and seniors on the importance of Pope Francis. They were honest with their love and admiration for Pope Francis and his ministry to the world's indigenous peoples, especially Canadian First Nations folks and USA tribes. They appreciated and made profound comments about his work on behalf of the poor, immigrants, and refugees, and appreciated the inclusive nature of Pope Francis to respect

all peoples, especially those who are LGBTQ+. Mona and I were genuinely touched by their hopes for the church leaders to choose another “Pope Francis.” We also spent time with a few grades giving vocational discernment talks and discussing how God guides their future. A highlight is always the Mass together, especially seeing that SMIS continues using the hymnals SPB donated to the students.



Mona Grigsby-Suarez and Fr John Thomas Lane SSS with middle school at Saint Michael Catholic Indian School, Saint Michaels, Arizona talking about the death of Pope Francis. Is Pope Francis a saint? Yes, everyone said!



Meeting with the high school seniors to chat about vocations and their plans.



Mona Grigsby-Suarez reads a letter from Saint Paschal Baylon Catholic School our pen pal partnership school.



Fr Lane invites all to pray the SSS Jubilee Prayer as we look forward to the future, reminding them of the plaque of Bishop Donald Pelotte SSS *(former bishop of their diocese).*



Father Lane shares the blessed prayer shawls from the Saint Paschal Baylon ministry group and a check from the funds that Saint Paschal Baylon Catholic School raised for their school.



After a day of travel by car to Albuquerque from the desert of the Navajo Nation, we came to the city and our former SSS parish. Associate leaders Carolyn Olona, Patricia Garcia-Zarate, Barbara Zachary, and former SSS James Owens blessed us by hosting a wonderful reception and organizational/retreat meeting with several associates. The associates and parishioners provided a wonderful potluck lunch of New Mexican delights; the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament hosted the parish reception in the evening. Scott Gongs, SSS Mission Advancement Director, also joined the retreat day. In our meeting, we brought several resources from the headquarters warehouse, including the *Novena with Saint Peter Julian Eymard* written for the eight retablo-stations in the Blessed Sacrament Shrine chapel (*now closed – but a sacristy*). Associates were pleased to see this fourth, revised edition of the novena (*with larger print*) and the artwork of the stations in this booklet. They also received many other resources, in English and Spanish.

Finally, in honor of the 125th anniversary of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament coming to the USA, an extraordinary jubilee Mass occurred during the parish's regular 5:00 Vigil Mass on April 26. I was the 18th pastor of Saint Charles from 2003 to 2009. It was a delight to see so many parishioners return for the celebration, as well as some of our SSS benefactors and friends come from across the country, planning their trips and lives around our 125th from New Hampshire to Tomé, New Mexico. The whole church enjoyed the special holy cards and mementos from headquarters and the special reception (*organized by the ABQ Associates mentioned above*).

It was a memorable moment to meet an altar server who was the child of a mom who was my former altar server, and another altar server who is now a dentist! Time flies in 22 years!

As I mentioned to the ABQ Associates at our retreat day and in my homily at the Jubilee Mass, it was the Nocturnal Adoration Society and Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament that in 1895, as part of the first national Eucharistic Congress in Washington, DC, invited the SSS men to come from Canada to share our Eucharistic charism, the mission of Christ and Saint Peter Julian Eymard. It is the Associates still, who like Christ, continue to be the instruments of peace, mercy, compassion, and Eucharistic love, living their faith and vocation to be the SSS Associates still today.

With Pope Francis' death, I highlighted his encyclical, *The Joy of the Gospel*, whereby we are the face of Christ, living monstrances of Christ today. We noted that Fathers Robert Stark and Thomas Smithson were native vocations, and Father Joseph Thai Tran (*now in Holiday, Florida*) is a proud product of Saint Charles. We gave special thanks to the Archdiocese of Santa Fe priest, Father Tim Martinez, for his welcome and hospitality (*even while he was recovering from surgery*) for having the SSS Associate reconvene at their beloved home of Saint Charles.

We look forward to continuing our Eymardian vocations as we zoom and meet with representatives participating in our Quarterly Associates meetings and Province Associates Council. Please ask for the link for the **Thursday, May 8, 7:30/6:30/5:30 MDT** Zoom gathering with Servant of the Blessed Sacrament Sister Mary Ann Mateo SSS from Pueblo, Colorado, leading our reflection night on “Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.” We continue to serve together, from the great southwest of the USA, making known the mystery of the Eucharist.



Saint Charles Borromeo Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



Scott Gongos with the Ortiz family
longtime Saint Charles parishioners.



David, Jeanne Holtby, Wendy Muller (*Associates Secretary*), and Mona Grigsby-Suarez at the Associates Retreat Luncheon.



Associates and parishioners gather in the former SSS Community Courtyard, and Deacon Bill Barry, Associate and former DER writer, stands with the others.



Deacon Paul Nguyen, Associate, with Father Lane and the legacy server in the final procession of the Mass.



On the right, from altar server to dentist with his mom!



Nearby pastor Father Andy Pavlak, James Owens, Fr Lane, Mona Grigsby-Suarez, and Carolyn Olona pose for a moment of gratitude for friendships that span 22 years.



A moment of fun with long-time parishioners, the Salazar Family!



Father Lane with Associates Wendy and Ed Muller