



SSS Grapevine

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Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for the
Eymardian Family

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Pastoral Visit #3: Houston, Texas – December 9-12, 2022

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The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament first came to the Diocese of Galveston-Houston in 1987. It began its mission on the original liturgical feast day of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, August 1. The original team of men who came to serve was Donald Jette SSS (Superior); Roland Laliberté SSS (Pastor); Dominic Thuan SSS (*Parochial Vicar & Women's Hospital Chaplain*) and Joseph Bourgeois SSS (*Saint Joseph Hospital Chaplain*). The parish and Blessed Sacrament Community quickly fell in love with a mutually excellent relationship of hospitality, ministry, and care. That same spirit continues today as the current team of Thomas Smithson SSS (*Pastor*) and Ravi Earnest Sebastian SSS (*Chaplain Corp*) continue to serve here and our growing lay associates in the area.

My visit began with a warm welcome by one of our associates, Laura Edstrom picking me up in a very humid 80 degrees! (Temps are above normal everywhere, having left 58 degrees at Hopkins Airport in Cleveland!) Every plane decided to arrive at once, so the exit from the airport was unusually long. After a great night's sleep, Tom Smithson and I made a pastoral visit to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston offices at Cathedral Square to visit with Rev. Tom Rafferty, the Vicar for Clergy and Religious. Tom and I served together in the deanery when we were both pastors of the area, so it was nice to catch up with him, hear about the pastoral planning going on in the Archdiocese (*the area was elevated to an Archdiocese in 2001*), and share the hopes we have with new religious coming to serve, especially with Christian Christopher coming from Sri Lanka to serve in the Chaplain Corps for the hospitals once his expedited VISA is approved. We were made aware of other openings in the Archdiocese, and there are currently 400 priests serving in the archdiocese, half being

religious. Ravi has to cover multiple hospitals because there are many openings for priests as hospital chaplains. We hope another SSS religious can assist in this ministry and are awaiting a possibility.

Tom and I visited a Vietnamese Mission in northeast Houston where one of our SSS priest-students is a caretaker. Joseph Doan Nguyen lives on a unique farm with five mobile homes as he completes a degree in theology at the University of Saint Thomas, Houston, this May 2023. The Vietnamese Province inherited this property from a diocesan priest, Giuse Doan Dinh Bang, who started the Saint Anthony Spiritual Homes. The place's future is uncertain, with a lay board hoping for recognition from the Archdiocese and a permanent priest assigned to the community.



Like many parishes in the country, Corpus Christi has been slowly rebuilding its ministries and staffing due to financial challenges. I enjoyed spending a little time with the pastoral staff, which is much less than before the pandemic. It was a joy to preside and preach at the English-speaking Masses over the weekend and see many parishioners I have known for over 31 years, first as a deacon, then a pastor and vocation director. *(In the picture are the Pastoral Associate Christi Ayo and former religious Joseph Patrick, the Music and Liturgy Minister with Father Smithson). The weekend was filled with First Confessions, a wedding, and preparations for the special celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast.*



On Saturday evening, I enjoyed time with many of our associates. It was great to get reacquainted with the group and remember the first Life in the Eucharist Seminar/Retreats (LITES) that started in the early 1990s and the hopes for the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing (CEE) and associates today. Members brought up future dreams for the CEE

with a director returning, partially funded by the associates through an introduction of “dues” or membership contributions to support the associates locally and the United States office of the CEE. Desires for Formation materials in Spanish, new LITES retreats, assistance with the national Eucharistic Revival, planning for our SSS Eucharistic Congress August 4-6 in Highland Heights, Ohio (*at Saint Paschal Baylon*), the Eymard Pilgrimage (*November 2024*) and the updated book *Dining in the Kingdom* by Eugene LaVerdiere SSS, were many of the topics discussed. As always, it was a delicious potluck and a wonderful exchange of ideas and thoughts.

I appreciate the hospitality offered by many of the Hispanic leaders for a Sunday afternoon gathering to celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe and Monday morning began with a “quick trip to the railroad tracks” to say goodbye to the parishioners beginning Las Mañanitas, the rosary procession from there to the church that is part of the annual Guadalupe Fiesta each December 12.



Thank you, Houston, for a great, quick weekend of Advent joy! I continue to be blessed by the great faith, devotion, hospitality, and Eucharistic life that is “Corpus Christi” and to be grateful for their service to the church, one another, and the Congregation for these 35 years (and we look forward to so much more!). I’m so grateful to Father Tom, Father Ravi



Earnest, the Pastoral Staff, Associates, and parish ministry leaders for their hospitality and reunion. The great music and participation for liturgy, the lively ministries, the active prayer life, and the involvement of our parishioners (*especially the associates*) make this parish a great

Eucharistic center where the Eymardian vision is truly on fire.

Congratulations Father Juancho “Choy” Ramos SSS

Good News for Father Choy and us! On the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Father Choy shared with me the great news that he received his “green card” and is now a permanent resident of the United States for the next ten years. We thank you for all your prayers and support in this two-year process. We are so grateful to God, and you, for the opportunity to have Father Choy continue to serve with us and take on the role of the local religious superior of the Cleveland community of religious. We are most grateful to Mrs. Susan Work, our provincial administrative assistant, for her efforts in following the mountains of paperwork necessary for Father Ramos to obtain his green card.



New Year of “Daily Eucharistic Reflections” begins on January 1, 2023

If you haven't yet signed up to receive a free daily reflection in your email box, now is the time to do that! Several authors in the Eymardian Family share their prayerful reflections on the daily Scripture readings, how the Eucharist plays a vital role in our lives, and how we can put into practice the eucharistic charism of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the Apostle of the Eucharist. To begin receiving these reflections, send a quick note to ccc@blessedsacrament.com, and we will add you to the list. You can also encourage family and friends to avail themselves of these spiritual resources.