

'Congress' at 45: Still renewing, refreshing, re-energizing



MIKE NELSON
The Religious Education Congress is the largest event of its kind in the world, held in the Anaheim Convention Center.

BY DORIS BENAVIDES
Staff Writer

Renewal, friendship, camaraderie — all words that summarize the purpose of the Religious Education Congress throughout nearly half a century, words used by those who have seen the growth of an event that annually brings more Catholics together than any other in the Los Angeles Archdiocese.

Msgr. James Loughnane — pastor of St. Denis Church, Diamond Bar, for the last 17 years and currently episcopal vicar of the San Gabriel Pastoral Region — worked in developing religious education programs in the Los Angeles Archdiocese in the 1960s, not long after he had arrived here after his ordination from his native Ireland.

Eva Walters, current president of the Native American City of Angels Kateri Circle, was among the first 100 people to attend the first congress (then an "institute") held at Immaculate Heart College.

Religious Sister of Charity Edith Prendergast has been in charge of the event for nearly 25 years, in her position as director of the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education, a time when Congress has become the largest event of its kind worldwide.

Recently, each reflected on Congress' growth and history.

From 'CCD' to 'RE'

Msgr. Loughnane recalled when in the early 1960s what would now be the director of religious educa-

tion position was a volunteer position in every parish. Mostly women ran it, he said, while men were mostly involved in teaching.

At the high school level the program was very strong, he said, each class lasting about an hour and a half. Much like today, Catholic schools' classrooms were used during weekday afternoons and on Saturdays to teach religious education to hundreds of public school students.

"I enjoyed it actually," Msgr. Loughnane said with a smile, recalling many professionals who were involved in teaching religious education — school teachers, engineers, even an FBI agent who later became a deacon.

The program was then called the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), and the desire for more knowledge to serve the growing local population helped to launch, one Sunday a year, a three-hour religious education meeting at Immaculate Heart College.

"That was really the genesis of the Religious Education Congress," said Msgr. Loughnane. "It was the place where the catechists went to get motivated for their teaching."

Parallel to the religious education classes were teacher training programs throughout the year. Eventually, the meetings overgrew the space at the college and led to the first Southern California Confraternity Congress, held Jan. 13-15, 1967, at the International Hotel near LAX. To everyone's surprise, attendance ballooned to

Please see CONGRESS, page 14

Tidings

ADVERTISE IN THE FUTURE ISSUES OF THE TIDINGS!

(213) 637-7360

CALL US FOR AD RATES!

Where Love and Healing Flow

How do you define "healing" in terms of end-of-life care? At Saint Jude Hospice, it's a matter of bringing families together to honor someone they've loved for so long, to bring a spirit of peace to them all.

And love? For that we simply turn to the words of Jesus Christ: "Love one another as I have loved you." That, above all, is our mission.

We adhere to Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services.

Call Saint Jude Hospice at **1-800-HOSPICE** and let the healing wings take flight.
www.saintjudehospice.org

Founder & CEO, Tom Moreland, is a member of Legatus, a Knight of Columbus & a Knight of Malta.

BE AN AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECT PRIEST OR BROTHER!

Our mission embraces a variety of praiseworthy apostolates, such as parish ministry, Cursillos and retreats, which enrich our community and the people of God whom we serve through the living out of our Augustinian Recollect charism of "one mind and one heart intent upon God."

COME AND SEE! VEN Y VERÁS!

Order of Augustinian Recollects
www.augustinianrecollects.us

Fr. Francisco Sandoval, OAR
Tagaste Monastery
220 Lafayette Ave.
Suffern, New York
(845) 357-0067
sandoavr@yahoo.com

Fr. Ramon Gaitan, OAR
St. Augustine Priory
400 W. Sherwood Way
Oxnard, California
(805) 204-8440
augustiniansrct@gmail.com

New Features @
www.the-tidings.com