

Awaken

the soul & let your spirit fly

A bimonthly publication of Good Shepherd Catholic Church ~ steadfast in awakening our true being in God.

Recognizing human dignity in every person

Good Shepherd to launch Mental Health Ministry

“Mental and spiritual health are intertwined,” Father Michael suggests, seeing both mental and spiritual aspects of whole-person care – *mind, body, and soul care* – as woven together, influencing or impacting individuals and communities. A holistic approach that considers every person with human dignity is “vitally necessary” if we are to walk with one another, our Good Shepherd pastor insists.

“From my military experience, I’ve seen that the chaplain and the behavioral health professionals walk hand-in-hand,” Father Michael observes, recognizing a worthy model “to emulate” in church communities. It inspired him to suggest and encourage a new mental health ministry at Good Shepherd.

Father Michael recalls a workshop he attended for priests. Guest speaker Deacon Ed Schoener of Scranton, Pennsylvania covered the topic of mental health ministry speaking from his own tragic experience and sharing his testimony of losing his daughter to suicide. It moved Deacon Ed to form the Association for Catholic Mental Health Ministers.

Part of his presentation stressed that the volunteers who help in such parish-based mental health ministries are not experts themselves. Rather, “they have compassion for people and want to accompany people who need help,” Father Michael says, clarifying the purpose of assembling a core group of people who are focused on creating opportunities for sharing – *openings for support* – and resources in the field hospital of life.

Father Michael refers to the progressive work of the Diocese of Phoenix and Sacramento's St. Ignatius Parish, citing both as leaders in forming compassionate mental health ministries. Good Shep-

(Continues on page 5)

*Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you
and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. 3 John 1:2*

Let's Go

GROW IN FAITH
& DISCIPLESHIP!



SUMMER MOVIE NIGHT PLANNED FOR FRIDAY, JULY 25, 2025

A fan favorite, mark your calendars for another family movie night! Under the stars, on the plaza, everyone will enjoy this hallmark of Good Shepherds' summertime fellowship, especially our parish youth. Bring lawn chairs (and maybe a light blanket in case of cool summer winds) and enjoy this break from routine. A hot dog dinner will be available for purchase. Watch for more details on the parish website.

Movie "selection" coming soon... wait for it...wait...and get excited!

Visit GSCCEG.org to learn more about upcoming events.

GOOD SHEPHERD WELCOMES 9TH PAROCHIAL VICAR

Beginning on July 1, 2025, **Rev. Devassikutty "Davis" Koottala Joseph** will serve as Good Shepherd Parish's 9th Parochial Vicar. Father Davis is a priest from the Diocese of Irinjalakuda in the state of Kerala on the Malabar Coast. He was ordained in 1998. At the request of his bishop, he served a five-year U.S. assignment in Alabama from 2014 to 2019. He returned to Kerala for a time before his bishop asked him to once again serve in the United States, this time in the Diocese of Sacramento. He arrived last year to serve three parishes as Parochial Vicar of St. Patrick Parish, Grass Valley, St. Canice Parish, Nevada City, and Immaculate Conception Parish, Downieville.



Father Davis brings a wealth of experience in pastoral ministry, pastoring many parishes. His love for the Catholic faith runs deep. Many family members are priests and religious. He shares that when St. Thomas the Apostle came to evangelize India in the first century, he preached the Gospel in a location about five meters from Father Davis' native home!



YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY SUMMER EVENTS!

Fiat Catholic Young Adult Ministry plans on two great events to enliven your summer! As a ministry for those between the ages of 18 and 39, Fiat events deliver opportunities to grow in faith and discipleship while also ensuring fellowship and fun. For more events & updates, follow us on Instagram @fiat_ya, or find us on Facebook by searching Fiat Catholic Young Adults.

Wednesday, July 2, 2025 Fiat welcomes Auxiliary Bishop Rey Bersabal

Join Fiat for an inspiring evening as the Most Reverend Rey B. Bersabal addresses young adults on the theme, *Pilgrims of Hope, the guiding motto of the Catholic Church's Jubilee Year 2025.*

This event is open to young adults ages 18-39. Please RSVP at tinyurl.com/BishopRey for more information and to secure your seat!



Saturday, August 23, 2025 Fiat hosts a Summer Dance!

Fiat is excited to host its Summer Dance on Saturday, August 23, 2025 – an unforgettable evening for young adults ages 18-39! We'll have a delicious dinner, dance lessons, photo ops, games and more!

Our past dances have welcomed over 150 attendees from across California, and this year promises to be even bigger.

Keep an eye on the parish website for ticket details coming this summer. We can't wait to see you there!

Fiat meets weekly on Wednesdays!

How to stay connected with Fiat:
https://linktr.ee/fiat_ya



Just slightly past the halfway point of this Jubilee Year, Pilgrims of Hope **STILL HAVE TIME**

to immerse themselves in the graces that come from pilgrimage and practice! Pick up the brochures in the narthex to learn more.

*As missionary disciples we are also **MISSIONARIES OF HOPE** called to "fan the flame of hope that has been give us." This can lead to the "renewal and rebirth we so urgently desire."*

CATHOLIC FAITH FORMATION REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS THURSDAY JULY 31, 2025 FOR THE 2025-2026 YEAR

Please download forms on the parish website for all classes and sacrament preparation. The gift of faith is infused at Baptism. Through faith formation, inspire your children to grow in faith and virtue!

WHAT A JOY IT IS TO BE SIMMERING SAINTS, SIMMERING APOSTLES, SIMMERING MARTYRS.

— Blessed Mario Borzaga

“I felt happiness and joy,” Mikaela Vaden, 32, shares. She completed her sacraments of initiation on Easter Vigil receiving confirmation last April. “Utter peace and joy for the first time in my life,” she continues, searching for the best words but conceding, maybe there are no words to describe the gift of God, and the powerful encounter that comes with “Yes, Lord.”

“Even though I did go to Catholic school, and I am aware of a lot of things in the Catholic Church, there is still so much more to experience,” offers the graduate of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School and St. Francis High School.

When Mikaela’s mom suggested she look into RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, now OCIA, “Order of”), Mikaela admits, she had a casual response. “Sure,” she answered, not at all realizing then what would become “a beautiful finding,” as she puts it. “The program has been such a pivotal part of my life,” Mikaela affirms stating that after a few classes, she knew, “I’m supposed to be here.”

A look at three of Mikaela’s “go-to” saints reveals a bit more of her journey, and how her deepened faith is one of unwavering trust in God.

ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA — “I lose things. I lose my mind. I am very forgetful,” Mikaela says reasoning how St. Anthony, patron of lost articles, hears from her often. But not for why most consult the saint, that is, pleading to him to reveal misplaced items. No, Mikaela rests in her prayers to St. Anthony confident that he will guide her to *patience*, knowing she will find what she is looking for, and more importantly, that God will always find *her*.

“It’s a reminder to pray,” she says. “When you lose things, it can be extremely frustrating and you’re frantic,” Mikaela observes. But turning to St. Anthony “adds another prayer to my day. Take a moment to pray,” she recommends, always confident that she will find what she needs.

ST. MARIA MICAELA DESMAISIÈRES

— When asked to choose a saint for confirmation, Mikaela thought, “I should look into her,” she mentions, acknowledging that she did not know much about the origin of her Christian name of baptism.



MIKAELA VADEN Turns to 3 Revered Saints for Intercession

“Despite me not knowing her, *she knows me*,” Mikaela conveys, honoring the 19th-century Spanish saint. “I admire her devotion to God and her dedication to living a life that is pleasing to God,” she says, pointing to a saint who did not back down when it came to “helping others despite being scrutinized for the types of people she was helping.”

“I am a person that helps,” Mikaela acknowledges, sensing something far more than a coincidence but rather a supernatural grace. Like St. Maria Micaela, Mikaela relates to her saint’s purpose-driven focus to help even though “it may be draining or inconvenient. It is my purpose,” she says.

“What is your purpose that God has given you? That gift?” Mikaela posits with wisdom gleaned from St. Maria Micaela. “We deal with a lot of scrutiny over our religion, or maybe where we work, or for [denying] temptations,” Mikaela explains but “you push through because you’re pursuing what God truly has for you.”

SAINT MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

— “Mary, *besides God*, is my next person,” Mikaela says, sequencing her last in the saintly line-up to honor her. “I desperately needed [Mary] in my life. When I delve deeper into

prayer with Mary, I feel an indescribable, warm embrace of a mother. It brings me peace, calmness and joy.”

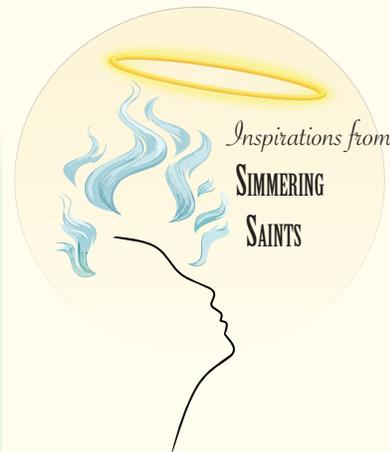
A busy 4th-grade teacher at Elk Grove’s Union House Elementary School and a track coach for Sacramento City College and Christian Brothers High School, (with a track history of her own),

Mikaela is no stranger to hustle and bustle. “I remember a specific day when I was so overwhelmed, frustrated and stressed-out in my brain, I just got in my car and I drove here,” she recalls of a surreal “autopilot” experience directing her to church. “I went in the back, to the Divine Mercy Chapel, and I cried and I prayed and I sat,” she discloses.

“I felt like Mary was sitting with me, like her arms were around me,” Mikaela remembers of a time when “I needed a hug.” In her spiritual journey since that day, Mikaela honors Mary as “the epitome of a devoted person and what *our* relationship with God should look like.”

“When I go through hard times, I think of how *she* went through hard times. She never said, ‘I don’t want to be on this path anymore.’ Rather, she fully, completely trusted God,” Mikaela submits, describing her apartment decorated with images of nature and the Blessed Mother. With Mary top-of-mind, the young teacher/coach finds serenity and peace amid a-sometimes-dark world.

“I know I’m going to still go through ups and downs, but it isn’t because God doesn’t love me,” Mikaela says. “At the end of the day, I’m still human and I still make choices. I



Inspirations from
SIMMERING
SAINTS

remember being angry at God but now that I am stronger in my faith, it’s *thank you, God, for sending me through that*...I got through it and I wouldn’t have been able to without God,” she assures, confident in the model of Mary who always trusts God.

“There’s a reason we go to church. There’s a reason that we pray. There’s a reason for everything in the Catholic Church,” Mikaela stresses captivated by its meaning, purpose and beauty. “It’s so important to take time to pray,” she says, seeing these moments as pure grace to give thanks to God and be aware. “Please God, soften my heart. Please God, calm my mind,” she whispers.

In Mikaela’s teaching and coaching, her discipleship shines through. “One of my athletes called me,” she shares intimating that he was “going through something.”

“Sit with me on the phone for a second,” Mikaela asked and proceeded to read to him powerful words from Thomas’ Kempis’ *The Imitation of Christ*. He did not want to sit on the phone with her but Mikaela insisted, saying, “Just listen.” “The next day he called me and said ‘I have clarity,’” Mikaela shares thinking about what she read to him. “God always guides us to the prayers that we need,” and no doubt, to the saints that we need, too. For Mikaela, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Maria Micaela Desmaysières and St. Mary our Blessed Mother are integral to Mikaela’s “team,” helping her to compete well, finish the race and keep the faith. (Cf. 2 Timothy 4:7)

Mental Health Ministry to focus on education, accompaniment and advocacy

do not let your b



“We cannot *NOT* do this,” says Antony Ta of the parish's decision to move forward in forming a mental health ministry. Indicating a “need and desire” among parishioners and staff to proceed, acting now seems right. Father Michael Vaughan tapped Antony as director of youth ministry to kick-start efforts and build a core team to develop and

guide the new parish ministry.

Each core team participant brings their own experiences, professionally and personally, and everyone agrees, “It is important,” Antony confirms. The prevalence of mental health issues covers a range of conditions but most commonly anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation and various other behavioral health disorders that are present among us.

“For me, a couple of years ago as a youth minister at another parish, a youth committed suicide,” he shares, noting the reality of it “hit me hard.”

“The Holy Spirit is moving this,” Antony assures, expressing the main focus of the ministry.

“It would be **education, accompaniment and advocacy**,” Antony says, emphasizing an objective to “destigmatize” mental health issues and mental illness. It means fostering a parish community that recognizes the need for inclusion, acceptance, support and recovery. In effect, those who may be suffering, their loved ones and the people in the pews all see the importance of this *vulnerable space*. It is a “space” that favors compassion and accompaniment.

Initially, the core team is engaging the community on the mental health topic by conducting a survey. The results will help the core team to understand expressed needs and how best to structure the ministry more fully.

“We’re still thinking about the options before us,” Antony conveys suggesting that the core team will examine education events and workshops and segue into group offerings.

Dovetailing spirituality with mental health support and awareness is key to this vision. The new ministry aims to foster prayer and hope while facilitating ministry outreach. “The idea is to help connect people to resources,” Antony asserts recognizing that people don’t always know where to turn, or how to move forward.

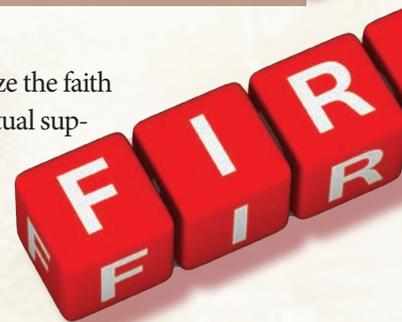
“This is intended to be *more* than support groups, but rather it’s about forming a community that builds resilience,” Antony says, foreseeing a parish community where “people find a place where they know they’re safe, and where they can be courageous in facing their challenges.”

The ministry core team plans to participate in “mental health first aid” training, which the National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI) defines as an “education program that helps trainees to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses” for the purpose of guiding individuals onward to appropriate resources.



Core team members responsible for survey development and timeline implementation include left to right: Cynthia Arrieta, Josue Santos, Anne Burke and Betty May. Not pictured: Monica Small and Elaine Sobon-Stenoski.

The new ministry intends to prioritize the faith component providing Catholic spiritual support and accompaniment throughout the journey toward mental health. †



(Continues here from page 1)

herd's core team turns to these Catholic entities for insight and information as it moves forward to structure its ministry.

"We're not going to solve the problems but we have to do something," Father Michael says of the Christian ethic to help.

"We all need healing in one way or another," Father adds, suggesting that awareness of one's personal woundedness moves us to greater compassion for the human dignity of every person.

"The Church is always focused on the spiritual because that is what we do, that's the work of the priest," he explains. Yet, spiritual accompaniment acknowledges that some circumstances warrant appropriate guidance toward health care professionals beyond the Church.

"Our doors are open," Father Michael confirms as an entry point to spiritual healing. In order for a mental health ministry to work, he surmises, hearts must be open, too. That means open to vulnerability, open to seeking help, open to doing your part. †



RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

Avail yourself to these prayerful and educational resources! Equip yourself with timely information that encourages understanding, compassion and accompaniment.

- **MENTAL HEALTH NOVENA** - Pray this novena found on the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops website. It includes thoughtful learnings, ways to act, and powerful prayers.
https://www.usccb.org/resources/novena_for_mental_health.pdf
- **FORMED MEDIA** - Access this 8-part series FREE on Formed Media by linking on Good Shepherd's parish website and account.

"THE SANCTUARY COURSE FOR CATHOLICS: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND MENTAL HEALTH"

- **GOOD SHEPHERD MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE PAGE** - Check this page found under the "More" drop down menu for a growing list of resources and information.
- **JOHN PAUL II HEALING INSTITUTE** - Find healing content, retreats and book store to complement your knowledge.
<https://jpihealingcenter.org>



Pray for us Saint Dymphna
Patron Saint
of mental health professionals and mental illness.
That there may be an end to mental health stigma and indifference, pray for us!

STOP STIGMA SACRAMENTO stopstigmасacramento.org/the-facts/



- Mental illness is a common health condition. Roughly 1 in every 5 adults and 1 in 6 children will experience a diagnosable mental health condition during their lifetime. In Sacramento County, more than 300,000 people live with mental illness.
- Mental illness causes mild to severe disturbances in thinking, perception, mood and/or behavior. These disturbances can affect a person's ability to cope with life's demands and routines. However, with education, support and treatment, people can—and do—recover and live fulfilling lives.
- Two-thirds of people with a diagnosable mental illness never seek professional help. This is due to a variety of factors including, but not limited to: lack of awareness or knowledge to identify features of mental illness, lack of awareness about symptoms of mental illness and about how to access health and behavioral health services, discrimination, and self-stigma.
- Mental illness can have an impact on physical health as well as mental health. For instance, people with depression have a 40% higher risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population. Seeking treatment is important in promoting overall health.
- Co-occurring disorders involve the coexistence of a mental health condition and a substance use disorder (SUD), with approximately 21.5 million adults in the U.S. affected, according to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's 2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.



Cynthia Arnaiz takes a moment to reminisce about her Lourdes experience while visiting the Marian grotto on property at Good Shepherd /St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School

Cynthia Arnaiz volunteers to serve pilgrims at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, France

To be considered for volunteer work at Notre Dame de Lourdes, Cynthia shares that the application process requires a letter from her pastor. That was early in 2024.

When they responded immediately to her submission, Cynthia's dream began to unfold and by June 2024, she was off to France for training, or "stagiaire" as the French say, of the vital "interning" period.

"The minimum requirement is to serve five to seven days a year," Cynthia explains, detailing how the first visit entails a two-part program consisting of training and service. Teams may include five to 10 people.

"My team... we were French, German, Italian and American," Cynthia remembers citing the love they had for each other and the common denominator to serve.

Part of the training experience introduces new volunteers to five distinct areas of service at the Sanctuary. Cynthia describes the opportunities that range from helping pilgrims in their accommodations to kitchen work to special repair skills, to interface and service with the pilgrims outdoors and throughout the sanctuary grounds. This latter area appealed to Cynthia, zeroing in on helping pilgrims at the grotto, at the baths and in the evening processions.

While they are trained in every area, volunteers are asked to pick their preferences.

"The Sanctuary cannot function without volunteers," Cynthia says, again pointing to the millions who come annually for Mary's intercession, "coming to Our Lady."

The commitment period is a minimum of four years or a total of 24 days. "But you can work more," Cynthia suggests, describing an "engagement ceremony" at the end of four years for grateful recognition and presentation of a pin.

Steeped in Bernadette

Cynthia recites the story of Bernadette Soubirous flawlessly, sharing the little saint's humble story of witness to 18 apparitions of the Blessed Mother.

"Back in the 1800s, many didn't believe," Cynthia explains, that is until the fateful day when the Bishop, amazed at the fact that Bernadette could not read or write, somehow conveyed the vision of Mary and her telling words, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception had only been proclaimed a few years earlier in 1854, yet Bernadette, at 14, shared the words, which were, no

"I feel the Blessed Mother calling me," Cynthia Arnaiz explains, repeating the words she spoke to Father Michael when he asked her, "Why do you want to serve at Lourdes?"

The remote, multi-Basilica venue draws millions of pilgrims a year to southwestern France, and more so in this Jubilee Year as a designated site of hope and healing. Saint Bernadette of Lourdes responded to the "beautiful lady," the Immaculate Conception, in obedience and devotion, smearing the muddy earth upon her face and locating the healing springs of Lourdes in 1858. She ignited the faith, recognizing the powerful intercession of Mary, Mother of God.

The missionary spirit

"It's in my heart," Cynthia assures of the compelling desire within her to serve at Lourdes. She feels she must bring Christ to pilgrims. "I commit to serve as long as I can," Cynthia vows.

A devoted mother, grandmother and fitness aficionado, Cynthia sees the graces given to her to serve in this way. With certain strength and endurance, she pushes wheelchairs through the streets and over variable terrains, up and down ramps and to buses or accommodations.

"You can just see, how they look at you, how they grip your hands, or stare or gaze," Cynthia relates of the times when she knew — *when she felt* — the intense gratitude of pilgrims seeking her assistance in their pursuit of hope and healing. "They wish, *they want*, to be healed," she says of the bitter-sweet encounters. They are a world away but still, Cynthia carries them in her heart.

Cynthia recalls a particular moment of grace when exiting a train in Lourdes. She caught sight of a woman with a cane, and was prompted to extend an arm of help.

"I offered my arm and accompanied her to the line of cabs waiting outside the station," Cynthia explains. She was unable to converse in French but happy for make-shift sign language pointing her to French-speaking cabbies. They are among the first to welcome the sick and disabled pilgrims and Cynthia assures, "The cabbies are very kind and helpful."

Two drivers helped the lady into the cab. When she was settled and off to her destination, Cynthia was comforted. "I got an acknowledgment from them... *We got her*," they said."

Cynthia considers what might have transpired had she "just walked past her" that day. With heightened sensitivity to pilgrims everywhere, Cynthia feels the sway ... *the power of discipleship*.

"It was our Blessed Mother, in a split moment," Cynthia is sure. "This is how the Blessed Mother touched me," she says, sensing the *reality* of missionary discipleship lived out near and far.

A Good Shepherd parishioner since 1997, Cynthia considers the blessings in her life: family life rich with children and grandchildren, making time for visits out-of-state; her Catholic school upbringing in Manila, and how she stays in touch with classmates (particularly a friend in Vancouver, Canada who subsequently felt inspired to volunteer at Lourdes); her rosary group; and periodic service as a lector for the Spanish Mass.

"Thank you, Lord, and Mother Mary, for bringing me here," she conveys, speaking of Lourdes but also instinctively knowing that "here" can be anywhere in the world. "Here" can be beyond routine boundaries and peripheries. "Here" is where the heart moves missionary disciples at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

doubt, puzzling to an uncatechized, poverty-stricken shepherdess living in a tiny, isolated Pyrenees village.

Countless people, sick and frail, soon came by train. There were no wheelchairs. Volunteers carried them. They used straps to distribute the weight of pilgrims. Known as "bretelles," these same symbolic straps are worn by volunteers today, on sanctuary grounds only, in homage to those days when suffering and sick pilgrims swarmed, reliant on the service of volunteers to help them to the baths, to be healed in the "miraculous waters."

While healing comes in many ways – spiritually and physically – there are 71 documented healings at Lourdes, due to the spring waters of faith and restoration. Others acknowledge healing of a different kind – of peace and acceptance. Many come simply to die on sanctuary grounds.

"It is the most beautiful place of prayer," Cynthia ascribes to the Lourdes Sanctuary, noting that at any given time, Masses, confession, prayer, processions and Eucharistic Adoration are ongoing.

"I was struck," Cynthia mentions, referring to the processions when young and old would kneel down. "I would see 20-somethings kneel the minute the Blessed Sacrament passed, or when Our Lady passed... on their knees with bowed heads," Cynthia relates, taken by the beauty of their devotion and the continuity of faith, where young people readily greet and reverence Our Lord, and Our Lady.

"It is a place of prayer and conversion," Cynthia insists, beckoning volunteers, converts, and souls to experience the grace of Lourdes.

"I was in awe"

Cynthia's first official volunteer experience occurred in April 2025, a time typically beset with many student-pilgrims, traveling from all over Europe.

"Good morning, Mary, I am back," she says of those solemn, prayerful moments when she returned to Lourdes.

"I was so tired," Cynthia admits of the long days and hard work, but "I knew it was

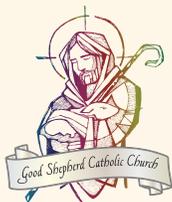
my 'happy place,'" she says. She replays in her mind the special days of her volunteer service over and over, deeply

affected by her experience – of gifts given and gifts received. "When I am there, I am so close to Mary... I am at peace," Cynthia imparts, sensing an indescribable joy, an awareness of the Blessed Mother's intercession. ✚



From Top:

- 1) Cynthia standing before the Basilica at 7 a.m., ready to report for her assignment,
- 2) "La Gare," (the train station) preparing and checking wheelchairs,
- 3) "Porte St. Michel" (St. Michael's Gate) with fellow team members,
- 4) The underground Basilica of St. Pius X assisting disabled pilgrims move about, and
- 5) Cynthia with Msgr. Schwanger who volunteers to lead formation for English speaking volunteers 2 to 3 times per year.



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Practice the faith...

Awaken THE SOUL

Praying Together is the Answer!

Jimmy and Noemi Lopez

"We've been a prayerful couple since we've been married," says Jimmy Lopez, reflecting on nearly 30 years of marriage. Both Jimmy and Noemi see how their prayers and practices may have changed over time, but more so, they see how prayer has *changed them*.

"As I get older, I want to know Him more," Jimmy mentions, adding that his recent heart bypass surgery and recovery led him closer to God, to a place where "I am hungry to know more."

"*I'm going to lose him,*" Noemi thought in those challenging days leading to and following the life-threatening surgery.

Having participated in charismatic groups, the *Light of Christ*, while in college, and *Servants of Christ* as a young professional in the Philippines, Noemi's roots kept her steadfast in prayer. She held tight to her faith knowing how these groups "opened my life to God in a very personal way."

Jimmy and Noemi met in 1994 when both participated in Couples for Christ's Singles Group in Los Angeles. After their marriage

in 1996, they continued to be a part of the charismatic community until they moved to Elk Grove in 2006.

"I like the relationships we have at Good Shepherd," Noemi says, referring to friends and clergy. "We know each other and we help each other," she explains of a natural tendency to "stay in touch and be there for one another."

Among friends at daily Mass, in ministry and on Sundays, Noemi describes "the presence of the people" and how coming together "makes you feel you're a part of the Church" in profound ways. As one body in Christ, she speaks of a unity that occurs because "we are all the same," worshipping the same God.

"My prayer is theirs. Their prayers are mine," Noemi offers, conveying a deep sense of connection. They see fellow parishioners as brothers and sisters in Christ.

When Jimmy was recovering and undergoing rehabilitation, Noemi checked in with a friend to hear her say, "Oh, we've been praying for your husband."

Moved by their prayers, Noemi thought, "Thank you, thank you," expressing immense gratitude and faith in the Lord's hand in Jimmy's improvement.

"No wonder," she announces, stressing the power of prayer and the intercession of "people who love him, who care about him and who care about us."

Returning to work part-time just over a month ago, Jimmy shares the same gratitude as he ponders his "second life," unsure what God has in store for him but open to whatever it may be.

Noemi and Jimmy make it a point to stop what they're doing for the Divine Mercy Chaplet every day at 3 p.m. and "every



night, we pray the rosary and read scripture," Jimmy adds. They are sure praying together as a couple deepens their faith and brings strength. Prayer is the answer for Jimmy and Noemi.