

# News

www.diopitt.org

Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh  
111 Boulevard of the Allies  
Pittsburgh PA 15222

E-mail: dioceseofpittsburghcommunications@diopitt.org

**For Release: February 15, 2009**

**Contact: Rev. Ronald P. Lengwin  
Diocese of Pittsburgh  
412.456.3021 (office)  
412.261.2113 (home)**

## **BISHOP CREATES NEW SAINT JUAN DIEGO PARISH FROM THREE SHARPSBURG PARISHES**

PITTSBURGH -- Bishop David Zubik has accepted the petition to merge three parishes into one parish from Father Frank Almada, administrator of three parishes in Sharpsburg. On Sunday, March 1, 2009, Saint Juan Diego Parish will be established in Sharpsburg as the merger of Saint Mary Parish, Saint John Cantius Parish, and Madonna of Jerusalem Parish. All three church buildings will be used in the new Saint Juan Diego Parish.

Who is Saint Juan Diego? He is the native Indian and widower to whom the Virgin Mary appeared outside the present day Mexico City in 1531. He communicated to the local bishop Our Lady's wish that a shrine be built on the site of her apparition. When the bishop asked for a sign, Our Lady had Juan Diego pick roses from the hill (in the dead of winter) and take them to the bishop. When Juan Diego showed the roses to the bishop, and they fell to the ground, the bishop knelt down at the image of Our Lady which was miraculously imprinted on his tilma (a rough outer cloak). The bishop complied with Our Lady of Guadalupe's request, and to this day a church has graced the spot of the apparitions. Juan Diego lived 17 more years as caretaker of the shrine, telling all of the love of God and the care and protection of Mary, the mother of God. Pope John Paul II canonized Saint Juan Diego in 2002. His feast day is December 9.

Saint Juan Diego Parish, Sharpsburg, is the first by this name in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and only the sixth parish to be established in the United States under his patronage, the first in the Northeast. The decree from Bishop Zubik establishing the parish notes, "This is the first recognition of a Native American saint in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and is granted to this new parish since Sharpsburg is known for its large statue of Chief Goyasuta, of the Seneca Indian Nation, who collaborated with George Washington during the French and Indian War."

Bishop Zubik also appointed Father Almada as the first pastor of Saint Juan Diego Parish, with a term of six years. The bishop will install Father Almada ceremonially as pastor on Sunday, March 15, 2009, at the 10:30 a.m. Mass in Saint Mary Church. All are invited to attend this Mass of Installation. As a sign of unity, this will be the only Mass celebrated that weekend in the new parish.

The formation of Saint Juan Diego Parish has come after a six month process of pastoral planning by the Moving Forward Committee last year, which followed the diocesan "Alteration of a Parish" policy. The Committee submitted a five part plan for the three parishes to all parishioners in June. The five recommendations in the plan were: (1) Support the Korean Catholic Community; (2) Sell unused buildings; (3) Promote evangelization; (4) Keep open all three church buildings; and (5) Merge the three parishes into one new parish, with a new name.

These recommendations received near unanimous approval by the 175 parishioners who attended two town meetings, and who responded to the parish-wide mailing later that month. After soliciting suggestions for names for the new parish, the members of the Moving Forward Committee, the Pastoral Council, the Finance Council and Father Almada signed a petition on October 31 formally requesting that the bishop merge the three parishes.

The bishop's pastoral staff, Envisioning Ministry for the Future Executive Committee, and the Priest Council reviewed the petition and its documentation of wide consultation and communication. The Envisioning Ministry Committee and Priest Council both unanimously recommended acceptance of the petition. Bishop Zubik approved the recommendation and set the date of March 1, 2009, for canonically establishing Saint Juan Diego Parish.

“While Saint Juan Diego may be unfamiliar to many in Pittsburgh,” Father Almada said, “he is an excellent patron for our new parish, for these reasons: (1) He received four apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is always associated with her, under the title of Virgin of Guadalupe. Two of our churches are named after Mary, who is always close to the hearts of her children. (2) After the visit of Mary to Juan Diego, and the gift of the tilma with her image on it, evangelization soared throughout Mexico and the American continent. It is estimated that 10 million souls were baptized over in the decade following Our Lady's appearance.”

Father Almada went on to note that the pastoral plan for the parish calls for a commitment to evangelization. Saint Juan Diego is known as the ‘apostle of evangelization.’

“The Catholic faith has been embraced in Sharpsburg by people of German, Irish, Polish, Italian, Korean, and many other ethnic groups and nationalities. Saint Juan Diego, one of the native peoples whom the Spaniards encountered when they came to the New World, represents the desire of God that all peoples, nationalities, ethnic groups and races, come to know and embrace Our Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Juan Diego represents the ‘catholicity’ or universality of the Church, open to all tongues and peoples,” Father Almada said.

Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin  
(1474-1548)

Juan Diego was born in 1474 with the name “Cuauhtlatoatzin” (“the talking eagle” in the Nahuatl language) in Cuautlitlan, which today is part of the modern city of Mexico City, Mexico. He was a member of the Chichimeca people, one of the more culturally advanced groups living in the Anahuac Valley.

Juan Diego was married to Maria Lucia. At age 50, in 1524, Juan Diego and his wife were baptized by a Franciscan priest, Father Peter da Gand, one of the first Franciscan missionaries to America. His wife died in 1529. On Saturday, December 9, 1531, when Juan Diego was walking to Mass, a young woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, appeared to him on Tepeyac Hill, on the outskirts of what is now modern day Mexico City. She asked him to go to the bishop and to request in her name that a shrine be built at Tepeyac, where she promised to pour out her grace upon those who invoked her. The bishop, who did not believe Juan Diego, asked for a sign to prove that the apparition was true. On December 12, Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac. Here Mary told him to climb the hill and to pick the flowers that he would find in bloom. He obeyed, although it was winter. He found roses flowering, and gathered them into his cloak and took them to Mary. She told him to take them to the bishop as “proof.”

When he saw the bishop again, Juan Diego told him about the roses. He opened his *tilma*, his outer cloak, to show him the roses. The roses fell on the ground, and there remained impressed, in place of the flowers, an image of the Blessed Mother, just as he had seen her at Tepeyac. Soon after, the bishop fulfilled Our Lady’s request and built a church on the site where she appeared. With the bishop’s permission, Juan Diego lived in a small hermitage at the shrine. He cared for the chapel and the pilgrims who came to pray there. He died at the age of 74, on May 30, 1548.

Juan Diego was declared venerable in 1987. Pope John Paul II beatified him on May 6, 1990 in the Shrine to Our Lady in Mexico City. The same pope canonized John Diego on July 31, 2002. He praised Juan Diego for his simple faith and as a model of humility.

News of the apparition on Tepeyac Hill spread quickly through Mexico. Over the next ten years, it is estimated that 10 million native peoples were converted to the Catholic Faith.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, as the Virgin Mary of this apparition came to be called, is integral to the faith of Catholics throughout Mexico and the rest of Latin America. At the request of the Special Assembly for the Americas of the Synod of Bishops, Pope John Paul II named Our Lady of Guadalupe patron of the Americas in 1999. Her liturgical celebration on December 12 now has the rank of solemnity throughout all of North, Central and South America.