

Our Local Church is Truly Blessed!

By BISHOP FELIPE J. ESTÉVEZ



Great blessings, great projects, and great faith – our local church is truly a fellowship of a Eucharistic people spread throughout northeastern Florida.

This year's Eucharistic Congress pulled so many faithful together to deepen the bond that keeps us together. More than 5,000 Catholics attended from throughout our diocese and beyond with the desire to grow in what is most essential to us, the Eucharistic Lord. An increase of faith, a strengthening of hope, and a deepening of love, are durable fruits of significant importance to our mission.

Also, this year's diocesan-wide appeal, the Bishop's Annual Stewardship Appeal, once again received generous support from donors, with more than \$3 million pledged and 42 percent collected so far to care for the poor and vulnerable among us, to ensure the preservation of Catholic education, and to educate our seminarians for the future of our church.

Referring to the Acts of Apostles, the late Father Raymond Brown, a scholar and priest of our diocese, used to say that the spirituality of the early Christians showed such great energy in supporting the Apostles, in building the church with extraordinary generosity and motivation. The success of the Appeal, the strong support given to our parishes and schools, our amazing care for the missions, is a convincing sign that the same Spirit is at work in the body of Christ here and now.

As the 450th anniversary of the founding of the City of St. Augustine approaches in 2015, the memory of our deep Catholic roots in this unique city are historically important and warrants documenting and educating present and future generations. In preparation for the 450th anniversary, three important initiatives are being developed with great care:

1. The pressing need of interior and exterior renovations to the Cathedral Basilica – America's first Catholic parish;
2. The appointment of a chaplain for the pastoral care of the Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche – America's first Marian shrine;
3. The veneration of the relics of Saint Augustine of Hippo that will be brought to the diocese from Italy for this celebration.

I encourage all of you to come as pilgrims to St. Augustine for these

unique celebrations and to visit our sacred places of immense cultural and historical significance.

We are fortunate that the Holy Father, Pope Francis has appointed a Papal delegate for this historic commemoration. Cardinal Seán Patrick O'Malley, OFM Cap. of the Archdiocese of Boston will preside at the celebration of the 450th Anniversary Mass on Sept. 8, 2015.

There has been discussion among church leaders that Pope Francis will travel to Philadelphia to celebrate the closing Mass of the eighth World Meeting of Families in late September 2015. While confirmation for such a visit is not expected anytime soon from the Holy See, there is hope that if the Holy Father comes to the U.S., he will come south to St. Augustine to personally grace us with a visit as part of the 450th Anniversary celebration!

As I think of you all, the words of Paul to the Philippians come to my heart, "I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat what I want is your happiness...and the peace of God which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." Ph. 4, 4-7

Invite your family to pray together this prayer:

*O Blessed Mother of La Leche,
At your breasts you nourished the Son of God,
Who you had conceived in your womb by the Holy
Spirit, and to whom you gave birth at Bethlehem.*

*Hear our humble prayer, and through your
intercession, We ask that your Son bless the local
Church of St. Augustine.*

*Inspire us to know the Eucharistic Lord and follow
Him ever more closely.*

*Inspire our people to a renewed missionary spirit.
That the Good News of salvation may be made
known among us, and lead more and more people
to acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord.*

Our Lady of La Leche, pray for us.

Saint Augustine of Hippo, our patron, pray for us. 