

Journeying to

Synod Preparatory Commission members answer

By Michael Gresham
The Texas Catholic

On Dec. 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Bishop Edward J. Burns will celebrate a Mass at St. Ann Catholic Church in Coppell that will officially mark the beginning of the preparatory phase of the Diocese of Dallas synod. While the Mass and accompanying festival in Coppell that day will be one of the first public events of the multi-year synodal process, work on the diocesan synod got underway months ago with the formation of the synod preparatory commission—a group tasked with guiding the diocese’s planning efforts leading up to the actual synod meeting in 2024.

“It is a group of people who have a passion for seeing the Dallas diocese becoming the best version of what it can be,” said Lacy de la Garza, who has been chosen by the bishop to serve as the chair for the preparatory commission.

The synod preparatory commission is comprised of 26 members from throughout the diocese. In addition to Bishop Burns, Auxiliary

Bishop Greg Kelly and de la Garza, the commission’s members include Bill Achenbach, Our Lady of the Lake Rockwall; Susie Aleman, St. Elizabeth of Hungary in Oak Cliff; Deacon Kevin Bartholomew, St. Bernard of Clairvaux; Father John Bayer, O. Cist., Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey; Father Paul Bechter, Diocesan Director of Vocations; Anand Bheemaretti, St. William in Greenville; Julie Billmeier, St. Rita; Fernando Blanco, Prince of Peace in Plano; Gregory Caridi, chancellor of the Diocese of Dallas; Deacon Joseph M. Coleman, Prince of Peace in Plano; Peter J. Ductram, diocesan senior director of ministries; Omar Enrique García Rojas, Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe; Father Charles Githinji, St. Patrick in Dallas; Pia Septién, University of Dallas; Christopher A. Johnson, Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe; James W. Keyes, All Saints; Father Radoslaw Michal Markiewicz, Redemptoris Mater Seminary; Joseph Rodriguez, St. Augustine; Lynn Rossol, Bishop’s Delegate for Ecumenism and Leg-

islative Advocacy; Sefanit Stefanos, St. Joseph in Richardson; Andre Valdivia, St. Joseph in Richardson; Clare Venegas, University of Dallas; and Sister Mary Anne Zuberbueler, OP, principal of Mary Immaculate Catholic School in Farmers Branch.

Many of those who responded to the call to serve on the commission are no strangers to service to the Church, having dedicated their lives in one way or another to their Catholic faith.

For instance, Valdivia began serving the Church as a middle school student through altar serving.

“Going to Catholic schools from kindergarten through university, there were always simple opportunities and encouragement to serve your community and the needy,” said Valdivia, who called it an honor to be able to participate in the synod. “I approach this with the knowledge that this will likely be one of the most significant contributions that I make to the Church in my lifetime. This is an invitation to use the gifts God has given me in service to the community that raised me.”

The list of volunteer activities

that Deacon Joe Coleman has done in service of the church over the years is numerous, ranging from RCIA sponsorship to Eucharistic Minister and from youth sports coach to Honduras missionary. Deacon Coleman is quick to point out how amazed and blessed he is by the people Christ has put in his life to help him along his own faith journey. Those experiences are what inspired him to say “yes” to the bishop’s request to serve on the synod preparatory commission.

“After some prayerful discernment, I just felt it’s not about me, it’s about serving as called,” he said, adding that he sees the synod as a chance to build upon the diocese’s strong foundation of faith. “I hope it will continue and improve the Church’s broad, loving outreach to all people to experience and deepen their relationship with Jesus.”

Service to the Church is also nothing new to Billmeier, who has worked in ministry for 13 years, including several coordinating young adult ministry for the

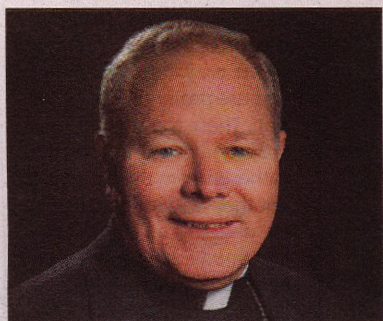
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LACY DE LA GARZA

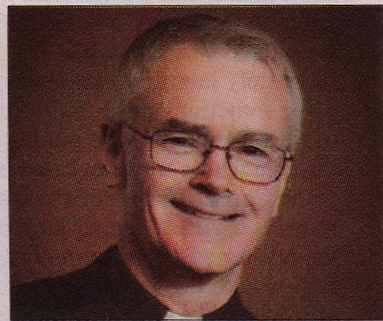
As Chair of the Synod Preparatory Commission, Lacy de la Garza oversees all planning and execution for the first three phases of our diocesan synod. She also currently serves as Director of Parish & Community Relations at Catholic Charities Dallas where she works with Catholic and non-Catholic community leaders to ensure quality care for those in need throughout our diocese. She holds a Bachelors and Masters in Psychology from the University of Dallas and has experience in education, research, and the performing arts. Previously, she worked at the University of Dallas and the Catholic Pro-Life Community. De la Garza resides in Irving and her immediate family is also in the Dallas area.

MEET THE SYNOD PREPARATORY COMMISSION



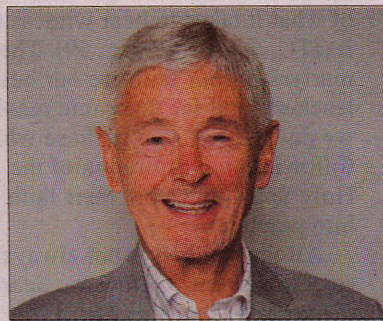
BISHOP EDWARD J. BURNS

Bishop Edward J. Burns is the eighth Bishop of the Diocese of Dallas, installed Feb. 9, 2017. Born in Pittsburgh, Penn., he was ordained a priest on June 25, 1983, named a monsignor in 2006, ordained a bishop at St. Paul’s Cathedral in Pittsburgh, Penn., on March 3, 2009, and installed as the fifth bishop of the Diocese of Juneau, Alaska, on April 2, 2009. Bishop Burns has served the Catholic Church on the national level as a current member of the Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth; current Chair of the Bishop’s Working Group for Youth and Young Adults; executive director of the Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation at USCCB, past chairman of the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People; past member of the board of directors for Catholic Relief Services; and past member of the subcommittee for Home Missions.



BISHOP GREGORY KELLY

Bishop Gregory Kelly is a native of Iowa and grew up in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He studied for the priesthood in Holy Trinity Seminary at the University of Dallas in Irving and was ordained to the priesthood in 1982. He served as parochial vicar at All Saints in Dallas, Chaplain at the University of Dallas in Irving; and pastor at St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish in McKinney. He was ordained as auxiliary bishop of Dallas Feb. 11, 2016 and resides at Holy Trinity Seminary in Irving.



WILLIAM (BILL) ACHENBACH

Born and raised in Pennsylvania, William (Bill) Achenbach has more than 20 years experience, serving as a senior human resource executive, developing and implementing organization wide transformation and change initiatives. He participates in several ministries within his parish, including membership in the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. He is currently serving as District 3 President of the Society. Bill has four adult children and eight grandchildren, lives with his wife Becky in Rockwall and is a Parishioner of Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church.



SUSIE ALEMAN

Susie Aleman serves as the Vice President of Client Services for Tic Toc, a Dallas-based marketing service and promotional products agency. She is a longtime parishioner of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church in Oak Cliff, where she attended school and now serves as a member of the school’s advisory council. She continues to serve her parish faithfully as a member of the Guadalupanas Association, an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and as a member of the parish finance committee.

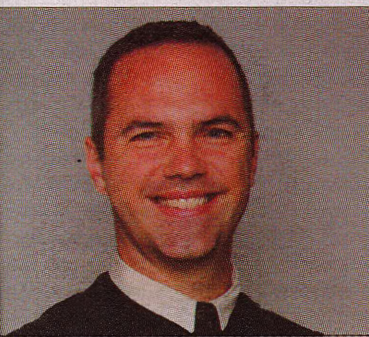


DEACON KEVIN BARTHOLOMEW

Deacon Kevin Bartholomew serves as the President of Ben E. Keith Beverages, where over the past 37 years he has served in a number of capacities, including manager, trainee, general manager of multiple distribution centers, and vice president of sales. In his current role, Deacon Bartholomew is responsible for the day-to-day operations, management, sales and marketing, and partnerships. A parishioner and deacon at St. Bernard of Clairvaux Catholic Church, Deacon Bartholomew also serves on the board of Catholic Charities Dallas. Deacon Bartholomew and his wife Cindy reside in Dallas.

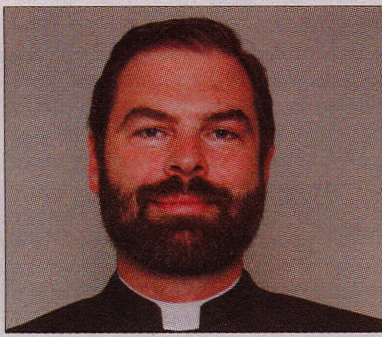
together in faith

All to serve Diocese of Dallas during historic time



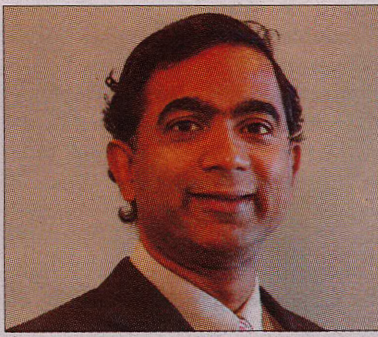
FATHER JOHN BAYER

Father John Bayer is a monk at the Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey and a teacher at Cistercian Preparatory School in Irving. Currently, he is the Form Master for the Class of 2025 and teaches English grammar, Latin, philosophy and theology. Father Bayer is also an adjunct professor of theology at the University of Dallas, and his courses there so far have focused on fundamental theology, apologetics and the relationship between faith and science. Born in Arlington, Father Bayer entered Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey in August 2007. He made his solemn profession on Aug. 19, 2012, and he was ordained on Aug. 10, 2013.



FATHER PAUL BECHTER

Father Paul Bechter serves as the Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Dallas. Father Bechter attended the University of Dallas and entered Holy Trinity Seminary in 2009, earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy and letters with a minor in physics in 2011. He continued his seminary formation in Rome at the North American College from 2011 to 2016, gaining a bachelor degree of Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was ordained a priest for the diocese in 2016, returning to Rome to earn a License in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute. He returned to Dallas, serving as a parochial vicar at St. Ann Catholic Church in Coppell from 2019-2021 before being named Director of Vocations.



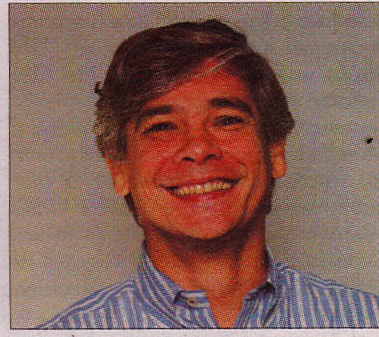
ANAND BHEEMARASETTI

Anand Bheemarasetti is a modern missionary, business entrepreneur, media specialist and community organizer. He started his professional career as a part-time tutor at the age of 8, graduated from college with a computer and science degree at the age of 20, and after excelling as an IT consultant for a decade entered the ministry world. He took his passion for the New Evangelization into campus ministry with FOCUS (Fellowship of College University Students), followed by an apologetics media ministry with the website, Ask a Bishop. Recently, he launched a project: Finding Calcutta, a weekend service ministry, to engage more Catholics in frequent corporal works of mercy locally. He currently works as the project's Director of Young Adult Ministry and the Director of Communications. He lives with his wife Lindsey, their four children and his parents.



JULIE BILLMEIER

Julie Billmeier has worked in ministries in the Diocese of Dallas for 13 years, including both serving in youth ministry for one year and coordinating a young adult ministry for five years for the Diocese of Dallas. She has also led a family faith formation pilot program for St. Rita Catholic Community, where she, her husband Adam and their four children are parishioners. At St. Rita, Billmeier and her husband have served as a sponsor couple for engaged couples and have been involved with the parish's annual Family Vacation Bible School. She serves as treasurer for a neighborhood preschool and volunteers with the parish's American Heritage Girls Troop. Currently, Billmeier works from home, homeschooling her children while teaching classes for the Neuhooff Institute for Ministry and Evangelization and for the University of Dayton VLCFF Program.



FERNANDO BLANCO

Fernando Blanco is a knight in Obedience in the Order of Malta, currently serving on the Board of Councillors for the national organization. He is also a trustee of The Catholic Foundation in Dallas and a parishioner of Prince of Peace Catholic Community in Plano. He keeps an active prayer life and is a spiritual director, guiding retreatants in the "Spiritual Exercises" of St. Ignatius. Blanco resides in Plano with his wife Angela. Their son Gabriel is a senior at Jesuit Dallas College Preparatory School and volunteers in the activities of the Order of Malta. Blanco is the Vice President and Chief Information Security Officer of CHRISTUS Health.



GREGORY CARIDI

Gregory Caridi, both a civil lawyer and a canon lawyer, is Chancellor for the Diocese of Dallas. The Chancellor is the official notary for the Diocese of Dallas, establishing the authenticity of the acts of the diocesan curia and ensuring that such acts as well as historical documents are safely stored in the diocesan archives. The Chancellor also serves as the Bishop's delegate for canonical and civil law matters, which includes oversight of the Safe Environment Program. Gregory was born and raised in Houston, where he practiced law and served in the tribunal for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston before coming to Dallas.



DEACON JOSEPH M. COLEMAN

Ordained a deacon in June 2019, Deacon Joseph M. Coleman was assigned to Prince of Peace Catholic Community in Plano, his home parish where he attended the first-ever Mass held at the parish and where his three children attended school. Thirty years ago, Deacon Coleman founded the law firm Kane Russell Coleman Logan, a full service commercial law firm, where he chairs the Corporate Reorganization and Restructuring Section and practices throughout the nation. His journey has been greatly impacted by Ignatian spirituality, having completed, among other programs, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. He is currently very active with young adults witnessing weddings and baptisms. Deacon Joe is married to his incredibly supportive wife, Carmen.



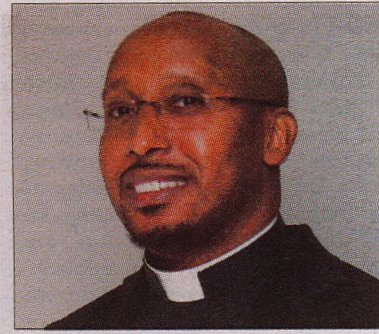
PETER J. DUCTRAM

Peter Ductram is the Senior Director of Ministries for the Catholic Diocese of Dallas. Born in Lima, Peru; Ductram served in ministry in Peru, Chile, Brazil, and the United States. He earned a Master of Arts in Theology and a Master of Divinity, with specialization in the Bible at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. He is currently finishing his doctorate degree at Barry University. He served as the archdiocesan Director of the Institute for Lay Ecclesial Ministry for the Archdiocese of San Antonio. He also served as Director of Catechesis for the Archdiocese of Miami. He also worked on Hispanic Ministry, Religious Education, and Evangelization for the Archdiocese of Chicago. Currently Ductram serves as president of the Federation for Pastoral Institutes, and a board member of the Council on Intellectual Disabilities.



OMAR ENRIQUE GARCIA ROJAS

Omar Enrique Garcia Rojas was born in Caracas and grew up in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. He is a parishioner at the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe, where he serves on the parish council and is a parish faith formation director and facilitator. At the cathedral, Garcia also serves as a leader and facilitator for the Missionary Childhood Association and Grupo "San Pablo." He is a Holy Hour music minister as well as coordinates and facilitates spiritual and Confirmation retreats. Garcia also is involved in the music ministry for the diocesan televised Masses, singing in both the English and Spanish celebrations. Garcia is a graduate of the University of Dallas.



FATHER CHARLES GITHINJI

Father Charles Githinji is the pastoral administrator for St. Patrick Catholic Church in Dallas. He is a native of Kenya and is the youngest of seven children, with three brothers and three sisters. Growing up in Kenya, he was raised by devout Catholic parents, learning to revere the name of Christ, to have devotion to Mary, Mother of Jesus, and to have a great desire for God. Father Githinji completed seminary formation at St. Mary's Seminary in Houston and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Dallas in 2013. Prior to serving at St. Patrick, he served as a parochial vicar at St. Gabriel the Archangel in McKinney and St. Francis of Assisi in McKinney.

MEET THE SYNOD PREPARATORY COMMISSION

**PIA SEPTIÁN**

Pia Septián is the Cynthia and David Freeman Professor of Sacred Scripture and Coordinator, Spanish Language Programs at the University of Dallas Neuhoff Institute. Hired 16 years ago to start the Catholic Bible School in Spanish, from there five more certificate programs in Spanish have been launched. Her books include: *Women of the Old Testament and Women of the New Testament*, *Los Evangelios de Mateo y Marcos*, *Los evangelios de Lucas y Juan*; *Los Hechos de los Apóstoles*, *¿Por qué?* Frequent guest of EWTN Radio *Hoy es tu gran día*. Writes for *La Revista Católica* published by the Diocese of Dallas. Consultant for Catholic Extension Society, Advisor for the V Encuentro Youth and Young Adult Leadership Initiative (USCCB) and member of the Education and Curriculum Development Board of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability. Married to Cesar, mother of five and grandmother of six.

**CHRISTOPHER A. JOHNSON**

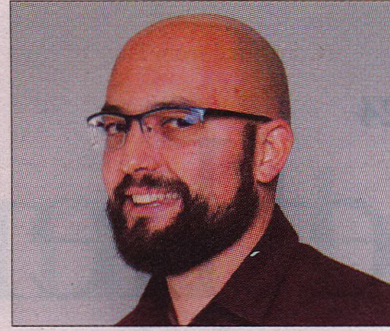
Christopher A. Johnson is the Director of Music and organist for the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He began playing the organ for the Catholic church in the fifth grade and competed frequently locally and nationally in his instrument. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Baylor University and led the music at the local Catholic Student Center. Driven by his missionary desire to "go out" and be a seed for the Fullness of Truth, Johnson has served Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and Jewish congregations. He and his wife, Kristy, are unabashed pro-life advocates with a special concern for children who have experienced or continue to experience the effects of abuse.

**JAMES W. KEYES**

James W. Keyes is the former CEO of two Fortune 500 companies, Blockbuster and 7-Eleven. He is a member of the Murphy USA 2014 board, the College of the Holy Cross board of trustees, the Columbia Graduate School of Business board of overseers, Cooper Institute board of directors, and the Dallas Symphony Association board of directors. Keyes earned a bachelor's degree from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. He also attended the University of London, Goldsmith's College and earned an MBA from the Columbia Graduate School of Business. He and his wife Margo are parishioners at All Saints Catholic Church in Dallas.

**FATHER RADOSLAW MICHAL MARKIEWICZ**

Father Radoslaw Michal Markiewicz is a priest of the Diocese of Dallas, currently serving as the Spiritual Director for Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Dallas. A native of Poland, Father Markiewicz joined the formation process at Redemptoris Mater Seminary in December 2006, earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a master's degree in theology at the University of Dallas in Irving as well as a Master of Divinity degree and a bachelor degree of Sacred Theology at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver. He is currently studying Canon Law at the Pontifical University of Salamanca in Spain. Father Markiewicz was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Dallas in May 2018, serving for two years as a parochial vicar at St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas prior to his appointment at Redemptoris Mater Seminary.

**JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ**

Joseph Rodriguez is the development and communications director for Community Does It, a non-profit organization that applies Community-Based Participatory Research Methods and grassroots organizing principles to engage and empower members of marginalized populations in Dallas. He also teaches Theology and Theology of the Body at Cristo Rey Dallas College Prep. Growing up in the Balch Springs/Pleasant Grove area, Rodriguez attended St. Augustine Catholic School and graduated from Bishop Lynch High School before completing his undergraduate studies at the University of Dallas. He then discerned and did itinerant missionary work in the Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Boston and Ireland before returning to the Dallas area. Rodriguez, his wife Lizette and their son, Liam, attend St. Augustine Catholic Church.

**LYNN ROSSOL**

Lynn Rossol was born and raised in New York City. Her family arrived in Dallas in 1976. Rossol began working for the Tejas Girl Scout Council, and moved in to parish youth ministry in 1983. She was appointed as Director of Pastoral Planning and Research in 2004 for the Diocese of Dallas and served in that role until 2016. At that time, Rossol continued working in the Diocesan Pastoral Center as the Bishop's Delegate for Ecumenism and Legislative Advocacy, a role she continues to serve. In addition, Rossol now serves in an administrative support role on the Synod Preparatory Commission.

**SEFANIT STEFANOS**

Sefanit Stefanos is a seeker of truth, wife, mom of two boys under the age of three, favorite sister and friend. Citizen of the world, she's originally from Eritrea, born in Rome, and raised in Dallas. Her upbringing in Eritrean-America home shaped her worldview, which taught her that she is part of a great community. She lives making people feel at home in her presence and to introduce others to the generous love of God that she has experienced, which is her calling in life. She experienced the best of both worlds as a graduate of both Texas A&M and Franciscan University and has worked in full-time ministry for the last 11 years in both the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and the Diocese of Dallas in the area of catechesis and evangelization.

**ANDRE VALDIVIA**

Born in Brazil to Peruvian parents, Andre Valdivia immigrated to the U.S. as a two-year-old and has lived his whole life in the North Dallas area. Valdivia attended St. Patrick Catholic School in Richardson, Jesuit College Preparatory School, graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a bachelor's degree and earned his MBA from the University of Texas at Dallas. Valdivia has been an active volunteer in his parish, St. Joseph, teaching faith formation for sacramental preparation and starting the mobile food pantry ministry in partnership with the Catholic Charities Dallas. He has supported Young Catholic Professionals as a contract consultant. Valdivia resides in Richardson with his wife, Tiffani, and three children.

**CLARE VENEGAS**

Clare Venegas serves as the Vice President of Marketing and Communications for the University of Dallas. She has more than 20 years of executive management and strategic communications experience in private, public, and non-profit sectors. Venegas started her career as a reporter and editor at the *Orange County Register*. She went on to hold several positions in marketing and corporate communications, and served for five years as manager of communications and public affairs for Southern California's largest toll-road system. In her current role, she oversees the institutional branding, public relations, digital and marketing initiatives for UD. Venegas lives in Flower Mound with her husband and three school-aged children.

**SISTER MARY ANNE ZUBERBUELER, O.P.**

Sister Mary Anne Zuberbueler is the principal of Mary Immaculate Catholic School in Farmers Branch. Sister Mary Anne joined the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia of Nashville, Tenn. in August 1989. Growing up in West Texas, Sister Mary Anne earned a bachelor's degree in English Literature from Christendom College, a master's degree in education from Northwestern State University in Louisiana, and a doctorate in education from the University of Memphis.



Diocese of Dallas
SYNOD 2024

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