

St. Mary's Altar Society celebrates 130 years of continuous service

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By Allegra Much on September 24, 2025

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[Community News](#)



The Altar of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Escondido.

Last Sunday the St. Mary's Altar and Rosary Society in Escondido celebrated its 130th anniversary. Founded in 1895, it is one of the oldest continuous women's ministries in the Catholic Diocese of San Diego. The historic church is also one of the oldest churches in the area—excluding the missions—and has a rich history which was carefully preserved by parishioner Margaret Jedlicka.

In the 1940's Jedlicka began assembling scrap books and other items detailing the history of the Altar Society. She also was able to interview surviving presidents and other members of the group dating as far back as the 1920's. The 24 scrapbooks, and several other display

boards and photographs were on display in the church during the anniversary for people to view.

Several family members of founding parishioners were scheduled to be honored—including Linda Jedlicka, a descendant of Margaret—were also invited to the event and honored for their families' contributions. The event included a blessing by St. Mary's priest in charge Fr. Scott Herrera during the 9 a.m. mass. The Altar and Rosary Society maintain the altar, including the upkeep of fresh cut flowers, and the purchase of eucharistic vessels and priest vestments at the behest of the priest in charge.

St. Mary's Catholic Church was established in 1888 when the Bishop of Los Angeles, Francis Mora, sent Father Robert F. Byrne on a mission to create a Catholic Church in Escondido. The church—originally located at the top of the hill on Kalmia Street—was known as *"The Church on the Hill."*

The original building no longer exists, however the new building complex, created in 1965 located on Broadway, still has a bell that was purchased in 1929, from the old church. According to President of the Altar and Rosary Society Margaret McCarthy: "These stories are immigrant stories, the women who were involved in the organization were pioneer Escondido families."

One of the interesting ministries the Altar and Rosary Society was involved in was sending clothing to soldiers stationed in Vietnam, as well as kids' clothes for children in Vietnam. According to McCarthy, the organization has always been about helping others, not just connected to St. Mary's. They also had a thrift shop, where clothes were given to the homeless and the needy. Another interesting fundraiser was a church fashion show with all the women dressing in apparel from the Sears catalogue.

St. Mary's was also one of the founding churches involved with Interfaith Community Services. The Altar and Rosary society pays for the flowers and maintains the altar, including paying for a professional cleaning service.

The church is currently the largest in the San Diego diocese, with over 7,000 parishioners, and is very active every day. If you would like more information about Mass, or other activities happening around the church, visit www.stmaryp.org.



The statue of St. Mary at St. Mary's Catholic Church.

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