

December 9, 2021
Feast of Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin

**Letter concerning the Youth Guild
of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe at La Crosse**

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Sixteen years ago, eight months after Pope Saint John Paul II left this world for his eternal reward, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe began the Saint Juan Diego Youth Guild. Certainly, the tireless apostolic labors of Pope Saint John Paul II in catechizing and evangelizing children and young people was a source of inspiration for the inauguration of the Shrine's Youth Guild. Identifying Saint Juan Diego as the patron for the Guild was, in another sense, also inspired by Pope Saint John Paul II's Beatification (6 May 1990) and Canonization (31 July 2002) of Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin (1474-1548), a Native American layman who was an extraordinary model of holiness of life. Thus, he was disposed to become the heroic messenger of Our Lady of Guadalupe at her apparitions from December 9th to 12th in 1531, and afterwards, dedicating the remaining seventeen years of his life to the mission of recounting the message of Our Lady to those on pilgrimage to venerate her miraculous image on his mantle (*ayate* or *tilma*). Saint Juan Diego, like all of the saints, is not only a role model of a virtuous and holy life, but also a living sign that holiness remains a realistic personal goal in today's world which is ever more forgetful of God and of His plan for our eternal salvation.

Over the last decade and a half, the Youth Guild has welcomed hundreds of members, many of whom are adults today. The fundamental purpose of the Youth Guild has always been to help children and young people to mature into holy men and women since, in the words of Pope Saint John Paul II, today's youth are "charged with the world of tomorrow" (19 August 1985) to "build a civilization based on love and truth and justice" (12 September 1984) because they are "the hope of the world" (World Youth Day, 1997). The Saint Juan Diego Youth Guild has wanted to serve Our Lord Who said:

“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19, 14). It has wanted to participate in the great work of the Gospel, that Christ may be formed in each young person (cf. Gal 4, 19), that Christ be his or her life (cf. Col 3, 3-4).

The Shrine must regularly examine herself on how effectively she is cooperating with the extraordinary graces granted by Our Lord, through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, to the Shrine and her pilgrims. Over the course of the last year, the Shrine has been reviewing many facets of her mission and organization, including the Saint Juan Diego Youth Guild, for the sake of the fullest possible cooperation with divine grace. Many blessings have come from this examination, such as the hiring of a new Executive Director, Father Paul Check, who, through his tireless priestly labors, has been building up the Kingdom of God by giving direction to and developing the mission of the Shrine. Another new member of the Shrine staff is Becket Ghioto, whose role as Director of Communications includes caring for and fostering the Youth Guild.

When it came time for the Youth Guild’s necessary and salutary self-examination, Mr. Ghioto, under the direction of Father Check, and I, with the blessing of the Shrine’s Board of Directors, discerned through prayer and study that, because the Shrine is developing structurally to meet the spiritual needs of an increasing number of pilgrims, the Youth Guild must likewise develop.

One of the Shrine’s immediate goals is the creation and establishment of an Evangelization and Catechesis Guild that will continue her dedication to the spiritual welfare of Shrine pilgrims. When seeking a patron for this Guild among the saints and blessed deeply connected to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the first saint that came to mind was the one whom the Virgin referred to as her least and littlest son, Saint Juan Diego. He was some fifty years old when he received the grace of Baptism. While he was receiving catechesis after his baptism, Our Lady appeared to him and chose him to be her particular messenger of evangelization in the New World of America. Through his work, the Virgin inaugurated one of the greatest acts of evangelization in salvation history, bringing millions of souls to her Son alive for them in the Church.

With the conclusion that Saint Juan Diego would be a consummate patron for the Shrine’s Evangelization and Catechesis Guild, it also seemed appropriate to find a new

patron saint for the Youth Guild, a patron nearer in age to the youth, yet also deeply connected with Our Lady of Guadalupe. Accordingly, as the patronage of Saint Juan Diego transfers to the Shrine's forthcoming Evangelization and Catechesis Guild, the new patron for the Youth Guild will be Saint José Sánchez del Río, who, at fourteen years of age, fought against anticlerical secularism during the Cristero War; who was captured, imprisoned and tortured for refusing to deny Christ; and whose final words before his martyrdom bespoke the depth and strength of his faith: "¡Viva Cristo Rey! ¡Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!" (Long Live Christ the King! Long Live the Virgin of Guadalupe!). The story of his heroic witness, even to the shedding of his blood, is recounted powerfully in the movie, *For Greater Glory*. The children and young people who come to know more intimately Saint José Sánchez del Río will, according to his example and with the help of his intercession, grow in their love of Christ the King and His Mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Considering that the Church has declared him the patron saint of children, adolescents, and persecuted Christians, his witness continues to leave a lasting impact throughout America. The Shrine's Youth Guild is just one more mark of Saint José Sánchez del Río's enduring legacy of heroic sanctity.

The Saint José Sánchez del Río Youth Guild accepts memberships from toddlers to teenagers. The youth are encouraged to register themselves, if possible, yet parents and grandparents can also register children and grandchildren at the Shrine's website, GuadalupeShrine.org/Youth. When a child or young person becomes a member of this Guild, he will receive a blessed medal of Saint José Sánchez del Río and will begin receiving a new monthly youth journal, titled *Full of Grace*. The *Full of Grace* Youth Journal will feature a new young saint for each month, a text from one of Pope Saint John Paul II's letters to youth, Scripture commentary and catechesis, holy cards, including the prayer of the Morning Offering and of the daily consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and much more. Youth will also have the opportunity to write a question of faith to the Youth Journal and have it answered by Father Check or myself. In addition to all this, on February 10th each year, the Feast Day of Saint José Sánchez del Río, the Shrine will host a special Mass for the Youth Guild, at the conclusion of which the celebrant will bless the congregation with a first-class relic of the young saint. This annual liturgical celebration will also be the occasion for the more solemn induction of new members of

the Youth Guild. For more details on the development of the Saint José Sánchez del Río Youth Guild, please visit GuadalupeShrine.org/Youth.

Those youth who are already registered in the Shrine's Youth Guild will automatically receive the new patron's medal, as well as the monthly editions of the *Full of Grace* Youth Journal.

If your child or grandchild is not registered, I encourage you to register them today at GuadalupeShrine.org/Youth.

I encourage you also to pray for all families, for the sanctity of marriage, and especially for children and young people, that they will grow ever more in the likeness of Christ, that they will mature into holy men and women.

Asking God to bless you, your homes, and all your labors, I remain

Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus
and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
and in the Purest Heart of Saint Joseph,



Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE