

# OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL CATHOLIC PARISH

Carmel Valley, California

## *Report of the Ad Hoc Council Regarding Furniture and Furnishings Recently added to Sanctuary and Nave*

### I. Introduction.

Parishioners were surprised when they filed into the church for Masses the weekend of July 12-13, 2025, to find that a new back altar featuring the tabernacle, a handsome new crucifix and recently colorized (to match the crucifix) statues of Joseph and Mary. Likewise the weekend of August 16-17, when they were greeted by large and elaborately framed images of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Guadalupe in the places formerly occupied by the Joseph and Mary with child statues, by another crucifix portraying the Risen Lord on the wall of the choir alcove, and by a large and elaborately framed painting of Saint Faustina's vision of Divine Mercy on the west wall of the nave in the place formerly occupied by a smaller Lady of Guadalupe picture. Less noticeable were a new lectern and modifications to the ambo (pulpit).<sup>1</sup>

The above-described changes to the sanctuary and nave (body) of the church are referred to in this report, collectively, as the "Project." Some before and after photographs of the spaces affected by the Project are shown on the following page.

Parishioner response to the Project was decidedly mixed. Some thought the new additions were proportionately too large or too flamboyant for the modest dimensions and humble origins of the church. Others worried about the effect of the cost of the changes on the financial condition of the parish, notwithstanding the vast majority of the Project was donor funded.

In due course, four parishioners<sup>2</sup> approached the parish priest, Father Jhonnatan Flores Carmona, regarding the advisability of appointing a committee to investigate and report on the circumstances surrounding the Project and to make recommendations for a process to be followed in the case of similar such projects undertaken in the future. The result was a letter dated October 1, 2025, from Fr. Jhonnatan to the four appointing them to an "ad hoc council" (the "AHC") to pursue the work referred to in the previous sentence.<sup>3</sup>

The AHC thereafter proceeded to put together the particulars for each component of the Project, including provenance of the artwork, support for the purchase price paid, including source of funds, and accounting treatment. In addition, the council began to interview the principals involved, including the principal donor of the funds used to acquire the back altar and Fr. Jhonnatan.

At the conclusion of his interview, on **December 4, 2025**, Fr. Jhonnatan, however, forbade any further contact with "donors or makers", on the basis that the AHC already knew enough to prepare its report. Shortly thereafter, the vice chancellor of the Diocese of Monterey informed the AHC, in effect, that they could expect no response to their requests for relevant diocesan decrees and the like dealing with projects like the Project (sometimes referred to as "statutes") inasmuch



*The Sanctuary during Ordinary Time, before and after the Project.*



*The choir alcove, before the tabernacle was moved to the Sanctuary, and after the Project.*



*Lindenwood statues of St Joseph and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, before and after colorization.*

as the diocese was satisfied with its dealings with Fr. Jhonnatan and that the matter was now considered closed. <sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, the AHC based the advice contained in this Report on information gathered through early December 2025, admittedly incomplete in some respects, and, regarding compliance with applicable requirements, of canon law as well as of diocesan statutes which it believes to be in existence but did not actually see.

Additionally, and the AHC believes consistent with its charter, this Report sets forth (a) best practices with respect to consultation with the parish community which, if followed in the case of the Project might well have headed off the negative feedback referred to above; (b) some recommendations regarding processes to be followed in the case of future such undertakings; and (c) the effect of the Project on the parish's finances.

Importantly, the AHC believes that nothing it has seen in the course of its work would lead its members to suspect any bad faith or self-dealing in the conception, financing or execution of the Project.

## II. Acquisitions.

The Project, as realized by the end of August 2025, consists of several significant changes to the Sanctuary and Nave of the church. These include the following:

- purchase and installation of a new crucifix, and removal of the original crucifix
- purchase and installation of a large, new back altar, also called a reredos, in the Sanctuary plus new candleholders, book holders for ambo and lectern
- colorization (by painting) of the wooden statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and child Jesus, and St Joseph
- purchase and installation of a new “Risen Lord” figure and cross in the east alcove (also known as the “music alcove”)
- a framed lithograph of Our Lady of Guadalupe
- a framed painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- a framed painting of the Divine Mercy vision of St Faustina

### A. Background and Financing.

According to Fr. Jhonnatan, parts of the project were conceived shortly after his arrival in July 2021. He thought the original crucifix was too small, and that the statues of the Virgin Mary and St Joseph were too pale. Furthermore, after the tabernacle was moved in 2024 there was an empty spot between the two angels on the wall mural in the east alcove. Fr. Jhonnatan thought the “Risen Lord” figure that was displayed during the Easter season was too large and rather unwieldy, and a new “Risen Lord” figure could fill the empty spot.<sup>5</sup> On the recommendation of his uncle, Fr. Henry Carmona, during one of his trips to Columbia Fr. Jhonnatan visited an artisan, Fernando Raúl Castro Terán, from San Antonio de Ibarra, Ecuador,<sup>6</sup> and discussed his interest in commissioning a crucifix and a “Risen Lord” figure.

Given the expected cost of the carvings, he waited for donors willing to support the work rather than present his plan to the Finance Council, which would be the norm for typical financing. (Note, 2025 resolutions by the Finance Council require the pastor to submit non-budgeted projects of more than \$1,500 for review by the Finance Council, whether donor paid or not.)

The first of these pledges appears to have been obtained from the Cachagua community organizers of the 2024 Las Posadas novena, who had funds available from that event. Fr. Jhonnatan suggested they support a new Risen Lord figure commissioned by Mr. Terán. Funds in the amount of \$1,800 were set aside, with the donation to be made after the purchase was complete.<sup>7</sup>

In January 2025, parishioner Tom Albanese expressed to Fr Jhonnatan his interest in making a donation to the church in honor of his deceased father, Carmen Albanese. Fr. Jhonnatan suggested that he support carving of a new crucifix, which Mr. Albanese pledged to support.

During this period in early 2025, the project scope increased significantly. Fr. Jhonnatan envisioned a back altar on which to place not only the new crucifix, but the statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph (after they’d been colorized). Moving those statues would leave empty areas on the church walls where they had originally been installed, and he envisioned new artwork for those areas. Mr. Albanese agreed to fund the construction and installation of the new back altar (dedicated to his deceased father), and an anonymous donor pledged to fund the

artwork. With pledges made, the project was set fully in motion, and on February 16, 2025 the first donation of \$1,500 from Tom Albanese was made for “Crucifix Project”.<sup>8</sup>

#### B. Consultations with the Parish.

Throughout the conception, design, and planning, Fr. Jhonnatan had no documented discussions with the church’s Pastoral Council, Finance Council, or with any parishioners except for the two individuals who funded the Project. According to Fr. Jhonnatan, this was intentional and aimed at expediency, as dissenting opinions would delay or perhaps thwart the project. Furthermore, Fr. Jhonnatan has stated that such consultations are unnecessary, because the Councils are advisory only.<sup>9</sup> Briefings of the Councils began only after parts of the project were already ordered.

The first documented evidence of notifying the Councils is in a council member’s personal notes taken during the February 21, 2025 Pastoral Council meeting.<sup>10</sup> There are no minutes of the meeting; however the notes state:

*“New Crucific [sic] for the Altar. Tom Albanese is sponsoring a new crucifix for the Altar to increase size from 15x35 to 60x24; Made of mongillo [sic<sup>11</sup>] wood from Ecuador and is being specially made.”* The notes describe other agenda items which involved discussions, but no discussion is mentioned for this item.

The second documented evidence of discussions with the Councils is the minutes of the June 4, 2025 Finance Council meeting.<sup>12</sup> The minutes state:

*“Fr. Jhonnatan then informed the council that he has been working on a project to create a new back altar for the sanctuary of the parish church; that he had already taken delivery of a new crucifix from an Ecuadorean artist that would be paired with the existing statues of Mary and Joseph after they had been retouched and colorized; that he had preliminary sketches and an estimate (\$45K - \$50K) for the project from two potential wood-working companies; and that a parishioner was interested in underwriting this project in honor of his late father. The council authorized Fr. Jhonnatan to proceed with this project, it being the sense of the meeting that, while it would be ideal for the donor to absorb the full cost, the difference between his undertaking and the cost to complete could be bridged by a portion of the excess from this year’s AMA appeal raise.”*

There are no other notes or meeting minutes which mention the project until after its August completion. The parish first learned of the project on June 8, 2025 when Fr. Jhonnatan announced from the pulpit that he was going to make some changes to the altar and to the statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph.

#### C. Purchases and Installations.

##### *The Crucifix in the Sanctuary*

Early in 2025, presumably after a conversation with the donor, Fr. Jhonnatan ordered a crucifix from Mr. Terán in Ecuador, having sent him a photograph of the smaller existing crucifix to use as a model. On February 26, 2025, Fr. Jhonnatan received a reimbursement of \$1,218 from the parish operating account, presumably against an expense report, for the new crucifix (\$1,009) and its shipping (\$209).<sup>13</sup> No bill of sale for the crucifix has been provided to date.

The new crucifix was stored until the installation of the back altar in July 2025. The original crucifix was moved to the rectory. The provenance of the original crucifix isn't known by the authors of this report.

### *The Back Altar*

According to donor Tom Albanese, the back altar was completely designed by Fr. Jhonnatan, including the choice of blue fields with stars behind the figures. Fr. Jhonnatan selected Sergio Barajas, an artisan working in Arvin, California to do the work. Mr. Barajas was recommended by Fr. Lucas Pantoja, the pastor of the Old Mission San Miguel church. According to Fr. Jhonnatan, Mr. Barajas has crafted many furniture items for churches in the Diocese of Fresno. Another local artisan (TSS Millworks) was initially contacted for the work, but the cost estimate was deemed by Fr. Jhonnatan to be too high.<sup>14</sup>

On June 6, an initial payment of \$15,000 was made to Mr. Barajas out of the operating account.<sup>15</sup>

On June 8, 2025, Mr. Barajas submitted an invoice for “final amount for service” for a “back altar, 12x9 ft” (\$38,000), “two candlesticks, includes book holder for pulpit” (\$3,500), and “restoration [sic] of St Joseph and Virgin Mary” (\$3,500) for a total of \$45,000<sup>16</sup>. Work would begin on June 8 and the items would be delivered no later than July 10, 2025. The invoice stated that payments would be made in three installments of \$15,000 each. According to Fr. Jhonnatan, this was done so as to avoid drawing the attention of the Diocese of Monterey to the project, given that the Diocese requires the Bishop's approval for and Diocese supervision of expenses exceeding \$20,000.<sup>17</sup>

On June 29, a deposit of \$45,000 was made to the church bank account, a donation from Tom Albanese for “Altar project”.<sup>18</sup>

During the week of July 6, 2025, a crew installed the back altar, new crucifix, colorized statues, and new altar furniture in the Sanctuary of the church. They also moved the tabernacle into the new back altar. A plaque dedicating the back altar to Carmen Albanese was attached to the right side of the altar.

On July 13, 2025, then Bishop Daniel Garcia celebrated the Feast Mass of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, during which he blessed the new back altar.

### *Colorization (by painting) of wooden statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and child Jesus, and St Joseph*

As part of the contract for the back altar, the colorization of the statues of the Virgin Mary with child and St Joseph were done by Mr. Barajas. The painting was done off-site, possibly in the artisan's studio in Arvin, California. There were no special instructions for their removal from the church or transportation.

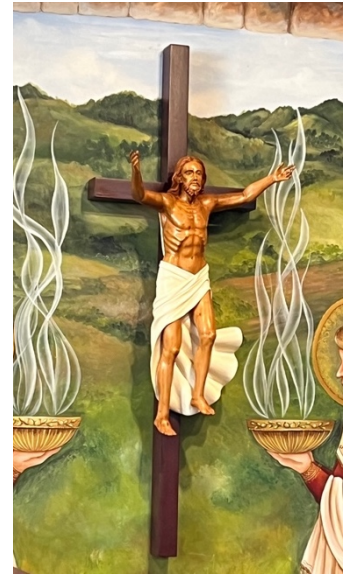
The statues were installed in the back altar prior to the Bishop's celebration of Mass on July 13.

According to parish records, the two statues were originally installed in the church in 1973. They were hand-carved in Italy from linden wood and were blessed by Bishop Harry Clinch in December 1973.

*“Risen Lord” figure*

The figure of Christ walking forward from the Cross is a work from the same artisan who carved the crucifix (Mr. Terán). However, its provenance is less clear. The only documentation found for the figure is an invoice of \$488.23 for shipping from Cali, Columbia, <sup>19</sup> and a payment of \$493.11 from the church (the difference is a transaction charge). <sup>20</sup>

Although funds for the figure were pledged by the Cachagua Las Posadas organization, they continue to wait for a bill-of-sale and no donation has yet been made. <sup>21</sup> Fr. Jhonnatan is presumably the owner of the figure at present.



*Framed lithograph of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Fr. Jhonnatan wanted to replace the original image of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a much larger replica from Mexico that he owned. The size of this replica roughly determined the sizes of the Sacred Heart and Divine Mercy paintings. <sup>22</sup> Fr. Jhonnatan asked Sergio Barajas to make a frame for the image using cast resin (chosen for expediency, as Mr. Barajas had the material in stock). Mr. Barajas charged \$2500 for the frame. <sup>23</sup>

The price of this frame was borne by an anonymous donor whose donation was deposited on August 10, 2025. <sup>24</sup>

The original image was donated by the mother of parishioner Lucy Zarazua, and has been placed in storage. According to Fr. Jhonnatan, Ms. Zarazua was agreeable with that. <sup>25</sup>

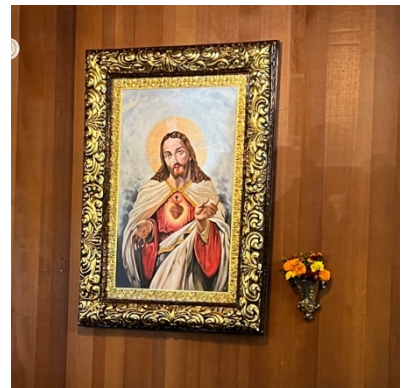


*Framed painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Fr. Jhonnatan has worked before with the artist Salvador Zarate of Watsonville, and two of his paintings are presently mounted in the parish hall. Fr. Jhonnatan asked him to paint a copy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from an image he had seen online (of a 19th century Portuguese painting, artist unknown), and Mr. Zarate did so. <sup>26</sup>

No bill-of-sale was found for the painting, and no payment was made for it by the church, therefore the painting is presumably the property of Fr. Jhonnatan.

The resin frame, however, was commissioned by Fr. Jhonnatan to Sergio Barajas, who charged \$2,000 for it as part of his frame and painting invoice of August 21, 2025. <sup>27</sup>



Like the frame for Our Lady of Guadalupe, the price of the frame was covered by an anonymous donation.

*Framed painting of the Divine Mercy vision of St. Faustina*

Fr. Jhonnatan was approached by an anonymous parishioner who wanted for the church specifically a painting of the Divine Mercy vision of St. Faustina, and was willing to pay \$5,000 in installments for it. <sup>28</sup> Fr. Jhonnatan agreed, and commissioned Sergio Barajas to make the painting and cast resin frame. Mr. Barajas charged \$3,500 for the painting and frame <sup>29</sup>.

The painting is a copy of one made by American artist Kathleen Weber, who had in turn copied (with modifications) one by Polish artist Adolf Hyła <sup>30</sup>.



#### D. Guidelines

The Catholic Church provides extensive guidelines in several documents on how changes to the worship space should be made. Covering these guidelines is beyond the scope of this report, however, the guidelines are relevant to this project and must be noted. A sampling of references and relevant language is given below:

**Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship** from the Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, dated November 16, 2000:

from the section "Roles Within the Parish"

*"In the final analysis, decisions concerning every facet of the building program from beginning to end remain with the pastor, in conformity with diocesan regulations. Wisdom, however, requires that the pastor consult broadly with the congregation, the parish staff, the parish pastoral council, the parish liturgy committee, and the parish finance council, as well as with liturgical and architectural experts and experienced diocesan personnel."*

from the section "Collaboration"

*"Collaboration is essential to every architectural project, but it is even more so in architecture at the service of liturgy, for cooperation reflects the very nature of the Body of Christ. The members of the parish community along with their pastor, the liturgical consultant, the artist, the architect, and the contractor are all called to a collaborative effort, whose goal is to summon forth the finest expressions of faith within their means. Mutual trust and openness are central components of the collaborative effort. The parish, represented by its pastor and committees, the architect and liturgical design consultant, the artist, and the contractors should strive to listen to each other with careful attention so that a place of sacred beauty will emerge from their mutual dialogue."*

**SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM**, solemnly promulgated by his holiness St Pope Paul VI, dated December 4, 1963:

*“126. When passing judgment on works of art, local ordinaries shall give a hearing to the diocesan commission on sacred art and, if needed, also to others who are especially expert, and to the commissions referred to in Art. 44, 45, and 46.*

*“Ordinaries must be very careful to see that sacred furnishings and works of value are not disposed of or dispersed; for they are the ornaments of the house of God.”*

**OPERA ARTIS: Circular Letter on the Care of the Church’s Historical and Artistic Heritage**, Congregation for the Clergy – April 11, 1971:

*“In commissioning artists and choosing works of art that are to become part of a church, the highest artistic standard is to be set in order that art may aid faith and devotion and be true to the reality it is to symbolize and the purpose it is to serve.”*

Other guidelines and rules may be found in the **General Instruction of the Roman Missal** and in the **Code of Canon Law**.

#### E. Effect of Project on Parish Finances

The cost of the Project is mainly, but not entirely, covered by donations which are reflected on the balance sheet as “restricted funds.” To the extent that such costs exceed donations, they are paid as operating expenses. The amount of such excess as of 12/31/25 was approximately \$4,200. In addition, the full amount of donations received is treated as parish revenue subject to assessment at the rate of 22% by the Diocese of Monterey payable in monthly installments in an amount set each fiscal year based on the parish’s prior year collections.

As detailed above under “Purchases and “Installations”, reimbursement of the approximately \$1,700 cost of the Risen Lord crucifix, including shipping, is in suspense pending receipt by the donor of a bill-of-sale. And, since the donation to cover the cost of the Divine Mercy painting is to be made in installments, \$3,000, representing the as-yet unpaid portion of the contribution, is carried as an account receivable.

Accordingly, the parish is responsible for the \$4,200 shortfall plus up to \$16,700 of diocesan assessment on the donations plus the amount of any uncollected donations related to the Risen Christ crucifix and the Divine Mercy painting. The likely source of the cash required is a reallocation of funds from savings to current operating expenses, which will require Finance Council approval (*see* subsection (F)(3) below).

#### F. Recommendations.

The recent experience with the new back altar, new paintings, and related crucifixes (hereinbefore referred to as the “Project”) has exposed significant gaps in Our Lady of Mount Carmel’s (“OLMC”) administrative processes, including those related to diocesan financial and ecclesiastical guidelines, and common-sense dialog with the parish community. These gaps include failure to adhere to diocese financial guidelines, no (or minimal) collaboration with the

Pastoral Council and the Finance Council, or any real outreach to the parish community at large. These shortcomings should be addressed in future undertakings of this sort.

In light of these observations, the Ad Hoc Council would like to recommend the following guidelines be observed in future as pertains to ANY material changes to the parish facilities, in particular those that impact the worship space, as follows:

1. **Collaboration with Pastoral Council** (the “PC”) on intent and design considerations for any material changes to parish facilities – sacred space and secular (*e.g.*, the hall) in both instances. The PC should at minimum be made aware of the thought processes behind any contemplated changes, approximate costs, and likely funding sources (*i.e.*, specific donations, or parish financial resources, whether restricted or operating funds.) The PC should have a leading role in providing feedback and guidance to the parish priest for changes to sacred spaces.
2. **Full compliance with relevant diocesan guidelines** AND applicable canon law for approval of any changes to sacred spaces whatsoever. These guidelines or rules should ideally be consulted before a project has been conceived, but certainly in advance of or in conjunction with item (1) above. For example, in the case of the back altar, the Catholic Church does not allow naming rights after a donor and, in particular, inscriptions on the altar. Rather, a plaque elsewhere in the church is permitted.<sup>31</sup>
3. By an early 2025 agreement with Fr. Johnathan, **Finance Council (“FC”) approval is required for all unbudgeted expenses greater than \$1,500**, whether donor-paid or not. This requirement was more formally adopted by Finance Council resolution on October 8, 2025 and documented in the minutes of that meeting. Said FC approval need not be time consuming or burdensome and can be approved by the FC at a scheduled meeting or by approval by email or conference call.
4. **Compliance with then current Diocesan financial rules is mandatory, the \$20,000 limit (as of early 2026 and perhaps updated over time) on parish project spending in particular.**<sup>32</sup> This limit requires formal approval for project expenses greater than the above limit, a purchase agreement or contract approved by the Diocese, and payment of related invoices by the Diocese. In no case is it acceptable to break more expensive projects into payment amounts to remain under the \$20,000 threshold. This is deliberately deceptive and not appropriate.
5. **For significant gifts**, best practice (and presumably diocesan policy) requires **a written gift agreement or memorandum of understanding**. Such a writing would include the amount and payment schedule of the gift, the purpose of and any restrictions on the gift and a statement regarding what happens if the project changes or cannot be completed. In addition, the writing should indicate approval by the parish priest, FC, and the Bishop of the Diocese.<sup>33</sup>

Respectfully submitted on April 17, 2026, by the Ad Hoc Council

Rebecca Bayless  
John Finn  
Alex Gray  
James Rice

## Notes.

The number in brackets at the end of some of the following notes refer to the document number in the Appendix.

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<sup>1</sup> The first row of pews was also refinished at negligible cost by the provider of the back altar to better match the others in the church.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Bayless, Alex Gray and James Rice, long serving members of the parish finance council, and John Finn, the parish webmaster.

<sup>3</sup> A copy of this letter is attached in the Appendix to this report. [1]

<sup>4</sup> Email dated December 11, 2025, from Father Tim Nondorf to John Finn. [2]

<sup>5</sup> Interview of Fr Jhonnatan by the four members of the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

<sup>6</sup> A flyer describing some of the details of the back altar, distributed with the bulletin on July 13, 2025. [4]

<sup>7</sup> Interview of Trini Resendiz by Alondra Valdez-Klemek and John Finn on November 16, 2025. [5]

<sup>8</sup> Transaction Report for the Altar Project, line 1. [6]

<sup>9</sup> Interview of Fr Jhonnatan by the four members of the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

<sup>10</sup> Notes from the February 21, 2025 Pastoral Council meeting, by Alondra Klemek. [7]

<sup>11</sup> According to the July 13, 2025 back altar flyer, the crucifix is made from naranjillo wood, often used for religious images and instruments. [4]

<sup>12</sup> Agenda and minutes of the June 6, 2025 Finance Council meeting. [8]

<sup>13</sup> Payment to Fr Jhonnatan, February 26, 2025, Wells Fargo transaction detail. [9]

<sup>14</sup> Interview of Fr Jhonnatan by the four members of the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

<sup>15</sup> Transaction Report for the Altar Project, line 8. [6]

<sup>16</sup> Collected invoices from Sergio Barajas / Sacred Art Restoration and Religious Goods, various dates, page 1. [10]

<sup>17</sup> Interview of Fr Jhonnatan by the four members of the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

<sup>18</sup> Transaction Report for the Altar Project, line 2. [6]

<sup>19</sup> Receipt for Shipping of Risen Lord, dated July 2, 2025, signed by Fr Jhonnatan Carmona. [11]

<sup>20</sup> Transaction Report for the Altar Project, line 12. [6]

<sup>21</sup> Interview of Trini Resendiz by Alondra Valdez-Klemek and John Finn on November 16, 2025,. [5]

<sup>22</sup> Interview of Fr Jhonnatan by the four members of the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

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<sup>23</sup> Collected invoices from Sergio Barajas / Sacred Art Restoration and Religious Goods, various dates, page 3. [10]

<sup>24</sup> Transaction Report for the Altar Project, line 3. [6]

<sup>25</sup> Interview of Fr. Jhonnatan by the four members of the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

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<sup>28</sup> Interview of Fr. Jhonnatan by the Ad Hoc Council on December 4, 2025. [3]

<sup>29</sup> Collected invoices from Sergio Barajas / Sacred Art Restoration and Religious Goods, various dates, page 3. [6]

<sup>30</sup> Wikipedia entry for “Divine Mercy Image”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine\\_Mercy\\_image#Hyla\\_painting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Mercy_image#Hyla_painting), retrieved January 13, 2026.

<sup>31</sup> *See, generally*, Canon Law Canon 1171 (dealing with the treatment of sacred objects). Also the diocesan Worship Office would presumably be a reliable source of statutory guidance on this subject and should be consulted in advance of any commitment to a donor in regard to form of recognition. Interview, December 4, 2025, with Fr. Jhonnatan.

<sup>32</sup> Email dated December 11, 2025, from Father Tim Nondorf to John Finn. [2]

<sup>33</sup> *See, generally*, Canon Law Canon 1277 (dealing with the administration of church goods).