

American Academy of Religion
Annual Meeting – San Diego, 2024

San Diego Historic Houses of Worship

David Bains, Samford University
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Monday, November 25, 2024 - 1:00 PM-5:00 PM

Meet at Convention Center in front of Hall F

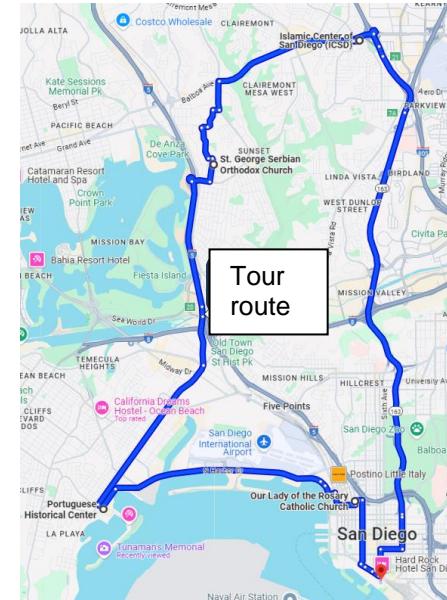
This bus tour explores how San Diego's religious landscape has been shaped by a variety of immigrant communities and international contacts. We begin north of downtown at the Islamic Center of San Diego (1986) designed by Robert E. Des Lauriers, a significant modernist architect in San Diego. From there we proceed to St. George Serbian Orthodox Church designed by another San Diego architect, George Lykos, (1969). Returning to older neighborhoods near the harbor we will visit the United Portuguese *Sociedade do Espírito Santo* Chapel (1922); and Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church (1925), a center of Italian American life. The architecture of the first two sites is rooted in San Diego's well-known modernist architecture, while the later two reflect European traditions. St. George and Our Lady of the Rosary are both richly decorated churches. The first with mosaics designed by Stevan Cukich of Belgrade and executed by Italian-American mosaic craftsman Publio Cavalini; the second with paintings by Fausto Tasca, a Venetian painter working in Los Angeles.

Note: The Islamic Center reminds us that in the Islamic tradition it is discouraged for individuals from different genders to shake hands when introduced to each other. Women are encouraged to wear a headscarf, but this is not required.

Portions of this guide are drawn from guides to previous AAR tours which were co-authored by David Bains, Jeanne Halgren Kilde, University of Minnesota, and Rick Kennedy, Point Loma Nazarene University.

Schedule

- 1:00 Leave Convention Center
- 1:30 Arrive at Islamic Center of San Diego
7050 Eckstrom Avenue
San Diego, CA 92111
- 2:00 Board Bus to Leave Islamic Center
- 2:20 St. George Serbian Orthodox Church
3025 Denver Street
San Diego, CA 92117
- 3:05 Board Bus to Leave St. George
- 3:20 Arrive United Portuguese *Sociedade do Espírito Santo* Chapel and Hall
2818 Avenida De Portugal
San Diego, CA 92106
- 3:50 Board bus to leave SES
- 4:10 Arrive Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church
1668 State Street
San Diego CA 92101
- 4:35 Leave Our Lady of the Rosary
- 4:50 Arrive Convention Center



Islamic Center of San Diego
7050 Eckstrom Avenue
San Diego, CA 92111
<http://www.icsd.org/>

Originally called Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Mosque, this building was designed by Robert E. Des Lauriers in 1986 for a small group of Muslims living in San Diego County. Construction was completed in 1990.

Des Lauriers was raised in Los Angeles and settled in San Diego in 1952 after receiving his architectural training at the University of Colorado. He was an important figure in southern California's embrace of modern design as a signature architectural style. Most of his work consisted of naval, residential, and educational structures. In 1959, however, he won an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects for his design of Carlton Hills Lutheran Church in Santee, California. This established his reputation as an architect who could design spiritually inspiring spaces in a contemporary style. Over the course of his career he completed sixty-seven religious projects including San Diego's Calvary Lutheran (1961), First Assembly of God (1971), and Hope United Methodist Church (1978).

Des Lauriers experience with both houses of worship and schools made him a natural choice for this Muslim community. The center was designed to accommodate a variety of needs and services. It includes not only a mosque but also significant auxiliary spaces, including those housing the Islamic School of San Diego. The building's exterior combines clean modern lines with a traditional Islamic dome and stylized minaret. This makes it easily recognizable to motorists on the adjoining streets and freeway as an Islamic house of prayer. These elements are not merely external signs, rather they extend inside the building itself. The prayer room features large windows letting in abundant light from the north and east, while its positioning on the northeast corner of property facilitates a harmonious orientation of the room toward Mecca. (The *qiblah* or direction of prayer in San Diego is roughly 25° or north-northeast.) Since the founding of the Center, the congregation has grown significantly, and now serves as an Islamic resource center for the region.



In addition to the location we will visit, the center maintains a separate location in the eastern part of the county in an adapted building. The center has recently acquired adjoining property and is considering whether to build additional structures there or to reconstruct the entire property.

The center's website offers the following information for visitors: "The Islamic Center of San Diego is open for visits from people of all faiths. Please note that NO SHOES are allowed in the prayer halls. . . . In the Islamic tradition, it is discouraged for individuals from different genders to shake hands when introduced to each other. Visitors are requested to be dressed modestly and it is considered respectful for women to wear a head scarf, although not required."

Sources:

MIT Libraries. "Dome." <http://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/30132>
Modern San Diego. <http://www.modernsandiego.com/RobertDesLauriers.html>

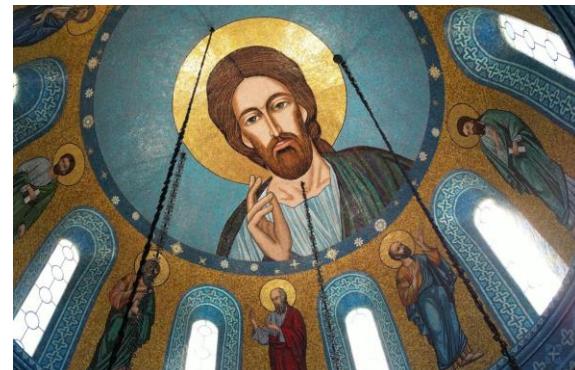
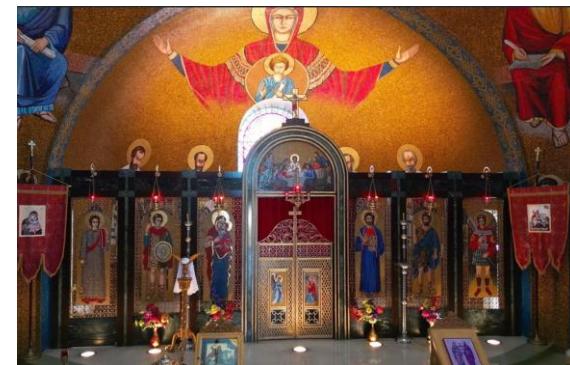
St. George Serbian Orthodox Church
3025 Denver Street
San Diego, CA 92117
<https://www.stgeorgeinsd.org/>

The dramatic post-World War II growth of the city of San Diego included a surge in the Serbian population. These Orthodox Christians founded St. George parish on May 4, 1952. The following year a building site was purchased at 3264 Lincoln Avenue northeast of Balboa Park. Ground breaking for the church new took place in April 1956 with dedication ceremonies in November of the same year. Six years later, however, the property was purchased by the state department of highways for the construction of Interstate 805. This enabled the parish to move and purchase its present site in the Mission Bay neighborhood.

George Lykos (1911-2001) designed the building. Born in Boston, he studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology receiving his bachelor's degree in 1935 and his master's the following year. In 1942, he and Sidney Ingram Goldhammer organized the Lykos & Goldhammer Architecture & Engineering in San Diego. Lykos's works include the Grant K-8 School (1956), First Unitarian Universalist Church (1959), and Saint Sophia Church (1959).

The western front of the rectangular church is topped by two domed towers and a large dome rises above the center of the nave. As is traditional, icons depicting saints, biblical scenes, and feast days cover the interior of the church. While these are most commonly painted, here it was determined that mosaics with better withstand the salt air of the nearby Pacific Ocean. The designs for the mosaics were made by Stevan Cukich, an academic painter from Belgrade, Serbia and the mosaics crafted by an Italian tile-works owner, Mr. Giovanni Nastrucci, and the mosaic craftsman, Mr. Publio Cavalini. The church was consecrated in July 1969. The church has been served by Father Bratislav Bratso Krsic since 2007.

Photos from St. George Serbian Orthodox Church.



United Portuguese Sociedade do Espírito Santo Chapel and Hall

Portuguese Historian Center

2818 Avenida De Portugal

San Diego, CA 92106

<http://www.upses.com/>

Whaling supported the first Portuguese immigrants to Point Loma in the middle 1880s and eventually the Portuguese community found financial stability in the booming tuna industry. Today, although the tuna industry has largely left San Diego, the Portuguese continue to thrive and promote their heritage through the local United Portuguese Sociedade do Espírito Santo (U.P.S.E.S.), the Portuguese Historical Society, and through St. Agnes Catholic Church. The U.P.S.E.S. supports many religious and civic activities, sports teams, and generally encourages community spirit in what was sometimes called either "Roseville" or "Tunaville" but is now referred to as Point Loma village.



United Portuguese Sociedade do Espírito Santo Chapel and Hall (as built in 1922).

The best known of the annual events sponsored by the U.P.S.E.S. is the *Festa do Divino Espírito Santo*. The *Festa* celebrates the answered prayer of Queen-Saint Isabel of Portugal (1271-1336). During a time of famine, Queen Isabel imported food to feed her people. At a morning mass, having depleted all her funds and the famine persisting, she promised to the Holy Spirit, "I will give my crown to the Church if you will send me a miracle, so my people will be relieved of their hunger." As she left the church, she saw ships coming into the harbor loaded with wheat and corn. In accord with her promise, she gave her crown to the church in honor of the Holy Spirit's faithfulness to the people. For over 700 years Portuguese people have celebrated this event in the *Festa do Espírito Santo*. In 1884, immigrants brought the festival to San Diego. In 1910 the festival was formally established as an annual event in Point Loma.

The central feature of *Festa* is a formal procession of the leaders of the Portuguese community along with young people representing Queen-Saint Isabel of Portugal and her court. The queen carries the crown, called the "Holy Spirit Crown," representing the one donated to the church. The procession begins at the Portuguese Hall, marches several blocks up to St. Agnes Church where it stops for a celebratory mass. Leaving the church, the procession ends at the chapel where the Holy Spirit Crown is installed for the rest of the *Festa*.



Festa Queen holding the Holy Spirit Crown in front of chapel.

The chapel was completed in 1922 along with the first hall that stood on the site of the present hall. The chapel is a facsimile of those that exist on the island of Terceira, Azores. The Azores being the ancestral home of many in Point Loma. Inside is a statue of Queen-Saint Isabel holding a mantle of flowers. The statue depicts a story about Isabel that is often represented in painting and sculpture. It was her practice to save bread from her own table and, herself, give it to the poor. Her haughty husband, the king, tried to stop

her from nightly mingling with the poor. At one point, catching her sneaking food out of the castle, he demanded that she show him what she carried. She said a prayer and threw open her cloak. Instead of bread, red roses tumbled out. God, in the interest of the poor, had protected her from the wrath of her husband.

The Portuguese Historical Center is located across the street from the chapel and hall. The center was founded in 1977. It was instrumental in the erection of a bronze sculpture on Shelter Island, the Tunaman's Memorial, designed by Franco Vianello, in 1988.

Sources: Web sites and brochures of *United Portuguese S.E.S, Point Loma*, and the *Portuguese Historical Center, Point Loma*. Thanks also to Carl Silva, President of U.P.S.E.S.

Our Lady of the Rosary Church
Italian National Catholic Parish in San
Diego

1668 State Street
San Diego CA 92101
<http://olrsd.org/>



History: Italian immigrants began arriving in San Diego in the late nineteenth-century. Their numbers increased steadily in the early twentieth century as Italians, like Portuguese, were drawn to jobs offered by San Diego's growing tuna industry. Their neighborhood near the docks and tuna canneries soon became known as Little Italy.

In late 1921 John J. Cantwell, bishop of Monterey-Los Angeles (and later first archbishop of Los Angeles), sent Father Sylvester Rabagliati (1871-1940) to serve the growing Italian community. A native of Italy, Rabagliati had served Italian communities in New York, San Francisco, and Washington State. Rabagliati found an ideal site for a church at the corner of Date and State Streets. Initially he celebrated mass in a small house on Columbia Street while raising money for the new church. Ground was broken in August 1923 and the church, which drew both Italian and Portuguese families, held its first worship service that Christmas Eve. The completed church was consecrated on November 15, 1925. While the parish struggled for many years with the debt on the building, the growth of various religious societies encouraged the completion of an adjoining parish hall in 1939.

The construction of the Crosstown Freeway (now Interstate 5) in the early 1960s bisected the neighborhood, destroying many homes and threatening the neighborhood. Businesses increasingly crowded out residences and families moved to the suburbs. This familiar American story dramatically threatened parish life. Since it was a national parish for Italian-Americans, rather than a territorial parish for a neighborhood, however, the leaders of Our Lady of the Rosary urged families to attend the church regardless of their place of residence.

Since 1969, the parish has been staffed by Barnabite Fathers (formally known as Clerics Regular of St. Paul). The order was founded in 1530 in Milan by St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria and others. The current pastor of the parish is Fr. Joseph M. Tabigue, C.R.S.P., a native of the Philippines, he has served the church since 2007 and became the church's seventh pastor, and first non-Italian pastor in 2011.

Today the parish remains a central feature of San Diego's Little Italy and its Italian-American community. Several religious societies continue to be affiliated with the parish and to celebrate their annual festivals. These include the Addolorata Society and the Madonna del Lume (Our Lady of Light) Society, both of which carry the

statue of Our Lady in procession from the church to the Embarcadero on their respective autumn feast days to pray for fishermen and bless their boats.

Art and Architecture. The church is built in a simple Italian Renaissance style with arched windows and a central door flanked by two towers. A painted sculptural medallion over the front door depicts Mary holding the infant Jesus. The entrance is flanked by marble statues of St. Peter, the patron of fishermen, and of the Genoese explorer Christopher Columbus.

Our Lady of the Rosary is most noted for its interior decoration. Fr. Rabagliati commissioned Fausto Tasca, a Venetian painter working in Los Angeles, to decorate the ceilings and the walls of the church. Tasca immigrated to the United States in 1913, moving to Santa

Barbara in 1916, and then to Los Angeles in 1920. He completed these paintings on canvas in his Los Angeles studio and then they were mounted in the church. The greatest works are the mural of the crucifixion over the altar and that of the Last Judgment on the church's rear wall. Both are complex scenes with many figures. The likeness of Fr. Rabagliati is included in the bottom center of the Last Judgment presenting the Church of the Holy Rosary to Christ and Mary. The seven medallions in the center of the ceiling depict mysteries of the Christian faith. Along the sides of the ceiling are the apostles. The fifteen stained-glass windows depict the events in the life of Jesus and Mary that are the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries of the rosary. The depiction of Our Lady of the Rosary over the side entrance to the left of the altar was painted in Italy for the church. It was originally located above the altar.



Tasca commissioned fellow immigrant, Carlos Romanelli, to create the statues of Our Lady, the Sacred Heart, St. Anne, and St. Joseph. Other statues found in the church include St. Antony of Padua and Addolorata (a Sicilian devotion to Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows). Stations of the Cross line the walls of the church.

Sources and Further Reading:

1925-1975, *The First Fifty Years: Our Lady of the Rosary Church*. San Diego: The Church, 1975.

Fausto Bellino Tasca <http://www.faustotasca.com/>

Italian Archives of San Diego: A Program of the Convivio Society
<http://italianarchives.smugmug.com/>

Quinney, Kimber Marie. *San Diego's Little Italy*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2007.

Solcia, Louis. *Our Lady of the Rosary: The Jewel of Little Italy*. John B. Productions, Inc. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZIxDF8x9dE>