



## Arnie Lara: *inspired and inspiring*

Arnold Lara has been an Associate of the Sisters of Notre Dame for three years. His interest in the Associate program was sparked when he read the *Vision & Challenge* magazine (a semi-annual update of the happenings of the Sisters of Notre Dame). When he discovered this, he felt a call. “I found the information about the SND Associates to be quite interesting, and I decided that it was something I would like to be involved in.”

Arnie is a Senior Systems Analyst for the Superior Court of California in Ventura. As a resident of Ventura County, Arnie is actively involved with his parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Santa Paula. He facilitates Lectio Divina, serves as an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, and has been the Master of Ceremonies for Christmas, Easter and Confirmation liturgies.

A graduate of St. Bonaventure High School in Ventura, Arnie vividly remembers the encounters he had with the SNDs as his teachers. As Arnie files through the list of SNDs he lists the sisters one by one. “The late Sr. M. Carlann Paganelli was my freshman religion teacher. In my senior year, I had the privilege of knowing Sr. M. Ann Carla Costello and Sr. M. Louise Wanamaker as my English teachers.” As he acknowledges his connection with the SNDs to have come full circle, Arnie is surprised and grateful for the opportunities that arise when he finds himself taking an example from the SND spirit. He says, “Responding to those in need can be as simple as words of support or being present to a discouraged person.”

Last October, Arnie served on the Steering Committee for the National Associate Gathering in Chardon, Ohio—an opportunity for SND Associates across the United States to spend a weekend in spiritual renewal and community building. Needless to say, working with a team

to orchestrate an event nearly 2,500 miles away does have challenges. Arnie explained, “I learned that boundaries can be overcome by time and creativity. The Steering Committee met via Zoom video conference calls every month for a year. We dealt out assignments based on talent and expertise or were appointed/drafted by fellow steering committee members.”

Arnie remembers well the message that Sr. Mary Kristin Battles, SND Superior General, shared with the participants. “Her perspective is that the Associate’s attitude is his or her charisma.” Arnie says, “that simple phrase struck a chord with me. As I go through the day and encounter all the negativity and hurt of others, I am still called to be a light in the darkness. I am called to share our divine and provident God with others and mirror that love in our world.”

When asked about his time thus far as an Associate and the many blessings it has bestowed upon him, Arnie happily replies, “The most rewarding part of being an Associate is saying ‘yes’ and not knowing exactly where that will take me. I believe that I am always learning from these experiences and it increases my awareness to be able to express empathy towards others. I am also comforted in knowing that I have a spiritual association with approximately 500 Associates in the United States and SNDs worldwide who are praying for me, and I for them--it can’t get much better than that!”

Arnie describes his affiliation with the SNDs as an Associate as a radical form of discipleship, where one is called not only to follow but to encounter God in a spiritual journey of love and service to Him. He summarizes this experience as “Love of neighbor through the spirit and mission of the SNDs. Dare to dream it, dare to do it, dare to find yourself!”