

Mesilla's historic San Albino elevated to basilica status

By Jason Gibbs
SUN-NEWS REPORTER

LAS CRUCES — You might not think the answer to a prayer would come in the form of a fax.

But that's what happened Thursday when the Vatican notified Bishop Ricardo Ramirez that the San Albino Catholic Church in historic Mesilla has been elevated to basilica status — one of only two in the state of New Mexico.

"We've got good news," Ramirez said Thursday. "We got word this morning, a fax from the Vatican approving our status as a basilica."

In May 2007, the Las Cruces Catholic Diocese sent an application to Rome seek-

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▶ To view the decree designating San Albino as a minor basilica, log on to www.lcsun-news.com and click on the link at the top of this story.



ing the distinguished status. Parish members worked for more than a year, preparing overviews of the church's history, support of local culture and religion, and educational outreach efforts since it was founded in the mid-1800s.

The only other basilica in

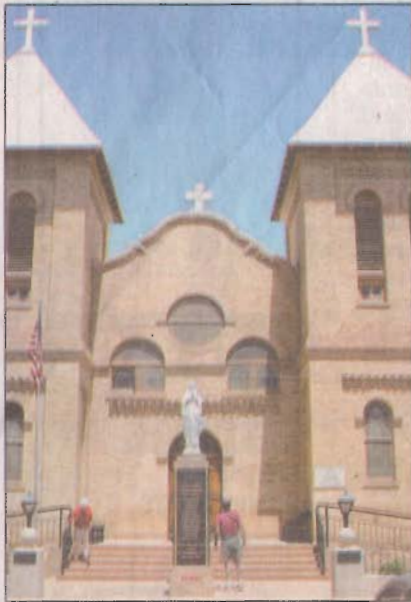
Inside

▶ What exactly is basilica status? Read more about the designation and what it means for San Albino on page 11A.

the state is St. Francis of Assisi Basilica in Santa Fe. San Albino's designation will be formally announced today by diocese officials.

Designation as a basilica is an honor given by the pope to churches that are known for their leadership in the faith and life of the people they serve, or for the dedication to history, education or works of art.

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Phyllis Gallardo, of Las Cruces, and her son-in-law, Sanford Bloom, of Appleton, Wis., wander the grounds of the San Albino Catholic Church last year in hopes of touring the inside and lighting a candle in honor of Gallardo's late husband.

Albino

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It represents a higher level of spiritual involvement in the overall structure of the church, with increased pilgrimages and a special canopy, made in Rome, to be used for major feast day celebrations.

"It's a great honor," Ramirez said. "It's really a tribute to the faith of the area and how that faith has been handed down generation to generation. To this day, the church community remains vibrant in faith and vibrant in religious practices.

"This is a tribute to all of that plus the church itself."

Mesilla Mayor Michael Cadena said he was excited about San Albino's designation.

"It's important, very important to our community, not only for the history of the church but of the way it has been so closely tied to Mesilla," Cadena said. "This is certainly going to add to the historical significance of the Plaza and Mesilla itself."

Sun-News reporter Steve Ramirez contributed to this report.

A closer look

▶ The title of Basilica is given to a church rarely and after careful scrutiny. The only other basilica in the state of New Mexico is the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis in Santa Fe.

▶ The principal church of the diocese is its cathedral, where the cathedra (or chair, the visible sign of the teaching office of the bishop) is found. A basilica ranks, after the cathedral, as a church of great distinction.

▶ The title "minor basilica" distinguishes the church in rank from the few churches in the world that bear the title of "major basilica," four of whom are in Rome.


▶ When a church is named minor basilica, a special bond is created between the Holy Father, presently Benedict XVI and the church that is awarded the title.

▶ The designation as a minor basilica is an indication, not only of the harmonious beauty and appropriate design of the church as an exemplary place for rendering worship, honor and praise to God, but especially of the vitality of the parish as a center that fosters the growth of the faithful through pastoral service, the administration of the sacraments and formation in the faith.

▶ The procedure for requesting the title of basilica begins with the presentation of a formal petition by the bishop that includes a full dossier of documents. Both the extensive examination of details by the Vatican office and the rarity with which the title is granted, indicate the seriousness with which the title is viewed by the Holy See. The petition includes written and photographic documentation that demonstrates that the church is indeed an exceptional place that bespeaks of the grandeur of God, whose house it is, and the dignity of the people called to praise him within its walls.

▶ It must be demonstrated that the faith life of the parish is put into practice through services for the sick and those in need.

SOURCE: DIOCESE OF LAS CRUCES



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