



[ conviction ]

## A BOUNCE IN HIS STEP

**Catholic Charities head Vino Pajanor walks the walk**

by Karen Gross

**A**ppaswamy “Vino” Pajanor ‘02 (LLM) knows what it’s like to be a newcomer. That’s exactly what he was when he arrived in San Diego in the fall of 2000, having left his parents, extended family and a successful law practice behind in India.

“What brought me here? The changing environment in India along with my need to acquire more knowledge and exposure,” he says. The University of San Diego offered not just a top-tier legal education in a

Catholic setting, but also a merit scholarship and a place to call home in a foreign land.

“Right from the get-go, there was a personal touch at USD. They knew who I was and what kinds of needs I had. They helped me integrate into the community and gave me a lot of opportunities.”

Pajanor’s Catholic upbringing in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, prepared him to do well and do good at the same time. Photographs proudly displayed in his office show his father, India’s

first practicing Catholic cabinet minister, meeting Pope John Paul II following a personal invitation to Rome.

“He was always a person who followed his faith. He was my inspiration and my guide in whatever I did,” he says. “He had an affinity for Mother Teresa, and as a parliamentarian, he fought against a bill to expel the missionaries. When my dad left politics, she sent him a handwritten note.”

A dedication to the moral high ground brought Pajanor



MARSHALL WILLIAMS

ships over the course of nearly a decade.

Last October, Pajanor brought his dedication and experience to the same position at Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego (CCDSD). Within days, he faced his first emergency, when federal authorities began dropping desperate asylum seekers at the bus station in downtown San Diego.

"I was brand new in my role, still learning how things worked," he recalls. He learned fast. "Catholic Charities has always been involved in providing immigration and refugee services, so it was natural for us to get involved when the crisis hit at the border."

That early test — combined with the region's increasingly grave homeless situation — gave Pajanor a crash course not only in CCDSD's role in the community and its regional relationships, but also in the delicate politics of his new position.

"There's always blowback when you deal with migrants coming in. People argue, 'There's already a need here, why help these other folks?'"

His answer is clear: "The homeless and those who come in as strangers, they're all critical for us, because this is a border town. If a migrant comes in and we don't address their needs, they're going to become homeless. They're going to end up on the street."

As CCDSD prepares to celebrate its centennial this year, Pajanor brings a fresh set of eyes to the deeply rooted institution. While the agency will evolve on Pajanor's watch, its vision will not waver. "For those who have no voice, Catholic Charities has always been at the forefront," he says. "That has to remain at the core of our mission." 📖

to his new life in the U.S. and has guided him over the years. As a student volunteer at St. Vincent de Paul's shelter, he helped reinstate a pro bono legal clinic that had closed.

"He came to me saying, 'We can do this. This is where people need help,'" recalls Allen Snyder, one of his law professors. "Whatever he was doing, he did with a bounce in his step and joy in his heart."

Pajanor's positivity found a new opportunity several years later, when a client at his law firm, Higgs, Fletcher & Mack, asked him to look into predatory lending practices in the local real estate market. That led to creation of the Housing Opportunities Collaborative, a nonprofit helping homeowners hit by the mortgage crisis. As its first executive director, Pajanor developed key public and private partner-

## 1950s

[1959] 🎓

**LOUIS CAPPELLO (BBA)** retired from his job as a mortgage banker in 2010.

## 1960s

[1963]

**ELOISA THOMPSON (BA)** is enjoying blessings of good health, family and living by the ocean in Baja. She has three grandchildren. "Thank you to our Sacred Heart for a wonderful education," she says.

[1968]

**JAMES JOSEPH (BA)** was inducted as a Golden Torero, an alumnus who graduated 50 or more years ago.

**DANNY WILSON (BA)** retired in 2014 after a 47-year career teaching at University of San Diego High School and Cathedral Catholic High School.

## 1970s

[1970]

**RUBEN ESCOBOSA (BS)** has been a commercial real estate broker for 43 years. His daughter, Rachel, graduated from USD in 1999 and is a human resources director at TargetCW; his daughter, Emilie, graduated from Otis College in 2009 and is an international fashion designer. He has two grandchildren: Jack, 10, and Avery, 7.

[1972]

**PAKA ANDERSEN (MEd)** is very happy to give back to her community and its ministries. She is also giving health care and retirement advice to her son and her son's employees.

[1976]

**BERNARD CIERNICK (BA), '82 (MA)** is proud that his oldest son entered the Army.

[1978]

**ANNE (CAREY) HENSEL (BA), '80 (MEd)** retired in October 2017 from her position as a special education director. "I currently am enjoying retired life as well as working part time supervising special education student teachers and interns through National University," she says. "Life is good!"

[1979] 🎓

**ADAM SARANCIK (JD)** published his second book: *Takeaway Quotes for Coaching Champions for Life*. It helps coaches be proactive in designing practice plans that offer lessons for life beyond the game.

## 1980s

[1980]

**JOHN SPITTERS (BA)** splits time between the Bay Area and Haverford, Pennsylvania. His stepson, Christopher, is a Menlo College alumnus and head football coach at ASA College in Brooklyn, New York.

[1981]

**MICHAEL BERG (JD)** was appointed a federal magistrate judge for the federal court in the Southern District of California.

**PAMELA HERKNER-CHASSE**

**(BA), '82 (MA)** reports that her daughter, Samantha, married Hunter Gemmill on June 22, 2018. Samantha and Hunter both work for Paramount Pictures. Pamela adds that her mother passed away in August 2016 and her sister's husband passed away in March 2017.

**THOMAS LOFFARELLI (MBA)**

reports that he was married in July 2017 and relocated to San Diego. He practiced law for 12 years and worked as a real estate broker, property manager and investor. He also has volunteered for the Wine Classic, the Bridges Academy lecture series and other USD events.

**LISA MATT (MA)** is retired after teaching for the San Diego Community College District for 28 years. She now works in the public library system.

**MARYANN THOMSON (BA), '82 (MEd)** retired after teaching in the San Diego Unified School District for almost 40 years. "Loving it!" she says.

**STEVE VASQUEZ (BBA)** moved his investment adviser office to San Clemente, California, after more than 30 years in Los Angeles County.

[1982]

**GAIL CONNERS (BA)** says she is "quite elderly now," but is getting along the best she can, thanks to the loving support of her children.