

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Eileen Conrad

Book Signings Scheduled for Sept. 11 and Oct. 17 for UCSB Historian's Biography of Rev. Virgil Cordano

UC Santa Barbara historian Mario T. García, author of "Padre, the Spiritual Journey of Father Virgil Cordano" (Capra Press, 2005), will sign copies of the recently published biography that chronicles the life of Santa Barbara's charismatic Franciscan spiritual leader on Sept. 11 at the Santa Barbara Mission and on Oct. 17 at UCSB.

García, Cordano, and Congresswomen Lois Capps will introduce the book, which includes a foreword written by Capps and selected writings by Cordano, who holds a doctorate in sacred scriptures.

Cordano has devoted his life to promoting greater understanding of all religions and increased dialogue among them.

The book signing on Sept. 11 at the historic Mission is scheduled from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the Friar's Lounge.

The UCSB event follows on Oct. 17 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the McCune Conference Room located in the Humanities and Social Sciences Building.

The biography traces the inspirational journey of George Cordano from his immigrant family roots in Sacramento and traditional Roman Catholic upbringing and education to the calling and the pilgrimage of becoming a priest.

It also examines his commitment to the church in difficult times and his experiences as teacher, pastor, and director of community relations at the Old Mission.

Today, at the age of 86, Cordano serves as pastor emeritus and director of community relations, linking the Mission to the Santa Barbara community.

"This biography preserves the extraordinary legacy of Father Virgil, a man deeply committed to the Catholic Church with strong ecumenical views who has lived a life of giving to others and embracing people of all faiths," said García, who holds a joint appointment in the History and Chicano Studies Departments at UCSB. "He transcends the role of a Catholic Franciscan priest.

That's why his story is such an inspiration, and why he is a beloved member of this community."

García noted that the book may have broad appeal beyond the local region because it reveals new insights into what it meant to be a Catholic priest in the tumultuous 20th century, when so many things in both the religious and secular worlds were unraveling.

"The changes that occurred here at the Mission were a microcosm of the larger changes that occurred within the U.S. Catholic Church during Vatican II, post-Vatican II, and the Vietnam War, changes that ultimately made the Catholic Church more relevant to the modern world, but also resulted in turmoil within the church," he said.

Catholicism, the oldest and most global Christian religion, has been the largest denomination in the United States since the mid-19th century.

Cordano's impact on the study of religion has been far-reaching.

He was instrumental in shaping community sentiment that encouraged the establishment of a Department of Religious Studies at UCSB more than 40 years ago.

Today, the department is widely considered one of the major centers in North America for the study of religions. UCSB is the only campus in the UC system that offers a comprehensive undergraduate program in religious studies as well as advanced degrees, including the Ph.D.

The National Research Council ranks UCSB's program among the top 10 in the nation and second among all public universities.

Recently, an endowed chair in Catholic Studies was established in the department in Cordano's honor, made possible by generous philanthropic gifts from Charles Schwab and numerous community supporters.

In his life story, Cordano describes the mission of the endowed chair: "to advance the cause of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, to discover what, at a deep level, unites all people.

To achieve this desired harmony, we need an educated understanding of all religions."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.