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CONTACT: Joe Haakenson
JUVE Creative, Inc.
(714) 841 9600
joe@juvecreative.com

MONSIGNOR HOLQUIN SPOTS SWALLOWS AT MISSION

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, Calif. (July 1, 2013) -- Happy anniversary Monsignor Arthur Holquin.

Monday, July 1 marks the 10-year anniversary of Msgr. Holquin being named Rector and Pastor of Mission Basilica San Juan Capistrano, and last week he received a special gift of sorts.

Mission San Juan Capistrano became well-known for the cliff swallows that nested there for decades, even centuries, but urbanization gave the swallows more options to nest and fewer and fewer swallows made the Mission their home.

But they may now be coming back.

"Father Michael Pontarelli told me, 'I think there are swallows building a nest inside the Mission, near the back door of the rectory,'" Msgr. Holquin said. "So I high-tailed it over there and looked up. At first I couldn't see it, but on the other side of a beam, you could see the very distinctive mud nest. About 60 seconds later, I saw a swallow fly out of it."

Swallows migrate from Argentina to the San Juan Capistrano Valley every spring to nest, so at first glance, one might not consider the significance of such a sighting. Not so fast, says Msgr. Holquin.

"We always say the Mission is a place of living history," he said. "I've always liked that motto. Living history is not just what's happened in the past, but it continues in the present and into the future.

"When we did the preservation work to the Great Stone Church, a lot of the swallows were displaced. We knew they were in the San Juan Valley, but when we realized they were not building nests within the Mission grounds, that was unsettling. It's part of our history."

So it wasn't lost of Msgr. Holquin that the sighting came so close to his milestone anniversary.

"Quite frankly, this is the first nest I've seen in the 10 years I've been here," he said. "It's a wonderful reflection of a place where history lives on. We knew they were getting close. We've had experts trying to lure them in with iPod calls. They said they were a block away. But now that they are here within the Mission grounds is very exciting."

About Mission San Juan Capistrano:

Known as the "Jewel of the Missions," Mission San Juan Capistrano is a museum and California's historic landmark #200 that boasts of quality permanent exhibits featuring original artifacts, as well as traveling and temporary exhibits on a wide variety of topics.

The site itself serves as a living outdoor museum with original buildings constructed by Native Americans in the 18th century, including the Serra Chapel, Great Stone Church, and the original padres' quarters of the South Wing.

The Mission was founded on November 1, 1776 by Padre Junipero Serra as the seventh in the chain of the twenty-one California missions established by Spain, and is Orange County's only mission. Every year, more than 60,000 students visit the Mission and engage in an inspirational learning experience via the Mission Matters programming, as part of their State required California history studies.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is owned by the Diocese of Orange and is supported by the Mission Preservation Foundation, which is comprised of business and community leaders committed to ensuring the long term preservation and viability of Orange County's only Mission. The Mission receives no funding

from either the Church or the State of California and charges admission as a means of providing public access.

The new Mission Store opens to the public on July 13 and promotes local, national, and international artisans. Proceeds from purchases at the Mission Store help protect the religious and historic significance of Mission San Juan Capistrano, and further educational programs, exhibits and preservation efforts.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is located at 26801 Ortega Highway, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675. Open Daily: 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Good Friday afternoon. Admission is \$9 adults; \$8 seniors (60 years or over); \$6 children (ages 4 to 11); and children ages 3 and under are admitted free. Free audio guide with senior and adult admission. For more information, call (949) 234-1300 or visit www.missionsjc.com.