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DEGRAZIA Y NEWMAN

**TED DEGRAZIA & THE ST. THOMAS MORE
CATHOLIC NEWMAN CENTER
TUCSON, ARIZONA**



**AUGUST 29, 2026
DEGRAZIA GALLERY IN THE SUN**



WELCOME • BIENVENIDOS



Father Campo Greets Kino at New Mission Site

As St. Thomas More Catholic Newman Center celebrates its Centennial, we remember the people, events and moments that have shaped our community across generations. Some stories are well known. Others have gradually faded from memory as students graduated, parishioners moved away and new generations arrived.

One such story began more than sixty years ago when a new Catholic student center was rising near the University of Arizona campus. It was a time of growth, optimism and change. Catholic campus ministry was expanding. The Newman Center was preparing to move into a new home. At the same moment, one of Arizona's most celebrated artists was creating work that reflected the spirit, landscape and people of the Southwest.

The meeting of those two stories produced a remarkable chapter in the history of the Newman Center: the creation of fifteen *Stations of the Cross* by renowned Tucson artist Ted DeGrazia. Today, few members of our parish realize that these original paintings once hung in St. Thomas More Chapel. Fewer still know the story of how they came to be created, or the lasting legacy they have left for both the Newman Center and the wider Tucson community.

This booklet celebrates that story.

A WAY OF THE CROSS FOR ARIZONA UN VIA CRUCIS PARA ARIZONA

The Stations that emerged from DeGrazia's studio were unlike any that had previously hung in a Catholic chapel. Rather than placing Christ's journey solely in ancient Jerusalem, DeGrazia brought the story into the landscape he knew best. Desert imagery appears throughout the series. Saguaros rise against the horizon. The colors and forms evoke the Southwest. The suffering of Christ becomes not a distant historical event but a reality present in every place and every generation.



*Simon Helps to Carry
His Cross*



*Jesus Falls the
First Time*



*Jesus is Nailed to
the Cross*

"If the Way of the Cross happened, it happened everywhere. It was felt by everyone here on the face of the Earth," the artist told the *Arizona Daily Star*.

The entire series reveals the artist's ability to unite simplicity and depth. The paintings are unmistakably DeGrazia, yet they remain profoundly devotional. They invite reflection rather than explanation. They ask viewers not merely to observe Christ's suffering, but to enter it.

His understanding of Christ's universality also shaped the imagery. In the paintings depicting Christ's falls beneath the cross, Jesus appears in different racial identities, reflecting DeGrazia's conviction that Christ belongs to all peoples.

Among the most striking images is the station depicting Veronica's veil, as shown on the cover of this booklet. The image is simple, direct and unforgettable. The face of Christ emerges as the face of human suffering itself.

"It was the face of suffering," Ted DeGrazia said.

THE ARTIST AND AN INVITATION

EL ARTISTA Y UNA INVITACION



Born in 1909, Ettore "Ted" DeGrazia became one of the most recognizable artists in the American Southwest. Arizona was more than his home; it was his inspiration. He painted its deserts, its people, its traditions and its light.

His artistic journey carried him far beyond Tucson. As a young man he spent several years in Italy, absorbing the artistic heritage of his family's homeland.

He studied at the University of Arizona, earning three degrees. He traveled extensively in Mexico and encountered the work of great muralists such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. The culture, faith, color, and dignity of ordinary people deeply influenced his vision.

DeGrazia was never easily categorized. Admirers praised his originality and sincerity. Critics sometimes questioned his methods and style. Yet few denied the power of his work or his devotion to his craft.

When Father Graff approached him about creating the Stations of the Cross for the new chapel, Ted DeGrazia's first reaction was unexpected. "Why not get someone who goes to church every Sunday?" he reportedly asked.

SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PROJECT TOUCHED HIM DEEPLY

Although not known for public displays of religiosity, DeGrazia possessed a deep personal understanding of faith. As he later explained, he believed that religion ultimately resides within the human heart. After reflection, he accepted the invitation.

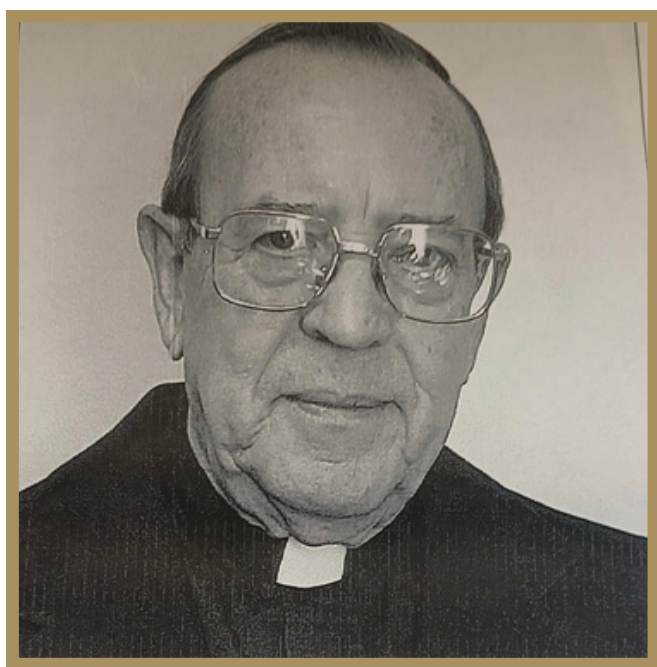
The Newman Center could not afford to purchase such a significant collection of original artwork. "Of course you can't afford them," he told Father Graff. Yet he agreed to create the paintings and place them in the chapel on loan.

What began as a commission soon became something far more personal. According to Father Graff, DeGrazia became completely absorbed in the project. "Once I started this, I couldn't sleep and I spent many a night at it."

The paintings were completed in only a few months. Marion DeGrazia later recalled that her husband had spent considerable time reflecting on the *Stations* before he ever approached the canvas.

When he finally began painting, he worked with extraordinary intensity. Using palette knives and only occasional brushwork, he created images marked by spontaneity, emotion and immediacy.

"He painted alone," Marion recalled. "He just put on what came from here," she said, pointing to her heart.



Father Robert L. Graff served as director of the Newman Center from 1962-1965.

He is best remembered for implementing the work of Vatican II, which he said "offered great hope and promise for the future of the Church... particularly true within the academic community."

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A NEW CHAPEL FOR A NEW ERA NUEVA CAPILLA Y ERA

In 1958, the Arizona Board of Regents announced a ten year plan affecting University of Arizona properties lining 3rd Street, the current grassy mall. The Newman Club, built in 1951, was one of those properties at the corner of Cherry Avenue and 3rd Street. In 1962, the land was swapped for its current site, corner of Cherry Avenue and 2nd Street.

Following rapid membership growth in the 1950s, a new Catholic student center was completed in 1963 to support the expanding campus ministry. The facility featured a spacious chapel alongside gathering areas, classrooms, offices, and a library. It was designed to serve as both a place for Mass and a hub for community and intellectual engagement, reflecting the spirit of renewal from the Second Vatican Council.



Desert Medicine Man

The new St. Thomas More Chapel reflected this same vision. Its altar now faced the congregation, encouraging fuller participation in the liturgy. The design emphasized community, prayer and active engagement in worship.

Appointed in 1962, Chaplain Father Robert L. Graff sought artists to enrich the community's spiritual life through sacred art. He commissioned Sister Leonard Marie, S.C., an art instructor at Salpointe High School, to create the Salvation History mural behind the altar. For the Stations of the Cross, Father Graff turned to a prominent Tucson artist known for designing the 1960 international UNICEF Christmas card, "Los Niños".

HIS CHOICE WAS TED DEGRAZIA.

THE FIFTEENTH STATION LA DECIMOQUINTA ESTACIÓN

One feature of the series remains especially distinctive. Traditionally, Catholic churches display fourteen Stations of the Cross, ending with Christ's burial in the tomb.

DeGrazia believed the story could not end there. During his research he discovered that the number and form of the Stations had evolved through history. While fourteen had become customary, he felt that the journey remained incomplete without the Resurrection. For that reason he created a fifteenth station.

The final painting depicts the risen Christ in an Arizona setting surrounded by symbols of life, celebration, and community. Native imagery appears alongside familiar desert forms. It is unmistakably a Resurrection scene, but one deeply rooted in the culture and landscape of the Southwest.

"I never thought the cycle would be completed unless we had the fifteenth station where Jesus arises in glory," he said.

In many ways, the fifteenth station captures the spirit of the entire project. The artist honored tradition while also bringing his own vision to it. He remained faithful to the Gospel story while expressing it through the people and landscape he loved.

The result was something uniquely Arizonan and unmistakably Christian.



Jesus Falls the Third Time

A LEGACY THAT ENDURES UN LEGADO QUE PERDURA

For a year, the original paintings hung in the St. Thomas More Chapel where students, parishioners, and visitors encountered them during prayer and worship.

Their presence quickly attracted attention. Art lovers visited the chapel. The paintings became known beyond the university community. Yet their growing value also created concern for their security. Eventually the originals were removed for safekeeping, and reproductions were installed in their place.

The story did not end there. Over the decades, the original paintings continued to inspire new generations through exhibitions and after seasonal displays at the gallery. During Lent, they became a treasured part of Tucson's religious and artistic life, drawing visitors from across Southern Arizona and beyond.

Today the original works remain an important part of DeGrazia's artistic legacy and continue to be displayed for public reflection and appreciation at the DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun, 6300 N. Swan Road, Tucson AZ.

As we celebrate one hundred years of the St. Thomas More Catholic Newman Center, this story reminds us that the history of a parish is shaped not only by buildings and dates, but also by relationships, vision, creativity, and faith.

More than sixty years ago, a university chaplain imagined a chapel enriched by beauty. A Tucson artist accepted an unexpected invitation. Together they offered a gift that continues to inspire people today.

THEIR STORY IS PART OF OUR STORY.



This summary was prepared from information drawn from available public newspaper accounts, input from the DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun and Newman Center archives and personal reminiscences.