

Six L.A. Catholic schools to close

Pandemic is final blow to campuses struggling with low enrollment, demographic shifts and hobbled finances.

By Andrew J. Campa

After a difficult year of pandemic-accelerated enrollment losses and hobbled fundraising, six elementary schools in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles will close in June as one of the nation's largest private educational systems struggles to keep many of its schools afloat.

Assumption in Boyle Heights, Blessed Sacrament in Hollywood, St. Catherine of Siena in Reseda, St. Ferdinand in San Fernando, St. Francis of Assisi in Silver Lake and St. Madeleine in Pomona are scheduled to be closed as part of a consolidation plan announced last week.

The schools largely enrolled children of working-class Latino families in many of the communities hardest hit during the pandemic. Parents have lost jobs and could no longer afford tuition that ranges from about \$3,900 to \$6,000 annually, leading to enrollment drops. The fiestas, jog-a-thons and bingo nights that boosted finances were canceled. The schools had been struggling for years, and the pandemic broke their ability to stay afloat, school officials said.

"This is a difficult and challenging time for our schools — schools that provide a service to our neediest children — and what you're seeing here is a response to shifting demographics and declining enrollment that's been happening for quite some time now," L.A. Archdiocese Supt. Paul Escala said. "We need to shift resources and ensure that we

[See Schools, A7]



WORSHIPERS RAISE their hands at New Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist in Willowbrook, one of the few L.A. Black churches that opened Sunday for in-person services for the second Easter during the pandemic.

After a year of loss, Black churches celebrate Easter

Many tune into Zoom, go outside or meet safely in sanctuaries

By Kailyn Brown and Donovan X. Ramsey

On Easter Sunday, Denice Daye listened to her pastor's voice booming from a computer.

She was alone in her View Park living room. Her fellow worshipers were isolated in their homes as well. Instead of being onstage with the church choir, she listened to herself sing in a prerecorded performance.

But none of that prevented her from dressing up in a soft peach blouse and black pants. She adorned the room with tulips and candles.



PASTOR SONJA DAWSON, left, weighed the views of older congregants, who wanted to return to church.

Daye, a 69-year-old hairdresser, has been a member of Grace United Methodist Church in Hyde Park, a predominantly Black church, for 25 years. In addition to singing in the choir, she is on the worship committee and plans events.

This was her second Zoom Easter, after a year of Sunday Zooms. Sometimes, she gets "sick of those little squares." But, she said, God does not need the four walls of a church to make his presence known.

"That's one thing that I have learned, just to appreciate the space that is and know that God is every-

[See Black churches, A6]

EASTER IN MOJAVE: Worshipers have marked their faith for decades in Sunrise Rock desert. CALIFORNIA, B1
FOURTH WAVE: Experts warn that coronavirus surges in the East may expand across the U.S. CALIFORNIA, B1

In Denver, magic mushroom therapy grows in legal gray area

By David Kelly

DENVER — Nearly two years after Denver made history as the nation's first city to decriminalize hallucinogenic mushrooms for personal use, the nightmare of rampant abuse and public intoxication feared by opponents has failed to materialize.

"There has been no effect

that has been apparent to law enforcement," said Denver Police Division Chief Joseph Montoya, who oversees major crime investigations.

Mushroom proponents see the absence of backlash as a key selling point in their push to eventually legalize psilocybin — the active ingredient — as a mainstream treatment for various mental health disorders.

A growing body of medi-

cal research suggests that psilocybin and other psychedelic drugs could help treat anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and addiction. That promise has given rise to dozens of companies eventually hoping to cash in.

But the legal environment remains fraught. The federal government classifies psilocybin as a Schedule

[See Mushrooms, A8]

What the winners at SAG Awards means for Oscars

Will "Chicago 7" get top Academy Award too? Unlikely, Glenn Whipp writes. CALENDAR, E1

Ex-crown prince accused of plot

Jordanian royal colluded with outside parties to target nation's security, official says. WORLD, A3

CSU trumpets accomplishments

An analysis shows that its 23 campuses have an outside impact on the economy. CALIFORNIA, B1

Clippers win L.A. bragging rights

Short-handed Lakers continue to slide down standings and are held to season low in points in 104-86 rout. SPORTS, D4



MORRY GASH Associated Press

THE CARDINAL RULE

Francesca Belibi kisses the championship trophy after Stanford's 54-53 win over Arizona. SPORTS, D5

Weather

Foggy, then sunny. L.A. Basin: 73/55. B6

Is UCLA ready for its encore?

After a riveting run to the Final Four, the Bruins' success next season will be contingent on who returns. SPORTS, D1



FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

RAQUEL ROSS attends a vigil for Gabriel Donnay outside his home in the Beverly Grove area on Saturday. Donnay was fatally stabbed in his backyard.

Attack has area on edge

After man's killing by intruder in Beverly Grove, neighbors vent frustrations over homelessness

By Kevin Rector and Jaclyn Cosgrove

During a somber memorial in a Beverly Hills park Friday night, Albert Donnay beamed through tears as friends, fellow musicians and co-workers remembered his 31-year-old son, Gabriel "Gabe" Donnay.

Gabe was whip smart, incredibly talented and deeply compassionate, they said — including toward those with mental health issues, which he struggled with himself.

"He was exactly the type of person that L.A. needs," said Bo Jacobson, a close friend.

"He loved L.A. so much and he loved so

many people," said his girlfriend, Liza Herzog.

The memorial was several nights after Gabriel Donnay's killing in his own backyard in nearby Beverly Grove, where he was stabbed by an intruder who police said was living out of his car and who neighbors had reported was hopping fences before the attack. Now, with the help of a loudspeaker balanced atop a park grill, Albert Donnay begged those gathered around him to use his son's memory to force change.

"Gabe would challenge us to find some way to move the world ahead from this," Donnay said. "We are not the first or the last to lose our child to senseless violence, but it won't stop unless we figure out a way

[See Donnay, A6]

Fatal attack has neighborhood on edge

[Donnay, from A1] to do it.”

On Saturday night, another crowd — some of Gabriel Donnay’s friends again, but also dozens of neighbors — gathered in front of the home where the attack occurred, in the 6600 block of Maryland Drive. They lighted candles and placed flowers near the front gate, then listened as Craig Brill, 54, who has lived in the neighborhood since 1996 and had interacted with the suspect before the attack, spoke up about the neighborhood’s fears and frustrations.

Brill said homeless encampments had grown out of control in the area during the pandemic, with people suffering from mental illness living in squalor and regularly burglarizing nearby properties. This new status quo, he said, was inhumane to the homeless people and unfair to the neighbors — and now, in the eyes of many neighbors, had led to a young man’s killing.

“It’s a tragedy that we lost Gabriel, and it’s also a tragedy that a man with mental illness was allowed to roam our streets as a danger to himself and to the community,” Brill said. “I hope as we all gather and we get to know each other better as neighbors, we can come together and try to organize and get our city to do something. What’s happening, around the city, is we’ve become one massive skid row.”

Others in the crowd nodded. Danae Weinberg, 68, held a sign that read, “My neighbor should not have died.... I want my neighborhood back!!!” She later placed the sign on the front gate of City Councilman Paul Koretz’s nearby home as Brill screamed for Koretz to come out.

Koretz did not emerge, but in a letter to constituents he said he is working “very aggressively” with city



FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

NEIGHBOR Craig Brill organized a vigil for Gabriel Donnay, who was stabbed to death in his Beverly Grove backyard. Police say the attacker was living in his car.

agencies to “bring homeless residents of the nearby encampment into housing.”

Some in Beverly Grove said they didn’t want to demonize the unhoused people living in their neighborhood or those with mental health issues. They argue city leaders are not doing enough to help those in need of services and treatment, whether it is housing or mental health services.

At a time of intense frustration around L.A.’s homelessness and mental illness crisis, in the wake of the controversial clearing of encampments along Echo Park Lake, and amid emerging conversations about how best to handle poverty and homelessness as the city begins to pull out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Donnay’s killing has become a particularly emotional tinderbox.

Those who loved Donnay and lived near him don’t all agree on the path forward, but they all agree that something has to change after his life was stolen so violently — particularly given such a startling series of events

preceding the attack.

His family members said they want to know why Los Angeles police officers released the suspect, 32-year-old Enoch Conners, after being called to the neighborhood less than two hours before Donnay was killed, for reports that a man was trespassing in neighborhood yards.

“Whoever made that determination that he wasn’t a threat certainly wasn’t right,” said younger brother Theo Donnay.

A ‘curious mind’

There was a moment years ago when Gabriel Donnay’s mother, Yvonne Ottaviano, a physician in Baltimore, talked to him about his future — no doubt bright for the University of Pennsylvania neuroscience major — and suggested he enter an M.D.-PhD program.

“He pretended to kind of go along with that for a while, but then he said, ‘Mom, I don’t really want to be a scientist,’” Ottaviano recalled last week. “I would only be discovering things that already exist. I want to

do music, because music doesn’t exist until you create it.”

Donnay’s love of music was overpowering, family, friends and co-workers said. But he was never just one note, and as he grew into adulthood and moved to Los Angeles, he — true to form — found a way to pursue music while also excelling in a science career.

By day, he directed data science for System1, a digital marketing company where his boss called him a “shining light” at the company’s Venice office.

A large cohort of co-workers who attended the Friday memorial recalled him as a generous colleague and brilliant mind who helped the start-up grow.

By night, Donnay created music — including, with some success, with band Satchmode — as a singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist who was just as comfortable with classical pieces on the keyboard as he was with tough pop guitar riffs.

He had a sweet voice, perfect for riding the bass lines

of the band’s songs, which were pitched on Spotify as “bringing heartbreak to the dance floor.”

Adam Boukis, his long-time bandmate, said Donnay was a creative marvel.

“It was just such an amazing thing to be able to work with Gabe creatively,” Boukis said. “I still think about the melodies he would write all the time, and I’m just in awe of how good they were and how many he wrote and how easily they came out of him.”

Friends from high school in Baltimore and college in Philadelphia all said he was a connector, one of those people who constantly pulled newcomers to L.A. into the fold and made his friends theirs too.

Ottaviano said her son had struggled with depression growing up and into his adult years, and he had come out of it “deeply compassionate” for others with mental illness, including those experiencing homelessness. Even in her grief, she said she wanted to have compassion too. And she wondered: What would her son, with his endlessly “curious mind,” make of his own killing?

A senseless crime

On the afternoon of March 29, police said, Donnay was at home when he was fatally stabbed by Conners, who was later found in a guesthouse in an adjacent backyard, dead after what police said were self-inflicted knife wounds.

Police had spoken to Conners not long before the attack. Det. Sean Kinchla of the Los Angeles Police Department’s West Bureau homicide unit said officers had been called to the area for a report of a trespasser but had not witnessed Conners trespassing and did not have a resident willing to make a citizen’s arrest — meaning they had no grounds for detaining him.

“The officers have their hands tied. There’s only so much they can do,” Kinchla said. “On one hand, you’ve got to try to help out the person making the call, but on the other hand, the person that is the subject of the call also has rights.”

Conners’ family could not be reached for comment. Kinchla said police have video capturing the attack and confirming that Conners was the assailant. Police said he appeared to be living out of his car.

Brill said that he also had run into Conners in the neighborhood before the attack and that Conners had asked him for directions to a sporting goods store where a large homeless encampment has grown in recent months.

He later walked off as Brill offered him help with his car, which appeared to be broken down in the area, Brill said.

“That must have been when he started jumping everybody’s walls,” he said.

Ottaviano said the family only found out the next day that her son had been killed, after his roommate was released from a long police interview. She said she asked the roommate for every detail of what happened, which he provided.

Donnay had been working in a studio at the rear of the house, having left the back door to the house unlocked so he could come and go, when he came back inside, walked upstairs to his room, realized it was in disarray and then saw Conners there with a knife, his mother said.

“Gabe said, ‘Get out!’ and he started running down the stairs and he was being chased and chased into the backyard,” where he was stabbed repeatedly, Ottaviano said. “Gabe was yelling, ‘Stop! Stop! Stop!’ ”

The roommate heard the commotion, rushed out and screamed, “Get out of here!” Ottaviano said.

Conners fled, and the roommate cradled her son until he died, his mother said.

Moving forward

At Saturday’s vigil, friends and neighbors clustered in small groups outside the home as a private security guard from the company Post Alarm stood by.

Danielle Peters, 41, grew up in Beverly Grove and has lived in the neighborhood all her life. She said she had already been working to sign neighbors up for the armed private security service when Donnay was killed. Since his killing, interest has increased — and the more neighbors who sign on, the more security patrols there will be.

For most of her life, Peters said, she felt safe in the neighborhood, but lately, she doesn’t go out after dark. She doesn’t know if private security is the answer, but said that she believes the LAPD is too understaffed and that homeless people aren’t getting enough support for the neighborhood to continue without the private watch.

“The majority of people understand there’s a broken system, and you can’t fix one part without fixing all the parts,” she said.

“I hope that we can all just reflect on what an incredible person we have lost, and just keep loving each other and being as open as possible, because that’s how Gabe was,” said Herzog, his girlfriend.

Charlie Dunn said he always admired his friend’s “intellectual genius” and “razor-sharp wit,” but “the thing that I really thought made him a tremendous person was the strength of his character, his moral strength.”

Jacobson said Donnay thought deeply about the plight of L.A.’s homeless population, especially those with untreated mental illness, and cared about a solution: “Gabe was so compassionate about that, and felt strongly about that.”

At one point during the memorial, Albert Donnay played a recording over the speaker. It was Gabe from 20 years ago, age 11, singing in his boyish voice a song he’d written himself about missing a departed loved one.

“I still remember you, the way you laughed, the way you cried,” the boy sang. “I hope you know I’m crying, too.”

Times staff writer Lila Seidman contributed to this report.

Second pandemic Easter for Black churches

[Black churches, from A1] where,” Daye said. “And we can worship him in whatever situation we find ourselves.”

From living rooms to parking lots to chapels with masked, socially distanced worshippers, Southern California’s Black churches celebrated their second pandemic Easter on Sunday after a year of hardship and loss.

With indoor services permitted at 25% capacity, pastors wrestled with whether to ditch Zoom and invite their flock to worship in person.

Most concluded the time was not right. Coronavirus cases were down and vaccinations were up, but they did not feel safe courting a disease that has killed Black people in disproportionate numbers.

Nor would pews that were only a quarter full be quite the same on a holiday that usually draws crowds — including those who do not normally go to church — decked out in elaborate hats and colorful pastels, to be uplifted by Christ’s resurrection and also to see and be seen, in a tradition centuries old.

The absence of full-blown in-person church services for a second year was an added blow for a Black community that has lost fellow worshippers, family members and revered religious leaders to the coronavirus. Businesses and livelihoods have been lost too.

A few churches opted for small in-person services, adhering to safety protocols, because face-to-face contact was so vital, especially for older members.

Like Daye, other worshippers across the region made the best of it, finding ways to inject holiday joy into their small gatherings or solo Zoom viewings. Some dressed to the nines, singing and clapping up a storm. Others found spirituality through yoga.

The theme of resurrection was especially resonant this year, with a return to normal life possibly on the horizon as the country slowly beats back the virus.

On Sunday morning, Pastor Fred Price Jr. looked out over the empty pews of his South L.A. megachurch, then retreated to a smaller room to deliver his Easter sermon via livestream on the church website and other



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

DENICE DAYE of View Park, with grandson Donte Murray, tuned in for Grace United Methodist Church’s Easter service online. “God is everywhere,” she said.

platforms.

The FaithDome at Crenshaw Christian Center seats more than 10,000 people, and at least that many were listening to Price from their homes.

Choir members sang from the bookshop, separated by clear plastic dividers to avoid the risk of spreading the virus.

There was something else profoundly different about this year. Price’s father, church founder Apostle Frederick K.C. Price, died of COVID-19 in February. His mother fell ill from the virus but recovered.

The losses of the last year, capped by the loss of one of his parents, have sharpened his empathy, he said.

“So, to then be put in the same position as people that I ministered to and counsel in those moments was very sobering,” he said. “And it was a classic case of, ‘Physician, heal thyself.’ ”

Even if the virus numbers continue to improve, Price does not anticipate holding in-person services until the summer at the earliest.

Price received the COVID-19 vaccine last week. Like many Black Americans, he was suspicious of the shot because of a history of Black people being used in medical experiments.

But as friends and family, including close friends who are doctors, got vaccinated, he overcame his hesitancy. Crenshaw Christian Center has been a coronavirus testing site and now is a vaccination site.

Price is now sharing his experience with his congregation and “encouraging them not to be afraid.”

Julie Landry, 74, was listening to Price from her Las Vegas home. She stuck with Crenshaw Christian after her move five years ago, so livestreamed services are nothing new for her.

This Easter, watching from her couch, the homemaker opted to dress casually instead of donning one of the “outlandish” church hats for which she is known. During Communion, she tore off pieces of bread and drank red wine from a small shot glass.

At L.A. High Memorial Park in Mid-Wilshire, more than 200 people, mostly Black or brown, gathered outdoors for an unconventional Easter celebration centered on yoga.

The free yoga class, called BreatheGood, has been offered in the park since June, a courtesy of WalkGoodLA, a nonprofit social justice organization formed by three Mid-City residents following the fatal shooting of an unarmed Black jogger, Ahmaud Arbery, by a white man in Georgia.

“We’re going to bring you to church today!” said lead yoga instructor Marley Ralph, who founded WalkGoodLA with her cousins Etienne and Ivy Coco Maurice to prioritize healing through wellness.

Ralph’s aunt, actress Sheryl Lee Ralph, opened the gathering with a message about getting along, the

meaning of Resurrection Sunday and being grateful.

A DJ played modern gospel, reggae and soul music, sequenced to the yoga poses. The session also included a guided meditation and sound bath.

BreatheGood was an alternative for those who would typically attend Easter services at their family churches. Without in-person services, they opted for the spirituality of yoga in the park.

“I do miss being with my church family, but obviously that wasn’t possible because of COVID-19,” Etienne Maurice said.

Tatiana Roache, 27, was among those who would have been in church on a normal Easter Sunday.

“I loved it because it felt like a New Age way to do church,” the North Hollywood resident said. “Because church is always about communion and a group of people coming together and worshiping.... It definitely still felt like [church].”

The yoga gathering was like church in another way, too.

“This is still church, so please donate,” Ralph said after the session ended.

For many large churches, holding indoor services at 25% capacity was unworkable, safety concerns aside.

With infrequent worshippers joining regular congregants, Pastor Michael J.T. Fisher would have had to conduct more services than the four packed gatherings

he leads on a typical Easter.

“I would literally have to do a marathon to accommodate the amount of people who would come, so it just wasn’t feasible physically or logically for us to open up,” said Fisher, who leads Greater Zion Church Family in Compton.

Some churches found other solutions.

First African Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest Black church in L.A., held a parking lot service.

Pastor William Epps at Second Baptist Church broadcast his sermon on the radio before hosting an Easter play on Zoom with church members.

New Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist in Willowbrook was one of the few Black churches that welcomed a limited number of in-person worshippers.

The Easter service was capped at a snappy 90 minutes for 58 church members who sat in chairs spread out across a multipurpose room instead of in pews.

A few others gathered in the church’s youth center, while others watched a livestream from home.

Everyone wore masks, and most opted for muted clothing — no fancy hats in sight.

Ushers greeted congregants and passed out programs as usual. They took temperatures and checked names against a list of those who had reserved a seat.

Pastor Sonja Dawson said she carefully weighed the risks and benefits of a small in-person service.

The previous Sunday, when the church’s leadership and senior members attended in person, some older congregants said they feared they would die before getting a chance to return to the church.

“Because he got up, we can get up,” Dawson shouted at the climax of her Easter sermon. “Even in our communities — making sure everyone is protected from this deadly virus — because he got up, we can get up.”

Elroy Webb, chairman of the deacon board for 40 years, said there is no substitute for gathering with his peers.

“I was just thrilled to see my church family,” Webb said. “Online and TV are good, but ain’t nothing like this atmosphere, the warmth.”