



Contact: Jane Tokito
503-261-2404
jtokito@thegrotto.org
thegrotto.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Grotto Announces New Leadership

Chris Blanchard named Executive Director of NE Portland Shrine

PORTLAND, OR, Sept. 18, 2017 – The Grotto welcomed Christopher Edward Blanchard, Monday, as the new Executive Director of the 93-year old Catholic shrine and Portland landmark. Blanchard will oversee the day-to-day administration of the shrine.

Blanchard was raised in Virginia and graduated from James Madison University with a Bachelor of Social Work degree. Following a short period working for the juvenile court system, Blanchard joined the U.S. Marine Corp and served for over 26 years. His assignments enabled him to travel broadly and included time in 49 countries, ranging from Afghanistan to Morocco to Yemen.

Upon retirement from active duty, Blanchard served as the Chief of Staff of Marine Corps Base Hawaii, supervising a staff which provided facilities, programs and services to Marines, sailors, and their families. Before relocating to the Pacific Northwest, he served as the President and CEO of Easter Seals Hawaii, offering services to individuals with disabilities or special needs.

“When I consider The Grotto, I reflect more on the formal name: The National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother,” said Blanchard. “The emphasis for me is on Sanctuary. A place to go and get away from the crowds. A place to walk or sit and to be thankful for all that I have been given.

“Most of all I look forward to meeting the people who visit and learning why they came here, and why they keep coming here. I want to hear how we can enrich their experience when they visit, and what we can do to make their visits to the sanctuary more meaningful.”

The Grotto, located on 62 scenic acres in Northeast Portland, has seen a dramatic increase in visitors in recent years, with more than 300,000 visiting in 2016. It is currently ranked the No. 5 “Thing to See and Do” in Portland by TripAdvisor, which also recently named it the No. 18 “Top Trending Destination in the United States.”

Blanchard hopes to accelerate those numbers further, stating: “I want the National Sanctuary to be exactly that: National.

“And The Grotto reminds of my mother, who passed away in 2005. Mom would ask my dad to bring her to Mass here from time-to-time. I know that no one is more pleased by my joining The Grotto than my mother, and that pleases me.”

Blanchard is a member of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Camas, Wash., and lives in Skamania County with his wife, Kelly, and their dog, Crash.

###