

Jacob and Matthew Band: 'Our goal is to serve'

BY DORIS BENAVIDES
Staff Writer

Jacob Villalobos and brothers Matthew and Michael Paul León admit that many times pressure allows them to work more efficiently and effectively.

But when they are challenged as they were a year ago when commissioned to compose the 2011 Religious Education Congress theme song, what really helps the three youth ministers remain calm and creative is prayer.

"In some ways pressure limits us regarding the fullness the song can reach, but it allows our spirit and our prayer to be challenged," declared Michael Paul.

Writing the theme song was not an easy task, due mainly to time constraints and juggling with their daily jobs, parenthood (Jacob and Matthew have two kids each) and marriage responsibilities, but the members of the Jacob and Matthew Band came up with "People Rise Up!", a bilingual song included in their latest album, "Trust," released in 2011.

Its lyrics include the following: "Nos mantenemos libres poniendo nuestra confianza en ti. Los corazones se abren dejando que nos renueve tu amor." ("We remain free putting our trust in you. Hearts open up, letting your love renew us.")

"We had to create something and we said, 'We'll do it,' and throughout



ALEX EUGINIO
THE BAND: Top row from left, Paul Van DeRiet, Jacob Villalobos. Bottom row, from left, Michael Debellis, Matthew León and Michael Paul León.

the whole process of getting in and out of the studio and making sure the songs are written in the short period of time they needed to get written, we had to put a lot of trust not in ourselves but really in what God was calling us to do, to share more music," said Jacob, band co-founder with his buddy Matt.

Having led worship and entertaining at Congress since 2004, the Jacob and Matthew Band will perform (with Danielle Rose) live March 25

during lunchtime entertainment at the Anaheim Convention Center Arena (as well as on Youth Day March 22).

Source of inspiration

In a friendly conversation last week at Matthew's home, the three band members shared their struggles, challenges and the band's history while Matthew (lead vocals/singer songwriter) prepared coffee, Michael Paul (electric guitar) ate his mid-morning Greek yogurt, and Jacob (guitar/singer songwriter) calmly checked his smart phone once in a while, especially when asked about his favorite (Jacob and Matthew) song.

But before all of them revealed their favorites ("All I Need," "I Will Follow," "Desire" and "Glorious Lord"), they talked about their

source of inspiration and provided a bit of their story.

"A year ago, in the middle of the recession we were noticing a lot of desperation in this country," said Michael Paul. "People were worried about paying for their homes, about retirement, and in my parish several teens moved to other cities because their parents couldn't afford living in the same area they had been living."

"We fall into sin because we start to look for things that are immediate. When you don't have the patience to wait for a revelation in your life, you start reaching for other things that are not of God."

Those were life experiences behind the lyrics of "All I Need":

"All I need is you Lord, is you Lord, it's all I need. All of me for all of you. Nothing else will ever do."

In their teenage years, both Mi-

chael Paul and his brother Matthew struggled to find comfort.

Although coming from a tight-knit Catholic family of eight members, where their father Marcus Gregory, a theologian and philosopher, spoke about faith to them, they had to search and find it by themselves.

"In life, things happen that are out of our control and we're challenged and we come out short," said Matthew. "And sometimes you get lost, confused."

But he kept searching, and finally one day got back to Church and at the time of Communion "everything started changing for me," he said.

"Something just clicked that day for me and at that moment I felt at peace; at home."

Music had always been part of the Leóns environment. The parents

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RE Congress begins March 23 in Anaheim

■ "Voice Infusing Life"/"Voz Que Infunde Vida" is the theme for the annual Religious Education Congress, the largest event of its kind in the world, which returns to the Anaheim Convention Center and surrounding hotels March 23-25. The keynote talk (March 24, 8:30 a.m.) is "The Urgency of Discipleship and Evangelization in Today's World," by Spiritan Father Anthony Gittins, professor of mission and culture at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. The closing liturgy in the Arena with Archbishop José Gomez presiding will begin at 3:30 p.m. Bishop Tod Brown of Orange will preside at the 8 a.m. Sunday Mass in the Arena. Archbishop Gomez also will conduct an online chat with students from St. Dorothy School, Glendora, on March 23,

10:15-11:15 a.m. in the Exhibit Hall. Coordinated by the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education, Congress (which began with Youth Day on March 22) includes three days of 300 workshops, plus liturgies, entertainment and fellowship for more than 40,000 Catholics from throughout Southern California, the U.S. and overseas. Information: (213) 637-7348 or www.recongress.org. **TD**



MIKE NELSON

Continuing a tradition begun by Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop José Gomez will conduct an online chat with students during the Religious Education Congress March 23.

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