

Catholic Saints & California Missions

Mission names, Catholic namesakes and religious titles • missions 1-11

Many California missions were named for Catholic saints, while others honor archangels, the Virgin Mary or the Holy Cross.

This guide uses 'namesake' broadly so that titles such as Santa Cruz are not incorrectly described as patron saints.

1	San Diego de Alcala St. Didacus (Diego) of Alcala	SAINT 15th-century Franciscan brother
2	San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo St. Charles Borromeo	SAINT Cardinal and reforming archbishop of Milan
3	San Antonio de Padua St. Anthony of Padua	SAINT Franciscan friar, preacher and Doctor of the Church
4	San Gabriel Arcangel Archangel Gabriel	ARCHANGEL Biblical messenger associated with the Annunciation
5	San Luis Obispo de Tolosa St. Louis of Toulouse	SAINT Franciscan bishop of Toulouse
6	San Francisco de Asis St. Francis of Assisi	SAINT Founder of the Franciscan order
7	San Juan Capistrano St. John of Capistrano	SAINT Franciscan friar and preacher
8	Santa Clara de Asis St. Clare of Assisi	SAINT Founder of the Poor Clares
9	San Buenaventura St. Bonaventure	SAINT Franciscan theologian, bishop and Doctor of the Church
10	Santa Barbara St. Barbara	SAINT Early Christian martyr in Catholic tradition
11	La Purisima Concepcion Immaculate Conception of Mary	MARIAN TITLE Catholic title honoring the conception of the Virgin Mary

WHY THE NAMES MATTER

Spanish Franciscan missionaries used Catholic names and feast-day traditions when naming missions and colonial sites. The names remain visible across California today in missions, cities, counties, streets and landmarks.

Catholic Saints & California Missions

Mission names, Catholic namesakes and religious titles • missions 12-21

12	Santa Cruz The Holy Cross	SACRED TITLE Named for the Cross of Jesus, not for an individual saint
13	Nuestra Senora de la Soledad Our Lady of Solitude	MARIAN TITLE A devotional title of the Virgin Mary
14	San Jose St. Joseph	SAINT Husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus
15	San Juan Bautista St. John the Baptist	SAINT Biblical prophet who baptized Jesus
16	San Miguel Arcangel Archangel Michael	ARCHANGEL Biblical archangel associated with protection
17	San Fernando Rey de Espana St. Ferdinand III of Castile	SAINT Medieval king later canonized by the Catholic Church
18	San Luis Rey de Francia St. Louis IX of France	SAINT King of France and patron of the Secular Franciscan Order
19	Santa Ines St. Agnes of Rome	SAINT Early Christian virgin and martyr
20	San Rafael Arcangel Archangel Raphael	ARCHANGEL Biblical archangel associated with healing and guidance
21	San Francisco Solano St. Francis Solanus	SAINT Franciscan missionary in South America

QUICK GUIDE TO THE NAME TYPES

- Saint:** a canonized or traditionally venerated holy person
- Archangel:** Gabriel, Michael or Raphael in biblical/Catholic tradition
- Marian title:** a devotional title referring to the Virgin Mary
- Sacred title:** Santa Cruz refers to the Holy Cross rather than a person

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Catholic naming of the missions reflects the Spanish colonial and Franciscan religious system of the mission era. Mission history should also include the California Native peoples whose lands, labor, communities and cultures were deeply affected by colonization. These religious names describe the missions; they do not represent the full history of each site.

Reference guide: California Missions Foundation mission histories; National Park Service mission history resources.