

Christian Education Report September 2020

Ministry to youth and families has been a challenge this fall due to the restrictions of Covid 19. Yet, it has also presented opportunities that none of us were aware of and has forced us to think outside the box, seeking new ways to reach one another and to be creative in our worship and programs.

Last month, Father Christian and Alexis launched our first ever “Virtual Short Term Mission” experience for our parish alongside our brothers and sister at Buen Pastor and Education = Hope. Throughout the week, parishioners were invited to join us “in Ecuador” for the week to learn about the culture of the area, poverty, history of the region and the church. Parishioners were given homework each evening and got to experience teachings by students in both parishes (Buen Pastor and St. Mary’s) as the students worked together and collaborated for their devotionals. At the end of the week when we concluded, the overall consensus of the parish was gratitude for the both the experience and for relationships formed. The Virtual Short Term Mission led to a request of our parish to support E = H by providing scholarships for students to attend school. St. Mary’s exceeded the goal of the original request, raising nearly \$25,000. This money will provide the educational needs for the students from Buen Pastor as well as two computer labs where the students will be able to do their schoolwork virtually. The generosity of our parish is overwhelming and truly a gift!

To date, Sunday school has been a difficult obstacle. Parents do not want any further screen time for the kids, understandably. Recently, Alexis began sending the lessons, activities and prayers directly to the grade school age students via good old fashioned mail. The mail is addressed to the students themselves and so far the response has been positive. In an effort to send to those willing and eager to participate, Alexis has asked them to sign up to receive the lessons. This gives her a good group of invested families for feedback and suggestions.

Youth ministry remains active via the web for meetings and with Alexis checking in with students regularly. At this time, there is not a plan to meet on campus in the near future. Students wear masks all week at school and they would rather be home meeting via zoom or Facetime without the mask. It certainly makes communication easier. They are getting ready to begin a study called “Finding Truth” by Pastor Francis Chan. It dives deeply into the truths we experience in

our day-to-day lives and what God's truth reveals about the world around us. It will be helpful to lead students to recognize the difference between culture and emotion and the truth within the Word of God, specifically in this difficult and divisive year and to recognize the influences that are constantly surrounding them and vying for their attention.

Lastly, students continue to participate in assisting with worship through technical support and assistance, editing, and assisting on Sunday mornings. This has been a challenge as well due to limited numbers of worship participants, but certainly not impossible. Several of the regulars remain active and eager to be at church, to stay involved and are continually seeking Jesus in their formation and walks. Alexis says it is truly a privilege to work with them and learn from them. Teens are showing up for drive-in mass in their own cars together without their parents. It shows how much our youth love St. Mary's and are committed to our parish.