Director’s Corner

As a human being, the days can be full of joy but many times there are challenges which make it difficult. In these times, our faith serves as a gift. We can get lost so simply dealing with earthly circumstances. Being obedient to our faith provides a map, keeps us grounded, and always reminds us to look to Him in times of distress. Our obedience to Him and so to His work are just a few tools we are so blessed to have in our Christian faith. I was reflecting on Psalms 31:10-11, “Be gracious to me, Lord, for I am in distress; with grief my eyes are wasted, my soul and body spent. My life is worn out by sorrow, my years by sighing.” My reflection led me to think of our youth, oh how they suffer. Many of them not given the faith as we were. We were taught by parents, mentors, teachers, friends, and countless others. For our youth, they have truly met Christ through you and your example. Our obedience and trust in Him is what our youth see. Thank you for sharing your most precious gift with them every week.

Franchelle

The Oratorio

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Young Adult Day

On March 17, St. Patrick’s Day, over 300 young adults gathered in the St. Dominic Chancery Auditorium for Mass celebrated by Bishop Sheltz. They were then sent out to do a service project around Houston. They helped serve those in need like victims of Harvey, those who are sick, poor, hungry, homeless, in prison, and immigrants. Special Youth Services hosted around 35 young adults who signed up to serve our youth. Our time together began with a presentation of who SYS is and who the youth we serve are. The young adults then proceeded to write letters to the youth, sending them their words of encouragement, hope, and prayers. They decorated Hope Bags and brought snacks (continued on page 2)
A Conversation with a Mr. D. Segura, age 17 JJC

Alejandra: How long have you been in placement?
D: 2 months. This is my 5th time being locked up.

A: What's the difference between you when you first got locked up and you now?
D: I was a little rascal, miss. I didn’t want to listen. I wanted to stick to the g-code. But now, it’s a whole different ballgame. I'm 17, an adult in the state of Texas. Reality is hitting me. “You're not a child anymore.” Now I'm building my relationship with my parents and God too. I stay in touch with Him all day. I pray for things, I pray for y'all. I've manned up a lot since I first got here when I was 12.

A: Describe your relationship with God.
D: It's amazing. Man. The way I look at things now, it's gotten me closer to God. I never felt like this before. I have peace and comfort in my heart. I feel blessed.

A: How has Special Youth Services helped you with your relationship with God?
D: I'm not going to lie to you, y'all really helped me a lot. In the free, there is so much going on like family and school. And y'all make me see something I've never seen in my life: you may have everything but when you go to Him, the Father, you won't have it. It's better to build your relationship with Him now, so you can be accepted into the Kingdom.

A: What was your favorite part of the Cinco de Mayo program?
D: Well, I got to speak in front of everybody. I had never done that before. It was an experience. I was shy, I thought I was gonna mess up and I was gonna make y'all look bad. I like that y'all gave me the chance to participate in the event. And the food was nice.

A: What advice do you have for kids who are acting out?
D: First advice, man, whatever you do, if you hang out with dogs you're gonna get fleas. Which means you hang out with positive people and positive things are the outcome; you hang out with negative people and negative things are the outcome. I learned the hard way, which is sticking to the g-code. The g-code isn't going to take you from here, but give you years in jail. Mainly, build your relationship with God and your parents. Do what they say. You're still underage.

A: What advice do you have for parents?
D: Have a structure at home. Check on your kids, talk to them, sit down and ask, “What can I do to help you improve your behavior?” Things like that. Keep an eye on them: their behavior, school-wise, house-wise, street-wise. Have them in [your] social media. A lot of parents, if they saw the type of pics their daughters and sons post, man they would not be happy.

Young Adult Day (continued)

to fill the bags. The group then set off to the Harris County Juvenile Justice Center downtown. After driving through the end of the St. Patrick’s Day parade, the group made its way to the front of the facility where Deacon Dan explained to them the procedure of a youth being detained in Harris County. He described what daily life is like for a detained youth and what court dates consist of. The group moved to the side of the building, where some youth would have visibility to the street below, and prayed a Divine Mercy Chaplet. They prayed for the youth in the building, for their families, and for the staff. The green shirts and balloons attracted a lot of attention from passersby, inciting horn honks and many a “Happy St. Patrick’s Day!”.

These young adults came together on that day to reach out to the vulnerable in our society, to young people who sometimes do not have anyone in the “free” to care, let alone, pray for them. We were honored they chose our youth for their project and we hope that more young adults would want to do the same. If your group would like to reach out to SYS youth, contact us at sys@archgh.org or (713) 741-8739. (see Young Adult Day pictures on page3)
A Volunteer’s Perspective

1200 Congress Avenue – God Lives Here – Steve Szymczak (Street Saint)

Until recently, 1200 Congress Ave. carried no significance for me. Today it symbolizes both what I hate and despise simultaneously with that for which I hope and pray. It is the address of the Harris County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) and the Juvenile Justice Center (JJC). It is my destination every Wednesday afternoon when I show up to mentor one of its temporary residents. This mentoring program is called Street Saints and is a ministry that originated at St. Ignatius parish in Spring. To date there are about 8 mentors (men mentor boys and women mentor girls). It is run under the auspices of the Archdiocesan SYS and, more specifically, under the tutelage of Deacon Dan Gilbert who is on site every day. This is a purposeful Christian evangelization program intended to introduce and strengthen the faith, hope and love of these young people.

“Hate and despise, yet hope and pray” – this may appear to be a clumsy juxtaposition, but it is in fact at the interface of what the mind sees and feels in a temporal sense and what the heart and soul know can be made better through God’s intervention and grace. His intervention is made possible when the hearts and minds of these youngsters are opened through the mentors that serve as His conduit.

Clanging, heavy metal doors, drab paint colors, buzzers and a static-filled speaker system dominate the environment. Detainees in un-fashionable jumpsuits who are told to walk with hands behind their backs are the focus of attention. These are boys and girls who for the most part are awaiting a court decision as to their eventual fate, e.g. certification as an adult, trial, or a decision to be sent home under the supervision of family. Because they are not adults there is no bail or release on their own recognizance. Often they do not go home because their home is not considered suitable for return or the court, for other reasons, has decided they must remain in detention.

If you are interested in viewing an in-situ metamorphosis, then come down to 1200 Congress Ave. between 3:00 and 4:30 PM on a Wednesday afternoon. Watch for a 66 year-old man entering and then exiting the building. You’ll see a normal looking person entering and a man with tears streaming down his cheeks upon exiting. That’ll be the telltale sign. This is a man who only a year ago would have said those kids got what they deserved, but who, solely through the grace of God, now sees the face of a suffering Jesus in the eyes of every one of these children. He sees the pain, fear and despair that come with the loss of faith, hope and love. He is crying both for the pain suffered by these “Street Saints” as well as for the mercy and joy brought about by a merciful God. We are all sinners searching for the pathway to sainthood. With God’s grace these young people will someday turn the favor and help those who come behind them.
The gym was packed at Strake Jesuit High School on April 6. Fans came out to support their favorite priest or seminarian (or both!) as they challenged each other in the second annual Priests vs. Seminarians Basketball Game. The evening began with a welcoming and opening prayer from Daniel Cardinal DiNardo and the national anthem was performed by St. Mary’s Seminary’s schola cantorum. The halftime middle and high school 3-point finals were emceed by Houston’s own Jim McIngvale “Mattress Mack”. In the end, the priests beat the seminarians with a score of 58 to 53. Congratulations to everyone who participated and a special shout out to our former SYS seminarians who played: Fr. Michael McFall, Fr. Preston Quintela, Fr. TJ Dolce, and Deacon Shane Wieck; to our current SYS seminarians who played: David Michael Moses and Ryan Stawaisz; and to our current seminarians who sang in the choir: Jimmy Touzeau and Anthony McFarland.

“Cinco de mayo is the day we celebrate the Batalla de Puebla. It was this really amazing victory that the Mexican soldiers had over the French!” Words spoken by B. Benavides, one of the actors in the play explaining what Cinco de Mayo is and why it is celebrated. Under the guidance of Mrs. LaKesha Brown and SYS staff, Benavides, D. Nguyen, K. Cooper, and L. Duran, put all their effort into the play practices and performance and did an outstanding job. The event emcee, D. Segura (see page 2), gave the introduction of the day as well as guided the transitions as if he were a professional host. After the play, D. Leonard confidently introduced the guest speaker, Angel Ponce, who captivated the audience speaking about his life before and after being in a gang. The day continued with games, aguas frescas, and pan dulce that were generously donated by Fiesta Mart #82. The youth played Lotería, Tape the Tail on the Donkey, trivia, and they decorated a piñata. They all picked one staff member to break the piñata and after she successfully did so, all of the kids recieved a bag of candy. This festive day was possible because of the help of SYS volunteers and JJC staff, who had as much fun as the kids. We thank everyone involved and we were glad the youth had fun while learning about this Mexican holiday.

Special Youth Services welcomes the new diaconate candidate class of 2021 (from left to right): Alex Hernández, Daniel Ruvalcab-a, José Romay, Franco Knoepfler, Tom Spicer, and Alejandro Padilla. They will be joining the soon-to-be deacons at various facilities doing one-on-one ministry. We are blessed to receive a great group of men every year and our youth benefit tremendously from their visits. Please keep these men in your prayers.
We were again blessed with a wonderful group of seminarians this year. These young men offered one-on-one prayer and spiritual mentorship to the youth at various facilities. SYS congratulates those who have been ordained or are in the process of being ordained as transitional deacons. Please keep these men in your prayers as they finish the final leg of their journey to the priesthood. For information on vocations, visit www.houstonvocations.com or www.cssrvocations.com for information on Redemptorists vocations.

(From left to right) Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston: David Michael Moses (BBRC), José Alonso (BBRC), Vincent Tran (JJC), Ryan Stawaisz (JJC); Diocese of Amarillo: Taylor Elzner (BBRC); Diocese of Beaumont: Anthony McFarland (BBRC); Diocese of Dallas: Jesús Chávez (JJC); Diocese of Charleston: Jimmy Touzeau (JJC); Diocese of El Paso: Sam Anchondo (BBRC); and Vietnamese Redemptorists (all JJC): Martin Nguyen, Quan Tran, Lam Tran, and Viet Nguyen.

Au revoir, Shelly!

We sadly had to say goodbye to our lovely administrative assistant, Shelly Slovacek, as she returned to school at UTMB. Shelly became an integral part of the Special Youth Services family during her time with us. She embraced her role as the office gatekeeper and sane one of the bunch, as well as a faithful Christian steward, taking her own time to visit youth at JJC. Every event she helped organize, every retreat she participated in, every copy she made was done with love and pure joy. Her smile and laughter were contagious around the office and her prayer life and faith were an example to be followed. We wish all the best to our Shelly. “She is clothed with strength and dignity and she laughs without fear of the future.” Proverbs 31:25

Special Youth Services was invited to participate in the 6th annual Wear Orange Day on Saturday, June 2. This family-friendly event raises awareness on national gun violence by providing workshops on gun safety and honoring the victims of gun violence, among other activities. We heard moving speeches from those who have been affected by gun violence, including a survivor of the shooting at Santa Fe High School. Pictured above are Sherriff Ed González, Alejandra and Fernando from SYS, and Officer Bean. For more information on this national event, please visit www.weareorange.org.
SYS Angels

Special Youth Services would like to recognize another group of angels that have blessed us these past few months. We thank them for strengthening the ministry and for extending their kindness to the youth we serve: Deacon Alvin Lovelady, Shelly Slovacek, Steve Szymcak, and Monica Hatcher. SYS has received special blessings from each of these people in a variety of capacities. We have been able to serve the youth and our volunteers better because of them.

Would your group like to reach out to the SYS youth? Please contact us at sys@archgh.org or at (713) 741-8739.

Correctional Ministries for Adults

This office offers pastoral care for adult Catholics who find themselves incarcerated in the 26 state prisons, 10 county jails, one federal facility, INS detention and numerous city jails within the boundaries of the Archdiocese. For more information, or if you would like to volunteer, visit www.archgh.org or call (713) 741-8732.

FAITH & FAMILY NIGHT

August 4 | 5:30-7:30™ | Tickets $24

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Archdiocesan Prayer Breakfast
Thursday, July 19, 2018 | 7:30 a.m. | Hilton-Americas

Keynote: Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill
Bishop of Victoria

Gladly will I GLORY

2 Corinthians 12:9

Tickets on sale now! Seating is limited!
www.archgh.org/prayerbreakfast

Maria Goretti Support Group

This new support group is for those afflicted with any type of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, or mental) and will begin to meet at 7:00 pm on the third Monday of every month in downtown Houston at the Cathedral Centre (1701 San Jacinto St., Houston 77002). For more information about the Maria Goretti Network that is sponsoring this support group, go to www.mgoretti.org or call (713) 851-3708.
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July 20-22, 2018

www.PowerInMyHandsTheMovie.com
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Please pray for the community of Santa Fe, Texas. May the Lord bring them peace, comfort, and hope during this time of suffering and may we come together as brothers and sisters in Christ to care for each other and reach out to the most vulnerable.

St. Jude Thaddeus

St. Jude, known as Thaddaeus, was a brother of St. James the Less, and a relative of Our Savior. He was one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus and his attribute is a club. Images of St. Jude often include a flame around his head, which represent his presence at Pentecost, when he accepted the Holy Spirit alongside the other apostles. Another attribute is St. Jude holding an image of Christ, in the Image of Edessa. Sometimes he can also be seen holding a carpenter’s ruler or is depicted with a scroll or book, the Epistle of Jude.

Biblical scholars agree St. Jude was a son of Clopas and his mother Mary was the Virgin Mary’s cousin. Ancient writers tell us that he preached the Gospel in Judea, Samaria, Idumaea, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Lybia. According to Eusebius, he returned to Jerusalem in the year 62, and assisted at the election of his brother, St. Simeon, as Bishop of Jerusalem.

Saint Jude is not the same person as Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Our Lord and despaired because of his great sin and lack of trust in God’s mercy.

Jude was the one who asked Jesus at the Last Supper why He would not manifest Himself to the whole world after His resurrection. Little else is known of his life. Legend claims that he visited Beirut and Edessa and could have been martyred with St. Simon in Persia.

He is an author of an epistle (letter) to the Churches of the East, particularly the Jewish converts, directed against the heresies of the Simonians, Nicolaites, and Gnostics. Though Saint Gregory the Illuminator has been credited as the “Apostle to the Armenians,” the Apostles Jude and Bartholomew are believed to have brought Christianity to Armenia, where Jude was rumored to have later been martyred.

Following his death, St. Jude’s body was brought to Rome and left in a crypt in St. Peter’s Basilica. Today his bones can be found in the left transept of St. Peter’s Basilica under the main altar of St. Joseph in a tomb he shares with the remains of the apostle Simon the Zealot.

Pilgrims came to St. Jude’s grave to pray and many reported a powerful intercession, leading to the title, “The Saint for the Hopeless and the Despaired.” Two Saints, St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Bernard, had visions from God asking them to accept St. Jude as “The Patron Saint of the Impossible.”

Roman Catholics invoke St. Jude when in desperate situations because his New Testament letter stresses that the faithful should persevere in the environment of harsh, difficult circumstances—just as their forefathers had done before them; therefore, he is the patron saint of desperate cases.

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?id=127

“The harvest is plentiful, laborers are few” Luke 10:2

SYS would like to thank you all for your continued support to this ministry. We welcome all to share this newsletter with anyone who might have an interest and to share with us if you would like to see something in the Oratorio. If you know someone who may be interested in becoming a volunteer with SYS, please contact our office at:

(713) 741-8739 or sys@archgh.org.