For SYS, the summer was here and gone within a flash! What an exciting summer! We had several programs which many of you shared with us. If you were not able to join us, no worries, this issue is full of those amazing events. Now, it is time for Saintly Saturday. As planning begins, we ask for your prayers to host a spirit-filled and joyful day. Through all the joy God allows us to experience when visiting His little ones, our hearts are still concerned about the environments they will return to. October is Rosary month. Please join SYS in praying the Rosary for those 31 days of October. Let us pray for truth. Let us pray for justice. Let us pray for peace in the world. Let us pray for all those who suffer. St. Michael, defend us. Our Lady, pray for us.

Franchelle
Alejandra: How old are you?
E: 15

A: How did you feel when you were asked to sing at the Juneteenth presentation?
E: I was nervous, but excited at the same time.

A: How did you feel during and after your performance?
E: I was nervous because I didn’t know if my voice sounded right or not. But when I started getting in it, I started enjoying myself. Afterwards, I thought, “Yay! I did it!”

A: How long have you been singing?
E: Since I was 8. My mom told me I started younger. I would always ask for a karaoke machine for Christmas until she bought me one.

A: What’s your favorite music to sing?
E: I don’t really have a favorite. I test my voice to see what works for me. I can sing pop, R & B, love, all of that but only where my voice fits. I love all music.

A: What happens when you’re feeling a song?
E: It feels good. You put yourself in the person who wrote it’s shoes. You feel warm. I don’t just sing a song because I like it, I relate to it in my own kind of way.

A: Do you like singing Gospel music like you did in the presentation?
E: It depends on what song I’m singing. I like “Forgiven and Loved” by Jimmy Needham and “Break every Chain”.

A: How do you feel your talent connects you to God?
E: I feel like it’s a gift. Not many people have it.

A: What is your relationship with God like?
E: Strong. Cuz I usually pray to Him about everything because I know He can get me out of any situation. I write down what I want to say to Him.

A: What is your dream?
E: I don’t want to be a singer. Maybe later. I want to get a degree in Culinary Arts and become a chef. I also want my cosmetology license so I can do make up for famous people.

A: What advice do you have for kids who are acting up?
E: Make the right choice before it’s too late. Being in this place is not good. In here, you’re told what to do, wear these clothes. At home, you may not be in the best environment but it’s better than in here. You can learn a lot in here, but you can’t do what you really want to do. You want to be able to talk to people. You can’t live your life in jail.

A: What advice do you have for parents?
E: Be there for their kids all the way around. Teach them right from wrong. Give them the love they need. Get a therapist, try to figure out why their kids are acting that way so they can help.

A: What would you have needed to hear to not have gotten locked up?
E: “I love you. We can get through this. All you have to do is push.”
God has blessed my life in more ways than I can count. I’ve always been a volunteer as a parent, in school and the community, but most of those were somewhat self-serving. I’ve learned in life the more you “put in” the more you “get out.”

As I’ve gotten older I’ve realized that I need and can do more. A few years ago, I started looking for ways to give back without expecting anything in return. I looked at many opportunities to serve, but none struck my fancy until one Sunday, Deacon Dan presented the Special Youth Services at Mass and how they needed volunteers to help with their juvenile detention ministry.

I was reminded of what Jesus said about visiting Him in prison and the disciples questioning that they never visited Him in prison and He told them that whenever they visited anyone in prison, it was visiting Him. This seemed like the perfect opportunity for me. I was grateful for what God has done for me and my family and I decided to act.

The program has been more that I could have imagined. The training process was lengthy and educational. It included a background check, training on detecting child abuse, prison rules and how to talk with the detainees. The last step in the training process was a fingerprinting and photo session with the Feds where I was given some advice from the officer who told me “Don’t let them see you sweat.”

Each week, we meet with the kids (ages 10-17) for an hour to go over the Readings from the previous Sunday Mass. I showed up, a little nervous, at the detention center along with the other volunteers- some new like me and many that had been doing this for years. They made me feel very welcomed. I shadowed one of the veterans for the first couple of sessions then was on my own.

Some of the kids are Catholic, most are not but they all have an interest in learning about God. They are under a lot of stress and are scared about their future. Most are from broken homes and few go to church on a regular basis. They are amazed to learn about God’s forgiveness and the fact that they can still have a bright future – if they want it. I’m not a Bible scholar but am always well briefed by our leader before each session on the readings and what the key discussion points are that might be enlightening to the kids. I always ask the Holy Spirit to help me figure out what to say and that has never been an issue. A great session is when you get questions and discussion among the kids.

I’ve never been afraid or felt uncomfortable, the kids are on good behavior and always participate and make me feel welcomed. It’s rewarding to see their participation in the sessions. I leave each session with a good feeling about my time there and confidence that the ministry is providing real value to these kids.

The highlight is always returning and not seeing one of the kids from before because they have been released. I keep all of them in my prayers. I hope I’ve helped them, I know they have helped me. Even though I didn’t go into this looking for anything, I leave each session with more than I came in with. I would like to encourage anyone looking to give back to consider this ministry. It’s amazing.

After over 30 years of service with the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, Executive Director Tom Brooks retired in August. His predecessor, and former Assistant Executive Director, Henry González, began his new position in August as well. Special Youth Services thanks Tom for the great partnership and support and wishes him all the best. We look forward to working with Henry to continue to bring spiritual nourishment to the juveniles in Harris County.
The Miracle - Steve Syzmacak

Yesterday was a day of miracles. I would venture to say that all of the young boys and girls I see at the Harris County Juvenile Detention Center have seen and experienced human realities that those of you reading this could not imagine with even the most vivid of imaginations. Before the age of majority, these kids have seen or perhaps participated in murder, armed robbery, drug deals, drug usage and other behaviors that make up the weekly story lines for Law & Order and CSI. When Jesus told us to visit the prisoners I'm not sure that He had in mind those that have experienced the crimes and destructive life styles experienced by these fragile minds.

At an age when kids should be playing football, cheerleading, hanging out at Starbucks and other mundane doings of average middle class kids, these young people count the number of people they knew who are dead due to violence on two or more hands. That makes them dirty and untouchable by those of us that worry when we find out one of our kids drank a beer or smoked a joint. If that was the extent of what these kids in JDC had experienced then people like Sister Theresa, Dorothy Day and the Salvation Army would be out of business. But their lives are even worse.

Those of us who don't want to hear excuses regarding abuse, neglect, background, absent parents and the lack of positive mentorship tune out reality and want punishment. Those of us who were once of that mind and then wandered into this world, soon realize that these are just kids who start every day with 2 strikes and 2 outs in the bottom of the 9th inning down 10-0. In other words, by reasons outside of the control of these youth they are forced to survive in the most dangerous of environments. Without intending to sound heretical, I'm not sure Christ would have been successful if His public ministry took place in the 3rd Ward, 5th Ward or Sunnyside. This is a tough world. Kids in Syria and Iraq do have it tough, but I think they may wish for chemical weapon attacks after a few days trying to survive in Kashmere Gardens.

Bible Bowl is the brain child of the team at SYS (Special Youth Services) of the Houston Archdiocese. This small group of true disciples spends their days and evenings bringing the gospel message to the kids at JDC, some of whom have never set a foot inside a church nor have ever been under the influence of an adult who taught the most simple of Christian values and virtues.

The Bible Bowl competition takes place this week. Each of the four Harris County youth detention centers held a competition. The final is to be held on Friday. Teams from each facility will compete. The winning team brings home the trophy for their facility. With that goes bragging rights for a year and a pizza dinner.

Bear in mind that in the world of "negative baggage" these kids are already world champs. In the world of the Bible Bowl they performed like elite "college bowl" teams that perform in Texas high school UIL competition.

The concept is simple. Each kid was given a study sheet of Bible questions. For example, "Who was Abraham's nephew?" (Lot, for those of you that need some Bible brush-up). Or, "To where was Paul traveling when he had his vision of the Risen Christ?" (Damascus). As is true in any group of kids, some studied harder than others.

Four kids per team sit at a table. Each has an electronic buzzer. The moderator asks the question, the kids push the buzzer and the buzzer that first lights up indicates which kid must answer. Back and forth, points accumulating, the kids that studied hard soon realize the reward for hard study. Like every competition, there is only one winner. Those who didn't win display good sportsmanship.

There is a difference though that even the untrained eye will detect. Whereas a child raised by parents and extended family that teaches both the material as well as the desired associated behavior, some of these kids don't handle defeat well. On a spectrum of behavior they are on the opposite end of the "spoiled child", but both the spoiled & neglected child respond similarly to defeat and disappointment.
Think how proud you were when you sat with other parents and watched your child perform. It could be dance, baseball, Scouts, school programs or any other of the dozens of activities and groups for which we sign up our kids. Now, imagine a child who performed well and experienced the acclamation of the crowd. After the event all of the parents hover around their kids, smile, take photos and congratulate. However, this single kid has no parents present, no one to pat his or her back, no one to take a photo. This kid looks around and sees evidence of a family life that he has only seen on TV. That's our kid. That's the kid who ends up in the JDC. That's the kid who has a high probability of living much of his life in an adult prison. Our kid is the one you see handcuffed and being stuffed into the back of a police car. Our kid is the reason you moved to the suburbs and to a school system that didn't have these kids on campus. You think, “thank God that he isn't my child”.

But God doesn't see it that way. He spends inordinate amounts of energy trying to find people who will crossover into this world of dysfunction, defeat and death at an age too young for dying. These SYS people are special. They are true disciples. You'll never know them as long as you “hang with the Pharisees”. You'll only see them and start to love them when you follow the Way, the True Way. Thank you, God, for giving me a glimpse of these saints, these Special Youth Saints.

“All scripture is inspired by God and useful for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be upright. This is how someone who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work.”

2Timothy 3:16-17
In the Fall of 2017, the staff at Harris County Leadership Academy (HCLA) in Katy had an idea to begin an outdoor garden for the kids to build and maintain. After several months of planning and partnering with Prairie View A&M’s Agri-Life Community Extension Program, HCLA began their own program teaching kids about agriculture beginning with planting vegetables, flowers, and herbs. However, staff at HCLA desired to have the kids learn about breeding animals as well, so the planning of having chickens and rabbits began. As preparations were underway for their Community Garden Open House, Special Youth Services (SYS) offered to help with that final step.

On June 20th, the HCLA Community Garden became official and with that, the facility also became the new home of five new guests. When not enjoying their new staff-built chicken coop, you will find Thelma and Louise roaming the HCLA backyard. In the comfort of the “great indoors” you will find Cocoa Puff, Big Nate and Fatty Wop, the new rabbits. While all the animals are a hit, you could say the kids are “Cuckoo” for Cocoa Puffs, the soft and cuddly Mini Rex that has been the hands-down favorite of all the rabbits.

But whether it’s gardening or handling chickens or rabbits, it is a joy to see these kids placed out of their usual comfort zone and doing something they may have never done before. Even those that may seem to have a hard exterior become vulnerable as they attempt to gently carry the rabbits and stroke their fur with the softest of touch.

Next on the agenda for HCLA is adding a goat, as well as possibly making candles scented from some of the flowers they are growing, such as Lavender. We look forward to seeing HCLA’s agriculture program grow.

A special Thank You to Peggy Kacinskas and Don Perry, SYS Volunteers, who made it out the Friday before Open House to put the finishing touches on the garden and chicken coop. SYS is always happy and willing to lend a hand.

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Juneteenth

“Free at last! Free at last! Our prayers have been answered!

We are free at last!”

These words resonated through the JJC gym as a group of boys and girls reenacted the moment Texas slaves found out they were free, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation! Juneteenth is the day Americans celebrate this news, every June 19th. Special Youth Services and Mrs. Lakesha Brown provided the opportunity for the staff and youth at JJC to find out more about this holiday with a presentation that included a performance by the St. Peter the Apostle’s Choir, a motivational speech by Dr. Carla Wyatt, a play by the youth, and a musical performance by E. Lira (see page 2). Actors K. Cooper, D. Nguyen, D. Segura, R. Edwards, I. Scott, C. Mills, and J. Vera gave a stellar performance after having practiced their lines every day for just a few weeks. The audience was served Juneteenth-themed snacks and sang along to the music throughout the day.

“Nothing ever stops; it divides and multiplies, and I guess sometimes it gets ground down superfine, but it doesn’t just blow away.” — Ralph Ellison

Yours are the heavens and Yours the earth, the world and all it holds, You founded them.” Psalms 89:11
By choice or by force, much of the youth that SYS ministers to are in gangs, which are all over Houston. We may have an initial judgment about these kids from what we see on TV and the movies, but have we ever wondered what gang life actually consists of or why a child would join such a group of people? On June 23rd, SYS volunteers had the opportunity to ask these questions at the 2018 Volunteer In-Service. Tino Chapa, from the Mayor’s Anti-Gang Office, was our guest presenter on Houston gangs, providing important facts and sharing his personal life experiences that led him to the position he is in today. A fellow proud Catholic, we are sure to see him active around the Archdiocese. Mr. Chapa’s presentation left the volunteers very informed and enlightened. Some were sparked to start their own projects for the youth. During and after lunch, the group had the opportunity to get to know each other and to share their experiences.

We enjoy providing opportunities throughout the year for our volunteers to grow, meet each other, and serve together. Want in on our next event? It’s Saintly Saturday! See below for details!

Save the Date
Saintly Saturday November 3, 2018

Calling all volunteers! Now is the time to start sending in your RSVP’s for our annual celebration of youth and the Eucharist at BBRC. This is a big event and not only does SYS need volunteers to ensure the day goes smoothly, but the kids love seeing visitors who will spend the day with them, worshipping and praying. Call Alejandra at (713) 741-8779 or email her at amaya@archgh.org to let her know you will be attending, whether it be half the day or the whole day. Invitations will be emailed soon!
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: **The Social Concerns Ministry at St. Laurence in Sugar Land.** This group of all ages wanted to do something special for our kids, so they made Hope Bags for the youth in the Fort Bend Juvenile Probation Department to celebrate the beginning of the school year. They did a wonderful job writing encouraging, loving notes and applying their artistic ability to brighten up the brown paper bags. The youth were very receptive to the bag of snacks and as we see most often, they took out the letters to read before taking out anything else. Some girls were moved to tears, knowing that someone took the time to not only send them a special treat, but to pray for them.

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

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**CONGRATULATIONS!**

JoAnn Zuniga is the Media Relations Manager for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and on August 24th, she was awarded the Houston Association of Hispanic Media Professionals (HAHMP) Lifetime Achievement Award. Before entering PR, JoAnn worked for almost 20 years as a news reporter for the Houston Chronicle and as an associate producer for Fox News. She is also one of the founders of HAHMP. Special Youth Services extends a warm congratulations to our co-worker and friend.

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**Want to volunteer?**

You have seen what we do, now be a part of it! Come plant seeds with us! We invite you to be a Bible Study leader, a spiritual mentor, a tutor, a music teacher, or to share any other talents you may have. Your school, youth group, young adult group, senior group, or church group can also reach out to our kids in a variety of ways! The youth are waiting for your visit. Answer God’s call and contact us today at (713) 741-8739 or email at sys@archgh.org!

“May our sons be like plants growing tall from their earliest days, our daughters like pillars carved fit for a palace...” Psalms 144:12
Law Enforcement
Blue Mass

Honoring those agencies that responded to the May 18 shooting at Santa Fe High School

Color Guard Lineup at 4:30 pm

This Mass is for Civilian & Classified and will take place on September 29, 2018 at 5:00 pm at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart: 1111 St. Joseph Pkwy @ Fannin St. Bishop George Sheltz will be presiding.

Who is this Mass for? All persons who are members of criminal justice agencies or organizations that support such agencies such as police departments, sheriff offices, constable offices, correctional agencies, probation and parole agencies, children and adult protective agencies, CJ education, institutions, military police, Homeland Security agencies, U.S. Coast Guard, DEA, DPS, TABC, TPW, LEF, TSA, dispatchers, CJ Lab Techs, all civilian employees of CJ agencies, CJ educators, CPS workers, 100 Club members, Police Foundation sponsors, Police Advisory Committee, Civilian Police Academy, Ministers Against Crime participants and PIP members. All those who would like to support the men and women in these professions who work to provide a safe and just environment for us to live in are also welcome to attend.

The Greater Houston area includes all of the following counties: Austin, Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, Grimes, Harris, Montgomery, San Jacinto, Waller, and Walker.

The Blue Mass is sponsored by the Office of Correctional Ministries of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. For more information, contact Deacon Alvin Lovelady at (713) 741-8745 or at BlueMass@archgh.org.
Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod was born in Aix-en-Provence France on 1st August 1782, the son of wealthy aristocratic parents. Young Eugene had a very comfortable life.

His idyllic world was swept away by the French Revolution in 1789 when the entire family was forced to flee into exile. Eugene was just eight years old when his family fled France, leaving their possessions behind, and thus began an eleven-year exile. These were years of family instability, material scarcity and danger. The Mazenodian family became political refugees, who trailed through a succession of cities in Italy – starting from Turin, Venice, Naples and finishing up at Palermo.

His father, who had been President of the Court of Accounts, Aids and Finances in Aix, was forced to try his hand at trade to support his family. He proved to be a poor businessman, and as the years went on the family came close to destitution. This meant that Eugene’s adolescence was impoverished. Deprived of friends of his own age, he was also separated from his mother who returned back to France and ended up divorcing her husband and reclaiming back all the family property in France.

In 1802, Eugene was 20 years old when he returned from exile. It was not until when he was 25, Eugene’s life was gradually being transformed by a “conversion” experience. During the adoration of the cross on Good Friday in 1807, Eugene had a special experience of the love of Christ for him and the forgiveness of sin. This was such an experience that Eugene decided to dedicate his life to Jesus his Saviour. A calling to the priesthood began to manifest itself, and Eugene answered that call. Despite opposition from his mother, he entered the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris in 1808, and on December 21, 1811, he was ordained a priest in Amiens. His dream was to be “the servant and priest of the poor.”

Eugene began his ministry by reaching out to the poor, the workers, the youth, the sick, the country villagers, the servants and the needy prisoners of Aix. He was overwhelmed by the demands of the ministry and he often carried it out in the face of opposition from the local clergy.

On January 25, 1816, Eugene founded the society of the “Missionaries of Provence”. In order to ensure there would be continuity for the work, Eugene took the bold step of going directly to the Pope and asking that his group be recognized officially as a Religious Congregation of pontifical right. His faith and his persistence paid off and on February 17, 1826, Pope Leo XII formally approved the newly founded Congregation as the “Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate”. Its motto is “He has sent me to evangelize the poor” expressed both its charism and way of life. St. Eugene is the patron saint of dysfunctional families.

https://oblates.ie/about-us/st-eugene-de-mazenod/

Please pray for workers and those looking for work, for the East Coast of the United States and the rest of the country affected by natural disasters, for those who remain separated from their loved ones, and for all who suffer.

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“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.