In July, SYS lost a friend on earth and gained a friend in Heaven. Not everyone had the privilege of meeting Deacon Gary Forse. I’d like to share an excerpt of a reflection he shared in March of 2013 when he was a diaconate candidate:

“As the month of February comes to a close, I am happy to say that I was finally able to meet with Dcn. Dan for most of a day at the Harris County Juvenile Detention Center. It is almost impossible to describe the various emotions and thoughts that I have experienced as I have attended orientation meetings, training, and clergy meetings over the last couple of months leading to the time I would actually go into a facility. It has been an emotional roller coaster as my mind moves from fear, to anxiety, to excitement and of course doubt. Working with Special Youth Services would not have been my choice of ministries. What I am slowly beginning to understand as I visit with those involved with SYS is what a positive impact the ministry has had and continues to have on the lives of these children.

Lord God, thank You for the gift of those that work with SYS and especially Dcn. Dan Gilbert. I pray that You will continue to guide me and direct me in this service that I have been called to. Help me to understand these kids and their situations and give me the wisdom to share the words that they need to hear. Amen.”

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, And let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace.

Franchelle
A Conversation with 16 year-old E. F. at JJC

Alejandra: How long have you been at JJC?
E: 1 year, 3 weeks

A: How was your relationship like with God when you first arrived? What about your behavior?
E: I prayed to Him sometimes, but I wasn’t as close to Him as I am now. [Laughs] I used to act out every day.

A: How is your relationship like with God now? Your behavior?
E: I’m close to Him, but I’m getting closer and closer as I learn new stuff. Like with the Bible Bowl questions. I kept reading them over and over. I’m still reading them. I’m doing good now. I know when Deacon Dan is going to come to visit me. I don’t want to disappoint him. I was on TC (temporary confinement) and he came to visit me.

A: How has Deacon Dan helped you with your relationship with God?
E: He gets me close to God. To me, I see him as God. He helps me a lot. I learn from him, like from my past. I thank him because he made me mature a lot. He made me grow. He made me learn about God. I feel a connection to God. I can’t see Him, but I can feel Him. I wanted to try something new every once in a while. I never thought I’d read the Bible. I get to learn new stuff from the Bible.

A: How was your experience like with Bible Bowl?
E: It was fun. I got to learn new stuff about God in a fun way. Even though my team didn’t win, I already won because I learned about God.

A: What are some things you learned?
E: That Jesus’s mom was Mary, He was crucified, He fed 5,000 people loaves and fishes. My mom also told me that people in the Bible have been incarcerated too.

A: What message do you have for kids who are acting out?
E: It ain’t worth it, because when you’re in closed walls it ain’t worth it. When you’re locked up, you get to see who really got your back.

A: What about a message to parents?
E: Be hard on your kids, but not too hard. Influence them to do more. When I was whooped, it made me do more. Do activities with the kids. Teach them about new things. I had that with my mom, but not with my dad.

A: What is your dream job?
E: I want to be an entrepreneur. I want to have a foundation where I can change kids’ lives, tell my story. I’d have different activities for them to do, to keep them busy and off the streets.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13
I often compare volunteering with Special Youth Services (SYS) with going to the gym. So many excuses appear in my mind as to why I should not go and simply head home to take a nap. The toughest part of volunteering is the drive over during traffic hour. But as soon as I enter the BBRC, I am greeted by other volunteers and by the deacons. I immediately feel God’s presence and sense of community. Walking into the cells, I am greeted by the kids. Sometimes I might get one Bible class student and sometimes I can get up to a dozen students interested in learning about the Bible. Often, I am impressed by the knowledge the students have. Some are well versed in the Bible.

I have been a volunteer for over three years now. I have grown close to the kids and always look forward to asking them about their progress and what their plans are for once they are released. On August 7th, SYS held the annual Bible Bowl at the Juvenile Detention Center where we make Bible Study into a “game show” type of contest. The students are given study sheets and a couple of weeks to prepare. Each contestant had a buzzer and the winning unit would get a pizza party. (I was embarrassed in that I personally did not know MANY of the trivia questions!) It was an enlightening and exhilarating experience for both the students and volunteers. The students showed great enthusiasm and will certainly walk away with trivia that will help them find direction and find the way of Jesus Christ.

Doing the Lord’s work is never easy. I acknowledge, however, that Jesus helped others that needed His love and assistance. Jesus never associated or congregated with wealthy people. Jesus always surrounded Himself with those in need. To be Catholic is to attempt to be like Jesus Christ.

I thank SYS for the opportunity to volunteer and help spread the Good Word. I acknowledge I am there to help the students, but the students, indirectly, also help me be a better Catholic. As I drive through the Houston traffic and walk into the cold cells of the BBRC, I acknowledge it is not my car or my feet that are carrying me to do the Lord’s work. I am carried by the Holy Spirit, which is the pilot of all good deeds.

The Harris County Juvenile Probation Department has undergone many changes during 2019 which have brought about changes in Special Youth Services. This past August, the Burnett Bayland Rehabilitation Center was closed and will transition into a facility that will be offering different services to youth. We do not know yet what exactly it will be, but we know that the juvenile staff has amazing ideas and it will surely benefit the youth and their families. Since it is no longer a residential facility, Bible Study will not be held there until further notice. Some of our volunteers have happily joined the volunteers at JJC for Bible Study and Good Samaritans. We are very grateful for the time all of the BBRC volunteers gave to our youth. Some of them got together on the last Monday and had a farewell to BBRC dinner. They are pictured from left to right, starting with the top row: Harry Herber, Jim Pritchett, Deacon Glen Pratt, Anna Cherukunnel, Deacon Thad Kudela, Lisa Mumbach, Ly Pham, and Curt Rohrman. Please keep the kids, the county, and the volunteers in your prayers.
50 years ago, Commander Neil Armstrong and lunar module pilot Buzz Aldrin made history as the first humans to step foot on the moon. They were part of a three-man crew on Apollo 11, which also included lunar module pilot Michael Collins. While Collins flew the command module Columbia alone in lunar orbit, Armstrong and Aldrin landed the Apollo Lunar Module Eagle on the Moon's surface. This historical voyage was celebrated all over the world this year especially in Houston, the home of NASA. Among the many people who made the mission possible, provided support, and witnessed the event was Ms. Virginia Thompson, a Special Youth Services volunteer at Harris County Youth Village in Clear Lake. Ms. Thompson joined SYS in 1997. Here is what she had to say on remembering the Moon landing:

“I joined the Manned Spacecraft Center when it first came to Houston in 1962 as a Clerk Stenographer. I worked in Administration in the central office located in the Farnsworth-Chambers Building on Telephone Rd. The Center offices were spread all over the East End and Ellington Air Force Field. The Manned Spacecraft Center was being built way out in the Clear Lake area with a 2-lane road. The name was later changed to Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center and I became a Contract Specialist and a Contracting Officer in the JSC Procurement Office and retired in 1997. During the Moon landing, I was at home glued to the television set for several days and nights. The three local TV channels covered it. I think Walter Cronkite was one of the primary reporters. A television broadcasting studio was set up on the top of the Nassau Bay Hotel on NASA Rd. I with 24-hour coverage. It was directly across the street from the main entrance to the Manned Spacecraft Center. Black and white TV coverage, I think, or at least our TV set was black and white. Exciting, breathtaking, scary, fantastic, all of the emotions because we knew it was really happening in front of our eyes. Wonderful, wonderful. I don’t think we left the house for several days. At work after the Moon landing, there was a lot of excitement and work. Phones ringing, meetings scheduled and supported with presentation materials, visitors to the office. I was very blessed to have a Catholic Church directly across the street from the Center with daily Mass, and Mass on Holy Days, and the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion available. There was a work ethic that was outstanding. The people were ready to come to work at almost any hour and put in the hours needed to get the job done. I know most of us were praying whenever there was a launch, during the mission, and a recovery. Some days seemed marked by miracles. Some of it is coming out now in the publicity of the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11. I was very blessed to be a small part of the space program. Thank you for letting me remember some really wonderful days.”
Special Youth Service’s 2nd annual Bible Bowl was once again a success! Boys and girls from Harris County’s Youth Village, Juvenile Justice Center, and Leadership Academy, and Fort Bend Juvenile Probation Department competed against each other in their respective facility to win pizza for their unit. All the questions were from the Bible and the teams of 3 to 7 players studied very hard and played a good game. They all received goodie bags and were very good sports. The following are the winning units from each facility:

**Youth Village:** Girls  
**Leadership:** Girls  
**JJC:** 2B (Boys)  
**Fort Bend:** Girls

Thank you to the volunteers who came out to help as well as to the staff at each facility who made this special event possible.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

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On the hot summer day of August 10th, a brave, patient group of Special Youth Services staff, volunteers, and their families boarded the New Buccaneer for a four hour fishing trip along the Galveston bay. The sea breeze provided some comfort from the hot sun and although there were few catches, they were exciting nonetheless. A big thank you to all who were able to make it out to our event. We enjoyed our ocean time with all of you.
As kids in “the free” bought new school supplies, checked out their schedules, and waited for their bus, the kids at JJC also prepared to start the new school year. A typical school day for them consists of waking up at 7:00 am, eating breakfast, and having their teachers rotate throughout the units until 3:00 pm, with a break for lunch. They are in a mixed grade level setting, but they also get the opportunity to receive the required credits for their school. The school year runs the same length as the HISD school schedule which includes holiday and summer breaks.

On the Friday before school started on Monday, August 26, JJC hosted a Back to School Rally for all of the youth. There were snacks, carnival style games, and Math Bingo. A DJ provided the summer soundtrack to the festivities. SYS staff helped with the Math Bingo, which the kids did great in. JJC staff did an outstanding job making sure the kids were having fun. Thank you again to Mrs. Lakesha Brown for including us in the facility’s attempts to celebrate important moments during the youth’s stay.

We would also like to thank Mrs. Lakesha Brown for inviting us to the Juvenile Detention Center Performing Arts program on August 9th. A team of kids and staff prepared for weeks for their dance, piano, guitar, drumline, poetry, singing, rapping, and stepping performances. They wore custom-made t-shirts and those who sang had previously recorded their music in the JJC sound studio. All the kids were led and trained by staff who generously shared their talents and time with the youth and also performed for the audience.

It is always a privilege for us to see what our kids are capable of doing. Sometimes, this is the only chance they get to display the talents that are hiding inside them. It is a reminder that these kids can achieve so much if they have the tools, support, and love they deserve.

“Who’s your favorite judge?”

“I ask you to build the future. Make the world a better place. Please don’t see life from afar. Live it. Jesus didn’t stay out in a balcony. Instead, He got involved. Follow Jesus’s example.” Pope Francis

SYS needs volunteers! We love the ones we have now, but we want our family to grow! The more volunteers we have, the more boys and girls we can minister to. You must be at least 21 years old, pass a criminal background check, attend county and ministry trainings, and have a heart for ministering to marginalized youth. Already a volunteer? Invite a friend. Thinking about volunteering? Contact us at sys@archgh.org or at (713) 741-8739.
It is with great sadness that we say farewell to Deacon Gary Forse who had been with Special Youth Services since 2012. Deacon Gary initially came to us as a diaconate candidate where he served at the Harris County Juvenile Detention Center. He later went on to serve at the Fort Bend Juvenile Detention Center. Then Deacon Gary was instrumental in opening our ministry in the Brazoria County Juvenile Detention Center where he served as Volunteer Coordinator.

Deacon Gary initially served the population at the Brazoria County facility alone and then later was joined by a host of volunteers who serve the kids there every Friday and Sunday without fail. Deacon Gary was loved by all: family, friends, his parish, SYS volunteers, and the kids at the detention center.

Deacon’s funeral was held at his home parish at St. Michael’s in Lake Jackson, Texas on July 13, 2019. It was evident how many lives Deacon had touched. The church was filled with standing room only with those who came to pay their last respect, as well as an overflow room with closed circuit TV for others to observe.

Brother deacons came from all over the Archdiocese, even as far as Bellville, Texas. The Knights of Columbus served as honor guard and made a presentation to the family. Deacon Gary will be missed by all and we just thank the Lord for sharing Deacon with us and the kids of the Special Youth Services ministry.

In 2008, the Campaign for Youth Justice declared October to be National Youth Justice Awareness Month (YJAM), inspired by those who fight for justice and by a mother whose seventeen-year-old son had committed suicide after receiving an adult sentence.

Organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Campaign for Youth Justice “host community events that expose the devastating consequences of children being sent to adult courts, jails and prisons”.

In 2015, President Barack Obama proclaimed October to be National Youth Justice Awareness Month.

“Every year, there are more than 1 million arrests of youth younger than 18, and the vast majority of those arrests are for nonviolent crimes. More than 54,000 individuals younger than 21 are being held in juvenile justice facilities nationwide—a disproportionate number of whom are young people of color. And, girls represent the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system, with girls of color particularly affected by this trend.

The good news is the number of young people in residential placement was cut in half from 1999 to 2013. However, despite this overall decline, the placement rate for youth of color was 2.7 times that of white youth in 2013. Overall, minority youth accounted for 68 percent of the youth in residential placement”. (https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/blog/celebrating-national-youth-justice-awareness-month)

Watch your inbox for more information from Special Youth Services and please pray for detained youth and those who are certified as adults.
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: Rhonda Bean, Ruby de Leon, and Marlyne Epps. We would also like to thank SYS staff family and friends who offer us unconditional support, love, and patience which allows us to grow in our relationships with them, with the Lord, and helps us to do our jobs with a grateful heart and a sincere smile.

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

Save the Dates!

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2

This year’s Saintly Saturday will be held at the Harris County Leadership Academy in Katy. Both boys and girls will be participating in praise & worship, activities, prayers, and Mass with Cardinal DiNardo. All volunteers are invited and clergy are required to attend. Details will be sent out soon.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

Special Youth Services volunteers are invited to attend the Annual Volunteer Retreat and Appreciation at St. Dominic’s. Put it on your calendar!

Feasts of the Archangels and Guardian Angels

Did you know that angels also have a feast day? September 29 is for the Archangels Raphael, Michael, and Gabriel. Read about them in the Book of Tobit, the letter of St. Jude, and the Gospel of Luke, respectively.

We celebrate the messengers and protectors and servants of the faithful, our Guardian Angels on October 2.


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
You are invited to attend the University of Dallas Ministry Conference, co-sponsored by the Diocese of Dallas, October 10-12 at the Irving Convention Center. This year we’ll feature keynote speaker, Sr. Miriam James Heidland, Visio Divina meditation and an interactive art project. Listen to speakers, attend daily mass, and visit the exhibit hall. Discounts available during early registration! Discover more at udallas.edu/udmc.
A MOTHER’S PRAYERS ANSWERED: 
ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

This famous son of St. Monica was born in Africa and spent many years of his life in wicked living and in false beliefs. Though he was one of the most intelligent men who ever lived and though he had been brought up a Christian, his sins of impurity and his pride darkened his mind so much, that he could not see or understand the Divine Truth anymore. Through the prayers of his holy mother and the marvelous preaching of St. Ambrose, Augustine finally became convinced that Christianity was the one true religion. Yet he did not become a Christian then, because he thought he could never live a pure life.

One day, however, he heard about two men who had suddenly been converted on reading the life of St. Antony, and he felt terrible ashamed of himself. "What are we doing?" he cried to his friend Alipius. "Unlearned people are taking Heaven by force, while we, with all our knowledge, are so cowardly that we keep rolling around in the mud of our sins!"

Full of bitter sorrow, Augustine flung himself out into the garden and cried out to God, "How long more, O Lord? Why does not this hour put an end to my sins?" Just then he heard a child singing, "Take up and read!" Thinking that God intended him to hear those words, he picked up the book of the Letters of St. Paul, and read the first passage his gaze fell on. It was just what Augustine needed, for in it, St. Paul says to put away all impurity and to live in imitation of Jesus. That did it! From then on, Augustine began a new life.

He was baptized, became a priest, a bishop, a famous Catholic writer, Founder of religious priests, and one of the greatest saints that ever lived. He became very devout and charitable, too. On the wall of his room he had the following sentence written in large letters: "Here we do not speak evil of anyone." St. Augustine overcame strong heresies, practiced great poverty and supported the poor, preached very often and prayed with great fervor right up until his death. "Too late have I loved You!" he once cried to God, but with his holy life he certainly made up for the sins he committed before his conversion. His feast day is August 28th.

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php? saint_id=418

Please pray for Marie Maybury (Brazoria), Franchesca Alamo (JJC), BBRC volunteers and staff as they transition into their new assignments, all students (and their parents) and teachers going back to school, and for the repose of the soul of Deacon Gary Forse.

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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.