Special Youth Services (SYS) models the embrace of Christ through pastoral care, advocacy, and faith sharing in local juvenile justice centers, facilities, and programs including the promotion and coordination of restorative services to at-risk youth and their families. Our ministry encompasses all counties within our local Archdiocese, working with youth from ages 10-17.

The Oratorio is a quarterly newsletter published with the purpose of sharing the voices of our youth and volunteers, activities of SYS, and information that may be beneficial to the spiritual life of the reader.

Special Youth Services (SYS) modela el abrazo de Cristo por medio de cuidado pastoral, apoyo, y compartir la fe en centros locales de justicia juvenil, instalaciones, y programas incluyendo la promoción y coordinación de servicios restaurativos a jóvenes en situación de riesgo y sus familias. Nuestro ministerio abarca cada condado entre nuestra arquidiócesis local, trabajando con jóvenes de edades 10 a 17.

The Oratorio es un boletín informativo trimestral publicado con el propósito de compartir las voces de nuestros jóvenes y voluntarios, actividades de SYS, e información que pueda ser útil para la vida espiritual de los lector.

People often see the ministry we serve in as unapproachable, unattainable, or mysterious but in truth, all the gifts and practices we bring when visiting the kids are no different than when we encounter any one of our brothers and sisters. The first ideal to remember is that the Holy Spirit is always working to mediate our encounters with one another. The second is remembering that you may be the only gospel a young person sees. As we enter into the Lenten season, let us invoke and practice serving as His body.

Blessings for a beautiful Lent and joyous Easter.

Franchelle

February 17, 2021 is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. It is a time we look forward to every year in our ministry because we have the honor of holding an Ash Wednesday service with ash distribution at all the facilities. This year we are not able to continue our annual tradition because of COVID restrictions. We ask that on that day and throughout Lent, you include our youth in your petitions. Think of them as you make your small sacrifices in order to be one with Jesus in the desert. Pray for their families during Holy Week that, like Jesus returned to His friends through His resurrection from the dead, their sons and daughters may return home to their families. The staff of SYS will be praying for our youth, but also for all of you during this hopeful Lenten season.
A Youth’s Perspective

A Conversation with a little brother in Christ, 16 Year-Old B.T.

How long have you been in detention? 7 months.

What was your relationship with God like before you came here? It was bad. My faith was not good at all. I never really thought about God like that.

How is it now? It is much closer now. I feel like God hears my prayers.

How has SYS helped your relationship with God? I like it that both Deacon Fernando and Deacon Dan visit me as they have helped me get closer to God. I like that I can see and feel Him now.

Could you describe the Christmas party for our readers? I don’t know about the other kids, but speaking for me, I was happy that y’all thought about us to try and make a good Christmas for us even though we were locked up.

What was a part of the day that you enjoyed? The food...yeah, the food.

What is your dream job/career? Business management and have my own business that sells clothes and shoes. If not that, then I would like to have a cooking job.

Do you have a message for kids that are beginning to act out? Act good and improve. This is not a good place to be at. You will miss your family. Don’t follow your peers if they are doing the wrong things. Don’t try to act bad to impress your peers. They won’t be there for you in the end. God does not want you here. Think about your decisions and consequences before you do the wrong thing. Listen to your parents.

What about a message for parents of kids who are acting out? Do more family activities so your kids do not pick the wrong things to do because the family is not spending time together.

A Volunteer’s Perspective

Lisa Mumbach, JJC

I volunteer with SYS because I hope to make a difference in someone’s life. I hope to draw the youth closer to God or introduce them to God if they don’t already know Him. I’d like to share God’s love with others; to bring them into a relationship with Jesus. Even if the youth and I don’t get into a deep discussion about God, the Bible, or the love of Jesus, I hope the young people would see Christ in me and at some point in their lives, choose to have a relationship with Him.

I started volunteering at BBRC participating in Bible Study. Then, when BBRC closed in August 2019 (BBRC has since reopened), I joined the mentor program, Good Samaritans, at JJC. Good Samaritans is a new program sponsored by SYS in which a volunteer meets one on one with a youth to visit and talk about whatever the young person wants to talk about. The visit didn’t necessarily involve Bible study but was guided by whatever the youth wanted to discuss. Sometimes we played games, talked about school, how their day went, what their meals were like, or books the youth read or was reading. While volunteering at JJC, I met with three girls one on one over an eight month period before COVID restrictions were enacted. COVID brought everything to an abrupt stop.

Now, I meet weekly, Wednesday evenings, with other SYS volunteers through Zoom. We share God’s Word and pray for the young people in detention. We also pray for the detention staff and SYS staff. We have had other virtual events such as Saintly Saturday and the SYS Volunteer Social. Both events were fun and enlightening. COVID has definitely caused us to have to get creative in ways to share God’s love and interact with each other.

For Saintly Saturday we had a speaker, Fr. Agustino Torres from the Bronx, New York and a rapper from Houston, Cesar “Big Cease” Lozano who offered inspiring and encouraging presentations. For the Volunteer Social we played games and had a Christmas dress-up/Christmas decorations contest as well as fun, in-depth discussions. The discussions allowed the volunteers to get better acquainted with each other and to share their thoughts on various subjects.

I look forward to being able to visit and interact with the youth again once it is safe to return to in-person visits. In the meantime, know that all the SYS volunteers are praying for and thinking of you.
Christmas season at SYS is a very special time. Volunteers work together to hold Christmas celebrations at all the Harris County facilities and in the Brazoria County facility. In January, the Fort Bend facility receives three wise men during our Epiphany celebration. Christmas 2020 was conducted differently, although with the same heart.

The annual Christmas party at the Harris County Juvenile Detention Center is made possible through the collaboration with SYS ecumenical partners and our volunteers. This year, the December 22 event was virtual and because of the further reach of the Zoom platform, we were able to broadcast to JJC, BBRC, and Leadership Academy. The youth watched a Nativity movie and ate popcorn, played BINGO, made Christmas cards to send home, ate authentic Chinese food, and even had a musical guest. There were many contributions that made the day not only possible, but successful:

* Teen Inc. provided the day’s boppin’ DJ as well as fun coloring sheets
* Houston reVision donated prizes for raffles and cute craft supplies to make Christmas cards as well as presented an interactive live instructional video
* Freestyle Ministries interviewed a special musical guest, local rap artist Austin Lanier. He shared some of his music videos and participated in a Q & A with the youth
* Youth SOULutions donated prizes for raffles and festive Christmas socks for all the youth
* State Representative Gene Wu and friends donated delicious Chinese food for all youth and facilities staff and made a generous monetary donation
* Special Youth Services hosted a friendly BINGO game and a movie, donated prizes for raffles and BINGO winners, and gifted Christmas cards to the youth made by Strake Jesuit theology students and parishioners at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
* Volunteers from all ministries made a festive video to send warm Christmas greetings to the youth. You can see some of their messages on our Facebook page (link on page 5)!

Brazoria County

Although this year the volunteers at Brazoria County could not enter the facility to help with the Christmas party, they were still able to put goodie bags together for the youth as well as drop off cakes for the staff.

Fort Bend County

The juvenile facility in Fort Bend is still under very strict restrictions and so the volunteers offered their prayers for all the youth residing there, their families, and for the staff at the facility.
The dates for diaconate ordinations have been changed to February 19 & 20. Please pray for the class of 2021, who among the candidates are four SYS volunteers: Fritz Claydon (JJC), Daniel Ruvalcaba (HCLA), Tom Spicer (Gulf Coast), and Alejandro Padilla (Gulf Coast). We pray that they may have the experience of receiving this Sacrament of Holy Orders fully and safely and we pray for those organizing the event from Office of Worship and the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

“Thus those who serve well as deacons gain good standing and much confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 3:13

SYS VOLUNTEER SOCIAL

On December 12, SYS volunteers gathered via Zoom for some fellowship, faith, and fun at the SYS Volunteer Christmas Social. We came together to pray, chat with one another, and play virtual Pictionary with a prize to the player with the highest score, David Jezierski. Prizes also went to our raffle winner, Paul Nguyen and to Delores Gibson who won the “Most Festive Wear” contest. Thank you to those who could join us and we pray that the 2021 Social will be in person!

SYS volunteers know the power that prayer has and how we must never cease to pray. They continue to ask God to watch over our youth and they are receiving weekly prayer request emails for youth (without being named) and their struggles, whether in the facility or at home. May we all continue to pray for the youth, their families, and facility staff.
SYS Angels

Special Youth Services would like to thank a 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: Texas State Representatives Gene Wu, Alma Allen, and other generous legislators for their Christmas donations for the youth; Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Crowe for donating gift cards to the Christmas party; and especially Mr. & Mrs. Frederick Fargo, whom we cannot thank enough.

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

HAPPY 90TH BIRTHDAY, ARCHBISHOP FIORENZA!

Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza celebrated his 90th birthday on January 25! SYS sends him our prayers for blessings, health, and joy for his milestone occasion!

“The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!” Numbers 6:24-26

Farewell, Bishop Rizzotto

On January 17, Bishop Vincent M. Rizzotto left to his heavenly home at the age of 89 years old. He was a native Houstonian who was ordained a priest in 1956, was raised to the rank of Monsignor in 1978, and was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Galveston-Houston and Titular Bishop of Lamasba in 2001. He retired as auxiliary bishop in 2006 after reaching the mandatory retirement age of 75. He served as pastor at All Saints Church, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Cecilia throughout his priestly career as well as an official of the diocesan marriage Tribunal, Vicar General, Chair of the Priests Personnel Board, Vicar for African American Catholics, and Secretariat Director for Chaplaincy Services and Clergy Formation. He made a lasting impact on the Archdiocese with his passion for the liturgy. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

“For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.” Romans 14:8

Have you liked our Facebook page yet? Visit us at www.facebook.com/specialyouthservicesarchgh or click the icon!
La perspectiva de un joven

Una conversación con un hermanito en Cristo de 16 años de edad, B.T.

¿Cuánto tiempo has estado en detención? 7 meses.


¿Ahora cómo es? Está más cerca a hora. Siento que Dios escucha mis oraciones.

¿Cómo te ha ayudado SYS en tu relación con Dios? Me gusta que el diácono Fernando y el diácono Dan me visiten porque ellos me han ayudado a acercarme a Dios. Me gusta que ahora Lo puedo ver y sentir.

¿Puedes describir la fiesta de Navidad para nuestros lectores? No puedo hablar para los otros jóvenes, pero hablando de mí, yo estaba contento que ustedes pensaron en nosotros para intentar a hacer una buena Navidad para nosotros aunque estemos encerrados.

¿Qué fue algo del día que te gustó? La comida...sí, la comida.

¿Cuál es el trabajo/carrera de tus sueños? Administración de negocios y tener mi propio negocio donde vendo ropa y zapatos. Si no eso, entonces me gustaría tener un trabajo de cocinero.


¿Algún mensaje para los padres de jóvenes que se están portando mal? Hagan más actividades familiares para que sus hijos no eligen las cosas equivocadas porque la familia no esté pasando tiempo junta.

La perspectiva de un voluntario

Lisa Mumbach, JJC

Yo soy una voluntaria con SYS porque espero poder hacer alguna diferencia en la vida de alguien. Espero llamar a los jóvenes a estar más cerca a Dios o presentarles a Dios si todavía no Lo conocen. Me gustaría compartir el amor de Dios con otros; a traerlos a tener una relación con Jesús. Aunque los jóvenes y yo no tengamos una conversación profunda sobre Dios, la Biblia, o el amor de Jesús, espero que los jóvenes vean a Cristo en mí y en algún momento de sus vidas, eligen tener una relación con Él.

Empecé a ser voluntaria en BBRC participando en Estudio Bíblico. Y luego cuando cerró BBRC en agosto de 2019 (se ha abierto BBRC desde entonces), ingresé al programa de mentores, Good Samaritans (Buenos Samaritanos), en JJC. Good Samaritans es un programa nuevo patrocinado por SYS en donde un voluntario se reúne con un joven para visitarlo y hablar de lo que quiera el joven. La visita no necesariamente involucra un estudio bíblico pero era dirigida por lo que el joven quisiera discutir. A veces jugábamos juegos, hablábamos de la escuela, cómo pasaban su día, cómo eran sus comidas, o libros que habían leído o estaban leyendo. Mientras era voluntaria en JJC, me reuní con tres jovencitas cara a cara durante un periodo de ocho meses antes que se promulgaran las restricciones de COVID. El COVID trajo todo a una parada abrupta.

Ahora, me reúno semanalmente, miércoles por la tarde, con otros voluntarios de SYS por medio de Zoom. Compartimos la Palabra de Dios y oramos por los jóvenes en detención. También oramos por el personal de detención y de SYS. Hemos tenido otros eventos virtuales como Saintly Saturday y la reunión para voluntarios de SYS. Los dos eventos fueron divertidos y reveladores. El COVID definitivamente nos ha causado a ser creativos en maneras para compartir el amor de Dios e interactuar el uno con el otro.

Para Saintly Saturday tuvimos un invitado, el padre Agustino Torres del Bronx, Nueva York, y un rapero de Houston, César Lozano, quienes ofrecieron presentaciones inspiradoras y alentadoras. Para la reunión de voluntarios, jugamos juegos y tuvimos un concurso de arreglo navideño/decoraciones navideñas al igual que conversaciones divertidas y profundas. Las conversaciones permitieron que los voluntarios se conocieran mejor y compartieran sus opiniones sobre varios temas.

Anhelo poder visitar e interactuar de nuevo con los jóvenes cuando sea seguro de regresar a hacer visitas en persona. Mientras tanto, que sepas que todos los voluntarios de SYS están orando por y pensando en ti.
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.

Ministerio Penal para Adultos

Esta oficina ofrece cuidado pastoral a adultos católicos quienes se encuentran encarcelados en las 26 prisiones estatales, 10 cárcel del condado, una instalación federal, detención migratoria, y numerosas cárceles de la ciudad dentro de los límites de la Arquidiócesis. Para más información o si le gustaría ser voluntario, visita www.archgh.org o llama al (713) 741-8732.
A Father to Follow

From Vatican News:

**Pope Francis Proclaims “Year of St. Joseph”**

In a new Apostolic Letter entitled Patris corde (“With a Father’s Heart”), Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

The Letter marks the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX’s declaration of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. To celebrate the anniversary, Pope Francis has proclaimed a special “Year of St Joseph,” beginning on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2020 and extending to the same feast in 2021.

The Holy Father wrote Patris corde against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which, he says, has helped us see more clearly the importance of “ordinary” people who, though far from the limelight, exercise patience and offer hope every day. In this, they resemble Saint Joseph, “the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence,” who nonetheless played “an incomparable role in the history of salvation.”

Saint Joseph, in fact, “concretely expressed his fatherhood” by making an offering of himself in love “a love placed at the service of the Messiah who was growing to maturity in his home,” writes Pope Francis, quoting his predecessor St Paul VI.

And because of his role at “the crossroads between the Old and New Testament,” St Joseph “has always been venerated as a father by the Christian people” (PC, 1). In him, “Jesus saw the tender love of God,” the one that helps us accept our weakness, because “it is through” and despite “our fears, our frailties, and our weakness” that most divine designs are realized. “Only tender love will save us from the snares of the accuser,” emphasizes the Pontiff, and it is by encountering God’s mercy especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we “experience His truth and tenderness,” – because “we know that God’s truth does not condemn us, but instead welcomes, embraces, sustains and forgives us” (2).

Joseph is also a father in obedience to God: with his ‘fiat’ he protects Mary and Jesus and teaches his Son to “do the will of the Father.” Called by God to serve the mission of Jesus, he “cooperated… in the great mystery of Redemption,” as St John Paul II said, “and is truly a minister of salvation” (3).

**Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,**
**Blessed Joseph, to us too,**
**Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**
**Show yourself a father**
**To you God entrusted His only Son;**
**And guide us in the path of life.**
**In you Mary placed her trust;**
**Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage,**
**with you Christ became man.**
**and defend us from every evil. Amen.**


Please pray for peace, healing, and hope for families, especially those of victims, of the detained, and of the incarcerated.

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