



COLEGIO ANEXO SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS

Bogotá, Colombia – January 2016

Dear Friends and Collaborators of CASFA,

New Year's BLESSINGS to you! 2015-2016 is a Banner Year for us at CASFA, since we are celebrating our 30th Anniversary. (We still have to pinch ourselves to believe it!) So, we are eager to share with you some of the highlights of our first semester.

Anniversary Week – September 28 – October 2, 2015

The week leading up to October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, special activities were planned to celebrate our 30th anniversary. Beginning on Monday night, September 28th, we held a *Lunada* — an evening under the moon— for our parents and graduates. The atmosphere was wonderful! With music playing in the background, pictures of our students and notation of key events from our history were hung from the trees and ceilings. Fire torches lighted the path. On colored paper, the guests wrote what they thanked the school for in these 30 years, and placed them on big San Damiano crosses in the patio of the school.



Soon the space was dancing with memories and happy hearts circulating around to read these vignettes of joy and gratitude. The evening's program included a prayer/reflection offered by Sister Carolina Pardo on the meaning of the San Damiano Cross, which each child wears over his/her heart on the uniform sweater. We also showed a video, created by two senior students, depicting the different stages of CASFA's development. Live music was provided by recent graduates, along with the present music staff. We enjoyed delicious snacks and literally hours of shared storytelling.

Other activities during that week included a Gratitude Day when the students sowed many new plants in every nook and cranny while older students served and entertained the younger crowd. We also held a Service Day with 17 different groups of students going to the nearby barrios offering their presence and helping hands in a variety of projects. They assisted at daycare centers, provided service to the elderly, participated in garden crews, served in health care centers, etc. All arrived back at school just in time to enjoy a local favorite, hearty "Ajiaco" (3-potato soup) offered by the teachers. Laughter and merriment accompanied their sharing of stories about their morning's experiences – and once again, a growth in self-worth was evident.

Friday, October 2nd, was the most special day of all! The students filed out of school with colorful banners, handmade by each group, and hiked up into the *barrio in silence* as a sign of their own participation in the efforts for peace in Colombia and in the world. A solitary drum beat out the rhythm of the walk, indicating times to pause and offer a special petition for a given group needing peace. The students finally arrived at the parish church in the *barrio*, and remained in silent reflection until the Anniversary Mass started.



The Eucharist itself was a very moving experience. Leading the entrance procession were Sister Marilyn Geiger and other Rochester Franciscans, followed by the founders of the school: Patricia León, Gonzalo Díaz with a picture of Sister Tierney Trueman. Numerous parents and guests were on hand to join in this great communal act of thanksgiving for the blessings throughout our CASFA history. Many students took leadership roles at the Mass, serving as readers, petitioners and choir members. Perhaps one of the most unique moments was the offertory procession, in which a group of our sophomores performed an amazing dance in the form of a moving mandala, resembling the opening of a lotus flower. At the conclusion, the flower's center opened to reveal two small children dressed in white who showered rose petals in every direction! It was literally beyond words. All in all, it felt like a very sacred occasion. All of *you* were very present in mind and prayer, since we are well aware that *none* of this would have been possible without you and your generosity!



Pathways to Children Experience by David Suárez, CASFA senior

During the week of November 23–29, 2015, seventeen students, sophomores, junior and seniors from San Francisco de Asís School, had the opportunity to be the hosts of an equivalent group of students from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In that experience, we shared information about our respective cultures, languages, food and points of view. Also, we performed social service projects in different places of Bogotá. One of the most unforgettable experiences was a trip to the south side of the city, called Soacha, and painted a house with a group of young leaders. It was so much fun sharing time with them, and painting each other! During that

week, we also went to play with children in public kindergartens from El Codito neighborhood. Most of the San Francisco de Asís students live in this area.



One of the most rewarding experiences was repairing a playground in El Codito neighborhood. We had a lot of fun building a slide, swings, a soccer field and most of all, working as a group.

In addition, we visited some important places in the city: Monserrate, Gold Museum, Historic Memory Center, 26th Street Murals, Independence Park, La Candelaria and the downtown district. During the daily tour, we shared important things about those places with the visiting students, and



they told us about important places in their community. It was interesting because we could compare places from Colombia and the United States.

Another interesting experience was to enjoy a Thanksgiving dinner, since we don't have that tradition. Playing soccer and volleyball, eating breakfast together, sharing and analyzing our favorite songs and having a farewell party that we prepared for the Cristo Rey students, were also part of that week's activities.

We are so grateful for this experience because we met new people and developed some new friendships, as well as helped our local community. We had a great time getting to know these students. We are thrilled that, through the invitation of Pathways to Children, who sponsored this trip for our Cristo Rey friends, we will get to visit them this summer in the Twin Cities, if we are granted our visas. Pray that we do! We are missing them already. It was an awesome experience!

"Vital Heroism" Project

A *new feature* in our Vital Heroism project this semester was the music workshop with instrument building. Together with an Argentinian teacher, 30 children from within and beyond the school, ranging from first grade to juniors, engaged in building "Cajones Peruanos," a Peruvian percussion



wood drum, and took the first steps in creating a percussion orchestra. Building, decorating, playing their instruments and then composing their own songs, was an absolutely incredible creative enterprise. At the end of the semester they presented a show for the whole school. We hope to continue to build bongos, flutes, drums and other percussion instruments in the next semester.

In Conclusion

This anniversary year has helped us continue to believe that giving flesh to dreams is possible. The invitation to an ever-widening circle of persons to participate in this dream allows us to continue with your support and generous contributions! Accompanying this newsletter is an informational sheet listing four payment options in which donations can be contributed. Please take a moment to acquaint yourself with these options, in case there is something more convenient for you.

From all of us at CASFA, a huge "THANK YOU" for your interest and fidelity to this cause! Your support impacts us more than you can imagine — our families and graduates can attest to this! May our tender God bless you and your dear ones as 2016 unfolds.

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