

## Damien Unites with Sister Schools for Retreat at St. Joseph Upland

Eight Damien students along with eight young ladies from Pomona Catholic, St. Lucy's and Etiwanda High school all returned to their roots in Upland. With one enthusiastic and resounding message, 'God's love is relentless', they came back to plant seeds of hope, encouragement and faith into the fertile ground at St. Joseph's school.

The theme of the April 19th retreat, 'God's Relentless Love' was based on both the lyrics of a song called 'Reckless Love' as well as the Parable of the Lost Sheep from Luke's Gospel (Lk 15:3-7). Mr. Sullivan, who was one of the adult leaders along with Mrs. Bowen and Sister Mary



Mr. Sullivan introduces leaders.

said, "The message that day was that God, in his greatness can't help but be relentless in his love. He is infinitely relentless in searching for us and in calling us to something better than where we are now". The lyrics of the song reverberated throughout the campus as the entire school was led by freshman T.J. Rodriguez and P.C. freshman, Lily Torres. T. J. was on guitar and Lily sang beautifully from the heart, "Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me. You have been so, so good to me. Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me. You have been so, so kind to me. Oh,

the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God".



T.J. Rodriguez and Lily Torres



St. Joseph's students sing along.

The day began with a school-wide Mass. We were reminded in the Gospel and in the homily by Fr. Carlos that, like the lost sheep in Luke's parable, Jesus, the good shepherd, would leave the ninety nine to go in search of the one lost sheep. After Mass the student leaders introduced the theme by performing a skit. Tristan Bato played himself in the skit as the 'lost sheep' figure who alienated his family and friends by terrible personal choices. After hitting rock bottom, he is led

by his guardian angel to come face to face with God (played by Avishka Silva). God reminds him of all of the blessings that he was given in his life and this generates in Tristan a deep sense of gratitude for God's relentless love in his own life.

The Damien student leaders this year were, senior Ched Popov, juniors Avishka Silva, Tristan Bato and Jaime Cetina, sophomores Jacob Santiago and Jacob Summers and freshmen T. J. Rodriguez and Matthew Nugraha. The high school girls who led were Bailey Lamascus, Savannah Hoffman, Camila Castro, Alicia Rodriguez, Maddy Sullivan, Sarah Sullivan, Jessica Luevano, Lily Torres and Carissa Johnson.



**Retreat Leaders**

These leaders went in pairs to different classrooms to share God's word, their own life experiences and a fun activity to reinforce the message. "This was completely student led. These high school students are so gifted and so willing to be a witness for

Christ. Since the message was coming from high school kids who were once literally in their

seats, in the classes, in their school as alumni of St. Joseph it was very impactful and meaningful". The various break out session covered 'prayer and sacraments', 'sin and obstacles to happy relationships', 'bullying and gossip', 'servant leadership' and 'sanctification and sainthood'.

During lunch and recess the teens had as much fun as the younger kids playing basketball, volleyball, tag and kickball.



**Bailey Lamascus and Jessica Luevano with students.**



**Ched Popov with students.**



**Carissa Johnson and Matthew Nugraha with students.**



**Tristan Bato and Avishka Silva with students.**



**Jacob Summers and Jacob Santiago.**



**Maddy Sullivan and Sarah Sullivan with students.**



**Jacob Santiago and Jacob Summers with students.**



**Mrs. Bowen discussing retreat theme.**

St. Joseph school administrators, Mrs. Alamo-Ng, Mrs. Fessler and faculty were all very welcoming and supportive. The staff and faculty enjoyed seeing their former students and many commented on how mature they have become, not just physically and intellectually but spiritually as well. "They did such a beautiful job. So powerful!", former principal Sr. Mary said of the teens as she assisted them throughout the day. This was the fourth retreat that Damien students led at St. Joseph School. Each time there is a different student team and a different

theme. This theme of God's relentless love really matches the experience of any St. Joseph alumni. Just when you thought you graduated and are now in high school you get pulled back in to lead a retreat. One thing is for sure the St. Joseph community is relentless in how much they love their students, both current students and graduates. 'Once a Viking always a Viking', because with God, our love too is relentless!

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(Special thanks to Mrs. Torres -photography)