



Annual Mass honors high school seniors and teachers for outstanding community service

Julie Schnieders
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A total of 76 high school seniors and 10 teachers were honored during this year's Christian Service Awards Mass on March 14 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels in Downtown L.A. (photo/Victor Alemán)

Coming from a big family, high school senior Karen Galicia is used to looking after other children. It was a natural fit when she started volunteering at a local recreational center, bringing in her own art supplies and coloring books to entertain children.

Today, she spends weekends and some afternoons volunteering at the same recreational center teaching arts and crafts to youths, and reading books or delivering meals to children at St. Jude's, Kaiser Permanente or Children's Hospital.

"It makes me feel good. I get happiness out of it," Galicia said, who has logged 982 hours of service during her four years at Bishop Conaty-Our Lady of Loretto High School in Los Angeles.

Galicia was one of 76 high school seniors and 10 teachers honored during this year's Christian Service Awards Mass on March 14 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels in Downtown L.A. Organized by the Department of Catholic Schools of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, the Mass recognized high school seniors from 51 archdiocesan Catholic high schools for their outstanding community service.

“This is an important award given by the archdiocese and a major recognition of the significant contributions made by these students in service to the local Church and the community,” said Holy Faith Sister Angela Hallahan, archdiocesan coordinator for the yearly Christian Service Awards.

Sister Hallahan told Angelus News that Christian service gives young people the opportunity to put into action both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The Christian Service program not only calls for service, but also for theological reflection on that service. Students benefit from this experience and many come to appreciate and realize that they themselves are served through their service.

“A student once told me, ‘I got much more out of this than I gave,’” said Sister Hallahan.

Archbishop José H. Gomez, who celebrated the Mass, encouraged those in attendance “to make service the hallmark of our lives and to follow the example of Jesus Christ.”

During his homily, Archbishop Gomez admitted that serving others is challenging, but can be transformative.

“It is beautiful when we transform our lives through service to others,” he said.

Immediately following the Mass, the archbishop congratulated the high school students and teachers who received awards and presented each of them with a Christian Service Award Medal for outstanding community service. This year, the high school students logged a combined total of 52,000 hours in service.

Audrey Sayer, an award recipient, is a former Girl Scout and active volunteer at her former grade school who took it upon herself to find service projects at La Salle High School in Pasadena to serve the greater community.

“Audrey helping others was its own reward and she expected nothing more in return. It was very gratifying as a parent for La Salle to acknowledge her efforts and select her for this honor,” said Sue Sayer, Audrey’s mother.

Teacher award recipients for outstanding community service included: Linda Brown, Pomona Catholic High School; Joanna Cecilia, Notre Dame High School; Dr. Nan Freitas, Villanova Preparatory School; Margaret Hernandez, St. Joseph High School, Lakewood; Leo Imbert, St. Bernard High School; Brother Denis O’Sullivan, St. Paul High School; Brad Stolz, Don Bosco Technical Institute; Kathleen Trossi, Paraclete High School; and Robert Warren, Bishop Alemany High School.

In addition to the high school seniors and teachers being recognized for their community service efforts, four high school students — one from each grade level — received the Pope Francis Scholarship, a monetary award from the Mission Doctors Association, which they won after submitting an original essay, video and poster or artwork about poverty and health care around the world.

Kelsey Kavanaugh, a Pope Francis Scholarship winner and a sophomore at Mary Star of the Sea High School in San Pedro, wrote an essay about starting her own service club at school to raise money for her parish.

“We sold homemade baked goods and gave the proceeds to our parish,” Kavanaugh said.

In the spirit of the Mission Doctors Association, Kavanaugh said she hopes to “help educate young people to the needs of others” in the future.

The three other Pope Francis Scholarship winners were: Anna Martin, freshman, La Reina High School in Thousand Oaks; Sabrina Hamor, junior, La Reina High School; and Alana Nuñez-Garcia, a senior at St. Joseph High School in Lakewood.

The awards ceremony wrapped up with the Department of Catholic Schools “surprising” Sister Hallahan with a plaque recognizing her 59 years of service in Catholic education.

The plaque read: “In appreciation for 59 years of outstanding dedication to Catholic education, especially for upholding the mission of the Department of Catholic Schools for 19 of those years and in modeling a commitment to Gospel values.”