

This Christmas Newsletter is dedicated to "Share the Journey", an initiative to change negative myths and perceptions about refugees and migrants, encouraging Catholics to welcome the strangers among us.

Shepherds were in the fields, taking turns watching their flock by night. An angel from the Lord suddenly appeared to them. The glory of the Lord filled the area with light, and they were terrified. The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you..."

(Luke 2:8)

The angels at Bethlehem were terrifying strangers, but the shepherds welcomed them anyway. In Biblical times, to "welcome the stranger" was a reminder that foreigners were heralds, bringing useful news, customs, and technologies from afar. To turn a stranger away was to turn one's back on a gift from God. The three Wise Men could follow a star, but sometimes, Jesus is hard to find. Our Catholic faith shows us we can sometimes find the way to Jesus through a stranger. After his resurrection, Jesus walked the road to Emmaus with his friends, Cleopas and Mary. But they did not recognize him. Some theologians believe this was because their grief and depression over his crucifixion blinded them. They let doubt and pessimism supplant hope and faith. When the village of Emmaus finally came into view, the couple insisted this "stranger" spend the night. Finally, in the breaking of the bread, they recognized Jesus. Grief and anxiety, depression and hurriedness, doubt and intellectualism can keep us from recognizing that Jesus is walking with us. This Christmas, we pray, that like Cleopas and Mary, you welcome the stranger and through that experience are led more deeply into friendship with the living Christ.



Genesis Miranda, Kindergarten. Will graduate high school in 2030. *Only 4 percent of Catholic Latino children are enrolled in Catholic schools. (America Magazine)*



Audrielle Kurban, 3rd grade. Greets classroom visitors. *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels un-awares. (Hebrews 13:2)*



Gabriela Munoz & Natalia Gonzalez, 6th grade. Started a neighborhood clean-up program. *Two-thirds of Hispanic Catholics in the United States were born here. (America Magazine)*



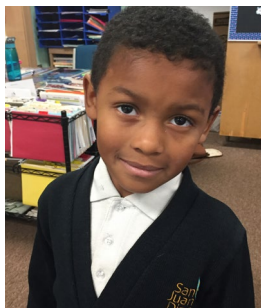
Antonella Talledo-Alvarez, 1st grade. A new student from Ecuador. *"We are called to respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity..." (Pope Francis)*



Emmanuel Diaz, 4th grade. Tests at middle school reading level. *An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (Proverbs 18:15)*



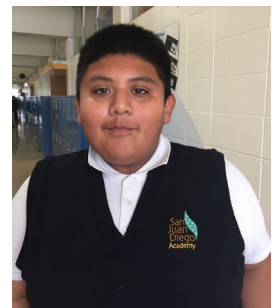
Yesenia Pablo, 7th grade. Church Cantor. *I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live. (Psalm 104:33)*



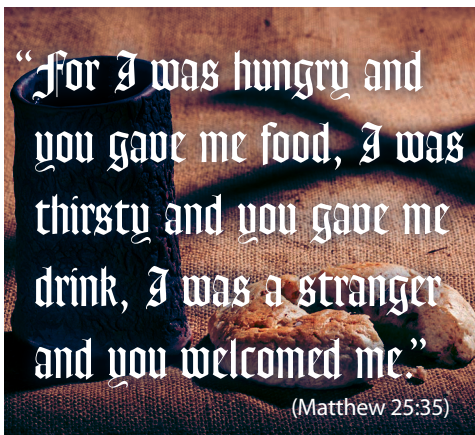
Santiago Cole-Bravo, 2nd grade. Receives his First Holy Communion this year. *While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." (Matthew 26:26)*



Dylan Enriquez-Martinez, 5th grade. Wants to be a priest. *Latinos account for 71 percent of the growth of the Catholic population in the United States. (America Magazine)*



Cristian Perez, 8th grade. Scores nearly four years ahead of grade level in math. *SJDA students consistently score at or above national proficiency standards, far outshining area public and charter schools. (mischooldata.com)*



Christmas is a time for miracles. But, at San Juan Diego Academy miracles happen everyday and nearly always involve strangers and the people who journey with them: The Latino 6th grader who achieves Honor Roll as his volunteer tutor proudly looks on. The mom who cries into a patterned hankie as a translator explains her daughter has been offered a math prize. The Spanish-speaking father, dead from cancer at age 44, whose faith and generous spirit inspired an entire school and united a parish. Like our students, Jesus was a stranger in his own land. History suggests Jesus was an Aramaic-speaking Jew in a culture dominated by Latin-speaking Roman pagans and would have lived poor, suspect and marginalized. Jesus' teachings on the stranger are many, but one thing is always clear: What we do for the stranger, we do for him. As Pope Francis puts it, "Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ." And, isn't that miracle enough?

Thank You

200 Blessings... Year after year, this newsletter is short of space to properly thank all those who have supported SJDA. In this season of counted blessings, we'd like to thank the following individuals and organizations who have blessed SJDA with gifts of up to \$200 this calendar year. Their faithfulness to our 'mission school next door' creates a strong support base and is very much appreciated.

Teri and Paul Allie
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Nancee & Thomas Woudstra
Stan & Christine Wroblewski
Mary Zahrt
Ronald Zapolnik
Donald & Marjorie Zerial
Paul & Kara Ziedins
Ben & Nanette Zora

A special thanks to **George and Marge Pulaski**, who were inadvertently omitted from the previous newsletter, for their generous contribution of \$500—and to **Richard J. Lacks, Jr.** for replacing the 55 year old gym floor, bringing smiles to many students' faces and to the **Hugh Michael Beahan Foundation** for their continued tuition assistance support.



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