



COLEGIO ANEXO SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS

By Jennifer Malaver

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Dear Friends and Supporters,

New Year greetings to you from Bogotá, Colombia! We are excited to share some stories from the last school semester. Certainly, this was a time full of experiences for our CASFA community that led us to develop new learnings and ideas. Our students were helped to think critically and creatively; to approach reality with an open mind ready for active social engagement. Check out some of these amazing experiences!

We won a grant and wrote a book!



We were one of the recipients of the grant: "Schools as narrative places of memories" from the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación (Memory, Peace and Reconciliation Centre of Colombia). The tenth grade students worked for over a year on memory construction in the social studies class. With this grant, they were able to create a book capturing the stories of seven victims of enforced disappearance* in Colombia: Rafael Sanjuán Arévalo, Cristina del Pilar Guarín, Nydia Erika Bautista, Father Tiberio Fernández, Fair Leonardo Bernal, Jorge Mario Monsalve and Duván Barros.

**Enforced disappearance: A crime in which a person is secretly abducted by agents of the State and their whereabouts are concealed; often involving torture and death.*

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-disappearances/about-enforced-disappearance>

On December 16, we launched the book "Desapare-SER". In it, the students presented their work on "memory construction" and wrote about the ways in which each of these persons remain alive in our memory as a nation and continue to be present today. The stories were connected to: photographs that represent the visual memory; a particular sound composition that symbolizes each life story and elicits auditory memory; and a perfume which evokes an olfactory memory from their daily lives. Have you ever thought about the multiple ways of remembering our loved ones?

On the path to recover the memory of these seven people, the students researched different sources of information to obtain a closer look at each one's story. Some students had the opportunity to talk to the families of the forcibly disappeared to learn more about who they were and how they are still present. During this process, the students learned about the history and reality of our country and connected with each of the seven people in a special way. In the words of one of the students, "these stories touched our hearts, left a mark and especially allowed us to generate empathy, since we met great human beings with whom we connect, as happens with friends."



The launching of the book was attended by the students of tenth grade, their families, the entire school staff and

a representative of the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation. We also had the immense pleasure of greeting some of the families of the people who inspired this book. With joy, we were able to deliver the book and the perfume made for them. It was a day of intense emotions, which caused goose bumps when we saw the work that was done and the gratitude of the families for telling the story of their loved ones.

Saint Francis Day - Annual Day of Service

We celebrate the life of Saint Francis around the following question: "How can we be seeds of transformation in the world? "

We celebrated the day by sharing and serving our community. On October 3rd, the grades from pre-kindergarten to 11th gathered in each classroom to share an Agape around a delicious breakfast. This was a space for reflection to remember the presence of God among us. We had bread as a symbol of fraternity and hot chocolate to prepare our hearts to serve. Then, the whole school celebrated the Eucharist in a very heartfelt and spiritual way. During the Mass, we asked ourselves about the seed we wanted to sow in our hearts and how to be a seed of transformation for the world. Like Saint Francis, we invited our community to be seeds of truth and reconciliation to advance in our collective commitment to become a better society.



On October 7th we celebrated the day of service. On this day, students from preschool through 4th grade participated in the Blessing of Creation (including pets and plants), with some parents and grandparents able to join in. The students also sang a song in honor of their pets and the earth. Afterwards, they shared dance and music with their grandparents. It was an opportunity to have fun and to be thankful for the guidance of the elders in our lives and community.

The students from 5th to 11th grade started this day with the "Sending-off Ceremony," a ritual before leaving the school to serve in different parts of our neighborhood. Then, the students gathered in service groups and went out to perform different activities: taking care of children and elders, planting trees, fixing school spaces and painting small murals. The students who

shared with the elders played bingo and danced with them and some others made and decorated animal masks with small children. Other students organized the school library, cleaned the gardens and painted murals about the need to take the care of the environment.

The day ended with a delicious ajiaco (traditional soup) prepared for all the students and teachers, with the school band playing joyful songs.

"Bottle Brick" Project

We continued our efforts to take care of the environment. In this case, we had a contest amongst all grade levels to collect plastic bottles, stuffed full of inorganic landfill trash (plastic bags, wrappers, etc.) until they become compressed like bricks.

With this initiative, the students were invited to recycle plastic waste, and they also learned new ways to use waste profitably. At the end of the process, the bottle bricks were donated to a foundation. In total, 600 brick bottles were



donated. The fourth grade made the most bottles—128 brick bottles! As a reward for their hard work, the students went to the Botanical Gardens of Bogotá, where they received a guided tour in which they learned about the country's flora, pollination processes, and climate change. Undoubtedly, these spaces and strategies continued to promote our work for the environment.

Book Exhibition

Literature and food invaded a morning at CASFA. Through a literary exhibition, the 8th graders explained to the public the book they read during the semester: “Como Agua para Chocolate” (Like Water for Chocolate), written by Laura Esquivel. This novel is full of magical realism, and tells the story of Tita, a young girl in love who uses food to express her feelings.

The students shared with the audience some of the recipes they learned from the book and expressed their ideas regarding Mexican traditions, rebellion, machismo and human relationships, which were the central topics of this novel. The students showed enthusiasm and passion to connect books with the way they live their lives.



Finally, through the presentations, we thought about the power of food to connect with emotions. For example, we remembered the smell of our favorite childhood dish and we understood the reason mothers always say that "the secret ingredient is love."

Sports Day!



We organized the Sports Day in December to encourage students and teachers to have fun, get active, and work together in physical activities and challenges. With guidance of physical education teacher Andrés Cárdenas, the students of 10th and 11th grades organized and led different stations in which each class could participate.

Some of the activities were: sack race, aerobics, obstacle courses, capture the flag, and a big soccer match. It was a day full of fun, teamwork, and laughter for everyone. This was a space to promote physical activity as well as a great opportunity to share and spend time outside the school with our classmates.

Advent Time

As part of the Advent time, we had a special day full of spirituality with all the CASFA staff. We reflected on how we were going to discover God this season and prepared ourselves for this encounter. The message of this day was that God is already in and between us. This reflection was guided by questions such as: How does God live in me? How do I manifest his presence to others?

We also made an Advent wreath for each of our homes. Everyone brought branches, garlands, candles and other decorations to



accomplish the activity. At the end, we set our intention for this Advent time by lighting one candle. It was a day full of joy to remind ourselves about God's presence and his love living in and among us.

Immaculate Conception Vigil (Observed feast in Colombia) popularly called "Candle Night" Celebration

We commemorated the Immaculate Conception Feast, remembering the sacred moment in which Mary is chosen for the birth of the son of God, Jesus. The oldest students joined together with the youngest students and had a very special time sharing and reflecting about the light that dwells in our hearts and the light that we want God to renew in us.



During the moment of lighting the candles, each student and teacher shared with the other the light that shines the most in their hearts, so that each one gave and received from the other the light of love, friendship, empathy, gentleness, wisdom, compassion and many qualities. We also took advantage of this moment to reflect on Mary's "YES" and her assurance of being the bearer of a promise. The students and teachers shared about trusting in God's love and his promises. The moment ended with a prayer of gratitude for those who have been the light and the heart of CASFA: the Sisters of Saint Francis and our supporters.



Novenas

As a way of preparing our hearts for the coming of Jesus, we organized four small novenas at the school and a general novena in which all the students, their families, and the school staff participated. During the four novenas, we thought about the seeds we want to be in the world (recapturing the celebration of Saint Francis Day). We decided to be seeds of love, forgiveness, truth, and life. In the general novena, we offered those four seeds to be sown in our hearts, so that at Christmas time they could germinate and grow strong to remind us of the true meaning of the birth of Jesus. This was a night of prayer, union and hope. It was a very joyful evening, accompanied by music and dance.

Through a small representation of the journey and arrival of the Family of Nazareth to the City of Bogotá, we also remembered the families who had been victims of forced displacement in our country, Colombia. We witnessed the multiple ways in which life is trampled, we committed to create peace and fraternity with our families to advance in the path of social justice. In the novena, we highlighted the value of life and we learned that it is God who gives us hope for a new life and who revives in our minds and hearts the strength to fight for a life of dignity and peace. Our invitation is to be seeds and sowers of love, life, truth, and the restoration of relationships. We hope that you also continue with us on this path.

Our Deepest Gratitude for your care and support of our CASFA community! Your generosity enriches us all and we hope you hear in this newsletter the impact you are having not only on the lives of our children and families, but on Colombia and its future. You are helping shape the heart of our world! Thank You!

MAY GOD'S BLESSINGS ENFOLD EACH OF YOU

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