Colegio Anexo San Francisco de Asís

Bogotá, Colombia – *Winter 2023*
By Juan Nicolás Rueda

Dear Friends and Supporters,

May you receive a warm and grateful greeting from Bogotá, Colombia! We want to share with you some news and stories from CASFA about what has helped us grow, have fun and engage our families. Our students and teachers have been very busy helping the community, trying to give more each day. Check out some of these amazing stories!

Remembering Sister Valerie

Think of someone whose presence conveys love, sweetness, and peace. What does that person mean to you and your heart? For CASFA, *Love* and *Service* are the words that express the life of Sister Valerie Usher.

When the Franciscan Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of Lourdes arrived 38 years ago to establish our school in El Codito, Sister Valerie began a long history of service at CASFA. She moved to Bogotá to work with our families and children, driven by the desire to serve in the best Franciscan tradition.

Just a year after returning to the U.S., Sister Valerie died at Assisi Heights on Saturday, July 22, 2023. We are deeply grateful for her journey, as her presence among us was a gift — a light that radiated with the purity of charity and tenderness, a love that emanates from the gentle God, as she used to call Him.

The seeds of love that Sister Valerie planted in the hearts and lives she touched and inspired transcend time and space. Keeping this legacy alive and providing a space to embody her goodness at CASFA, we dedicated the Oratory in her honor. We want this space to be a refuge of safety for everyone in our community during times of doubt or distress. Since then, we have spent time in the Oratory with the youngest students, sharing stories about this woman who put her heart and soul into serving God.

Honoring Sister Valerie's life, we persist in working to foster love, joy, and a spirit of service in all those who are and will be a part of the miracle that CASFA represents.

To conclude, we ask you to think once more about that person you had in mind at the beginning of these words, the one who fills you with love and peace. We encourage you to honor their lives by being someone with an open heart, ready to welcome our brothers and sisters with unconditional love. May the love of all these significant people for us, including Sister Valerie, inspire us to be bearers of hope and peace for those who need it most.

Celebrating Saint Francis Day

We don't know if you've heard this story about the Chinese Bamboo Tree before, but it is a tale that inspired our celebration of Saint Francis Day this year.

Like any plant, the growth of the Chinese Bamboo Tree requires care: water, fertile soil, and sunlight. In its first year, we see no visible signs of change. In the second year, still there is no growth above the ground. In the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth year, still nothing. This might lead someone planting it for the first time to believe that all efforts are in vain. But finally, in the seventh year, behold, there is a miracle! We experience growth. The Chinese Bamboo Tree

grows 80 feet in just six weeks! The question is: Did it only take six weeks to grow? No, in reality, it took seven years to make the big leap, thanks to the patience and hope of those who cared for it. During the initial years, the bamboo seedling was developing its strong roots that would enable it to support the 'immensity' that was about to come.

For the celebration of Saint Francis Day with our CASFA community, we reflected that just as the bamboo takes seven years to grow, we are a community that has grown for

many years, almost 40! Our roots have dug deep and have impacted the lives of many.

We have had to wait patiently, fertilize, and water the soil to see each of the dreamed of achievements – the first graduating class that successfully completed their studies, the acquisition of our own headquarters, the emergence of the orchestra and choir, the establishment of a computer room and science lab, and many more significant and small accomplishments that we sometimes overlook. In the day-to-day, it may seem like the steps are small, but looking back, we realize the long journey traveled and what we have built. In fact, we have our own magnolia tree that, for years, blooms with gigantic flowers in our yard and reminds us of this growth.

As a way to honor these roots, this year we held the Eucharist at the parish of Blessed Miguel de Rúa in the Codito neighborhood; the place where it all began and where most of the CASFA families live. As part of the celebration, we had the traditional Service Day, aiming to nurture the roots we have always sought to grow in the hearts of our students and community: the vocation of service. This year, we went to different places in our neighborhood to serve our community. We went to gardens to share growing things with the children, to the neighborhood to pick up trash and paint murals, to nursing homes to care for the elderly, and engaged in many other activities. We ended the day with a great lunch that we all shared.

Valuing our roots was a way to connect with ourselves and to walk the path we seek to continue. We realized that love, enthusiasm, and the dreams of building a better society have shaped the history of CASFA. At the conclusion of our celebration, we reflected on the fact that all of us here today will

be, at some point, the roots that will hold CASFA. Therefore, the invitation was to live joyfully in the CASFA of the present and continue working day-by-day on the dream of what we want to become. All of this means we must recall the history we have traveled so far, reflect on those collective dreams, and strengthen the hope for a better society. We will continue doing what we do best: serving others.

CASFA Family Day

Bogotá, October 22, 2023

We celebrated the Family Day at CASFA, once again, on Sunday, October 22. It was an exceptional celebration.

We had a sunny day, not only in the sky but also in our hearts. We witnessed great generosity from everyone: teachers, students, and families. It was a day of gathering, celebration, and strengthening the bonds within the CASFA community.

The day turned into a great party with time and space for activities, games, and delicious food prepared by many hands. We enjoyed various dishes such as 'Ájiaco', 'Tamales', 'Obleas' and many more. To add fun to the event, we enjoyed two bingo games with prizes, face painting, dances, and live music performed by our school band.

We want to recognize and thank the efforts of the mothers from the Parents' Council who led the preparation, as well as the Board of Directors and the class representatives who helped with the different activities. As always, the work of the teachers and staff was crucial for everything to unfold in the best possible way. We also thank the ninth and tenth-grade students who accompanied us throughout the day, providing support in all activities. We thank all of them immensely.

We are confident that these experiences create an environment which promotes the unity of the CASFA community.

Children's Day at CASFA

Bogotá, October 27, 2023

On October 27, we celebrated one of the most exciting festivities of the year at CASFA: Children's Day! It was a very special moment for our children in which they could play and have fun.

For our children, this celebration not only means a day full of candy, but also a wonderful opportunity to showcase their creativity and imagination through costumes. Remembering that the essence of this day lies in fun and fantasy, we invited the children and their families to let their imaginations soar and enjoy to the fullest this magical day.

Because we always think about caring for the environment, one of the recommendations for our students' costumes was to take into account the rule of the three Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Here are pictures of special moments in our day:

Sports Day at CASFA

Excitement and sport filled every corner! On Thursday, November 30, our students had the chance to immerse themselves in a day full of energy and teamwork during our long-awaited Sports Day. They demonstrated their passion for the game by participating in various activities and games that kept their adrenaline at the maximum.

From thrilling races to endurance competitions, every moment provided an opportunity to celebrate the dedication and sportsmanship of our talented students. Laughter, camaraderie, and enthusiasm were abundant around every corner! Creating such experiences is integral to providing our students with a comprehensive education which highlights that play, teamwork, and the promotion of healthy habits and lifestyles are essential. It was a memorable day filled with unforgettable moments that strengthened the ties of our school community.

Novenas and Advent Celebration

We celebrate the magical tradition of Novena gatherings in our school which give us the opportunity to come together as a community. In them we share the light of hope and emphasize the importance of the values that define us as a Franciscan-Clarian family.

In the end, we had a magnificent Nativity scene which we used for our Great Novena, with our families, students and all the staff. This representation of the birth emerged to revive, in our homes, the meeting with the God who is in each of our hearts.

The Novenas provide us a space to reflect on the meaning of Christmas: the miracle of the birth of Jesus in history and in our hearts. This year, we celebrated the fact that 800 years ago, Saint Francis created the first Nativity scene! Inspired by Saint Francis, we created our own Nativity scene, with each grade making one of the figures.

Novenas not only connect us with the spirituality of the season, but also strengthen the bonds that unite us as a family. We had a great time sharing with the children and families and expect that these Novenas will illumine our hearts and guide us towards a new year filled with achievements and enriching experiences!

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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