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Creating Opportunities to Serve

Despite the many ways that COVID-19 has made life unpredictable, students at Oakcrest School in Virginia have continued doing all they can to serve the needy.

12/11/2020

This year students have found many creative ways to serve both those in their immediate community and beyond.

In the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving break, students participated in a schoolwide Thanksgiving food drive benefiting St. Stephen's Food Pantry at St. Jude parish in Rockville, Maryland. Oakcrest math teacher Jennifer Kilmer and her family, who are St. Jude's parishioners, volunteer at St. Stephen's Pantry. They first got involved over the summer when it was set up to bring relief to those suffering from the economic impact of the COVID-19 closures. Oakies brought in box loads of canned cranberry sauce, stuffing mix, instant potatoes and biscuit mix and donated enough food to feed over 400 families Thanksgiving dinner.

The school's Service Initiative Programs (SIPs) serve various needs. In November, Helping Hands, which serves the homeless and needy, created care packages for senior citizens. "In these times of COVID,

many elderly people suffer from loneliness and isolation; we felt that senior citizens were an important sector of the population to focus on serving,” Helping Hands founder Catalina Scheider-Galiñanes explains. Oakies created and assembled dozens of care packages. Each included a booklet about the Catholic faith, a Divine Mercy Jesus card, and a handwritten note of encouragement. Helping Hands members filled their care packages with non-slip fuzzy socks, travel size toiletries and lotions, snacks, classic novels, brain teasers and crosswords, tea bags, and blankets. They donated all of the bags—over 95 pounds—to the Catholic Charities of Arlington at the St. Lucy's Food Project. Helping Hands also organized a schoolwide Christmas Toy Drive.

Students have been active in many other SIPs this semester as well. Buttons and Bows, which makes

handmade gifts for those in the community, led a project where Oakies created cards and sock dolls for kids in the hospital. Students in Random Acts of Kindness collected wellness supply kits for the homeless and sent out cards to friends and family. Operation Sacrifice—an SIP that works to serve and thank military members— is making paracord survival bracelets for those in the military.

Although Oakcrest's 2020 summer mission trip with Mustard Seed Communities in Jamaica was canceled due to the pandemic, the team leapt into action to provide much-needed financial support for the organization. Mustard Seed is dedicated to caring for the most vulnerable populations, and the pandemic was a huge challenge for the organization. The Oakcrest mission trip team held a Mission Trip Walk-a-Thon at home to raise money

for Mustard Seed. The goal was to walk 2600 miles as a team in 100 days. Students ultimately succeeded in raising \$10,000. Mustard Seed Communities was very appreciative of the team's initiative, saying, "Thank you for your hard work and ingenuity!! We appreciate all that you do for the residents of Mustard Seed!" Oakcrest plans to resume the Jamaica service trip in June of 2021.

In addition to SIPs and the summer mission trip to Jamaica, all Oakcrest students perform service hours each semester. Oakcrest also holds an annual All-School Service Day in the fall, when the entire school participates in projects that serve the surrounding community.

About Oakcrest: Oakcrest School, located in Vienna VA, is an independent school for girls in grades 6-12 guided by the teachings of the Catholic Church. For over 40

years, the school has provided an exceptional liberal arts education to girls of all faiths while fulfilling its mission to challenge and inspire its students to thrive in college and throughout their lives. Learn more at Oakcrest.org

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