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Around the World in 7 Days

Camp Orbis: an international online leadership camp for girls. Overcoming the restrictions on travel and mass gatherings in pandemic times.

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Around the world, summer offers young people the opportunity to bask in the sun, pursue their passions, and forge friendships. Summer camps combine these activities and make for an enriching experience. Young girls have become increasingly

interested in summer camps in the Philippines. In recent years, camps were organized in more and more provinces around the country.

The on-going pandemic, though, posed an obstacle to organizing the summer camps in 2020. At the same time, the trials and uncertainties brought about by the situation highlighted the need for such camps.

With over 10 years of experience running camps locally through the various Centers of Opus Dei for students, Camnela, Lala, and Vix saw an opportunity in this time of distancing and isolation for young girls to come together in unity and solidarity. They ran the camp on a global scale online. The power of technology hurdled the restrictions on travel and mass gatherings. It gave rise to Camp Orbis, an international online leadership camp for girls.

On July 27 to August 2, Camp Orbis brought together 92 campers ages 13-16 from around the world. “Orbis” in Latin means Earth, the World, or the Globe. In the midst of a universal crisis, Camp Orbis provided a positive and meaningful experience for girls worldwide.

“Meeting new friends has been one of the nicest parts of camp,” said Lucia from Colombia. “I met kind and wonderful girls. Orbis taught me about unity and friendship, and that quarantine can’t stop social relationships.”

Each camper was assigned to a cabin of 10 girls from different countries. With the theme, “Around the World in 7 days,” everyone met virtually and participated in inter-cabin activities. Through the online platforms Zoom and Slack, they forged deep friendships.

The girls established connections immediately. “Everyone is so friendly and enthusiastic, and their energy during the cabin meetings and games was definitely contagious, even through a computer screen,” said Anyes from the US. “I really enjoyed getting to learn about new cultures and making new friends.”

35 counselors from seven countries ran activities designed to hone the participants’ skills, talents and personality. Those interested in writing were challenged to respond meaningfully to daily prompts. They wrote future eulogies, letters to community leaders, and their reflections on the quarantine. Others who were interested in picking up a new language learned basic phrases in Tagalog, Spanish, and the American Sign Language.

“Thank you for giving us such fun activities and different ways to

challenge myself and step out of my comfort zone,” said Anina from the Philippines. “Thank you also for the support and feedback you have given me in my respective interests.”

In line with the international nature of the camp, there were activities that showcased the participants’ cultural diversity. Campers shared their favorite recipes from home. A singing group put together a mashup cover of “Heal the World” by Michael Jackson, sung in different languages.

“It has been an amazing atmosphere where campers and counselors appreciate diversity in culture and opinions,” said Christine from Kenya. “I liked meeting new people who have a different culture from mine. I am loving it.”

Throughout the week, campers were encouraged to send in videos wearing their national costumes and showcasing their talents for Orbis

Got Talent. The videos were compiled and presented during the camp-wide watch party. At the culminating event, awards were given for best in costume, pianist of the night, and best actress.

“I really like meeting different people across the world and finding out that we’re really not so different,” said Zoe. “I find it so interesting and exciting!”

Amidst the jam-packed week, campers found time to slow down and enrich their faith. When they said the rosary, they shared their prayer intentions, which included finding a cure to end the pandemic, bringing peace and justice to those suffering, and healing the world.

Counselors pre-recorded leadership talks on friendship, gratitude, and the importance of prayer, which the campers could reflect on their own and discuss during their cabin

meetings. The exercise helped them to get to know each other at a deeper level and to expand their personal consideration of the topics discussed.

“I’m happy and grateful for joining Camp Orbis. I’ve made so many friends with the same interests and I hope I can keep in touch with them for a long long time,” said Lu from Peru. “One can really see that now we are like a huge family, a family that will stay together despite distance and time zones.”

The campers ended the week feeling hopeful and determined to build a better *orbis*, recognizing God’s hand in all things, even in the most unlikely circumstances.

“Really, it was amazing! More than words can explain,” Syamie from the Philippines concluded. “I thank God especially since He was the reason I came here. Thank you, Camp Orbis! I

hope you hold another one next year... hopefully in person.”

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