



ST. RAYMOND DE PEÑAFORT

301 S. I Oka Avenue | Mount Prospect | Illinois 60056

August 26, 2020

Dear Parents of Teens of St. Raymond:

We hope that you and your students are settling into the new school year routine even if it looks a bit different than the last. This letter is an invitation for you to welcome Diana Arizmendi as the new Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministry at St. Raymond. We had hoped by now to have had an opportunity for you to meet her in person, but given the current pandemic that has not been a possibility. Despite that, please know that in the short time Diana has been with us, we have been praying for your families, especially the teens as we understand how challenging and isolating this health crisis continues to be for them.

In his letter to young people, *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis reminds us that “**youth ministry involves two main courses of action... One is outreach, the way we attract new young people to an experience of the Lord. The other is growth, the way we help those who have already had that experience to mature in it.**” What an incredible and awesome responsibility Pope Francis lays out for a parish community to cultivate moments of encounter with our Lord, Jesus Christ. As a parish we are called to be **relevant, engaging and inclusive** for our Church to help teens grow in deeper relationships with Jesus and each other.

We recognize the necessity in continuing to offer opportunities that allow this next generation to explore our faith, create lasting friendships, discuss relevant topics, and find belonging to the larger Church. We are extremely thankful that there is a robust High School Youth Ministry through Branches for over the last 30 years and are excited to continue these efforts by building upon the solid foundation laid before us. Our hope is that Branches Youth Ministry will equip a teen to face the joys and challenges of life and strengthen their conviction of living out our Catholic faith as witnesses to the love of Christ.

The core of the Branches program is meeting in small groups, and this is a value that will be preserved. In the small group setting, teens develop a sense of trust and build community with others in their group. We believe that all teens should have a unified experience within Branches Youth Ministry that will provide them with the encouragement and tools they need to grow deeper in their faith and be aware of God’s presence in their lives. In order to provide a consistent experience for all teens, we will be introducing Life Teen resources to our parish. Life Teen provides many resources, curriculum and support for teens, parents and mentors that are relevant and engaging to the lives of the teens. Branches Youth Ministry will continue to meet every two weeks on Sunday evenings as in the past. Our sessions will include a large group gathering where a talk will be given to all teens and after that they will break off into small groups. Sessions will be led by Diana and members of the adult core team of mentors will help facilitate small groups and other activities.

As Catholics we are called to foster a great sense of community not just in our own homes or parish but in our surrounding communities at large. Currently, best practices of the Archdiocese of Chicago do not support continued regular youth meetings in homes. Instead, we are asked to host meetings and activities at the parish

campus in order to ensure the safety of all participants but also to empower all to grow in community and be more inclusive. For the Branches program in the fall, the Archdiocese is allowing us to host an in-person kickoff event for our program on campus and after that all of our meetings will be held virtually through Zoom until the Archdiocese determines it is safe for us to resume sessions on the parish campus.

In looking to the future of youth ministry at St. Raymond, we face the challenge of how to welcome all interested teens into Branches Youth Ministry. All recent studies of young adult Catholics who have left the practice of their faith show us how important it is to engage teens. In order to welcome all teens into Branches Youth Ministry we do need to increase our pool of adult mentors. We would like to invite any adults over 21 years old, who feels called to be part of the adult core team of mentors, to contact Diana at d.arizmendi@st-raymond.org to discuss your interest in being a mentor.

We have seen firsthand that high school students have been asked to pivot in every aspect of their life for the last 6 months and they have done so with resilient grace, compassion, and humility. This gives us great hope that as the parish shifts the way we engage the teens this fall, to align with the current Archdiocese of Chicago guidelines, they will remain open and present to Jesus and His calling.

Please pray, along with us and core team members, that we may continue to be attentive to the calling of the Holy Spirit as we minister to the teens of our community.

Blessings,



Fr. Scott Hebden, Pastor



Diana Arizmendi, Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministry