

L.A. Catholic students raise prayers and charity for Japan



CARING — Student participants at St. Emydius' "Jam for Japan" pose for a photo following the dance-a-thon in the school auditorium April 1.

SHARING — Yuki Kitagawa, a visiting teacher from Japan, shows Holy Angels students in Arcadia how to fold origami paper during a recent U.S. trip.

BY PAULA DOYLE
Staff Writer

Prayers and proceeds are being raised at several local Catholic schools this week in the wake of Japan's devastating March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Partnering with the Holy Childhood Association in Los Angeles, archdiocesan schools are observing "Christ's Care for Japan Week" from April 4-8 as a "Time of prayer and collecting charity for our friends in Japan."

Many schools are participating in creative fundraising efforts, with proceeds being sent to the Catholic Diocese of Sendai on northern Japan's Pacific coast, which was the first to fall victim to the tsunami caused by the 9.0-magnitude quake. Schoolchildren are also saying daily prayers for Japan written by Holy Childhood's archdiocesan coordi-

nator, Father Ken Deasy.

"Los Angeles archdiocesan and school and religious education communities began responding early to the Japanese crisis with fundraiser activities such as baking, jumping, dancing and wearing jammies or jeans for Japan," said Father Deasy. "The children's less-inhibited sense of wonder and imagination, as seen in their creative ways of showing compassion to the Japanese, allows them to experience at a young age the joy of living in the Faith of Jesus Christ."

Holy Angels School in Arcadia, which has hosted visiting Japanese teachers from a Pre-K/Kindergarten private bilingual (Japanese/English) school in Gifu, Japan, south of Tokyo, collected \$4,000 in donations from school families. Ted Carroll, principal, said students were encouraged to bring in a financial donation or say a decade of the rosary for the victims, resulting in many

prayers and "pennies."

"It was kind of impressive since we're in the midst of a Lenten 'Heifer Project' collection," said Carroll. "The students have kept the Japanese people in the forefront of their prayers every day using Father Deasy's prayers for Japan."

April Luchonok, principal of Sacred Heart School in Covina, sent out a March 16 letter to Catholic School principals, inviting them to hold a "Jump for Japan" HCA Japan Fund benefit sometime between March 29-31 where students collected pledges for jumping rope or doing jumping jacks.

"I am looking forward to working together to support the people of Japan during this tragic time," wrote Luchonok. "This is who we are as Catholic schools and it will be wonderful to demonstrate it once again on a large scale."

A short list of schools that have held fundraisers for Japan so far also includes Cathedral Chapel, Los Angeles; Holy Family, Glendale; St. Emydius, Lynwood; St. Paschal Baylon, Thousand Oaks; St. Pius X, Santa Fe Springs; and St. Teresa of Avila, Los Angeles.

St. Emydius School raised \$834.40 from recent events that included a \$1 free dress day on March 25 and a "Jam for Japan" dance on April 1. "We came up with a lot of ideas to raise money, but we thought the dance-a-thon would be the most effective," said eighth grader Kathleen Marin. Students collected \$5 — \$1 from five people — to participate in the Jam for Japan.

"I'm very proud of our students," said Socorro Mendoza, principal, adding that the

school is very involved with social justice projects. "We try to help as much as possible. Even though these students don't have a lot, they all donate."

More than 150 students wearing free dress gathered in the school auditorium for the dance-a-thon, facing the stage in horizontal rows with kindergartners in the front all the way to eighth graders in back. Before the music was played for each dance, starting with the flapping arm "Chicken Dance," students listened to a brief vignette about Japanese tsunami victims, many homeless and some missing family members.

At the conclusion of the one-hour Jam for Japan, a few student representatives shared with The Tidings what they wanted to say to Japanese children coping in the aftermath of the disaster, which, to date, has 12,000 confirmed dead, 15,000 reported missing and 160,000 survivors living in shelters.

"I would like to let all the children of Japan know that we're extremely sorry for what happened," said Marin. "We want to let them know to stay strong and to watch over your parents."

"We are thinking and praying for you," said Ashley Cabrera, eighth grader. "You'll always be in our hearts. Even though we don't personally know you, we feel like we understand what you're going through."

"Every day I'm trying to think what to do to help everybody," said Fernanda Aranda,

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Congress Youth Day collection raises \$15,500 for Japan

A total of \$15,500 was raised during the March 17 Religious Education Congress Youth Day to support relief efforts in Japan, according to organizers.

"We took up a collection at all three liturgies during Youth Day and raised \$15,500 that will be sent to Catholic Relief Services to support their efforts in Japan," Mike Norman, associate director of the archdiocesan office of Religious Education, told The Tidings.

"This collection is the Good News lived out at Youth Day and spread across the waters to Japan!!!" reads a message posted on the Youth Day Internet page by Jeanine Boucher-Colbert, CRS' youth program organizer.

"Solidarity is alive and well in the young church of Los Angeles!" she added. "I will be getting an update on Caritas Japan's response and our support of that response in the coming days to share with you."

The annual youth event offered a spe-

cial opportunity for Archbishop José Gomez, event organizers and speakers to stress the importance of lending a helping hand to "our neighbors," especially those afflicted by natural tragedies, such as the people in Japan.

Archbishop Gomez urged the more than 11,000 youth attending the Arena Mass at the Anaheim Convention Center to "keep Japan in your prayers and hearts."

The high school students and their chaperones were encouraged to donate money to support the survivors of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. CRS volunteers also collected more than 2,000 interfaith prayers and messages of solidarity that have been mailed to Japan.

"I know the young people of L.A. (and beyond) say thank you for helping us to make it possible to be in solidarity with those in Japan," wrote Norman on the Religious Congress Web site. ❖

—Doris Benavides



DANCING — Young students dance to the music at the St. Emydius "Jam for Japan" fundraiser.