



BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT *because we are Catholic.*

Get on the Bus: 'Keeping the bond alive'



Top: Dad and kids visit

Left: St John Fisher students display school busses they earned for making \$5 donations to Get on the Bus

Catholic school students raise money, write letters to support children visiting their parents in prison.

More than 200,000 children in California alone have a parent in prison. These often overlooked children are the hidden victims of crime and the unintended victims of the criminal justice system. Through no fault of their own, they find their parents taken from them, generating feelings of abandonment, shame, grief and even guilt.

This year more than 1,100 children will be reunited with their parent in 11 different prisons throughout California with the help of the Get on the Bus Program. And once again, thousands of students in elementary and high schools across California help the Get on the Bus program by undertaking projects to help these children make the long and emotional trip to the prison.

At St. John Fisher School in Rancho Palos Verdes and St. Dominic Savio School in Bellflower, students made Get on the Bus their Lenten "program of service."

"The Get on the Bus Program is a great way to help me grow closer to God," said seventh-grader Zayra, from St. Dominic Savio. "I can help someone to see their mother or father in prison. I'm really glad to participate in this awesome program and I wish I can do it again in the future."

St. John Fisher students organized fundraisers including one in which those who donated \$5 received a yellow school bus to display on their classroom doors and windows and these quickly became a traffic jam of yellow busses.

"It is inspirational to see how quickly and completely the students adopted these children in need," observed eighth grade teacher Tracey Martin. "This is truly Catholic social justice in action."

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Get on the Bus: 'Keeping the bond alive' (continued)



St. Dominic Savio seventh-graders assemble travel bags for children who will visit their parents in prison this year.

Students said they took pride in “giving moral support for those who really need it,” and in helping kids “have a better life and a relationship with their parents.”

Not only did the students of St. John Fisher, St. Dominic Savio, and St. Joseph in Long Beach (to mention a few of the schools) raise money to help children “get on a bus” (which generally costs around \$100 per child per trip), but they also made travel bags to make a long trip easier. The bags included snacks, water, books (for reading, coloring or doing puzzles), Mother’s Day or Father’s Day cards to give to their parents, lip gloss and wipes.

Such seemingly small items are given with a great amount of care and love. “I believe that it is not the child’s fault that their family member is in prison,” wrote Albert, a seventh-grader. “I want to help each child to see their family member in order to keep their bond alive.”

Besides the material items, our elementary and high school students give something even more meaningful: personalized, handwritten cards and letters. These treasures, which children first discover in their travel bags, are read over and over on the long trip to see their parents.

The following were written by two St. John Fisher students to Get on the Bus children:

“Dear Victoria,

“My name is Cristina and I am 12 years old. Remember you are always loved. As long as there are stars in the sky, then you’re loved. My school (St. John Fisher School) is praying for you. Always be positive and look on the bright side of things. God is always with you. Be strong and stay strong.

Love, Cristina.”

And:

“Dear Elisha,

“You don’t know me and I don’t know you, but I want to tell you that you are awesome. I don’t know what you look like, but you are beautiful. I’ve never seen your grades, but you are smart. And I’ve never seen your smile, but you are radiant. You are amazing the way you are. I don’t know where you are or where you’ve been, but your future is bright. Life is what you make of it, and I believe you can do anything. When times get hard, remember that there is a random girl somewhere who thinks you are amazing. Believe in yourself! Keep calm and carry on. [Signed]

- Angelina.”

This year, 54 busloads of children with their guardians or volunteers travel to 11 different prison gates almost every weekend during May, June and July for a four- to five-hour quality visit with their parents for Mother’s or Father’s Day. They will return home with a photo of them with their parent (for some, the only photo they will have of their parent), a letter from their parent, a teddy bear and a priceless memory of quality time spent with a never-forgotten loved one.

The Get on the Bus Program believes that every child has a right to a lifelong relationship with their parent, which includes seeing, hearing and touching them so that they are assured that their parent loves them and that they have not abandoned them intentionally.

St Joseph of Carondelet Sister Teresa Lynch is programs director for Get on the Bus. She can be contacted at (818) 980-7714; www.getonthebus.us.

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Mom and daughter visit

For more information, go to:

catholic.org
www.getonthebus.us