

Miss Clarisa Rivero

## Annual Catholic Appeal

The Annual Catholic Appeal is an incredible way for members of parishes throughout the archdiocese of St. Louis to come together and give back to the community. The importance of our Catholic community is crucial, not just in our own parishes, but throughout all of St. Louis. As St. Francis says, “no one is an island.” When we come together with our fellow Catholics as witnesses of our faith to support the Annual Catholic Appeal, the lives of those in need are positively affected, and our parish communities are greatly benefitted as well. The goal of the Annual Catholic Appeal is to build our Catholic community, and at the same time, bring our parishes closer together and closer to Christ. It is so important that everyone come together for this appeal, because together we have a stronger, more profound impact on people’s lives. By building this foundation of service and love for one another, we are promoting stewardship throughout and beyond our community.

Stewardship is not something we can check off our list for the year after giving an annual donation to the Annual Catholic Appeal; it calls for an infinite giving of our lives as servants to Christ. It requires using and developing our God-given gifts for others and putting God first in everything we do. Good stewards dedicate their lives to others through their love of God, example of leadership, and service to both their local community, and to those outside their immediate bubble who desperately need love and care. As an older sister to three siblings, a Student Council leader, member of my parish, and simply a citizen of society, stewardship plays an important role in my life through each and every one of my actions. Daily, I am faced with choices that require me to decide what I prioritize in my life.

I was born in Venezuela, and I still have family living in this third world, war-torn country. From an early age, I became aware of the value of service and prayer through the example of my parents and grandparents who dedicate themselves to doing all they can to help those suffering in Venezuela. Following their lead, I actively prayed for those suffering and did what I could to raise money through donations instead of birthday gifts to send money for meals for children in Venezuela. While I had already encountered a community whose need for good stewards was evident, it was not until this summer that the idea of stewardship truly resonated within me. A very much spur of the moment decision, I signed up to go on a mission trip through Mission Youth to Ahuazotepc, Mexico. To be honest, I am not the most low-maintenance person, but this week that I spent living in simplicity, serving others, and spreading the love and message of Christ, I honestly experienced true joy and had the most gratifying week of my life.

I feel immensely blessed that I was able to take part in such an impactful and fulfilling experience for both the people I served and for myself. I had to give up the commodities I am fortunate to have at home, but free from all societal and material distractions, I was able to freely serve Christ and others and answer my call to stewardship. The experiences I took part in this summer helped unveil to me a deeper, more profound meaning of stewardship, and I've resolved to share this with my friends so they can also experience the joy of self-giving. A bigger challenge arises back home, where I am confronted with the stress and responsibilities of high school and an individualistic, materialistic society. The call to stewardship is much harder to answer with so much commotion. Every day, I must make a stronger effort to be a good steward, even if I am not on a mission trip. I must deliberately choose to serve my family, my friends, and those in need in my community. I must live out my faith without hesitation. I must remember and pray for the people suffering in Venezuela and the families I encountered in Mexico. God

has blessed me with gifts and talents, and he has presented me with numerous blessings and opportunities in my family, my church, my school, and the world to use these gifts to glorify him and serve others.

When good stewards throughout the entire archdiocese come together, we have incredible, abundant outcomes. The Annual Catholic Appeal benefits thousands of people every year. Our small contribution is immense when as a community we come together with a common goal to serve others. The financial goal for the 2018 Annual Catholic Appeal is \$14.2 million. With this contribution, we are promoting and supporting Catholic education, charities and foundations that have changed lives, faith formation, life, sacraments, and numerous other vital needs of our community. Whether it be providing kids with a Catholic education where they can learn that a life of faith is just as important as learning math; or forming men and women into missionary disciples that will spread the message of Christ everywhere they go; or promoting the sanctity of life in a society that desperately needs it, the Annual Catholic Appeal's influence is undeniably there. The stories of the people who the Annual Catholic Appeal serve illustrate the impact that the Catholic Church has when all of its members come together to serve others in the name of Christ.