

Tony Cantu, teacher: Religious education at SJA

Tony Cantu holds a unique position at St. Joseph Academy, working primarily in the field of religious education. He is a 1975 graduate of SJA and a faculty member for 32 years, beginning with the 1982-83 school year.

His primary duty is campus ministry, which includes teaching a course titled "Call to Ministry." This course is designed to serve as a peer ministry, in which students learn to develop, plan and implement retreats and liturgical celebrations for the school community.

His responsibilities also include working with campus ministry activities, retreats, liturgical celebrations, service opportunities and organizing mission trips that provide students opportunities to travel to other areas to engage in mission work.

An addition to those duties, he has at times taken on a variety of other jobs, such as serving as the production chair for the annual style show and as a cheerleader coach.

He was honored when the annual yearbook for the year 1997 was dedicated to him. The commentary about him in the yearbook indicated he has made a great difference in the lives of many students, who have benefited from his involvement in religion, drama classes, homecoming court, retreats, style show and liturgies. It was emphasized that he has made a tremendous mark at SJA. The yearbook also recalled that he has had his embarrassing moments, such as entering the wrong classroom and starting to teach the wrong class. He says the most significant rewards for him have been the friendships he has made, and the feeling he has made a difference in the lives of the students. He loves his involvement with the people and with the activities of the school.

One of his responsibilities is to organize and coordinate service opportunities for students throughout the Brownsville community. This involves such activities as working with community organizations, tutoring at local elementary schools, working at a soup kitchen and providing assistance to elderly citizens.

He is responsible for the school's mission program, where in previous years students traveled to small mountain villages in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, for mission work. The Mexico travels have been discontinued because of safety concerns, and mission trips in recent years have been to destinations in the United States. During the past six years St. Joseph students have made mission trips to the upper Rio Grande Valley (McAllen, Edinburg, Pharr, Alamo), Eagle Pass; Gallup, New Mexico; Zuni, New Mexico; Moore, Oklahoma (to help victims of a tornado); and Harlan, Kentucky. Students in the 10th, 11th and 12 grades play a role in these mission trips. As many as 40 to 45 students participate in a mission experience that lasts around 12 days.

Under his guidance, the Call To Ministry class organizes annual retreats for students. The 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students participate in a one-day retreat experience at a facility in Brownsville. The sophomores participate in a service retreat, where they engage in such activities as assistance in home building, working with children in the local elementary schools and ecology work in city parks in Brownsville and San Benito. The juniors have a three-day retreat at Bayview, called Marist Youth Encounter Christ. Seniors have a three-day retreat experience in New Braunfels, Texas. The subject at this retreat is based on the Marks of a Marist Student.

The work of Tony Cantu has played an important role in the life of St. Joseph Academy.

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