

SUMMER 2022

# AGAPE SERVICE PROJECT

## NEWSLETTER

I don't know if I've believed in the mission of Agape as much as I have this summer. Two years of operating during COVID left me with a lot of questions and doubts. But this summer of youth groups returning, the full extent of our services being lived, new learnings and changes coming out of COVID, and a whole lot of incredible growth has left me believing in this mission with my whole being in new ways.

Our holy friend for the summer was Servant of God Dorothy Day, and her wisdom speaks to a major takeaway from this summer: "We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other." The holistic services of Agape leads to a deep knowing for all people involved. Agape participants spending quality time with the children of farmworkers multiple times in the week leads to both parties feeling known and seen. Our mobile food distribution enables us to meet families where they are at which deepens the connections at the food bank the next day. Parents knowing we know and love their kids from enrichment activities builds a sense of trust and safety. To be called by name by someone unexpected is a powerful moment. To know & be known - to love & be loved. We are interwoven brothers and sisters, and that was felt on a deeper level for me this year. Agape is necessary because we lead with relationship and encounter.

None of this is possible without our incredible partners, generous donors, the participating groups, and a Creator that pours endless Grace over this program. We stand in awe and gratitude at another beautiful summer of encounter and love. - Kelsey Harrington, Director

### ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS

Something that has been missing from our program the past two summers has been enrichment activities (community bbq, sharks and minnows, bracelet-making, slime science projects, bubbles wands, etc.) for the farmworker kids at their housing sites. We historically had provided this service at only one of the housing sites. During COVID, we started doing food distribution to four different housing sites, but it was usually just an in-and-out operation without much actual connection. This year, the need for bringing food and other necessary goods to the homes still existed, but with the addition of the Agape groups we knew we could also add enrichment activities at two new camps.

At first it just made sense as a filling of a gap, but after our first week, it became obvious these opportunities to play with the kids were one of the most mutually important aspects of the summer. Shy members of our groups broke out of their shells goofing around with toddlers, farmworker kids learned to shoot a basketball, strangers spoke the same language of using bubble wands for a lightsaber duel, and joyous giggles abounded.



*A joy-filled game of red light, green light and new friends making slime.*



*Students from Our Lady of the Lake helping distribute boxes of food & frozen protein.*

### MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION

For seven weeks, we delivered food to an average of 144 families weekly at four different farmworker housing sites throughout Whatcom County. For many families they face various challenges to get food, such as time and transportation and lack access to nutritious food. This summer, we were again able to partner with Bellingham Food Bank to deliver boxes filled with culturally relevant food, baby supplies, and feminine products straight to their door.



Students from Christ the King School harvest strawberries with Bellingham Food Bank Gleaning.

## FARM WORK

Farm work for the Agape staff and the youth groups was an essential component this summer. We worked with organic and justice-oriented farms to support a better vision of agriculture and connect with creation. We harvested strawberries, blueberries, cabbage, garlic, and picked lots of weeds. Participating in farm work allowed us to get a small glimpse of what farmworkers experience everyday. Farmworkers labor long hours, weekends, and in extreme heat. Working at these farms allowed us to enter into solidarity with our fellows in the campos (fields).

## ADVOCACY

A key piece to this summer's faith formation was teaching about advocacy. By the end of the week, youth felt passionate about using their hands to serve, but we wanted to inspire them to harness the strength of their voices as well. Youth were empowered to be involved in the second foot of 'love in action' - the social justice works alongside charitable works. Youth groups learned about two major bills (S. 1068 & S. 3283) currently in the Senate which directly apply to the farmworkers they came to know and care for over the week. Then, they wrote to our local senators in support of the bills that would help protect farmworkers while they work in extreme heat and from harmful pesticides. This experience rounded out our week of Agape and unified us in our efforts to advocate for the basic needs and quality of life of our brothers and sisters.



Behind the scenes of our virtual Gather for Agape event with a game of Lotería.

## PRE-SUMMER STEWARDSHIP

We wrapped our Month for Agape (a month of storytelling & support) on June 15 with our second annual Gather for Agape event. The larger Agape family celebrated and supported our mission, and we fundraised \$13,296. AND THEN, that was matched \$2 for every \$1 for an additional \$26,592, AND THEN, another foundation donated an additional \$10,000!!!

We are a fully self-funded ministry, so our mission & services are made possible by every single donation. In May and June, we had no concept of the astronomical numbers of families we would serve at our food bank. These generous donations enabled us to operate not from a place of scarcity and limits, but out of freedom.

Look for information about a large, in-person gathering to celebrate the 20th summer of Agape sometime in spring 2023!

## STAFF TRAINING SESSIONS

The spring training and formation of our young adult staff is an important part of our mission as we strive to form them to be servant leaders and missionary disciples for our world and Church. We are so grateful for the wisdom and time of our incredible guest speakers: Fr. Bryan Dolejsi (Holy Family, Kirkland), Giselle Cárcamo (Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center), Joe Cotton (Archdiocese of Seattle), and Anna Robertson (Catholic Climate Covenant).

Staff Zoom training session in May.



# 2022 AGAPE YOUNG ADULT STAFF

## **JUSTIN, 3rd Year**

At the farmworker housing site we spent the most time at – mostly playing and having barbecues with the kids – there was a girl named Eva who was going into sixth grade and always took care of her three younger brothers while her parents worked. The last day we were there, we made slime, which the kids, for some reason unbeknownst to me, go crazy about. Eva knew it would be the last time we might see each other, so she insisted on making each of us staff a bag of slime. She mixed together each glob with great care and labored on while other kids finished up and left to go play. I told her she didn't have to make us any since we could make some for ourselves at home with the ingredients if we wanted and so she could be sure to have time to play with everybody else, but her mind was made. She handed each bag of slime to us with excitement for us to receive her hand-made creation. I think it was the only way she knew how in that moment to express she would miss us and present a symbol of friendship. It was beautiful and humbling to be given such a simple gift that was made with such great love.



## **ANTHONY THOMAS, 2nd Year**

Agape 2022 was for me a marvelous and memorable experience. I remember lots of laughs and smiles but also lots of trials and difficulties. Spending the week with the youth groups, farms, and the food bank filled my summer with service, purpose, and Agape. I won't forget playing kickball, sharks & minnows, and making connections with the families. Thank you, Jesus, for placing me in Agape.



## **ELLEN, 3rd Year**

This summer, the Agape family felt more like a family than ever before. One night in Eucharistic Adoration after our food bank, I thought about the multilayered vulnerabilities one may feel entering into a food bank. In this, I remembered reading a book to Oscar and José, two kids I had gotten to know throughout the summer when we went to play at the farmworker housing sites. I then sat in gratitude at the ways Agape can soften the possible anxieties of the families we encounter. I imagined Oscar & Jose's parents glancing over, recognizing the people playing with their children, and feeling a sense of peace. What a mutual space of honor and peace - to know the faces and names of the people we encounter weekly, daily, even momentarily. To see that we are all interwoven and, ultimately, family.



## **ROSA, 2nd Year**

Personally, this summer was indescribable. It was filled with joy, laughter, tears, sweat, and so much more. I was able to joyfully reconnect with relationships formed last year, and then made new ones. This year I was able to form a very special relationship with Jazmin, a migrant youth. She was sassy, funny, friendly, and basically a mini-me. With her I was able to see how beautiful friendships are and how each one of us can grow and learn from each other. When it was time to say goodbye, we both realized how much we cared for and cherished each other. It is a relationship I will forever hold in my heart and one I would love to share more with others.



## **KATERI, 1st Year**

Just like slime, foam stickers, bubbles, grill grease and “back-y rides,” there was an abundance of grace poured out over my time at Agape this summer. I resonated with the concepts of gift of self and gifts of others most. I was blessed to encounter the gifts of many kind migrant workers and the joyful spirits of their children. Their daily sacrifices continue to feed into and enrich our lives both spiritually and physically. Youth groups brought a zeal-full passion to our mission - from late-night dodgeball to an attitude of always being ready to jump right in. Reflecting on the summer, I can also see how the Lord never tires of giving; His hand evident in the many “loaves and fishes” moments during the summer. I am grateful that the last nine weeks have helped show me how to give of myself in a way that truly radiated the Father's agape love.



# FOOD BANK UPDATE

It's hard to put into words how monumental our food bank was this summer. Since 2007 our food bank has been outdoors - always providing relational services with joy & dignity - but also always a bit limited. Now, we have a floor, a ceiling, and electricity - providing coverage from all weather and space for shelving and fridges! This is a true team effort - Lynden School District, Bellingham Food Bank, Food Lifeline - all coming together to make this dream a reality. We returned to a shopping model, as opposed to a drive-thru, which ensured the dignity of choice. Because of Bellingham Food Bank, we were able to provide the best quality and quantity of nutritious, culturally-appropriate food that we ever have.

We heard from a mom accessing our food bank, "¡Es cómo una tienda (It's like a store)!" Another woman shared about how for the last few years at our drive-thru food bank, we've asked what different items we should provide when we re-open the shopping model, and she shared, "It's all here now, everything I asked for."

Food banks should not have to exist - this is 'both, and' work. So while we work for a more just society, where dignity is upheld and workers are paid justly, we also strive to make our food bank dignified, joy-filled, and welcoming, while offering the largest variety of choice as possible.

The food bank became so much more than food access. It was a space for connection and rest - three food bank guests and a volunteer sharing recipes in the produce section, volunteers reading books to kiddos while their parents 'shop,' friends sitting down and chatting over plates of tacos from our taco stand, Agape participants helping guests find the perfect clothing items.

Over the seven weeks, we served 2,067 families (8,586 individuals) including a program high of 412 families at the last food bank. We are humbled and blessed to encounter this many people.

Thank you to every Agape family member who has been here for years or is brand new - you are part of this dream as well!

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Clothing & Books Provided Weekly:** Thank you to everyone who donated. These are highly requested & important resources to offer.
- **Resource Center:** For years we have desired for our food bank to be a resource hub - a 'one-stop shop' for access to various agencies. This vision really came to life this year as we had nine different organizations join us multiple times over the summer (see the list on the last page).
- **Taco Stand:** Five weeks of providing a delicious, hot meal of carnitas tacos thanks to a Food Lifeline grant & generous donors. This became a space for rest & connection!
- **325 Backpacks:** We have never been able to provide so many fully stocked backpacks before, thank you donors!
- **Bishop Elizondo Visit:** We are so grateful Bishop joined our food bank for a morning, met volunteers & guests, and blessed the food bank & all the people!



*Bishop Elizondo visited & blessed our food bank!*



*Part of the produce section at our food bank.*



*Some students with their new backpacks & school supplies!*

## PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

### EMILY, HOLY FAMILY (KIRKLAND)

It was the day of the food bank & I was helping put away clothing. I was busy taking new boxes of clothes out of the truck out back when I noticed a box that I had donated filled with clothes from when I was probably only 7 or 8 years old. Now, I am extremely sentimental, so saying goodbye to all my favorite shirts when I was a kid was not as easy.

I had just finished putting away the rest of my clothes when I noticed a young girl that I had met the other day. She was with her mother and seemed to be looking for clothes so I excitedly went over to say hi. When I was walking toward her, I looked to the side and found one of my old shirts with a flower on it thinking it might be something that she would like. Her face lit up and I had to tell her that it was my favorite shirt as a kid. After I did, the response that I got really struck me.

"Thank you so much!" she said, "I will wear it until I grow out of it and then I always give my old clothes to my friends."

This was probably a moment I will never forget because it was an example of kindness in many different ways. I shared something important to me with her and her joy and willingness to then serve others the way I just did made me truly feel so good.

That was my moment from Agape where I really saw God's presence, and I feel blessed to have been given this opportunity.



### FINN, ST. JOSEPH (SEATTLE)

During the three-day trip, we organized and ran a food bank, played with migrant worker's kids, and so much more.

I think my favorite part about the camp was the food bank.

It feels really good to be giving back to the people who grow and pick a good portion of our food. While there, we also wrote letters to our state's senators, advocating for laws that won't overlook basic human needs. These laws include banning the use of pesticides, which is extremely bad for the workers who are breathing it for hours on end. Another one of the laws was for safety from the heat and accessibility to water. Many of the people working in the fields have extremely limited access to water and shade, that the law would make obligatory.

Throughout the trip, I met many people who work super hard picking and preparing other's food and get paid very little. They deserve much more than what they get and I'm grateful for the time I spent with them.



## ASHLEY, ST. JOSEPH (SEATTLE)

This experience not only made me happy, it was very impactful to the way I saw things. At the food bank I had conversations with many people, but there were these two ladies that made me realize important things. I was just serving tacos with two other boys, but I was in charge of asking for orders. I had this conversation with a lady while we were waiting for her tacos, and I had said that the day was very hot. She agreed, but she had said that in this heat she started work. She worked from 5am until 3 in the afternoon. While picking, planting, and cleaning food that other people use that they cannot get. If most people can barely resist heat with an air conditioner imagine working 8 hours or more without it, and having to come directly to get food for a family. I could barely resist the heat, with even a fan. Overall, during my time with Agape I am very glad that I was able to learn and experience new things. As well as at the same time help and have fun with a community.



## MIGUEL, SEMINARIAN, ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE

As baptized Catholics, we are called and summoned by Christ into life in Him. Our Christian faith has never been meant to be kept to ourselves, siloed in privilege, but it's meant to be shared and spread throughout the world. Agape provided me with opportunities to be a missionary for the Lord. We brought love, kindness, laughter, and joy to so many immigrant families and their communities.



We spent time in Adoration, prayer, and attended Mass. The Mass and social justice are interwoven so we can be transformed into the hands and feet of Jesus to help bring his kingdom here on earth. At Agape we received these graces and engaged in a committed and transformative way of living out the Gospel.

Christ makes clear the central mission to our faith is love. The teaching of Matthew highlights this mission, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me. For as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me". Our faith and service are well interwoven here; we honor, and love Christ every time we welcome our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters. A powerful moment for me was how touched I was to see every young person commit their heart, mind, body and soul to this mission (without ever complaining). Talk about true disciples of Christ, these young people received each farmworker family member as if they were meeting Christ. For me, this is why the Agape program is so important because we were able to live out our Catholic faith in joyful, enlightening, and loving ways to everyone one we met.

*This summer Agape initiated a partnership with the Vocations Office of the Archdiocese. Two Seminarians joined us for a week each during their summer rotations. It was an opportunity for them to learn about Agape, experience chaperoning a service trip, & engage with our farmworker brothers and sisters. It also provided the youth an opportunity to meet & get to know a seminarian & hear their vocation story. We are so grateful for Miguel & Simon.*

# THANK YOU!



It was a beautiful summer of collaboration! We could not have served the farmworker families without our amazing partners and generous supporters!

- **Food Bank and Distribution:** Bellingham Food Bank, Lynden School District, Food Lifeline, Ferndale Food Bank, Project Hope Lynden Food Bank, Catholic Community Services' PREPARES, La Gloria Market
- **Additional Agencies Present at Food Bank:** Community to Community, Inspire Development Center, Whatcom Goodwill Job Training and Education Center, Skagit Valley College Cardinal Career Scholars & CAMP Program, Wage and Hour Division, Opportunity Council Rental Assistance, Department of Labor & Industries, Spiritual Resources from Fr. Moore, NWESD 189 Migrant Education
- **Farms:** Bellingham Country Gardens, Growing Veterans, Bellingham Food Bank Gleaning, Breckenridge Blueberries, Common Threads School Gardens
- **Operations:** Church of the Assumption, Sacred Heart Church, CYO Camps, CYO Athletics, WWU Newman Center, St. James Cathedral
- **Agape Participant Communities:** Christ the King (Seattle), Holy Family (Kirkland), St. Teresa of Calcutta (Woodinville), Our Lady of the Lake (Seattle), St. Joseph (Seattle), Sacred Heart (Bellingham), Church of the Assumption (Bellingham)
- All of our generous donors, volunteers, and prayer team who support us year-round

## JOIN US BY SUPPORTING OUR WORK

Agape Service Project is fully self-funded; we are abundantly grateful for the donors who make our services and ministry possible each year. If you are interested in financially supporting our continued work, please visit:

[donate.seattlearchdiocese.org/agape-gift](https://donate.seattlearchdiocese.org/agape-gift)

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



*The 2022 Staff*

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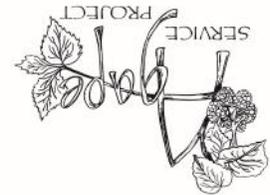
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## LET'S STAY CONNECTED

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## SUMMER 2022 BY THE NUMBERS

- 7 weeks of services
- 6 staff members
- 46 different food & hygiene items offered at the food bank
- 439 families served on average weekly at both food distribution & food bank
- 111 Youth & adult Agape participants from 7 parishes/schools
- 325 backpacks fully stocked with school supplies distributed
- 40,546 diapers distributed at the Agape Food Bank & Tuesday distribution
- 575 lbs of carnitas served at 5 weeks of the Agape Food Bank taco stand



*Students from Christ the King serve tacos to guests at the food bank.*