

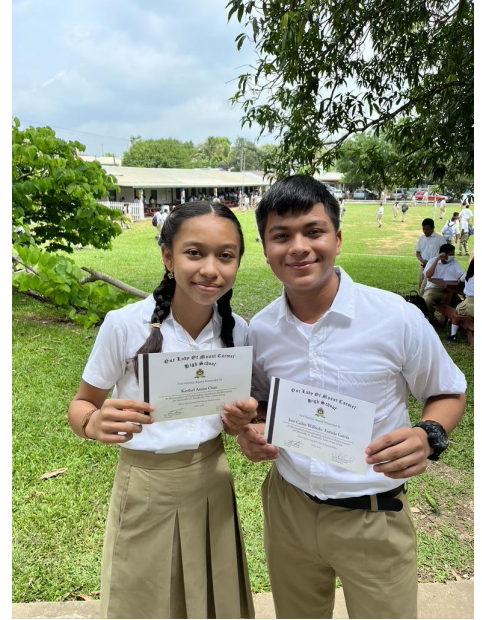
Hi! Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year! It is a joy to be able to write this newsletter for the parish and share what has been happening in Benque this semester. I write a monthly newsletter with pictures, stories, and reflections, so I thought I'd use excerpts from those for this Christmas update. I'm excited to be home for Christmas and some colder weather. If you want to hear more about life here or help out in any financial or prayerful way, don't hesitate to reach out! There are always more scholarships, student emergencies, lunches, and other things to help support. My Venmo is @Naomi-Hemphill. Please know that I'm praying for you and your families during Advent & Christmas and hope to see you when I'm home. If you would like to follow along with my newsletters the link is [www.naomihemphill.wixsite.com/all-is-grace](http://www.naomihemphill.wixsite.com/all-is-grace). Dios bendiga

### August: "The Misses are back!"

"The Misses are back!" is the sweetest phrase to hear and it made me smile so big every time I heard it the first few weeks back in Benque. By the time school started 2 weeks later, it felt like we hadn't left, and summer was a fever dream.

Getting to rest and take a step away this summer gave me the space to evaluate why I'm doing what I'm doing and be reconvicted of the Kingdom. It is so easy to see our daily life here as our job and not think about how radical and different it is compared to most of the world, because I'm just trying to get through 7 classes on a Friday! But there is something deeper happening here; there is a fight for souls and the coming of the Kingdom - and there are students to love.

I have 187 students this year which means I am morally responsible for getting 187 souls a little closer to Heaven this year. This reality has hit me harder than I expected. I'm teaching 5 of the 6 2nd Form Religion classes and 1 of the 2nd Form Science classes.



A fundraising glory story I want to share: Last year, there was a brother and sister who had no money for lunch and often didn't eat breakfast before coming to school. Through the generosity of our administration, they personally paid for these 2 students to have lunch all year. A group of teachers came together, and we funded their breakfast. One of my goals for fundraising this year was to cover lunch for the brother, since I

thought the sister still had funding left over. However, it turned out neither of them had money left over, and they have another brother in 1st Form this year. I love this family, they are the sweetest kids and always go to Sunday Mass with their mom. Their names are Gracey, Hamneron, and Julner. Because of the generous donations of all of



you, I'm able to cover all 3 of their lunches for the year! Truly praise Jesus!

### September: "Death and Life"

I purposely have death and life in this order. Because "life and death" is too common of a phrase and an exaggerated meaning. But death and life is Christian, because we have hope in the Resurrection after the Cross. And this is what I've been trying to believe for the past 2 months.

That has been the order of my month. Death of a student's father, life to a student's baby, and death of a student's mother - all in the span of 8 days. A student who I don't teach, but know well; his father tragically drowned in the river. That weekend, I was at the hospital all night with a former MCHS student who I coached in futbol last year, as she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. And later that week, I was at another funeral in Melchor, Guatemala for my student's mother, who also unexpectedly passed away.



How do you look your kid in the eye and comfort them when their whole world is flipped upside down? How did Mary look at the Apostles during the Crucifixion, after they had left everything to be with Him?

I can only show up for my kids. After that, it is solely the grace of God that can heal them. And so many struggles in prayer and apostolate; this has been the hardest season of living here yet.



Maidy was a 4th Former last year at MCHS and I coached her in futbol. She's feisty and passionate, smart and dedicated. She's got a fun personality and lives up to what her name sounds like, "mighty." I've loved her since the moment I met her.

The day we got back from Easter break last semester, she asked to talk to me after school. As we sat down at the picnic tables, I could see Maidy was stressed and not her usual lighthearted self.

Me: "Okay Maidy, what's up?"

Maidy: "Ms. I'm pregnant. I found out at the end of December and I'm due in September. I'm keeping the baby. The father is my boyfriend."

Me: \*deep breath\* "Maidy, you're going to be okay. Thank you for telling me. Now let's talk about this..."

Obviously there were lots of conversations about morals, raising a child, logistics etc, and it has truly been a gift to walk alongside her in all of this. I loved shopping for baby items over the summer and watching her start to become a mom. After waiting up most of the night outside the hospital with her mom and her boyfriend, baby Zyrie came into the world at 4:15am Sept 9th. Maidy was an absolute rockstar, and Zyrie is perfect. \*getting to pay for her hospital bill\*

I can't help myself; I'm over there almost every other day, just hanging out, holding Zyrie, and being with Maily. When I walk in, Maily's mom announces, "ah! La Madrina de Zyrie!" And it just makes me laugh. Because I never thought I would get to be in this place and live the life I am, but aquí estoy. I am here.

I am seeing where the Lord is breaking me open, and it's the most painful it's ever been. Sanctification is real and tangible. He means it when He says He desires Heaven for us the most, and He will move and make it happen when we open ourselves up to the grace. And that process is hard and more real than the air I breathe.



A verse I have been praying with is, "there is no fear in love" 1 John 4:18.

For awhile this verse has always meant to love without limits and to have no fear of the cost or the return. But now, I read it as, "there is no fear in Love." No fear in Love Himself; no fear in just letting Him love me and see me. It's not a burden for Him or taking Him away from anyone else; He longs to just love me. To let myself be seen by Him. And the more I fix my gaze on Him, the all consuming Love, then I have to be more purified, because His gaze is perfect and calls anything that is not of Him, out.



### October: "Nimodos"manicmesa297

Nimodos: Spanish slang for "it is what it is, what can I do about it?" "Es lo que es."

Let it go. \*queue Elsa and the Frozen soundtrack\*



I hold this with both hands. Let go of the schedule changes, missing school because of a hurricane, others' unrealistic expectations of community, exhaustion, my bedroom and downstairs of our house flooding from a burst pipe - the list goes on.

Nimodos para esta mundo. Nimodos for this world.

But don't let go of the next. Heaven is more real than the air I breathe. Don't let go of the hope of salvation, for myself or my kids. Show them a faith that saves; not just a faith that acknowledges God.

Welcome to Ms. Naomi's Religion class the past 2 months. "Alrighty, take a seat in your seating chart. No, you can't sit there, Javier, you can sit in your seating chart. Yes, I'll take your late work but you only get 2 more

days. No you can't go to the bathroom, you just had break. Raise your hand for questions! I want to hear them! And get ready for a reflection paragraph at the end of class. Here we go y'all!"



Perpetual Adoration chapel

I get to teach about the Covenants of the Old Testament in 2nd Form Religion this year. But how does this bring them to Heaven? Who is Jesus Christ and how is He the Messiah of the Jewish people of the Old and how is He still saving you? What are God's signs of faithfulness in each Covenant and what is His sign in the Covenant we're living in now?

Since the beginning of Creation, God the Father has desired nothing more to be in a full communion relationship with us, His favorite Creation. He literally created the whole world JUST for us! Man is created to serve & guard and Woman is created to receive & give life - it's a beautiful cycle of Woman receiving people's hearts as gifts from the Father and life from her husband and Man serving and guarding the Garden of Eden, his family, and laying down his life for them.

And we have free will so our yes to Him is more complete and total of ourselves. So through the Fall, all these relationships - with God, each other, and ourselves - are broken because we weren't made to live in brokenness! And yet He never tires in pouring out His mercy. He creates Covenant after Covenant to bring His beloved back to Himself - our greatest good.

As the flood waters recreated the world from all its sin, Baptism recreates us. Not just a spiritual recreation where you close your eyes and go under and sorta kinda figure something is happening. No, it practically, realistically, totally recreates us.

God loves His Creation, of course He does - He made it! So we are beloved creatures, but we have human nature and He is Divine nature. We cannot relate to anyone unless we share a nature with them ("you can't relate to your dog the same as you can with your best friend" - that clicked with the kids). God in His unending desire to be in relationship with us gives us His Holy Spirit in Baptism so we can share in His Divine nature (elevates us above our human nature) so THEN we can relate to Him and He can look at us and say "son or daughter" and we can say "Father." This begins our entire relationship with Him.



It is SO hard to have to tell them we're beloved creatures of God and not His son or daughter if we're not Baptized. But I imagine that it's a fraction of the real pain the Father feels for His beloved creatures not being His son & daughter; particularly when He gave us this gift.

I see their gears turning and they're asking the right questions. They're engaged and seriously thinking about this. I want Heaven for them more than anything! I'm praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the waters of Baptism - a Pentecost over Mount Carmel High School.

### **November & December: "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"**

I don't have many words for the past month and a half besides the busyness in the external life of mission, community, kids, and end of the semester - and the silence and waiting of the interior life. As I've gone through Advent, the hymn "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" keeps calling me back to the hopeful promise that is coming. Eyes fixed on Heaven, not on this world. While praying the rosary, I'm asking Mary, "where are your hopeful moments in the Sorrowful Mysteries? And where are your sorrowful moments in the Joyful?" This semester has been painful but I have learned mercy in a whole new way - a mercy that is gentle, consistent, and reconfigures my view.



Adam & Eve Covenant skits

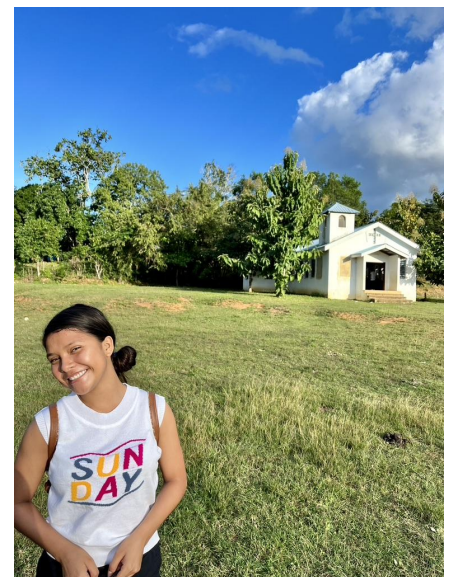
I do have some sweet stories and fun adventures from the end of this semester. Remember the family that I am able to pay lunches for because of fundraising? One of the girls, Gracey, is in 4th Form (aka senior) and loves coming to the village Masses on Sundays with her missionary teachers. One Sunday we were in Arenal and she was telling me about having to take care of 6 of her siblings that weekend. Their mom had been gone for a few days, working in San Benito, Guatemala. They hadn't had dinner the night before because their older siblings had not been able to work that day, and made no money. They had no plan for dinner that night either. I gave her \$40 BZE (\$20USD) -

which was all I had on me at the moment

but would have been plenty to cover dinner - and said please go somewhere in town and get all 8 of you dinner.

The next morning she told me she'd spent half the money on dinner that night and the other half she used to buy breakfast and lunch for the siblings that go to the primary school (and aren't covered by the fundraised money). It hadn't even occurred to me that there were more meals to be covered before their mom got home. But I'm learning that when you're a child of poverty & hunger, you know how to make every shilling count and plan ahead when there is a little bit available. I was floored when she happily explained to me what she'd done and how it was all covered.

A student I mentor, and at this point would consider another godchild, Joaquin, has really dove into this search for the Truth and wants to do something about it. He wants to be Baptized and enter into the family of God, but his mom won't let him. As I listen to his heart and try to help him reason with his mom, his sweet



Sweet Gracey in Arenal village

spirit and determination to be a son of God shines through. "It's okay Ms! It's just 2 more years before I'm 18 [and thus make his own decision] and it'll fly by. Then I will receive my Sacraments!"



2nd Form girls taking my phone for cute pictures



Brayan & Joaquin giving themselves haircuts at my desk after school



Baby Zyrine



Feast of Christ the King  
Eucharistic Procession



2nd Form school service day