After six successful seasons with Operation Rice Bowl, St. Dominic’s Director of Adult Faith Formation Michael O’Smith introduced a new Lenten program last year. He partnered with Living Water International to launch a water awareness platform for Lent of 2016, the Lenten Water Challenge. “Tap water,” Mr. Smith explained, “was our focus. We wanted to combine fasting, prayer, and alms-giving through a water-based project.” Calling parishioners to become “ambassadors of God’s living water,” O’Smith provided startling statistics. “We often take water for granted. But 1 in 9 people on earth are without safe, accessible drinking water. Many women must walk 20 hours a week, about 7 miles a day, collecting water that is often contaminated; 2.2 million deaths a year are due to water-related diseases.”

The Lenten Water Challenge invited parishioners to observe Lent spotlighting water scarcity and water sourcing in the country of Central African Republic. “This dove-tailed with the Year of Mercy,” according to O’Smith, “because that is where Pope Francis opened the first Holy Door to begin the observance.”

Fasting from all beverages except tap water, participating parishioners both raised their awareness of the luxury uses of water – such as soda, beer and coffee – while also saving money to contribute to water sourcing in C.A.R. The country already had operating water wells, but regular, proper maintenance of the wells cost an average of $150 per visit. Water pumps required repairs, as well as regular cleaning, greasing and resealing. Local people needed training so that mechanical issues could be addressed immediately. As St. Dominic’s partner observed, “One thing I’ve heard is that the only thing worse than not having safe water, is to experience and then lose it.”

Parishioners donated to the Water Challenge both through Sunday collections and through an
Torch groups let faith shine beyond Sundays
WRITTEN BY DOMINIQUE KIM

You may have heard Sunday announcements about “Torch groups,” but have you ever wondered what exactly Torch is and what Torch groups do?

Torch is a series of intentional small groups—8 to 12 people—that gather weekly to pray, reflect on Scripture in the context of the Dominican tradition, and share fellowship. Torch groups are led by trained facilitators and typically meet at the St. Dominic’s campus or in group members’ homes. There are three seasons of Torch being offered, each lasting 8-12 weeks and the second having begun the week of January 22.

Torch is a follow-up to some recent small group initiatives focused on Christian discipleship at St. Dominic’s. In January 2013, some 35 parish ministry leaders participated in a Making Disciples workshop facilitated by the Catherine of Siena Institute. The energy, insights, and renewal from this experience led to an experimental Small Christian Community series, and then a three-year sequence of programs, which were called “Intentional Disciples,” “Intentional Seekers,” and “Intentional Preachers.” Torch boils down the experience to a weekly, seasonal small group with a pair of trained torch leaders and a new theme, piece of Scripture, and Dominican Saint addressed each week. Each season concludes with a “Day of Reflection” for all Torch participants and the parish at large.

A key difference between Torch and the earlier “Intentional” programs is that Torch is deliberately focused on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Also, the format is a little different: for example, including time to reflect on a saint whose life drew upon the works of mercy in exemplary ways.

Amanda Frayer participated in the “Tuesday Torchers” group. “I wasn’t sure what to expect when I joined the Torch group last fall, however it turned out to be an invaluable experience. I’ve been attending St. Dominic’s for about two years, yet didn’t feel very connected. The Torch

Living Water (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

online portal. In all, the parish raised $15,000, funding nearly 100 maintenance visits to keep the C.A.R. wells functioning smoothly. This benefited 128 communities with populations as large as 3,000 people. “In all, St. Dominic’s blessed thousands of people through your sacrifice and giving!” exclaimed O’Smith.

Fasting and prayer became most focused during the third week of Lent. “We invited the parish to read and pray with the scripture from John 4:1-26, the woman at the well,” O’Smith explained, “which is the Gospel reading the third week of Lent.” Participants combined petitionary prayer for C.A.R.’s water needs, and those lacking water throughout the world, with reflection and prayer that Christ’s “living water” might flow through humanity. “Be Living Water!” became the motto of the program.

Keep an eye (and ear) out for details in Mass announcements, the bulletin, and online for this year’s Lenten Water Challenge and other ways the parish is using the Lenten season to be a spring of Living Water.
Torch Groups
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

Torch Groups not only introduced me to fellow parishioners, but also was a great opportunity to reflect and discuss some of the central tenants of our faith on a weekly basis.”

Another Torch participant, Andras Petery, said his experience was “inspirational, motivational, transformational. Torch raises Bible study to a whole new level by putting faith into action.”

The Winter/Lent 2017 season, Torch’s second, began the week of January 22nd and lasts 11 weeks. There are currently nine Torch groups meeting during the Winter/

Lent season. Some are open to all ages, others are limited to a specific peer group, and two are just for women. Torch groups are limited to 8-12 participants, and are closed after the first few weeks of the season.

The current season is focusing on the seven spiritual works of mercy:

1) Instruct the ignorant,
2) Counsel the doubtful,
3) Comfort the afflicted
4) Admonish sinners,
5) Forgive all injuries,
6) Bear wrongs patiently,
7) Pray for the living and the dead.

The season concludes with a day of reflection.

The third, Easter season of Torch will extend for 8 weeks, from April 23 to June 17, with the Day of Reflection on June 10. If you would like to sign up for Season 3 of Torch, visit the Torch website at stdominics.org/ministries/torch, or contact Michael Smith at michaelosmith@stdominics.org or (415) 674-0422. When signing up, you may opt for whatever weekly group session day and time suits your availability. You also have the option to sign up for age or gender specific groups.

To get the most out of the meetings participants are encouraged to commit to attending all sessions of the series they sign up for. Also, you may indicate if you are interested in being trained as a Torch Leader. Torch Leaders work in pairs to facilitate the group, and they prepare a brief reflection on the Scripture each week to help spark the faith-sharing.

If you’re on the fence about joining a Torch group or becoming a Torch leader for the Easter Season, Frayer encourages you to give it a try. “It’s a great opportunity to make new relationships and deepen existing ones while also growing in your faith.”
Her name is Socorro de Maria Reyes, and she came to us at St. Dominic’s in August of 2016. You may well have seen her around our parish, as she is the parish’s Director of our Family Faith Formation and Youth Ministries—a large and important role here at St. Dominic’s.

Socorro was born and raised in Nicaragua, the youngest of four girls in a loving Catholic family. Her name in Spanish means “Help of Mary,” and she feels her devotion to our Blessed Mother has brought her here to help. Socorro moved to the U.S, and earned her Bachelors degree in International Business from Thomas More University, while also studying Child Development & Psychology and Theology of the Body. Socorro earned her Masters degree in Theology and Catechetics from the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.

Socorro is passionate about her ministry and encourages parishioners with children to enroll their children in the appropriate program(s), come as a team, and assist with the classes. She and her group of dedicated volunteers serve the parish’s youth and families through 11 different programs that help families form their children in the faith (go to stdominics.org/ministries for more information). These programs continue the work of Jesus himself: to “go and make disciples of all nations… teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20).

“The Church needs you - St Dominic’s needs you.” These are the words Socorro uses in asking for your help with the Family Faith Formation and Youth Ministries. While there are 25+ valued parishioners on the team now, she feels the need to double that number in order to serve the needs of our ever-increasing youth community. The time commitment is approximately two hours on Sunday, and in return volunteers receive the joy of helping bring our faith to the youth of our parish.

Volunteers can also help with administrative duties, cleaning of the school, decoration, children’s safety, music, and/or sponsor an activity for the parents and/or children.

For those who don’t have time to spare, Socorro said they can still help by making a monetary donation to cover the costs of running these valuable programs.

**If you would like to support the parish’s mission and “Radiate the Joy of the Gospel in the Heart of the City” to our youth and families—or if you have questions, please contact Socorro at (415) 674-0466 or socorro@stdominics.org**