



Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels

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THE LAST WORD

- Home
- News
- Viewpoints
- Spirituality
- Liturgy
- Entertainment
- Calendar
- Sports

Friday, March 23, 2001

Jumping for Diego at St. John Eudes

By Brenda Rees

[text only version](#)

On a warm and sunny March 16 afternoon, 300 students at St. John Eudes School in Chatsworth skipped, jumped and leapt for one hour in honor of a little boy who sat happily watching the festivities from the confines of his wheelchair.

The students were raising money for the American Heart Association and donating it in honor of 8-year-old Diego Baza, who is battling both a heart defect and primary pulmonary hypertension. Baza attended St. John Eudes since kindergarten but, because of the progression of his disease and his weakened condition, is now back at home in hospice care.



Even though Baza isn't attending daily classes at St. John Eudes, "he is still very much a part of the school," said first-grade teacher Christina Carpenter, who taught Baza.

"Diego has had a good quality of life and part of that is being a part of St. John's. I never regret our decision to send him there." --Sandra DeLaRiva Baza, Diego's mom

"Students regularly send him cards and silly jokes which Diego really likes," she said. "Also, we wear yellow ribbons in his honor, to let him and his family know we are thinking about them. He is always included in our prayers at Mass, too."

Diagnosed when he was three months old, Diego has a rare disease that creates high blood pressure between his heart and lungs, and over time his lungs and heart are being damaged, said mom Sandra DeLaRiva Baza.

Since his disease is rapidly progressing, Baza's parents took him off the transplant list for both heart and lung. It was a tough decision, said Sandra, but after battling a debilitating infection this past winter and reaching a point where his medication wasn't helping him anymore, it seemed like the right thing to do.

"The medication kept him one step ahead of the disease; however, he maxed out on it. It wasn't effective anymore in buying him time," she said. Baza used to wear a backpack to school that concealed his shunt and IV, where his medication would be administered.

Baza began third grade at St. John Eudes last year but left around Christmas when he caught an infection that left him hospitalized and weakened. While there, students and faculty of St. John Eudes sent cards, gifts and visitors to keep up Baza and his family's spirits. "They are all treasures," said Sandra. "I am keeping them all."

Sandra and her husband Rick count their blessings these days. Back in

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News

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- [St. Joseph Center empowers individuals and families](#)
- ['Commitment to Life' weekend to be held Jan. 18-19](#)
- ['Early' deadline nears for Congress 2002](#)
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- [Children receive holiday blessings at Cardinal's party](#)

Past Issues

16
10
3
A pilgrim's journey

- [Cardinal meets with Buddhist leaders](#)
- [Regional News](#)

Viewpoints

- [Hope at Christmastime](#)
- [What kind of saints](#)
- [Truth-challenged](#)

Liturgy

- [We are called to wait and watch](#)
- [It is God who comes to us](#)

Spirituality

- [Where is Jesus being born in your presence?](#)
- [Haunting each others' dreams](#)

Sports

- [St. Bonaventure, Paraclete repeat as CIF grid champions](#)
- [Notre Dame hires O'Leary as coach](#)

Entertainment

- [Movie Reviews](#)
- [Christmas videos: What to watch with the family](#)

1997, a doctor told them that Diego would only live at best, four months. "I know it's been four years, two months since we were given that diagnosis," she said. "I count the days and I can't even believe that he is eight years old."

The doctor also strongly urged them to keep Diego at home, something both Sandra and Rick decided not to do. "We wanted him to go to school and experience life with other kids," said Sandra. They contacted Pious School Sister Rosemary Bochmiarz, the St. John Eudes principal, explained the situation and she agreed to allow Baza in the school.

In an interview with The Tidings two years ago, Sister Bochmiarz said, "It is an honor to have Diego here. We treat him like everyone else, even though we know each day we have with him is, in ways, a little miracle."

Sandra agrees that every day counts. "Diego has had a good quality of life and part of that is being a part of St. John's," she says. "They treated him so well and they still do. I never regret our decision to send him there."

When Sandra drives to pick up her other son, 6-year-old Jesse, from school, Diego comes with her to say hi and wave to his classmates.

"I am accepting and grateful for the time I have had -- and will have -- with Diego," said Sandra. "I know I am just a caretaker but I tell God, 'Please let me do the best job I can.' That's all any parent can ask, really."

Brenda Rees is a contributing writer to The Tidings.



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