

# Online evangelization a virtual twist for young NET Ministries missionaries

National Evangelization Teams (NET) missionaries are not barnstorming across the country to make face-to-face presentations as in years past.

But in a COVID-19 world, the mission to inspire young Catholics to embrace Christ and the Church remains the same, even though it is now carried out with a virtual twist.

“It is a common misconception to think that online ministry is not impactful. This simply isn’t true. The Lord can work through a screen too,” said Noah Runstedler, a second-year missionary with NET.

Although the bulk of NET Ministry’s evangelization since 1995 has consisted of delivering 5,000 in-person retreats, it has re-modelled its traditional set-up and grown to encompass an online ministry, feeding a youthful and virtual crowd.

Pierre O’Reilly, who had only been executive director of NET for five months before the pandemic hit, says that though the in-person option is preferable, the online alternative is solid.

“Online ministry has been a big surprise. An online presence means we can increase resources and accessibility for youth in churches and schools across Canada,” said O’Reilly, originally from Regina.

O’Reilly boasts 10 years of missionary experience at Catholic Christian Outreach, an evangelization organization present at Canadian universities. Drawing from his past involvement, he maintains that the ministry must forge forward.

“The short answer is that God wants us to continue even during a pandemic, so we keep on doing it,” said O’Reilly. “People are still booking us, we are still financially viable and missionaries are still applying. Although there is a pandemic, youth are still hungry for Christ.”

Though NET is more renowned for its retreat ministry, the organization also branches off into a discipleship sector, where a team of six to eight missionaries are stationed in a certain location across Canada for a year.

Runstedler is part of a discipleship team in Abbotsford, B.C. To gain the trust

and fellowship of St. John Brebeuf Catholic Secondary School students, the 20-year-old along with five other NET missionaries attend classes with the students and facilitate after-school youth groups for them.

“Although the cohort system in place at schools because of COVID means we can’t reach as many youth, it also brings blessings,” said Runstedler.

“It brings more of an intentionality and attention to a certain grade. Personally, we have seen the fruits of our mission. We have observed a change of culture for the better within the school.”

As a first-year missionary, 19-year-old Miriam Pereira has already been a part of a retreat squad in Calgary, a discipleship team in Whitehorse, Yukon, and just recently has become the female team leader of a discipleship ministry in Stoney Creek, Ont.

“The prayer time with youth is very transformative. Here, we plant the seed to deepen a relationship with Christ. During prayer time, we missionaries pray over the youth. Some youth said that they could even feel tingles throughout their body as we were praying with them,” said Pereira, who was born and bred in a NET family and discerned her calling as a missionary in Grade 12.

Pereira offers advice to Catholic youth struggling with the challenges of the day.

“It is hard to be in the world and not of the world at the same time. However, we have to keep in mind the ultimate goal which is God. We make time in life for things that are important. Make time to talk to God.”

*-Angelica Vecchiato is a writer for The Catholic Register which originally published this story.*