



Dear Potential Santiago Missionary Disciple,

Thank you for considering an application to the Missionary Disciple program at Santiago Retreat Center. Over the years, young adults have entered our gates in different capacities to deepen their relationship with Christ and minister to the youth of Orange County. It is my pleasure to introduce our newly formed Missionary Disciple program for young people to grow in faith, live in community, and engage the Catholic mission of evangelization set before us in the Gospels.

In our society of increasing misinformation, economic disparity, unmoderated use of technology, materialism and consumerism, along with decreasing attention to the importance of the family and the sanctity of all life, it is easy to feel overwhelmed or in darkness. As St. Pope John Paul II so aptly stated before the turn of the 21st century, we live in a “culture of death”. The Santiago Missionary Disciple program offers young people the opportunity to intentionally participate in a different culture - a life-giving, life-energizing culture centered on Christ at Santiago Retreat Center. You may even consider the Santiago Missionary Disciple program an extended retreat: 15 months of journeying along Santiago Retreat Center’s “Camino” toward Christ with other Catholic young adults.

What does the Santiago Missionary Disciple Program ask of you? We do ask a lot of our Missionary Disciples. Missionary Disciples serve Santiago Retreat Center in various ways - from preparing facilities for events to studying Holy Scripture to assisting in outreach to parishes and potential retreatants. They live in close community with one another, and are constantly seeking to meet the challenges of their faith through prayer, study and work. Missionary Disciples also self-fundraise, which Santiago Retreat Center supports through expert training and continued coaching. This life of the Santiago Missionary Disciples is no easy experience, although it is not an overwhelming one. And, of course, it is an experience punctuated by joy.

The program is founded upon three pillars: faith formation, intentional community, and joyful work. Everything that the missionaries perform is centered upon prayer and pointed toward the mission of evangelization. Prayer is the most important part of each day, and Santiago Missionary Disciples pray and worship in community for 2 hours or more each day. They join the global Church in morning and evening prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, come together each morning for daily Mass, and complete each day in conversation with our Blessed Mother through the Most Holy Rosary. Faith formation includes twice weekly studies of the Bible and theological texts that cover topics of Christian community and relationship, sacred tradition, prayer, family, decision-making, and discernment.

Not only do Missionary Disciple study together; they also live together, eat together, work together, and encounter joy together. One of the most special aspects of the Santiago Missionary Disciple Program is that they live together on Santiago Retreat Center's 500 acre facility in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains. Santiago Retreat Center offers the possibility to be *in creation* while living so close to the urban core of Orange County. We offer space for Santiago Missionary Disciples to grow closer with one another through weekly outings in the surrounding wilderness and cities.

Finally, the Missionary Disciples serve Santiago Retreat Center's mission of evangelization. In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us of our duty to evangelize: we are *all* missionary disciples. Evangelization comes through many forms, from leading retreats for youth and hosting young adult ministry to maintaining the facilities by servicing the pool or landscaping. As a "pre-discernment program", we do not expect our Missionary Disciples to leave here and enter the religious life. Instead, Santiago Retreat Center allows Missionary Disciples to grow as professionals, so that they may develop skills to succeed in future professional communities and serve as evangelists there. Depending on interest, Missionary Disciples will work alongside professionals in marketing, fundraising, networking, heavy machinery operation, landscaping, maintenance, and social media.

What if you're not interested in parts of the Missionary Disciple Program? As a Missionary Disciple, you will need to put aside temporarily your disinterest in certain parts of the program. The three pillars of the program - faith formation, intentional community, and joyful work - form a unity. Each aspect of the program situates Santiago Missionary Disciples in the heart of Santiago Retreat Center, nurturing their faith so they may best fulfill their life mission as evangelists. Focusing our relationship with Jesus Christ, learning to build holy relationships with others, and sharing the love of Christ with Orange County: as a union, the three pillars offer fertile ground for young Catholics to become courageous, focused, and experienced missionary disciples.

Our Santiago Missionary Disciple Program isn't the best choice for everyone. However, as pilgrims in the Faith we come from many different places and walks of life. As such, we bring our diverse thoughts, talents, and experiences to the Santiago Missionary Disciple table in this stop on our life-long "Caminos". If you are interested in becoming a Santiago Missionary Disciple, we welcome your application and look forward to connecting further.

In the Immaculata,
Mark McElrath
Executive Director, Santiago Retreat Center