

Aloha Holy Innocents Parish,

It's hard to believe that I would've been standing in the church, sharing what a year we had at the preschool and probably showing a slide show. Now, I am summing up our 2020-21 school year in a letter. In March 2020 the whole world was put on pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic and we were all literally flipped upside down.

We started off 2020 with such a bang. We were at full capacity at 34 students and with the funding from the North Beach West Maui Benefit Fund, we had weekly hula/Hawaiiana classes with Kumu Kathy Ralar and weekly ukulele/music classes with Maui Music Mission and Uncle Ruben. We also received a donation from the Sophie Deloria Foundation that allowed us to have monthly music time with Uncle Wayne Watkins.

We have always been big about field trips and opening our doors to our community. In September we had the Maui County Highways division bring in their big equipment, the "Opala" (Waste management) division brought in their garbage trucks, where everyone got a chance to see up close and even had a chance to sit in each rig. Maui Electric Company came down and talked about electrical safety and they even got to see their equipment, trucks and got to go in their "bucket". We went to the Fire department and the police department and spent a day learning all that they do for the community. On another day the Paramedics came down to the school to share their equipment and explain the importance of their job.

In the fall, we went to the Westin Nanea hotel to do Hawaiian cultural activities and to Maui Jim's to learn all about sunglasses. We were able to see the MFD "Big Show" where the fire department show off their equipment and teach fire prevention. We went to the park and to the Lahaina swimming pool and had our local shave ice man come down on many occasions so we all could have a shave ice treat.

We had our annual events such as Trick-o-Treating on Front street and Friendship soup for Thanksgiving. Santa came to visit and we had our Christmas Potluck.

In January we celebrated Chinese New Year and saw the lion dance at the Wharf Cinema Center. Lahaina Restoration Foundation gave us the honor of planting kalo at the rededication of the Lahaina Library King's taro patch. We also went to the Maui Ocean Center and on a whale watch with Trilogy. The last big event we had was for Valentine's day. We invited all our families to come down to the school to do crafts, play games and have a picnic lunch on the lawn. After spring break, we were planning to visit Kui'a farm and chocolate factory, learn about Ulu with Kui'a Farm, and take a trip to Punakea Palms to learn about coconuts.

As we stated before, in March, the world, our country, our state and our island closed down. We skidded to a stop and ended up closing for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. We pushed the reset button and had to restart with a "new-norm". We were given new guidelines from the Department of Health and had to rethink and change all that we knew. That meant we had to really alter our whole outlook of our program and make some drastic changes. Unfortunately, it was not easy and there were difficult decisions that had to be made. We had to reduce the number of children we can have from 34 to 24, have only 2 (completely separated) classes instead of 3 and raise our tuition. None of that was comfortable for us. We are the school that is known to be open to everyone and now has had to close our doors to friends and families. However, we were able to open back up in August for students only and even though we had to adjust things drastically, we feel that our program is strong and safe. We are keeping to our "ohana bubbles", cleaning and sanitizing everything all the time, wearing masks, washing hands and have strict health and travel policies. We all are looking forward to the day we are able to go back to how we had it before, but for now our number one priority is the health and safety of our HIPS ohana and keiki. None of this has been easy but our kids are thriving so the staff is happy.

Throughout all the struggles, our teachers have been rock stars. We still have Ms. Katie as our lead teacher and Ms. Julia is helping the teachers and doing an amazing job keeping the school clean and sanitized. We have a new teacher. Her name is Ihilani Marchello (Ms. Ihi) and she was student at our school in 1996! She is a great addition to our HIPS ohana.

I leave you with a story...one day I was walking from Kam III elementary and a surf instructor (he was in his late 20's) was walking in back of me and noticed my school shirt. He said, "Holy Innocents Preschool... I went there when I was little. Hey, do you still get to ring the bell for your birthday?" I replied "Yes!! That is something that we have always done and continue to do" (Mind you, I have been working here for over 17 years). He smiled and said, "If I ever have kids, this is where they would go to school!"

Holy Innocents Preschool has been a part of this Lahaina community for almost 50 years and I want to personally thank everyone for all their love and support for the preschool and know that we want to keep our birthday bell ringing for another 50 more!!

Sincerely,

Ms. Cynthia