



St. Mary celebrated multiple First Communion and Confirmation Masses this fall to provide sacraments to those who were unable to receive them during the shutdown. Fr. Don Cambe poses here with First Communicant Samantha Truesdale.

## TEEN MAKES VIRTUAL REP FUN

By Kirsten Bobber

Connecting with students virtually isn't easy, especially when it comes to talking about faith. However, St. Mary catechist Lexi Kasamis found creative and meaningful ways to engage her second-grade students in online learning. Kasamis had just completed e-learning during her freshman spring semester at Loyola University where she is studying to become a teacher, when St. Mary began planning its virtual summer program.

Kasamis has been a St. Mary catechist for four years and was a past participant in the St. Mary REP program K-8 as a youth. She helped her mother Claire with Children's Liturgy from her earliest days and credits both that experience and Debbie Chin for being her role model and inspiration.

To prepare for teaching REP virtually, Kasamis said, "I did a lot of research

and talked to my spiritual and education mentors. I went through my past lesson plans and found ways to adapt them to an online platform to keep students engaged." The class held costume days, danced around their rooms, and prayed for each other.

Kasamis said, "I made sure to welcome each student as they entered the virtual class. We would sing a new song every morning to energize our body and center our hearts." She added, "I hope my students found friends and community in each other and in Jesus. Above all, I wanted my students to take away a sense of community with their peers in the church."

Since the COVID-19 shutdown, St. Mary REP has touched the lives of approximately 450 children: 200 in summer religious education classes, 150 enrolled this fall, and more than 100 in Vacation Bible School. St. Mary chose virtual as the best delivery method for REP classes in order to



Lexi Kasamis taught religious education virtually this summer.

reduce health risks due to the large number of students typically enrolled. The classes meet twice a month for 45 minutes on Google Classroom rather than the two-hour block offered in person in prior years.

Sue Matousek, Director of Religious Education, was pleased that all of the catechists were willing to return this year and adapt their teaching methods to the digital realm. She said, "The content of the virtual lessons is more about building a faith community, making faith enjoyable, and connecting with the Lord. If we can help children and families do that during this time of pandemic, we will have done our best."

### ST. MARY OF THE ANNUNCIATION

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