



## NET RETREATS GO **VIRTUAL**

This past summer, NET began developing a plan to reach out to young people isolated due to the realities of the pandemic, and NET's Virtual Retreats were born. We took what we know best, relational ministry, and distilled it into a 2-3 hour online retreat.

It was clear from the beginning that what would set apart NET's virtual ministry is what has always set apart our ministry: our missionaries' ability to form relationships with the youth to whom they minister. We knew it was important to keep our retreats as live events so that NET Missionaries could still run live small groups via videoconferencing. Still, we also saw the opportunity to use the digital platform to our advantage. Working with NET alum Cameron O'Hearn and his company, Sacred Stories, four dramas were recreated in a video format, making them more engaging than ever. Meanwhile, Likeable Art produced four animated videos to serve as retreat talks, and three NET alumni testimonies were filmed in-house. Continued on page 4.

**Pictured:** Team 1 missionaries Collin Towns and Rachel Dolby lead a virtual retreat

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# A WORD FROM OUR FOUNDER

## DEAR FRIENDS,

Wow! What a crazy and challenging year! What a great first half the NET teams had, even with the craziness and challenges. The NET teams conducted 290 retreats. That's right. The NET teams conducted almost 300 retreats this fall.

While many parishes had discontinued their youth programs and many churches closed to in-person Sunday mass, the NET teams were out there sharing the hope and love of Jesus Christ. I am sure you have all heard on the news the dramatic increase of depression, anxiety, and loneliness in young people. Cut off from friends, school, and church, they are struggling. Has there ever been a more important time in our lifetimes to actively reach out to our young people with the message of Christ? I am so proud of the selflessness our missionaries have shown. It has not been a normal year. Ministry schedules are constantly changing, and COVID infection rates go up and down. Sometimes we don't know until the last minute where a team is lodging that night or who might serve them a meal. They don't complain. They continue to love one another and reach out in love to those they encounter with hope.

I am equally grateful for the many host families around the country who have taken in the NET missionaries. Thank you to the many families and individuals who have provided meals and gift cards for the teams. We could not serve so many young people without your tremendous support. We are very, very grateful.



In this newsletter, we are featuring some of our digital ministry. I have heard a lot of adults complain about “Zoom fatigue.” So many of us who are accustomed to going to work and restaurants and recreational events are eager to return to those activities. We are tired of being online. So when we hear about virtual retreats, we think they will never work. People are tired of Zoom! That is probably true of those of us over 40, but it is not true of our young people. They, more than any generation, live in a digital world. We have to find new and creative ways to meet them where they are and bring them to a better place. I will admit, we were not sure if virtual retreats would work, but we knew we needed to try. To our pleasant amazement, parishes have embraced the concept because they realize we can’t quarantine faith.

Be encouraged! Our missionaries are continuing their important work. Whether in-person live or on a computer live, they are reaching out to our teenage young people, sharing our faith, inviting them to entrust themselves to Christ, and praying personally with each and every young person. With your support and prayers, we will “stay with this task, whether convenient or inconvenient... putting up with hardship, performing our work as an evangelist, and fulfilling our ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:2,5)

**THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT,**

*Mark Berchem*

MARK BERCHEM, M.S.W., M.T.S.  
Founder and President  
NET Ministries



## VIRTUAL RETREATS (CONT.)

Each virtual retreat includes elements from the library of new digital content, with the rest of the retreat led live by the NET team. Even virtually, retreats still include live testimonies, games, small groups, music, and guided prayer time.

At first, concerns were raised about how effective relational ministry could be through an online platform. As teams began conducting virtual retreats, however, these concerns were quickly put to rest. One young person shared, “[The virtual retreat] made me realize that even in troubled times, we can still find a way to create a great faith experience; it just takes a little more work.” Another virtual retreatant said, “This retreat impacted me because it taught me that if I put my life in the hands of God, I will be in peace. The retreat gave me peace. The small groups made me feel secure, and I learned that I wasn’t the only one doubting my faith at a young age, even though I grew up in a very Catholic family. I don’t know yet, but I feel like I have a calling to join NET Ministries.”

Young people haven’t been the only ones impacted, however. One retreat contact person shared with us, “[The team] emoted so well even through a virtual platform. The youth were completely engaged and had such positive feedback about the retreat. It is evident that the team is bonded, and that transmits virtually through how well they work together. The production of the videos is excellent and impactful.” He then went on to schedule three more virtual retreats!

Initially, Team 5, the Los Angeles regional team, and Team 1, the Home Team, were trained to conduct virtual retreats, and combined the two teams reached 3,129 young people through 90 virtual retreats in the first half of the ministry year. Entering into the spring, another two teams have been trained to conduct retreats virtually, and as of January, over 100 virtual retreats had been booked for the spring.

To learn more about this exciting new form of ministry within NET or schedule a virtual retreat, head to [netusa.org/virtualretreats](https://netusa.org/virtualretreats).





## VIRTUAL PETRUS

This past November saw the rebirth of another of NET's ministries in a virtual format: Virtual Petrus. Petrus in its original form was an event where youth workers in Southern California could bring their young people to experience the love of God. The challenges of gathering in the present time, however, have not stopped the need to proclaim God's love, and so Petrus was reformatted for the virtual landscape.

Since 2016, Petrus has been run in conjunction with the Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles, and NET's partnership with the Sisters has continued through the virtual event. Virtual Petrus includes live music, a guest speaker, testimonies from NET missionaries, and an invitation to follow Christ. The first Virtual Petrus on November 14 featured a presentation by speaker DJ Bernal on "Experiencing Truth and Love in Prayer."

With the new online format, Petrus became more widely available, and youth ministers from across the country were able to use the event to facilitate an encounter with God for their young people. Additional resources were available for those watching the event with a group, including a small group leader guide and a reflection sheet for young people to use during the time of prayer. The event premiered on NET's website at 7 PM CST/5 PM PT, and was available to stream afterwards for groups who wanted to watch at a later time. Now, a few months later, around 1,000 people have viewed the event, whether by watching the premiere live or by streaming it later on.

The second Virtual Petrus, featuring NET alumna Chika Anyanwu, will premiere at [netusa.org/virtualpetrus](https://netusa.org/virtualpetrus) on Saturday, March 20.

**Pictured Left:** Team 1 missionaries Justin Rohr (left) and Raul Salazar (right) conduct a virtual retreat small group  
**Pictured Above:** Chika Anyanwu speaking at an in-person Petrus event in December 2018



# YDISCIPLINE

## THE FIRST **TWO YEARS**

While 2020 caused contraction in much of our world, it was the impetus for growth in YDisciple. Since YDisciple is an online platform, parishes were able to use this nimble program to move their ministry from in-person to online and back. And because YDisciple is only \$325 for an entire parish to subscribe for a year, parishes whose budgets were hard-hit were still able to offer their young people solid content. All told, YDisciple's impact tripled in less than a year.

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Since NET acquired YDisciple in January 2019 we have invested a great deal of time, energy, and resources into renewing the YDisciple product and brand. In this time we have accomplished the following:

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- Produced 3 new video series for teens.
- Created nearly 6 hours of training video content for adults.
- Launched the first non-video Bible study series on Confirmation.
- Professionally rebranded YDisciple with a new logo, color scheme, and style guide.
- Built and launched a new website including a subscription-based streaming platform.
- YDisciple.com surpassed the highest number of YDisciple subscribers the Augustine Institute attained when YD was a standalone program
- Reached over 3 million minutes of YDisciple streamed on FORMED.org

In the Spring of 2021 we will be releasing a brand new, 7-part video series on Prayer, inspired by the same training that the NET Missionaries receive. This series is hosted by NET alumna Ali Hoffman and NET Retreat Coordinator, Dan Driver. We will follow this with another series on living a moral life that will be released in time for the 2021-2022 school year.

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## INTRODUCING **ANDREA PATCH**



We are excited to announce that we have hired Andrea Patch as our new Eastern Regional Director!

Andrea comes to NET having spent the last 4 years as the Managing Director of Catechesis and Evangelization for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Andrea has mentored over 45 Catholic School Principals in Cincinnati in those 4 years. She also brings experience in ministry training from leading Totus Tuus initiatives in Cincinnati and surrounding dioceses.

Andrea has a Master's Degree in Pastoral Theology from the Augustine Institute. Andrea and her husband Jonathan have 3 children. She is originally from Iowa but has lived in Cincinnati for the last 7 years.

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