

Response to Covid-19: Loyola starts a help desk to reach out

Loyola College continues to reach students even during the Covid-19 lockdown period. Rev. Dr. Thomas Amirtham, S.J., Principal has recently set up a help desk operated from 9.30 am to 7.30 pm to address the emergency needs of staff and students of the college. Some of the regular medical needs of the staff and their parents, food sustenance for the students who are held up and counseling as a sign of wellness accompaniment during the lockdown period are the main objectives of the initiative. Linking with the concerned state government officials is another important step the college is venturing into.

All these are the result of its outreach programme the college is known for. Just like reaching out the neighbourhood communities incorporated in the regular curriculum, its relief works in a large scale during Chennai deluge 2015, Kerala Floods and Gaja Cyclone, it got involved in yeoman service rendered in three major areas during lockdown period also. Department of Social Work has collaborated with the Greater Chennai Corporation in setting up a world class online Counseling Centre on the premises of the corporation to provide a large number of people experiencing stress and mental turmoil due to the effect of lockdown with psycho-social support. Ever since its inception, the team of well trained counselors comprising medical doctors, corporation engineers, professional social workers and staff and student volunteers has attended thousands of calls and made an impact on the mental health of those callers.

Wellness accompaniment as feel good factor has been concretized in mobile contact to express the solidarity of the management and make sure that each one belongs to Loyola family. It has brought enormous comfort and wellness to thousands of students and five hundred staff who are kept in uncertainty relating to academic program, family burden and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic.

Thousands of migrant workers are held up in various places in Chennai, Kanchipuram and Thiruvalluvar districts without a permanent place to stay, a family card to avail state government support and daily sustenance. Loyola College with the financial and logistic support of well-wishers and alumni and in collaboration with agencies like World Vision reached out at least 2000 migrant families, gypsies and widows in slum areas with the much required provisions good enough for 20 days initially ensuring the social distance norms of the government not being violated. The contribution of Loyola alumni association made a substantial impact as the members along with their financial support made their presence literally felt with their logistics support. The service would continue to help them have a sense of hope and resilience to fight the virus.

At the outbreak of coronavirus, Entomology Research Institute (ERI) and Department of Chemistry have jointly formulated 17 alcohol-based herbal combinations and investigated their effectiveness for application of hand sanitizer, mouth wash and floor spray. After being tested against virus, two of them show very good activities at 80% and 100% concentrations which could be used as sanitizers. The college has further requested the Health Secretary of Tamil Nadu Government to give permission for evaluating the effective formulations against coronavirus at King Institute, Guindy, Chennai. ERI would continue its antiviral study on the stability of products, toxicity analysis, and manufacture of the effective formulation for the long term use.

Meanwhile, the college could not afford to neglect the academic responsibilities. Just like many other educational institutions, Loyola too switched over to on line mode of teaching and learning. Loyola Learning Management System (LLMS) created already in the college web portal has been exhaustively explored to create classes, share class notes, conduct assessment of student's progress through MCQs and other descriptive answers, and post question bank. Besides, the academic restructuring initiated during the academic year and Board of studies to finalize the syllabus continued with comprehensive discussion among officials, Heads of the Departments using video conferencing facilities. Most of the teachers have realized their dual role as teachers and learners as they have enrolled themselves to various online programs.

As a premier institution, the college has judiciously combined the knowledge generation & dissemination, socially relevant research and catering to the pressing needs of affected sections of the humanity. The institution continues to concretize the fundamental objective of higher education even at the face of the pandemic the world is experiencing.