

A Fire that Spreads (Part 2)

Pope Francis, in an interview with *La Stampa* in July 2015 said “Charity that does not change the situation of the poor isn’t enough.” The fire of charity has to warm the cold, the naked, the homeless, the lonely... The fire has to burn and it has to spread.

09/03/2025

Jerusalem. Rome. Madrid. Chicago. Nairobi. We follow the trail of the fire that spread from Christ Himself,

to His Apostles, to their descendants around the world, to St. Josemaria to his spiritual children in Opus Dei around the world, to Chicago and now to Nairobi. The fire continues to spread.

St. Josemaria, for example, would say that: *"A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart. While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind.*

Otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man." (Christ is Passing By, 167)

In tracing this fire, we caught up with two of those who have rolled up their sleeves and gotten their hands

cheerfully dirty in keeping this fire blazing.

Michael is one of those who has been working at *Macheo* for more than 10 years now. He was pleased to hear that other learning institutions are on their own initiative beginning programmes like *Macheo*. But for him, the success stories in *Macheo*, the growth and transformation of the students and of the volunteers who committedly chip in, ring much deeper.

In his conversations with many of these *Macheo* students, he has come to learn that there are two slums: the one the students live in and the one that lives within the students. He now understands that his work deals with this latter and that is why character development and education are key in *Macheo*.

He shared with us examples of students from very rough

backgrounds who embraced what *Macheo* had to offer, managed to break with many of their bad influences, pass their high school national examinations, join Strathmore University or other tertiary institutions and are now working not just at a paying job, but also to motivate their siblings and friends. Indeed, he adds, not every case is a success story. Each individual remains radically free how they wish to live their lives. But those who do grow and transform positively make the entire exercise completely worthwhile.

Macheo relies not just on trained teachers and lecturers, but also on current university students who volunteer to tutor and mentor the *Macheo* high-schoolers. Among these university volunteers, Michael has witnessed an awakening of their sense of awareness that they have a responsibility and a role to play in

making society better. That as youth as young as 20, 21 or 22 years, there is something they have that is valuable, and if they manage to channel it in the right way, then other people can benefit from their insights and knowledge.

In its 13 years, *Macheo* has won a couple of global awards. Michael is clear, however, that the real awards are the individual lives that have been set ablaze and are spreading the fire in their own way, in their own language, in their own place. The key thing for him is consistency.

Consistency in putting in the work, consistency in showing up, in encouraging the students, in focusing on the ones who are there not the ones who are not there. The consistency builds into something great because some of these young people have no experience of what it means to have someone show up

consistently for you, see you for who you are, and be dedicated to your path of growth.

(From the 1st to the 3rd of October, individuals from around the world like Michael, involved in such projects as Macheo will be sharing insights, ideas and experiences at the BeDoCare Conference to be held in Strathmore University. You can learn more about the Conference and register your attendance [here](#).)

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