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From Compassion to Action

In 1987, Blessed Álvaro del Portillo witnessed stark inequality in Cebu, Philippines, and responded with a vision that would transform generations. This is the story of CITE Technical Institute.

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“In a world where the poor are increasingly numerous, we paradoxically see the growth of a wealthy elite, living in a bubble of comfort and luxury, almost in another

world compared to ordinary people... a culture persists that discards others without even realizing it.” (Pope Leo XIV, Dilexi Te, 11)

Reading these words from Pope Leo XIV’s Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te*, I am reminded of the quiet but enduring legacy of Blessed Álvaro del Portillo during his visit to the Philippines in 1987.

While traveling along a road in Mactan, Cebu, a coastal city in the central Philippines, Blessed Álvaro observed a landscape of contrasts: fragile homes of poor families lining the roadside, overshadowed by palatial houses on nearby hills. Struck by this stark inequality, he turned to his companions and simply said that something had to be done for the poor.

Inspired by the wisdom of the proverb, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to

fish, and you feed him for a lifetime,” he proposed establishing a technical school for youth from disadvantaged families, to equip them with skills to secure dignified work in Cebu and beyond.

True to his word, upon returning to Rome, Blessed Álvaro personally mobilized support. He sent consultants from Centro ELIS, a well-known technical training center on the outskirts of Rome, to help lay the foundations of what would become a life-changing project.

In 1991, the Center for Industrial Technology and Enterprise (CITE) opened in Talamban, a district of Cebu City. With assistance from Centro ELIS, CITE developed a solid training curriculum and built laboratories that combined theoretical instruction with hands-on experience, preparing students for real-world employment.

CITE was not built on good intentions alone. Substantial resources were needed to construct buildings, acquire machinery, and provide scholarships. This challenge was met through the generosity of local businessmen, government officials, and families who believed in the school's mission.

To ensure sustainability, partnerships were forged with local industries that offered apprenticeships and employment to graduates. These collaborations continue today, quietly building bridges between those with opportunities and those most in need of them.

From the beginning, CITE opened its doors to students with physical challenges. One of the first enrollees was a young man with deformed fingers on his left hand. During the entrance assessment, he

demonstrated his ability to work by using a simple rubber band to grip tools. He excelled academically and became part of CITE's pioneering class of graduates.

Over the years, many similar stories have emerged: graduates who secured stable livelihoods for their families, and others who found opportunities to work abroad.

At CITE, formation goes beyond technical skills. Students — and even their parents — receive guidance in family life, virtues, and Catholic doctrine. At the heart of the campus stands a beautiful chapel where students can pause, pray, and reflect. During a visit in 1992, former President Corazon Aquino spent a few moments of silent prayer in this chapel, finding solace there.

The impact of CITE often extends well beyond graduation. For some, it has become a place of vocational

discernment. At least eight CITE graduates have gone on to become diocesan priests in Cebu City, the most recent ordained in 2025.

Others, moved by gratitude, have returned to teach, choosing to pass on what they themselves once received.

Nearly four decades have passed since Blessed Álvaro traveled that road in Mactan and felt compelled to “do something” for the poor of Cebu. His response brings to mind the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá:

“Among those around you—apostolic soul—you are the stone fallen into the lake. With your word and your example you produce a first circle... and then another... and another... wider each time. Now do you understand the greatness of your mission?” (*The Way*, no. 381)

At CITE, that circle of solidarity continues to widen. Inspired by Pope

Leo XIV and Blessed Álvaro, may we too find the courage to not only see the needs around us, but to do something for those who need it most.

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