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Charity Without Frontiers

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“I helped the children with their homework. I spent time getting to know them. I got to know Faith, Grace, Endurance, Temitope and a

whole lot whom I saw to be good children. I learnt that it is good to spend time with others and give back to society in the little ways we can. I also learnt that we should be very grateful to our parents as we too could have been any of the children there. I presented them with the Samsung I won at the Whitesands School Family Day raffle draw ...”

Thus wrote Nnamdi, 14 years old, after visiting a home for abandoned children.

Whitesands School, now in its sixteenth year strives to support parents in the all-round and Christian education of their children. Instilling in the boys a love for virtues, with the attendant desire to practice them in daily lives, is one defining objective of the school. The various activities and formative programmes of the school drive home this goal. Although only about forty percent of the students come

from Catholic families, all are very receptive to, and in fact, grateful for the formation imparted in the school which is a personal work of Opus Dei. A few boys have, with the support of their parents, converted to the Catholic faith, and all leave the school, after six years with some degree of Catholic “mentality”.

Over the years, Whitesands has undertaken to engage the boys in some work of charity on a yearly basis. The students usually organise themselves to contribute to a pool of basic domestic goods and money which they afterwards donate to a charity home, usually an orphanage. They accompany this gesture with some work such as cleaning, painting, weeding, tree planting, etc. A few schools in very poor communities have also benefited from this charity work. Whitesands students generally come from the upper-middle economic class of the

Nigerian society, and so many of them are really not in direct contact with the pervasive abject poverty in the land. Although most students donate money and contribute items, only few of the nearly six hundred students of the school have been able to participate in the concrete corporal works of mercy that put them in contact with the beneficiaries. How to get each and every one of our students to regularly participate in charity work became our challenge.

With the Year of Mercy, a solution suddenly popped up. Why not get the families to take up the gauntlet! If each family can organise one charity work every term, hundreds, if not thousands of needy persons will be reached and supported. And what is more, practically all our students will have an opportunity to carry out works of mercy on a continuous basis. This idea was immediately put

into action. The school informed the students about it and sent out mails to parents. Our students, alone, or teaming up with their friends, are to do charity visits with the support of their families. During such visits, they are encouraged to spend time with the needy and render some service, especially manual work. We also suggested that parents and the rest of the family try and participate as well. When a student has done a visit, he submits a completed charity form to the school. Among other data, he makes note of how his work of charity affected him and the lessons he learnt from it.

This family-organised charity work only began last term, i.e. four months ago. We are quite surprised and very impressed with the interest and support it has received from the students and their parents. Perhaps enthusiasm is an appropriate word to describe this response. From the

completed forms submitted at the end of the Easter holiday, more than half of the students (in many cases, along with some members of their families) visited over forty homes across Lagos. These include hospitals, hospices, orphanages, schools for the blind, homes for abandoned children and child correction centres. They went with lots of gifts and rendered various services, ranging from manual work, entertaining and teaching the children, to simply spending time with them. Some students undertook to do much more than was required, making several visits to a particular home or visiting several homes during the holiday. Eustace and Kachi, two students who are very good at Mathematics, visited an orphanage daily for one week. Eustace's report reads in part: *My friend and I made a five-day visit, for two hours daily, to teach about 15 Primary 3 and 4 children Maths. The*

children were some of the most cheerful and welcoming bunch I've ever met. We became friends immediately on the first day. ... on the last day, they had a small test and celebration afterwards. We gave prizes to five students under different categories... Although our major objective was to help these children understand Maths better, the time we spent with them was also important. I came to realise this as the children seemed to care not so much about Maths but stayed for the lessons because of the attention that was being given to them. I learned a lot about how privileged I was to grow up in a home and how important it is that we who have this privilege should show support to those who do not.

For Ebube, who visited a hospice that houses children with severe deformities, the experience was life-

changing. He reports: *Among the children I met there, was two-month old Prince who was born without a tongue and without his left hand and abandoned by his mother. Prince is an adorable little boy. When I touched him on his belly, he smiled at me... As we departed the children's ward, a little girl, about the age of seven, walked up to me and told me to kneel. As I knelt she said a short prayer for me, "God will protect you and bless you because you brought things for us and came to see us. In Jesus name. Amen". She then told me to pray for her and I did... It was a real life changing and eye-opening experience for me and my friend... I began to think about this positively by thinking about all the favours God has given me as I have a tongue, my two hands and I live with my mother and father.*

Some parents who participated also went home happy and determined to foster charity and mercy in their

homes. We believe that this project will doubtless strengthen our boys and their families in virtues, especially those of mercy, empathy, gratitude... in a word, CHARITY! We thank the Pope for proclaiming the Year of Mercy, which has brought about the impetus to add this lofty activity to our school programme. Laus Deo!

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