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Friendship without Walls

Zariba Young Professionals held an outreach programme for inmates of a correctional centre in Abuja, Nigeria. We were armed with an empty purse, some good humour and reliance on divine providence to reach our fundraising goal... The fruits were abundant!

30/04/2021

Each month, a small team drawn from members of Zariba's Young Professionals Club (YPC) deliver on

an activity or project for the benefit of all. The activities are meant to develop us personally alongside the spiritual formation facilitated by faithful of Opus Dei at Zariba Centre, Abuja, Nigeria.

Zariba, which is a project of the Nigerian Association for Women's Advancement (NAWA) offers all-round education through skills acquisition, instilling of moral values and spiritual well-being.

As young professionals making daily effort to live our Christian vocation, we emerged from the pandemic lockdown determined to stay connected and more involved in reaching out either physically or virtually to one another and everyone that crosses our path.

“You never can tell the extent of loneliness people experience even after the lockdown except you reach out to them,” said one of the young

professionals, who also added, “can we plan an outreach to those in prison as our Lenten charity project?”

Chisom, Maryann and I were put in charge of YPC activities for the month of March. Until then, we had not yet selected a project. So we went ahead and discussed the modalities and inquired from the prison chaplain Fr. Victor Nyoroh about the needs of the inmates before we started fundraising. The chaplain informed us that the inmates had been isolated for several months from family, loved ones and charity groups in compliance with the pandemic guidelines.

We committed the fundraising and the whole project to God and set out to sensitise the larger group on the project. At first, the contributions/donations trickled in but we were not deterred as we joyfully

acknowledged every contribution, adding funny and thankful emoji images.

Christian/Fraternal friendship, no one is excluded

A young professional Nneka volunteered to design an online flyer and in no time, the “hype” spread to other groups. Contributions then started coming in quite rapidly! It got to a point where we woke up each morning to see additional contributions made late at night or the early hours of the morning.

It became more than a YPC project. The bridge of friendship had extended to the Zariba ladies’ group (older ladies), family members and friends who generously supported the project.

We received friendly calls of encouragement and narrations of

how the project was touching their lives.

Overwhelmed with the growing support, Ugo said over the phone, “I realise now that God is closer to us than I thought. I know God is present but now I know He is very close to us, close to me.”

The older ladies were also inspired to reach out to the inmates and were glad they could contribute. Many others from other groups sent in their contributions too. Queen, who had no money volunteered her time. The bond of friendship kept expanding, everybody wanted to be a part of this. A lady called to thank us for reminding her there were people confined in prison during the pandemic and donated generously.

The prison chaplain extended the gratitude of the inmates especially those whose prison release fines we were able to pay for.

An excerpt from the foreword of one of Fr. Nyoroh's book brought to mind the teaching of St Josemaría Escrivá on our encounter with God in the ordinary things of our everyday lives: The title of Fr. Nyoroh's book, *Turning Duties into Temple*, is a thrilling metaphor that suggests that our workplace, our homes, and our jobs are the sanctuaries where we can encounter God.

The charity outreach renewed friendships, and the team spirit sustained the energy required to attain our fundraising target which we eventually exceeded.

It was very heart-warming to see these young and not-so-young ladies reaching out to others who are worse off than themselves in spite of the social isolation and economic hardship. Next time, we will visit another correctional centre closer to the city centre. The project helped us

cement friendships and build bridges
of friendship.

Elohor

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