

## **"They need someone willing to sit beside them"**

Jennifer, Francine, and Princess talk about their experience visiting the Philippine National School for the Blind in Pasay City. They went with a group of 40 women from Linang Center and Punlaan School (Manila, Philippines).

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In an encounter with families at the MOA Arena in Pasay City, Philippines

in July, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, reminded them of St. Josemaría's advice for people trying to grow in generosity: "To be happy, what you need is not a comfortable life but a heart which is in love" (*Furrow*, no. 795).

Jennifer (seen above) had just asked him how to care for people in need. She told the Prelate about her recent visit to Philippine National School for the Blind (PNSB) in Pasay City with 40 friends, teachers, staff and youth contacts of the Linang Center and Punlaan School. Linang is a center of Opus Dei in Quezon City, and Punlaan School is a vocational-technical institution in San Juan inspired by St. Josemaría's teaching.

The PNSB is a publicly funded educational facility for youngsters of school age with vision impairment. The students live in dormitories on campus.

Jennifer and her co-volunteers brought basic needs: toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soap, and sacks of rice for the students staying in the school dormitory. But they found that the children were more grateful for their company than the gifts.

One student said that they appreciated the visit because they rarely interacted with people outside the school. It felt good to have someone personally interested in them, listening to their life stories, and asking about their hobbies, talents and future plans.

"Excitement could be seen in their eyes while telling their stories, about how they face, encounter and conquer situations they are living at a young age," Francine, one of the volunteers, recalled. "They need someone who can make them feel special without making them feel like they are different."

The students liked hearing the volunteers describe the look and feel of the outside world. "They need someone willing to sit beside them and spend time listening to their stories and telling them about people who have succeeded in life despite having disabilities," Francine said.

Princess Geraldine, another volunteer, recalls a conversation with one of the students. Princess asked her, "What is your dream?" and the girl responded, "I want to be a teacher. Even if I am blind, I want to tell whoever my students will be that blindness or any other handicap is not an obstacle to achieve one's dreams. One must just trust in one's capabilities."

"I was touched," Princess said. "These students with impaired vision have such a capacity of envisioning their future and the drive to pursue it!"

The volunteers experienced firsthand the truth of what the Prelate of Opus Dei told Jennifer at the MOA Arena: loving and serving others leads to joy.

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Corazon Salvador, the principal of PNSB, said that the school would benefit from more supplies, equipment and facilities, including a braille printer, paper and food for the students. For contact information and more details about the PNSB, visit their website.

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