

Tondo Social Outreach: "Everyone can help"

Young professionals, teachers, students, and families in the Philippines responded generously to Pope Francis' message for the Second World Day of the Poor.

12/29/2018

Anyone can reach out to those living on the outermost fringes of society and perform the corporal works of mercy.

In response to Pope Francis' message for the Second World Day of the Poor and to the Catholic Bishops' Conference (CBCP) of the Philippines' celebration of the Year of the Youth, young professionals, teachers, students, and families held a social outreach activity in the district of Tondo (Manila) on November 18.

Moving encounters

“I realized that despite the hardships that these people encounter daily, they still have the heart to help others. This made me think, ‘We have much more than what they have. What can I do for others? How can I help?’” said outreach volunteer Keziah Duag, a human resources practitioner.

She narrated her encounter with a 62-year old male beneficiary, his 80-year old mother, and their “neighbor-in-need.” Duag discovered that the man retired from his work

as a cruise-ship chef and returned home to take care of his mother and to serve in their community and parish.

“The man misses his travels and luxuries, but these were nothing compared to what he could do to help his family and community,” Duag said.

The lady neighbor he brought for medical and psychiatric consultation had been physically and emotionally abused by the people she was living with. That day was a rare opportunity when she talked to a doctor about her ailments.

Dubbed the “Pakikipagkapwa – 2nd World Day of the Poor Tondo Outreach Initiative: A Grace-filled Opportunity,” the project gathered more than 200 volunteers, with two medical and dental teams composed of 80 doctors and medical students and 30 dentists and dental students,

to provide services to 2,000 family beneficiaries.

Family members also participated in catechism classes, story-telling for kids, “boy-girl relationship” talks for teens, and health and oral hygiene instructions for parents, while waiting their turn to receive medical and dental attention.

Initiative of laity

The Tondo Outreach Initiative is spearheaded by Family Cooperation Health Services Foundation, Inc. (FAMCOHSEF), a non-profit organization founded in 1991 by professionals from various backgrounds and expertise in response to a challenge posed to them by Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who at the time was the Prelate of Opus Dei: “What are you doing for the poor?”

Pope Francis established the World Day of the Poor through his apostolic letter, “*Misericordia et Misera*,” issued Nov. 20, 2016, at the closing of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. It has been observed since 2017 on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time.

The theme for this year’s World Day of the Poor is “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him” (Ps 34:6).

In his message the Holy Father told the faithful that these words of the Psalmist should “become our own whenever we are called to encounter the different conditions of suffering and marginalization experienced by so many of our brothers and sisters whom we are accustomed to label generically as ‘the poor.’”

Father Mickey Cardenas

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