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Greatest Gift To The Poor

Dr. Bernardo Villegas talks about faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei involved in education and skills training projects for the less privileged in society.

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MANILA, Philippines --- Faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei also work closely with other NGOs and public institutions in implementing anti-poverty projects among the poorest of the poor.

The Aeta Cooperation Project (ACP) is a case in point. Iraya Study Center, a corporate undertaking of the women of the Prelature, includes, among other activities, a long-term development plan for an Aeta community in Pampanga that was displaced twenty years ago when Pinatubo volcano erupted. As reported by MCS Pasion in Mabuhay (May 10, 2012) a seminar on organic vegetable gardening was conducted on August 21, 2011 for the teachers of the Villa Maria Integrated School (VMIS) in Porac, Pampanga and barangay leaders.

The project, crafted with inputs from all four stakeholders (the government, the local school, community members and local volunteers), aimed to train high school Aeta students in organic farming. The project is an incentive-based intervention that will not only encourage students to complete their

formal education but also improve their family incomes as well as their health and nutrition.

The training was conducted by experts from the Department of Agriculture through the Agriculture Training Institute on community-extension work and organic-based vegetable gardening to equip the volunteers with the knowledge and skills necessary in their role as community and agricultural extension workers. The grounds within VMIS were used as a model garden for this purpose.

More numerous and varied, however, are personal initiatives of the members and Cooperators of Opus Dei in addressing the problem of poverty. An example is Agnes Dayao, a retiree and widow. She was inspired with what St. Josemaria wrote in his best-seller, *The Way*: "Dream and your dreams will fall

short." Agnes dreamt of being able to help the urban poor.

As MCS Pasion reported in the Manila Bulletin (September 7, 2011), Agnes launched the Kabataan Public High School Girls' Club, together with Nanette Corcuera, another retired professional from Las Piñas City and other volunteer friends. They wanted to improve the quality of education in public schools around their neighborhood. Their pilot schools were Verdant, Golden Arches, Equitable Talon and East Talon all located in Las Piñas.

As Ms. Pasion reported: "Most of the students live in the urban poor areas of Las Piñas, where it is difficult for the most basic human virtues to thrive. They need to have a good dose of fortitude to stand up for what they learn in Kabataan which may clash with what they usually experience at home and in their

neighborhood...The backbone of Kabataan is the mentoring program where adult leaders volunteer their time for one-on-one life coaching.

With this, they are able to monitor the academic and personal development of the students." This mentoring work with children of the poor is a widespread practice of members of Opus Dei in the Philippines and all over the world.

Bernardo M. Villegas // Manila Bulletin, June 24, 2012

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