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Philippine Foundation for Cultural and Educational Development

Bernie Villegas describes some of the projects and social contributions of the Foundation since its establishment in 1965. On the occasion of its 60th anniversary, he takes the opportunity to thank the individuals and groups who have generously supported the Foundation's activities.

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The Philippine Foundation for Cultural and Educational Development (PFCED) celebrated its sixtieth anniversary this year, 2025. In 1965, Philippine society was very much in need of a non-stock, not-for-profit organization committed to being a catalyst for values transformation and education. Its central aim was to form citizens dedicated to the common good of Philippine society, closely following the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. PFCED dedicated itself to promoting academic excellence, professional proficiency, and social responsibility among people from all walks of life.

PFCED has inspired various centers for professional men and women, finding support from the business community in key cities across the Philippine Archipelago. These include the Greater Manila Area, CALABARZON, Central and Western Visayas, and Mindanao. PFCED pioneered setting up centers in Manila, and other foundations followed its example in the other regions. A good number of professionals commit their time and resources to promote Christian values, particularly concern for the common good, within the corporate, business, and professional sectors.

PFCED also operates centers for high school and college students (such as Lauan Study Center, Tanglaw University Center, and Tahilan Study Center) to help them develop leadership skills, strive for academic excellence, and foster freedom of spirit and social responsibility in the

service of country, community, and family. All formative and educational activities in these youth centers are always conducted in very close coordination with the parents of the participating youth.

Convinced that a change in society could only be effected by individuals who themselves undergo a personal transformation, PFCED established conference centers (e.g., Makiling Conference Center in Calamba, Laguna) and partnered with centers sharing similar objectives (e.g., Tagaytay Conference Center in Mendez, Cavite). In these centers, conferences and live-in workshops on family values, spiritual retreats, and short seminars on professional excellence in all honest human endeavors are organized by or through PFCED volunteers. These centers also serve as venues for the exchange of ideas, providing an environment for the thorough study

of important social issues and instilling the habit of considering such issues in the light of Christian social principles.

To guarantee this fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church, PFCED entrusted the formative activities undertaken in these centers to Opus Dei, a Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church whose mission is to spread the message of holiness in and through professional, occupational, family, and social life for men and women in the middle of the world.

To cite a specific example of one of PFCED's instruments for accomplishing its mission, the Makiling Conference Center is one of the oldest spiritual conference centers in the Philippines. When construction began in the late 1960s, a water source on the site could not be located. I was in the team

supervising the building of the edifice on the foothills of Mount Makiling. I traveled to Rome to appraise St. Josemaria Escriva, the Founder of Opus Dei. I informed him of our predicament about the unsuccessful efforts to find a source of water. St. Josemaria gave me a reassuring hug and whispered to my ear, "Be patient. It will come!" True enough, when I returned to the Philippines, we continued the digging, and the water sprang forth.

An example of a Cultural Center geared toward professional men established in 1987 by PFCED is the Sangandaan Cultural Center in the middle of the business district of Makati, in Legaspi Village. Sangandaan offers group and personalized activities for professional men, most of whom work in the surrounding business district that can extend all the way to BGC. Sangandaan is open from

Monday to Saturday so that professionals can use the facilities, such as conference rooms, classrooms, a library, a Catholic Chapel, and several mentoring rooms for classes and individual coaching, mentoring, and spiritual direction (Opus Dei priests are available for individual spiritual direction). In addition to the doctrinal guidance and spiritual direction made available to the professional people who frequent the Center, there are professional workshops, conversations, and conferences led by some of the country's movers and shakers on current political, social, and business issues. On their own initiative, some of those who attend activities in the Center organize themselves to form small groups that get involved in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, such as visits to the poor, sick, and aging people.

As I look back to the year 1965 when we, the five incorporators, founded the Philippine Foundation for Cultural and Educational Development, I fully understand what St. Josemaria Escriva used to say: “Dream and your dream will fall short.” It was the holy Founder of Opus Dei who inspired us, when he was still alive, to found this Foundation.

We thought of the Foundation’s goal as establishing cultural and educational centers for the lifelong and continuing education of university students and professionals, complementing the educational efforts of colleges and universities. All five of us were familiar with similar university residences and cultural centers in the U.S. and Europe where university students have an opportunity to widen their knowledge of the humanities and sciences outside of

the formal curricula offered in their schools. Our innovation was to apply this same method of mentoring perfected by such universities as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale—not only to full-time undergraduate students but also to professional people who are in constant need of upskilling, reskilling, and retooling, not only in the various secular fields of knowledge and technology but also in Catholic doctrine and spirituality. There will always be people—young and old—who want to widen their cultural knowledge and their professional skills.

We would like to thank all those who have generously given of their time and financial resources to help in the establishment and operations of the centers under the auspices of the Philippine Foundation for Cultural and Educational Development (PFCED). In my own capacity as one

of the fund-raisers for the various projects throughout these sixty years, I would like to give special mention to the corporate or family groups who have been especially generous with the financial contributions that enabled us to construct the necessary buildings and facilities that house these cultural, study, and conference centers. I personally thank the Ayala clan headed at their time by Don Jaime Zobel de Ayala and Enrique Zobel de Ayala; the UNITED LAB group whose founder, the late Jose Y. Campos, never spared resources to help us when we were beginning in the 1960s and 1970s; the late Don Mariano Que and his late daughter Vivian Azcona of the Mercury Drug group of companies; and the late David Consunji, founder of the DMCI and DICON groups of companies, whose children have continued to shower us with generous assistance, financially and in kind and services. We assure these generous

benefactors and their progenies that we will continue to dream, convinced that our dream will fall short of reality as we celebrate more anniversaries in the future.

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