

Seeing Inequality and Choosing Action

A chance encounter with poverty during Blessed Álvaro del Portillo's visit to Cebu on January 28-29, 1987 sparked the founding of CITE Technical Institute.

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“In a world where the poor are increasingly numerous, we paradoxically see the growth of a wealthy elite, living in a bubble of comfort and luxury, almost in another world compared to ordinary people...

a culture persists that discards others without even realizing it.” (Pope Leo XIV, Dilexi Te, 11)

Reading these words from Pope Leo XIV’s Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te (4 October 2025), I am reminded of the quiet but enduring legacy of Blessed Álvaro del Portillo during his visit to the Philippines in 1987.

While traveling along a road in Mactan, Cebu—lined with the fragile homes of poor families and shadowed by palatial houses on the nearby hills—Blessed Álvaro was struck by the stark contrast. Turning to his companions, he simply said that something had to be done for the poor.

Inspired by the wisdom of the proverb, “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime,” he proposed the establishment of a technical school for deserving youth

from disadvantaged families—one that would equip them with skills to secure dignified work in Cebu and beyond.

True to his word, upon returning to Rome, Blessed Álvaro personally mobilized support. He sent consultants from Centro ELIS, a well-known technical training center on the outskirts of Rome, to help lay the foundations of what would become a life-changing project.

In 1991, the Center for Industrial Technology and Enterprise (CITE) opened in Talamban, Cebu. With the assistance of Centro ELIS, CITE developed a solid training curriculum and built laboratories that combined theoretical instruction with hands-on experience—preparing students for real-world employment.

CITE was not built on good intentions alone. Substantial resources were

needed to construct buildings, acquire machinery, and provide scholarships. This challenge was met through the generosity of local businessmen, government officials, and families who believed in the school's mission.

To ensure sustainability, partnerships were forged with local industries that offered apprenticeships and employment to graduates. These collaborations continue today, quietly building bridges between those with opportunities and those most in need of them.

From the beginning, CITE opened its doors to students with physical challenges. One of its first enrollees was a young man with deformed fingers on his left hand. During the entrance assessment, he demonstrated his ability to work by using a simple rubber band to grip

tools. He excelled academically and became part of CITE's pioneering batch of graduates.

Over the years, many similar stories have emerged—graduates who secured stable livelihoods for their families, and others who found opportunities to work abroad.

At CITE, formation goes beyond technical skills. Students—and even their parents—receive guidance in family life, virtues, and Catholic doctrine. At the heart of the campus stands a beautiful chapel where students can pause, pray, and reflect. During a visit in 1992, former President Corazon Aquino spent a few moments of silent prayer in this chapel, finding solace there.

The impact of CITE often extends well beyond graduation. For some, it has become a place of vocational discernment. At least eight CITE graduates have gone on to become

diocesan priests in Cebu City, the most recent ordained in 2025. Others, moved by gratitude, have returned to teach—choosing to pass on what they themselves once received.

Thirty-nine years have passed since Blessed Álvaro traveled that road in Mactan and felt compelled to “do something” for the poor of Cebu. His response brings to mind the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá:

“Among those around you—apostolic soul—you are the stone fallen into the lake. With your word and your example you produce a first circle... and then another... and another... wider each time. Now do you understand the greatness of your mission?” (The Way, no. 381)

At CITE, that circle of solidarity continues to widen. Inspired by Pope Leo XIV and Blessed Álvaro, may we too find the courage—not just to see

the need—but to do something for those who need it most.

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