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"Still so much to accomplish in life"

Raymond Sampietro runs a geriatrics residence in Valladolid, Spain. He says he is grateful for the opportunity to help bring many people closer to God in a decisive moment of their lives.

03/30/2012

Raymond Sampietro lives in Valladolid, Spain, his hometown. 30 years old, he runs a geriatrics center. "For me, as for my mother and sister, the residence isn't an institution but

our second family. We live with the elderly and wear working clothes. Our motto is ‘no need for patience, just a good sense of humor.’ Often it’s nothing more than changing someone’s diaper—and having to repeat the operation five minutes later. We’ve found that the best solution is simply to laugh.”

What led him to undertake this initiative, besides the demand for this type of work today, was the desire to meet a real social need and assist people who seem to have reached the most difficult stage in their lives. “I say ‘seem to’ because when they receive affection and encouragement they are revitalized. I’ve heard that John Paul II, even in his final years, said he never felt ‘old’ because he still had so much he wanted to accomplish in life. That spirit of ‘still so much to accomplish’ is what we try to keep alive here.”

Surrounded by affection

“Eighty percent of the people here are women (so you can see they outlast us men, he jokes). 10 suffer senile dementia and a similar number are afflicted with Alzheimer’s. Our work here is demanding. I work more than 10 hours a day, including every other weekend. But in pouring yourself out for the people here, right away you begin to have a lot of affection for them, and you do everything possible to make them happy. It’s a wonderful compensation. Of course there can be bad moments, and occasionally very unpleasant tasks and problematic situations. But these are the exception—if you keep your sense of humor.”

He says that the spirit of Opus Dei is what underlies his dedication, helping him see in his work an opportunity to bring people close to

God in this decisive moment of their lives. “The oldest is 98, and 8 are in their 90's. All are grateful for Mass, which they attend once a week. Many speak personally with the chaplain, and all were eager to receive the Anointing of the Sick. They take care of the chapel, and paint a new altar scene for every Mass. They make the Way of the Cross several times a year and keep the large room used as a chapel filled with flowers, or with artificial ones they themselves make. When Christmas comes, they paint many Nativity Scenes; this year they made five of them with small figures. During Christmas season they really enjoyed listening to Christmas carols performed by sixty high school students. Each day they also read a brief passage from the Gospel followed by a short commentary.”

“The toughest part,” Raymond says, “are the deaths.” “I've closed the

eyes of a fair number already and then given the news to the others: “They’re in heaven now,” is how I put it.” When asked if anyone here has brought up the topic of euthanasia, he answers: “No one has even mentioned it. I haven’t heard a word about it in the six years I’ve been here. The atmosphere is one of real joy. They are surrounded by affection, and a noticeable climate of hope.”

Advice for entrepreneurs

Ray is often asked to give talks to high school and university students to encourage them to start their own business. He urges them to be “men and women with a passion,” and defines the entrepreneurial vocation as “the eagerness that moves us to get up each day.” He insists that they keep up a positive outlook and “overcome crises with ingenuity and

calm.” In short, “to be a leader of yourself.”

As soon as he graduated (at age 23) he wanted to be “a young entrepreneur” and launched his adventure passionately, along with his sister, and with the strong encouragement of their mother. He calls his mother the true force behind their endeavor: “She’s the one who constantly encourages us; she’s the soul of the residence.” His grandmother’s need for professional care was another factor. Their original plan called for a building with a new floor to accommodate 45 elderly persons in residence and another 15 during the day.

Today he operates a residence with a staff of twenty. “We are just the visible face of a large team of professionals,” he says. His daring, along with his sister’s, earned him the prize, “Young Entrepreneur of

2006 for Castile and Leon." But when his mother heard about the prize she told him, "Forget the prizes, and get to work."

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