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Works of Mercy: Rebuilding Homes and Strengthening Families

Iraya Study Center's three-year program to help in the rehabilitation of Leyte after Typhoon Yolanda

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"Frequently students' concern for social problem is limited to oral or written demonstrations, and at times it can degenerate into useless or harmful outbursts. I myself measure

the sincerity of concern for others in terms of works of service, and I know of thousands of cases of students in many countries who have refused to build their own little private worlds. They are giving themselves to others through their professional work, which they try to carry out with human perfection, through educational undertakings, through social and welfare activities, in a spirit of youth and cheerfulness." (Conversations with Msgr. Escriva, no. 75)

These words are at the heart of Iraya Study Center's three-year program to help in the rebuilding of Leyte after Typhoon Yolanda.

In November of 2013, the whole world watched in awe as video footages of the damage wrought by super-typhoon Yolanda (International name Haiyan) in the south of the Philippines were flashed

on TV. The magnitude of the destruction in terms of lives and properties lost could not but touch the hearts of many. One of those who immediately reacted was Pope Francis himself. He expressed his desire to visit the country and accompany the victims of the typhoon. For different motives, this could not be realized until almost one-and-a-half year later, in January 2015. In a moving liturgical ceremony in Tacloban itself, one of the places most ravaged by the typhoon, he said, “I am here, a little bit late, but I am here”.

To date, almost three years after, rehabilitation work is still on-going because many parts of Leyte province continue to be in need of assistance. Local and international organizations are sending help in different forms.

Part of those who continue to assist, also to second the Pope in his efforts to help the poor, are university girls and young professionals from Iraya Study Center, located near Manila's university belt and which caters mostly to students from the oldest Pontifical university in Asia, the University of Sto. Tomas. Their efforts are centered on rebuilding houses in the town of La Paz in Leyte. They are working in partnership with the Foundation for Professional Training Inc. (FPTI), which runs technical vocational schools for girls all around the country. A number of their students' families were affected by the typhoon.

Iraya's outreach program is composed of 3 phases (April 2015, April 2016 and June 2016). Project activities include rebuilding of

homes; visiting and counseling families, providing them medicines and first aid kits; and promoting health and hygiene skills among the children.

Believing in the integral unity of the person and the essential role of the family in the development of each individual, they have included a session on parenting skills for parents and school officials in Phase III of the program, in an effort to strengthen family unity.

When asked what she learned from the people she served during the service project, one volunteer worker answered, "Live life simply and you'll be happy. When others have lost everything, I have no right to complain."

Landa Murillo, one of the house beneficiaries, was in awe, "Not even in my wildest dreams did I imagine having a house as beautiful as this. I

thank God for making Opus Dei an instrument to help poor people like us."

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