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Volunteers to the Rescue

For St. Josemaría, one form of charity is “making life more agreeable for others.” A way to do that might be painting someone’s house if he can’t do it himself. This is what the Alazores University Association is doing in Málaga, Spain.

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A visitor to the home of Concepción Bueno would have noticed right away that it needed a fresh coat of paint. This lady is 73 and a victim of

an arthritic condition that keeps her from standing upright. It's hard to imagine someone like that painting a house. She could hire it done, but she can't afford that. As it is, she has to spend two-thirds of her pension on rent.

It's obvious that this lady qualifies for the program of voluntary assistance set up by 30 young citizens of Málaga to clean and paint the homes of persons with limited means. The majority are university students. This is its second year. "Last year we did 8 houses," says Javier García Rull, one of the coordinators. "This year we hope to do 10."

Andrés Aragon, 18, wears white overalls as he removes the furniture and cleans a room before the walls are painted. He plans to study civil engineering. "There's no age limit to be a volunteer, but the youngest ones

are 16,” he says. “It’s hard work, but anyone who wants is welcome to take part.”

Like the majority of the volunteer painters, Andrés learned about this project through the Alazores University Association, a personal work of members of Opus Dei. The association is affiliated with the ONG International Co-op and with firms that contribute the materials free of charge. The Andaluz Painters Union, for example, has given more than 300 cans of white paint. The Avis car rental agency made a pick-up truck available, and another firm provides technical assistance.

The volunteers work from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. The weather is something of a factor, because it can get very hot in Malaga. But the best month to do this work is July. “Many people are away on vacation then,”

Javier explains, “but plenty of people stay.”

The City Council of Málaga helps out by providing a list of the most needy homes.

“First paint the front room for me,” asks Concepción, “so I can use it while you do the rest.” “As you like, Concha,” replies her volunteer. This lady has lived for five years in her home in Amarguara St. in the center of the city. It’s a little over 200 square feet in size. Previously she lived for 20 years in a shanty. Her way of getting around is by walking with the support of a wicker chair.

When she cooks, she sits next to a small electric oven. Before they painted, Andrés and two others removed furniture that hadn’t been moved in years. Behind a couch they found a single playing card and a holy picture. Andrés reflects: “This year the houses are in fairly good

condition. Last year we had to do walls that were completely black and some of them full of holes.”

All of the volunteer painters agree that their greatest satisfaction is helping others. When they finish, Concepción will continue to live in her home, but it will be brighter than it was before.

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