

The Little Ones of the Infant Jesus

Cogeo, Antipolo, Philippines

Philippines is prone to earthquakes as it lies in the western part of the Pacific ring of fire. Oftentimes, torrential rains, typhoons and floods will disrupt work and affect the community. The Philippines has a population of 100 million people and ranks the 12th most populated country in the world. Urbanization is rapidly congesting the city and many people live in the slums where there is no access to safe drinking water and electricity.

WELCOME TO COGEO

Since the village was hit by typhoons in 2009, families were devastated as their homes were completely destroyed. Family members were displaced and many children suffered malnutrition. Most of the families stayed in an environment not conducive to their growth. These children were constantly exposed to multiple risks; such as drugs, alcoholism, gambling and theft. Despite the multiple struggles they face everyday, many of these children strive to go to school on foot and oftentimes without food.

With little or no financial means, the lives of these children and teenagers are disrupted and without careful and meaningful intervention, they may turn wayward. In order to prevent these young people from turning to vice, it is vital that their time and effort be directed to meaningful activities which can enable them to stay faithful to God, develop their gifts and talents and help them serve their community in small ways.

THE LITTLE ONES OF THE INFANT JESUS

In a collaborative spirit, the team, consisting of professionals - religious, medical doctors, retired teachers and members of the Social Service Ministry, pull our resources together and respond to the needs of those vulnerable members of our community who stay in the peripheries.

THE LITTLE ONES OF THE INFANT JESUS was born from this sector of the community. In order for us to help them keep off the streets and minimize their exposure to risk elements, we assist in their educational needs, faith and character development.

Their parents see the importance of a good education and together we embark on this project " DARE TO DREAM BIG, START SMALL"

Dra. Olive E. Ongcangco, a village physician, who is equally moved by the plight of these children offered her garage to help us kick-start the project. September 29, 2013 saw our dream beginning to take shape. Since then, we have conducted our programmes, catechetical instruction, values formation and skills training every Sunday.

There are signs of hope... the children learn to appreciate our efforts and they are self-motivated and disciplined and strive to study hard.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES.....

In 2013, five children asked me to teach them English and Mathematics. Every Saturday, they come for this tutorial class in my home and gradually the Lord added many more to the fold. As the number of children increased, we needed a bigger place. Since then, the garage has been our classroom on Sundays accommodating 60 children.

TRUST IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Indeed, the Lord is good. He has provided three volunteer assistants to take the children for spiritual nourishment, character development and skills enhancement.

Every Sunday the children look forward to come together to pray, learn, bond, sing, dance and celebrate life. Many of them will linger a little bit longer creating joyful bonding and laughter. The garage is no longer the space for the car but home for the "Little Ones".

ONE STEP HIGHER: FOOD FOR THE BODY AND FOOD FOR THE BRAIN

In November 2015, Sisters Maria and Jocelyn visited Cogeo. After our reflection on the struggles of the children, many of whom go to school on empty stomachs, we decided to start the ball rolling - feed the children with eggs twice a week, tutor the children before and after school and serve them with a simple meal.

In January 2016, my little home became a multi- purpose place; a classroom, a dining room, prayer room, meeting room and a playground for these lovable children eager to reach their dreams.

We began by taking in 15 young children. Half of them come for the morning session and the rest in the afternoon. At the end of the year, remarkable results were achieved. The children were more positive in their behaviour and became more hardworking giving priority to their studies.

One mother volunteered to prepare the food but volunteer teachers found it hard to commit themselves. This was a big challenge to the mission. However, we thank God for all that has been and we close the year with gratitude for His Providence.

This year 2017, despite the space, we accepted 26 children, 11 of them for the morning session and 15 for afternoon classes.

Faith and Trust in God's Providence is necessary to accomplish this charitable work. A major challenge was the lack of volunteer teachers to help in this ministry. It calls forth from each of us humility and trust that our gracious God will not abandon the cries of the children and we continue to trust in God whom we believe will never be outdone in generosity.

We can testify that in this ministry, God has shown that He provides and will continue to provide for us through the generosity of kind people who respond to God's call.

We now have two mothers, Lanie and Nida volunteering to take charge of the food and maintenance, while one young woman, Anabelle, imbued with the spirit of service, offers her time and effort to come three times a week to teach the children wholeheartedly.

It is truly inspiring to see these young people grow a little better in their attitude, showing great eagerness to study hard which has been manifested in their academic performances. We are aware of their difficulties academically but with gentle persuasion, one day it will yield fruits that last. The children have also developed self-confidence and a sense of community.

We believe that with the passage of time, each child will shine as s/he develops her/his God-given talents. Given space to learn, opportunities to grow in a caring environment and the experience of love and concern, these children will excel. It may not be in academic pursuit but they will turn out as persons with compassionate hearts.

We envision a holistic approach to strengthen their self-esteem, character and belief that God loves them. It is not a one way ticket but a reciprocal empowerment.

All throughout these years, there have been many little miracles happening but the best is when it produces fruits we call a " Change of Heart".

MY HOME IS THE CENTER AND THE CENTER IS OUR HOME.

Since the center is my home, space is limited for the children to explore other activities that will enhance their thinking skills.

The house becomes the study place from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. There are four adults running this tutorial programme. Two mothers have volunteered to be in charge of food and two teachers assist the children in their academic studies.

Our priorities are directed towards developing study habits, working projects and completion of assignments. We inculcate values like self-discipline, respect for each other and self-confidence. We train them to develop their skills and take up responsibilities.

To allow us to function smoothly every day, we have some rules and a timetable to guide our daily work.

There is time to play, to exercise their creativity and patience. This would help them develop teamwork, working with and sharing with others.

Recognizing their potential talents and providing adequate help contributes a lot to a responsive child.

Thus, the integrative components of having a good meal, supervised studies and prayers will help grow a child more holistically.

I HAVE A DREAM...

WE HAVE A DREAM...

TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE OUR DREAM COME TRUE.

WE CONTINUE TO DREAM, UNAFRAID OF THE FUTURE

NOW I KNOW OUR DREAM WILL LIVE ON

Sr Neriza IJS 2017