

Charity, Inspired

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“May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life.” (Ephesians 3:17)

Perhaps this one-liner teaches us to give being charitable a gracious try: to be compelled by others’ life situations, to use our gifts for others, and to even inspire charity in others.

Sometimes, early in our lives, we come across people who make their mark by example, or experience events that etch deep impressions – small beginnings yet with formative, lasting effects. My road to charity followed an easy, defining path thanks to my involvement with the Jesuits and my upbringing.

Bro. Jim’s and Fr. John’s genuine concern for others struck in me an indelible caring for persons in need. Born into affluent families, they spent most of their lifetime away from New York and had their final resting place in the Philippines. To me, the years they faithfully shared with the poor and guided young men like me back then are one sublime example of charity.

As a high school freshman, I spent my Saturdays with impoverished children teaching catechetical lessons. On our final weekend with them, the Jesuits distributed a few prayer books, school supplies and small toys to the children. The sight and sound of every poor boy and girl giggling with joy touched me quite deeply.

Furthermore, in my senior year, my class buddy and I spent weekends in a remote barrio with an elderly couple that subsisted solely on boiled green bananas for their all-day meals. The husband, a rheumatic and a travelling barber, plied his trade on foot and would often come home empty-handed. His wife, too feeble to move, stayed home all the time. Our job was to help them as we could. We cleaned up their nipa shanty and even tended a small vegetable garden, quietly sharing the couple’s hope of cooking up a different meal some day. Moved by their plight, I later asked our school alumni clinic for a few pain relievers and food items to

deliver to the couple, and arranged an appointment for them with a visiting alumnus-doctor.

My family also served as a strong influence. Among many instances of generosity in our household, my six siblings and I, at our young age, witnessed charity when our parents – public school teachers all their career – gave temporary shelter to a typhoon-ravaged family of five. Though we lived in modest means, my mother and father fervently cared for this family, offering them hot meals and warm blankets for a few weeks.

Over many years, my parents' values – epitomized by that experience – nourished and honed my growing awareness of the challenges faced by the needy. Even in our early years in Canada, my wife and I volunteered to prepare income returns for low-income seniors and immigrants, and continued to do so for 18 years, at few times braving snowstorms to see our commitments through. I also took upon myself to mentor new immigrants on their job search, spending countless hours with them to impart practical lessons I learned as one once myself. While working at the world's largest retailer, I along with a few took charge of a remarkably successful Head Office-wide food drive for the benefit of some of Toronto's homeless.

In my many years with my parish, I've taken part and marvelled at the parishioners' unfailing outpouring of support through donated food, used clothes, gift cards, Shoeboxes, relief goods and others in many drives, including those Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP)-initiated, for underprivileged families in and beyond our community. Donated clothes spilling in the church parking lot with the repository trailer already at full capacity, and stacks of canned goods in the church basement are a common sight. Well into my first months as Vincentian in 2019, I saw charity at work with close to 40 local businesses responding to my plea for gifts – both cash and in-kind – in support of our parish's walkathon fundraising aimed at subsidizing the back-to-school expenses of less fortunate families. Time and time again, I find my dedication to helping the poor renewed by the benevolence of my fellow parishioners and many others, including some believers of other faiths.

I'm thankful for the opportunities that have granted me to exercise charity, yet remain mindful that there are still boundless ways to inspire and influence others, just as the Jesuits and my parents unlocked for me. Pope Francis himself quotes Benedict XVI in the "The Joy of the Gospel": "The service of charity is a constituent element of the Church's mission and an indispensable expression of her being". The Pope in turn asserts the Church abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes. As members of the Church, let's keep walking the path of charity, engaging not only with material goods, but also with our many God-given gifts, and laying aside self-centredness, indifference and complacency. With joy in our hearts, let charity always shine upon the lives of those who are most in need.

Jose is a CPA (both in Canada and the Philippines) and early in his career, was on loan at the UN Headquarters in New York City as Sr. External Auditor. He has been a mass lector for over 25 years, was a member of the Finance Council for 10 years, and has been with the SSVP for three years now – all at St. John of the Cross Parish in Mississauga, Ontario.