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Manila Catholic Charities

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Notes and Comment

Manila Catholic Charities

The spirit of Catholic charity has expressed itself in various shapes and forms in different centuries and different countries depending on varying needs, cultures, and resources. The early history of the Philippines reveals such expressions of charity in institutions for orphans, care of the sick and prisoners. Examples are found in the Sta. Isabel House of Mercy (1594), Hospicio de San José (1810), Conference of St. Vincent de Paul (1860). In the beginning of the 20th century and continuing to the outbreak of World War II, the number of volunteer lay groups increased, giving even wider expression to works of charity. Some of the better-known of these are the Knights of Columbus (1905), Catholic Women's League (1919), Catholic Youth Organization (1941), Young Ladies Association of Charity (1944). The post-war period witnessed a continuing expansion of these groups, so that now there is scarcely a parish in Manila that does not have at least one group serving the needs of indigent families. Such expansion was inevitable in view of the great increase of the population of Manila and an accompanying increase of neglected children and hungry families.

The independent operation of these many agencies showed the need for a new manifestation of charity organized in such a way that it would reduce duplication of service, increase effectiveness and expand the far-reaching effects of help offered. Thus the Catholic faithful and Manila welfare agencies enthusiastically received the announcement of His Excellency, Most Rev. Rufino J. Santos, D.D., Archbishop of Manila, on March 25,

1953, that he would inaugurate Catholic Charities for Manila. Many who had experience in Catholic welfare work were invited to participate in preliminary discussions, after which study committees were named to formulate the Constitution, By-Laws, and organization framework of the new family welfare agency.

Following research and study, the Steering Committee approved the spirit and purpose which was to guide Catholic Charities in its future work:

Following the example of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whose life has been epitomized by the statement: "He went about doing good": following His commandment that we love our neighbor as ourselves; and following His counsel that whatever we do to the least of His brethren we do unto Him; and finally, under the special patronage and guidance of Blessed Martin de Porres who was urged in imitation of this charity of Christ to such outstanding deeds of assistance and enlightenment while on earth, these Constitutions and By-Laws are hereby adopted for the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Manila. (Preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Catholic Charities.)

The purpose of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Manila is: (1) to extend material aid to all those in economic straits with a view to affording them relief from temporal anxieties and thus enable them to devote time to higher objectives such as are the ideals of Christian living; (2) to give tangible expression to the solicitude and concern of the Catholic Church for the needy, whose condition might be availed of by the supporters of morally and socially subversive ideas to wrest them away from the practice of the teachings of Our Blessed Lord; (3) to strive for the recognition and defense of the individual, moral, and social rights of the common people in accordance with the dictates of reason, justice, and charity; and (4) to coordinate the activities of the various individuals and group efforts of charity in order to increase the efficacy and lasting effect of their labours and influences. (Article I in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Catholic Charities.)

In achieving this four-fold purpose, Catholic Charities function directly under the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Manila through an Administrative Board with policy-making powers. The responsibility for the implementation of such policies and super-

vision of personnel is handled by an Executive Director through a trained staff.

Catholic Charities' practical services include family and individual counselling, supported by religious, medical, material, vocational aid. As with most organizations of this nature a good deal of the work is done in cooperation with other Catholic, civic, and government agencies. Particularly by this means does Catholic Charities assist families in obtaining institutional care, education, and resettlement.

It is not only assisted by specialized working committees whose members are drawn from all parts of the community, but it plans and works with the member agencies of the Catholic Coordinating Council, Central Committee of Catholic Action, Social Welfare Administration, Manila Health Department, National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration, Philippine National Red Cross, and other welfare groups. Since part of its purpose is the coordination of welfare works conducted under Catholic auspices in the Archdiocese of Manila, Catholic Charities has a Parish Welfare Service through which it helps to bring about a closer working relationship and coordination among the different parish groups engaged in volunteer social welfare work. Through the Parish Welfare Service it will provide training in certain aspects of social welfare work for members of affiliated organizations and stimulate these affiliated organizations to more effective and efficient welfare work.

The program which Catholic Charities envisions in making its contribution toward satisfying the needs of thousands of disturbed and indigent families involves a large expenditure. To some it seems an impossible task. Those who were in sympathy with the undertaking were invited to join through membership dues, donations in kind or personal services. Through this combined effort Catholic Charities carried out its first year's program valued at over a hundred thousand pesos. This response is a wonderful tribute to the generosity and sincere interest of the community and affords a reasonable source of confidence that Catholic Charities will continue and grow in the work it has undertaken. The offices of Catholic Charities are on Isaac Peral. It is a member of the International Conference of Catholic Charities, Rome, Italy.

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