



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Micro-credits and a lot of help

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In May 2002, I went to the funeral of the husband of Yaya Lita, my children's nanny, in a small barrio in San Pedro Laguna (Philippines), I saw the state of poverty Yaya Lita and her neighbors were living in. I started to think of a way to help.

Later that year, in October 2002, Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei was canonized and I begged St. Josemaría for the answer on how to help the people of Sitio Rustan.

When I got back from my pilgrimage to Rome to attend the canonization of St. Josemaría, I learned that a house in the barrio was up for sale, I bought the unfinished house and converted it into a playhouse. Later, mothers who regularly brought their kids to the playhouse convinced me to make it into a daycare center. With help from relatives and friends, the St. Josemaría Daycare Center was constructed. Classes opened on July 3, 2003 with 35 enrollees.

Slowly, I got acquainted with the people of the barrio. With the help of my husband, I organized a weekly bible class for the men and catechism classes for the women. Not much later, the couples who were not yet married in Church agreed to receive the sacrament. In 2003, some 20 children were also baptized. Since then, a priest would come every weekend to celebrate Sunday Mass in the barrio.

### **Micro-credits, mushrooms and international volunteering**

With the help of the Development Advocacy for Women Volunteerism (DAVW), a non-government organization, a micro-lending scheme was established to help the local residents put up small businesses. DAVW's initiative called "Puso at Piso" [Heart and Peso] involved saving small amounts, even as low as 20 pesos. After a period, members were able to loan twice of what they have saved. In 2 years, their starting fund of P10,000 grew to P26,000. They started to look for alternative livelihood where they could invest their capital.

We went into rug making but we could not continue. We couldn't afford the high-speed sewing machines. We have an ongoing detergent making business...[which] we are hoping someone could help us market. We help them also go into mushroom production.

Conrado was one of those who tried mushroom growing together with Yaya Lita, his next-door neighbor in Sitio Rustan. Housing the seedlings provided by the Añover couple in a small shack at the side of their house, he successfully cultivated and harvested mushrooms. Dolores, a mother of ten, has been living in Sitio Rustan since 1994. Her husband, Jimmy, is jeepney driver. She had put up a small hairdressing parlor before, but had to close it down because of lack of clientele. With support from a DAWV micro-credit, Dolores took up a three-month cosmetology course at the Technical Educational Services Development Authority (TESDA). Now, she has a growing base of clients in Alabang Hillsborough for foot spa, pedicure, and manicure.

My husband Gig and I realized that we could not improve the lives of Sitio Rustan's residents on our own. Fortunately, the daycare center we put up has spawned other projects – unexpected and unimagined – and has attracted volunteers from as far as Australia and New Zealand. During their visit to Sitio Rustan, DAWV found that the place was also an ideal site for an international Work Camp. But the place needed a multipurpose hall.

In January 2004, six months after setting up the daycare center, 24 women volunteers from Australia and New Zealand made up of young professionals, high school, and university students arrived for DAWV's Work Camp. With funds they raised personally and the other half provided by Gig, the volunteers were able to build the hall.

For three weeks, the volunteers mixed cement and worked manually on the hall's construction in the morning. The afternoons were spent in teaching catechism, playing with the children and conducting livelihood and nutrition classes for the local women.

In March 2004, another group of high school students of the Narra Club came to Sitio Rustan to finish the painting of the multipurpose hall. On the last day of the service project, the multi-purpose hall was inaugurated and was fittingly named Philippine-Australia-New Zealand Friendship Hall or PAN-Z. Since then, PAN-Z Hall has been the venue of catechism classes, medical missions and other outreach activities organized by friends who volunteer to help the people of Sitio

Rustan.

### **Violin, flute, dentists: help from all around**

My eldest daughter, Tipin, together with her friends, organized a music appreciation activity for the local kids. She introduced her listeners to the violin, flute, and guitar. On another occasion, she brought a group of university students who visited the families and organized a raffle with prizes solicited from her father's clients. The proceeds were used to buy a water dispenser for the daycare and several educational materials for the daycare center. My son, Paul, had also brought a number of his PAREF Southridge schoolmates to the activities.

When your friends see that you are serious with your project, they do not hesitate to extend whatever help they could give. My personal dentist together with her fellow dentists have done free clinics in the community. Friends of friends would pass on my plea for more support. Such was the case of Vicky who heard about my initiatives from a friend. Vicky organized the first full feeding program for the barrio children to address the malnutrition problem with the support of several sponsors.

Like an ever-widening circle, the chain of people eager to help grew wider. Lea, a doctor, heard about the initiative through Narra Club. Together with her colleagues, they conducted several medical missions in the community. Another medical doctor, Mila, who was moved by the disconsoling panorama she found in Sitio Rustan decided to adopt Sitio Rustan as one of their foundation's beneficiary communities. There are many other individuals and groups who contribute in varying ways to improving the lot of the people in Sitio Rustan. A lot more needs to be done. And so the work continues.

Now, Yaya Lita is retired and runs her own sari-sari store which she set-up using the retirement gift we gave her. Mang Conrado continues to ply his "kariton" everyday looking for junk to sell to earn for his family. He hopes to be able to save some amount to buy seedlings to grow mushrooms again with Yaya Lita. Despite the difficulties, he remains hopeful. His near escape from death in a row with a scavenging syndicate, which he confesses is a favor of Sitio Rustans' patron, St. Josemaría Escrivá, confirms his faith that God watches over him and his family. He dreams of seeing all his children finish their studies and have a chance of a better life.

Dolores, on the other hand, looks forward to her wedding day with partner Jimmy once their papers are put in order. She hopes that Jimmy would soon have a permanent job. She, too, dreams of seeing all her ten children finish school.