

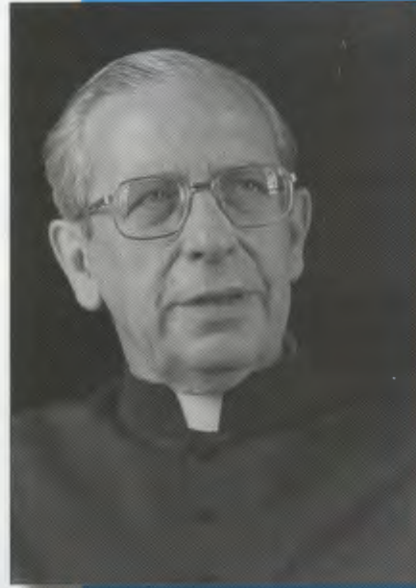
Prayer to

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo

Bishop and Prelate of Opus Dei

*O God, merciful Father,
Through the Blessed Virgin,
you granted your bishop, Blessed Alvaro
the grace of being an exemplary pastor in the
service of the Church
and a most faithful son and successor of
Saint Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei.
Grant that I also may respond faithfully
to the demands of the Christian vocation,
turning all the circumstances and events of my life
into opportunities to love you and
to serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
Deign to grant the canonization of Blessed Alvaro,
and through his intercession
grant me the favour I request...
(here make your petition).
Amen.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.



Those who have obtained favours through the intercession of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo are asked to let us know by writing to us at the address shown on this page. More information is available at www.alvarodelportillo.org

We would be grateful if our readers would send us names and addresses of others who might be interested in receiving this Informative Bulletin or the prayer card of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

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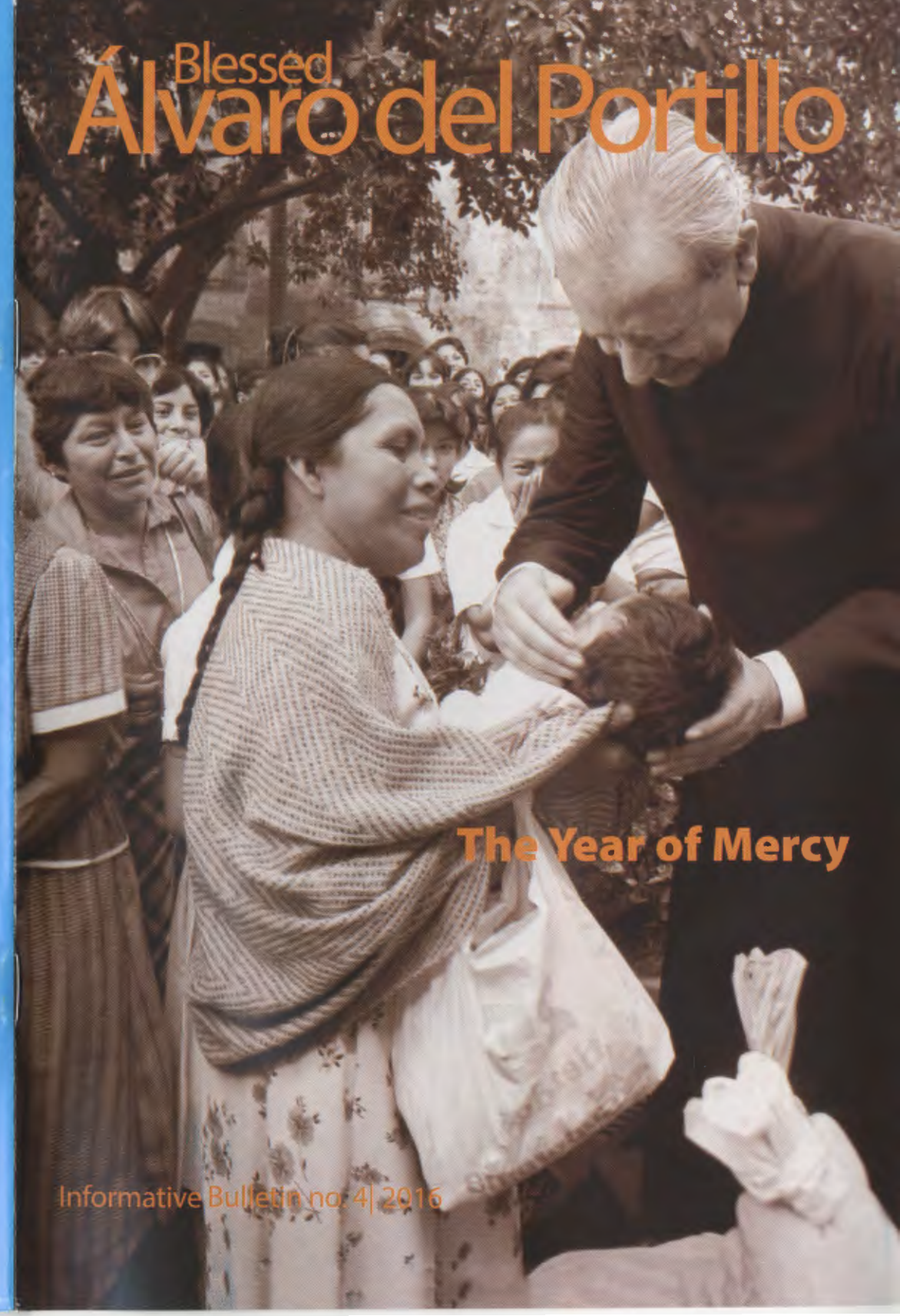
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Direct transfers to:
The Philippine Foundation for
C.E.D., Inc.
BPI Account Number:
0321-0202-08

Imprimatur:
✠ Bishop Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

Graphic design: MCM Srl – Florence
Typography: Daniele Rettori.

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo



The Year of Mercy

Informative Bulletin no. 4 | 2016

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10 FAMCOHSEF

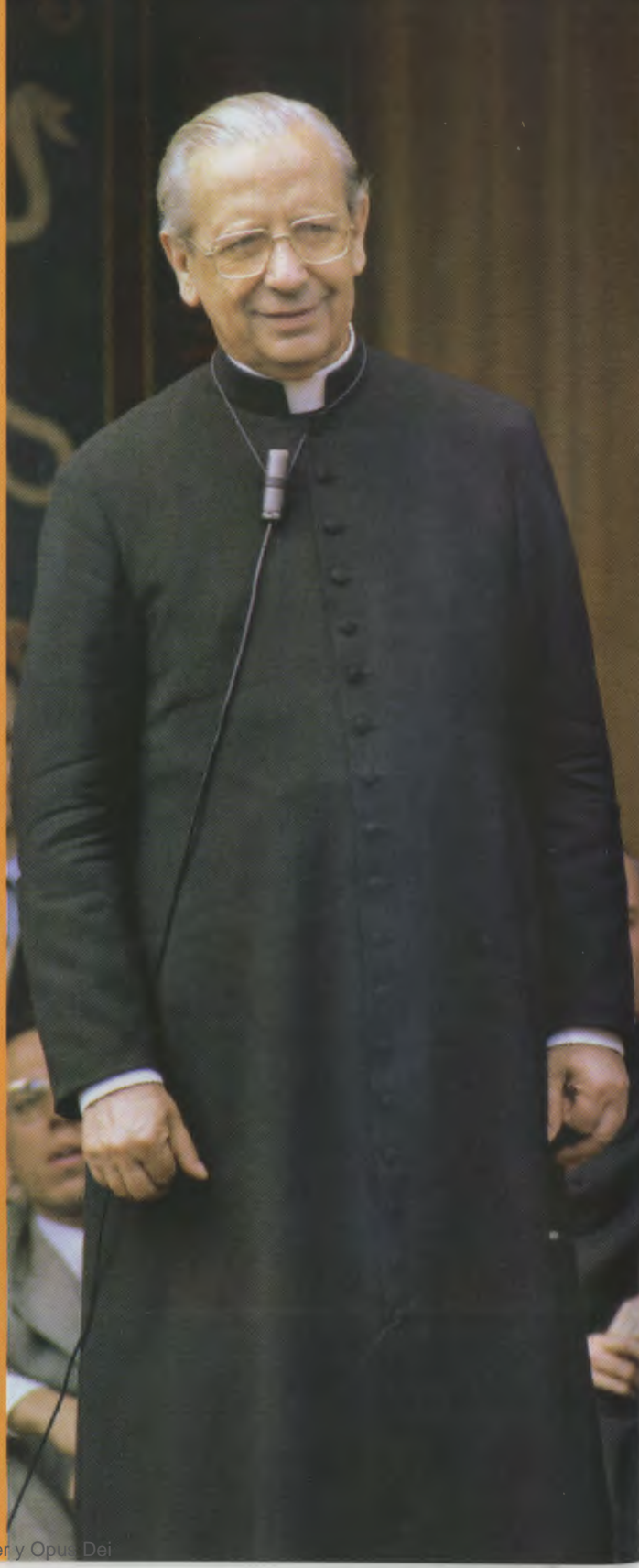
Blessed Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid (Spain) on 11 March 1914, into a large and deeply Christian family. As well as graduating as a Public Works official, he obtained doctorates in Civil Engineering, History and Canon Law. In 1935 he joined Opus Dei. He lived his Christian vocation with great loyalty and faithfulness, through his work and everyday duties, and helped to draw fellow students, colleagues at work and many other people closer to God.

Ordained a priest in 1944, he was completely committed to his pastoral ministry. In 1946 he moved to Rome. His service to the Church was also marked by his dedication to many tasks entrusted to him by the Holy See, especially in the Second Vatican Council. On 15 September 1975 he became Saint Josemaría Escrivá's first successor at the head of Opus Dei.

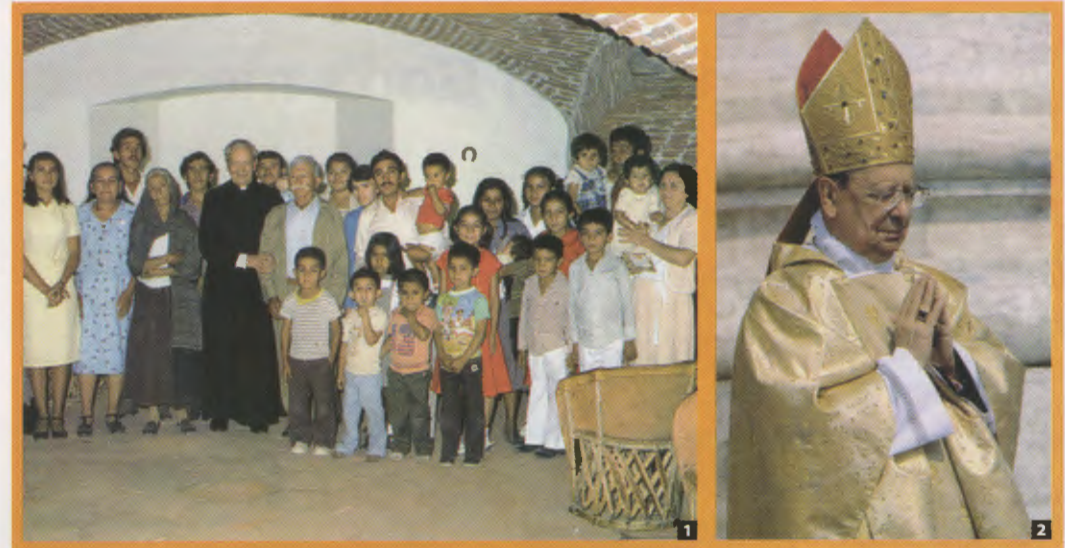
On 28 November 1982 Pope John Paul II established Opus Dei as a personal Prelature, made up of lay faithful and secular priests, and appointed Blessed Alvaro as its first Prelate. In 1991 the Pope ordained him a bishop. The way he governed Opus Dei was characterized by a deep communion with the Pope and the other bishops, complete faithfulness to the Founder of Opus Dei and his message, and tireless pastoral zeal.

Early in the morning of 23 March 1994, the Lord called this good and faithful servant to Himself, a few hours after his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where with deep piety he had visited the places where Jesus had been in that land. That same day, Saint John Paul II went to pray before his mortal remains, which now rest in the crypt of the church of the Prelature, Our Lady of Peace, at 75 Bruno Buozzi Street, Rome.

He was beatified on 27 September 2014.



Editorial



“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!” (Ps 118:1). In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis invites us “to contemplate the mystery of mercy” and to “experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope.”¹ In this way, allowing ourselves to be embraced by divine mercy, we become capable of being merciful towards others, as God is towards us.

“What is it that ‘pleases God most?’” the Holy Father recently asked. And he answered: “To forgive his children, to have mercy on them, so that they also, in turn, can forgive their brothers, shining as torches of God’s mercy in the world. This is what pleases God most.”²

This Holy Year is “an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal”³ first of all for each one to

obtain this mercy from God. In particular, it affords us the opportunity to rediscover the joy and peace which God the Father grants in the sacrament of Reconciliation, and an opportunity to alleviate the sorrows of others, by practising the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

It offers an opportune time to experience the closeness and tenderness of God, so that our faith is strengthened and, in this way, our witness as Christians can be more effective.⁴ In this issue we wish to echo this invitation from the Pope under the guidance of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. ■

¹ Blessed Alvaro with a family in Montefalco, Mexico, May 1983.

² At the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of St Josemaría Escrivá, Rome, 18 May 1992.

¹ Pope Francis, Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, 2-3.

² Pope Francis, General Audience, 9 December 2015

³ *Misericordiae Vultus*, 3

⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, Letter on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 1 November 2015

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

A manifestation of God's mercy

In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis is inviting us to rediscover God's mercy. He has recommended various ways in which we can do this, among them, having recourse to the sacrament of Penance. "Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy for themselves. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace."¹

Here are some texts on Confession from the preaching of Blessed Alvaro:

Divine mercy comes out to meet us

"When we fall, when we sin, divine mercy comes out to meet us, especially in the sacrament of peace and reconciliation, the sacrament of Penance. Go to Confession whenever you need to do so, so as to be cleansed of your sins and to recover the grace of God."²

Recovering our friendship with God

"The only really serious motive for worry and bitterness is sin, this voluntary turning away from God that leaves the soul in darkness, with the unease of having lost the genuine meaning of life, or at least of having cooled such an incomparable friendship: friendship with God! But not even in these moments, which may be frequent due to our weakness, should we allow sadness to get us down. We should feel sorrow for having offended

God and then run to recover our peace, by being reconciled with God and with the others through the Sacrament of Penance."³

The joy of frequent confession

"Go to confession frequently. Resolve to improve your sacramental reconciliation with God. Prepare it well. Examine your conscience deeply. Be sincere. Foster contrition of the heart. Renew the desire to fight better to do good. There are few joys as great as that of feeling, after a well-made confession, what the prodigal son felt: the embrace of our Father God forgiving us!"⁴

The strength needed to be Christ's witnesses

"In order to re-Christianise society, recourse to sacramental Confession is essential: in it each Christian receives the strength needed to be an effective witness to Christ, with his example and word, in all the earthly realities which have to be led back to God the Father. Each one of us needs to come to this source of grace; and we must help many others – relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours – to have recourse to this marvellous Sacrament of God's Forgiveness."⁵ ■

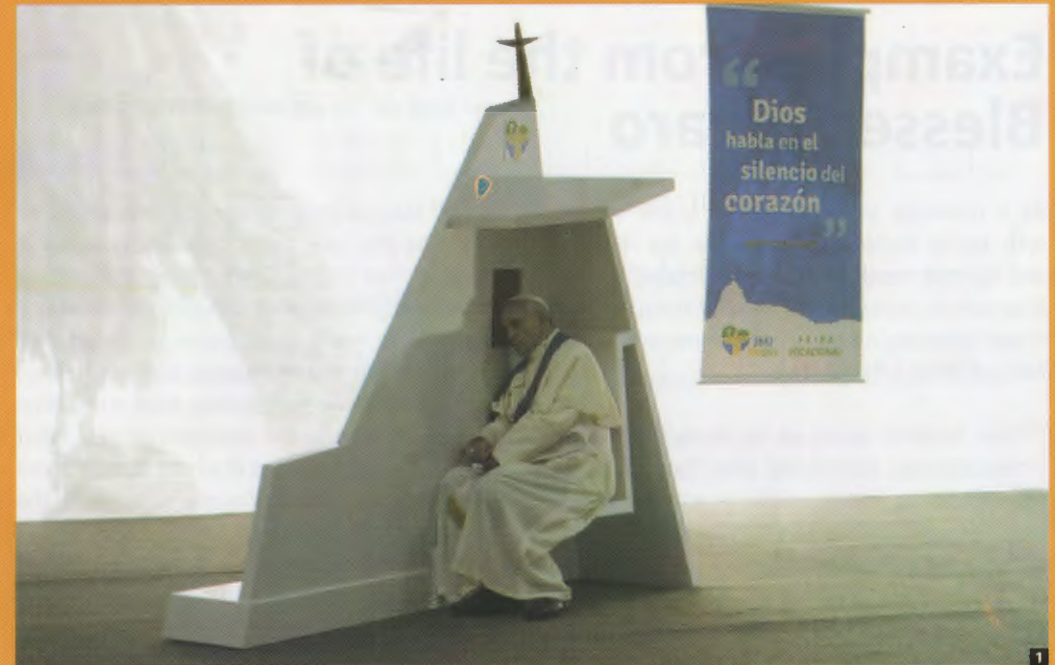
- 1 The Pope administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Rio de Janeiro, 26 July 2013.
- 2 Confessions during the beatification of Blessed Alvaro in Madrid, 27 September 2014.

¹ *Misericordiae Vultus*, 17.

² Homily, 30 March 1985, in Alvaro del Portillo, *Like Salt and Like Light* (an anthology compiled by J. A. Loarte), Scepter, London, 2013, 254.

³ Homily, 12 April 1984, in *ibid.*, 252.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.



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took place near the Abroñigal stream. Alvaro and Manuel had gone to visit several families living in slums and they found 'that there had been a fierce row in one of the families. The police had arrested the parents and put them in prison, leaving four small children on their own, abandoned in their shack. The poor children – one was only one year old – were bewildered not knowing what to do: they had no food and were shivering with cold.'

They took the children to the police station, but it was closed, so they gave some money to a neighbor to take care of them until the next day, when they could come back and go to the police station. But the police didn't want to get involved, so they had to go to a charitable institution: the Santa Cristina children's home, which was in the 'university city'.

Some of the children were so small they did not yet know how to walk. Manuel Pérez writes: 'I have kept in my memory that image of Alvaro, carrying one of those poor children in his arms through the streets of Madrid, heading for the children's home.'

Alvaro del Portillo went about these tasks with a Christian spirit, as reflected in the words with which he recalled this work, years later: 'I always learned from them: people who did not have enough to eat, and I saw nothing but joy. For me they were a great lesson'.¹ ■

¹ Blessed Alvaro in 1937.

² While in Japan, February 1987.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

To counsel the doubtful,
to instruct the ignorant,
to admonish sinners,
to comfort the afflicted,
to forgive offences,
to bear wrongs patiently,
to pray for the living and the dead.

¹ Javier Medina, *Álvaro del Portillo, Un hombre fiel*, Rialp, Madrid 2012, pp. 76-78.

Favors of Blessed Alvaro

Normal Delivery of a Healthy Baby Girl

My husband and I wanted to have a baby. Since we have been married for more than three years, I sought the intercession of Blessed Alvaro for this. Our prayers were answered when I got a positive result for my pregnancy test. Over the course of my pregnancy, I continued praying to Blessed Alvaro. There were no problems in the early stages. But on the third trimester, I experienced pre-term labor pains, so my doctor advised bed rest. On my 35th week, I experienced high blood pressure and was diagnosed to have mild preeclampsia with a high probability that I will undergo cesarean delivery. On my delivery day, everything was normal. I was admitted to the clinic and safely delivered a healthy baby girl. Thanks be to God for this precious gift and to Blessed Alvaro for his intercession!

J.P. (Philippines)

In Favor of Life

I wrote a play of which the main theme was the defence of life from the moment of conception. We sent it in to a public competition, but rather fearful because we are governed by people who tend rather to promote generalised abortion. I assumed that we would not be chosen. For a whole week I prayed the prayer card of Don Alvaro and not long afterwards they contacted us to say we had won. The play was very well received: it benefited 40 schools with lots of pupils, from 100 up to 700 boys and girls. Some even asked us to put it on again, even though the planned performances had ended.

J.W. (Colombia)

Passed the Bar Exams

While watching on TV the beatification ceremony of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, I asked the new blessed to intercede for me to Jesus for my bar exams which was scheduled two consecutive weeks after his beatification. It was the longest examination I've ever had, with 24 essay questions per subject and there were 8 subjects all in all. After passing each of my exam paper, I recited the prayer card of Blessed

Alvaro and increased my devotion to him. Finally, on the announcement date, I was one of those who passed. There were almost 6,000 examinees and below 20% made it. Now I am a lawyer through Blessed Alvaro's intercession, and I am very certain of this!

J.P. (Philippines)

Family Reconciled

I have a niece who has been married for 10 years and has a 4-year-old son. Two years ago she and her husband went through a difficult time in their marriage. The cause was a period of serious financial difficulties due to her husband's bad financial management. At a certain point her husband encouraged her to go back with her son to live with her parents, as he could not pay for their upkeep. In this worrying situation, I began to pray insistently to Don Alvaro. The situation got worse because when my brother saw the difficulties his daughter was going through he fell into a depression and didn't want to have anything to do with his son-in-law, even avoiding or forbidding that anyone in his house should contact with him. I continued praying a lot to Don Alvaro, whom I had known personally. I remember he had once spoken to me about my family, saying: "The better they know the Work, the happier they will be, and they too will want to join." Trusting in these words, I was sure that in some way a solution would be found. For my part, whenever I could, I listened to my niece, kept close to her and encouraged her. Later, a year ago, my niece and her son have gone back to live with her husband and they are happy there, despite pressures from friends and relatives who had advised them to separate. But the story does not end there. Last September, during the very days of the beatification, my brother invited them to his home for dinner, my niece, her husband and their son, and had them sit next to him. I have to thank Don Alvaro for looking after my family with such kindness.

A.P. (Italy)

Back to the Sacraments

My sibling has not been going to Mass for some years. Through Blessed Alvaro's intercession, this sibling went to Confession before going to Blessed Alvaro's beatification and has been regular in attending Sunday Mass since then.

S.T. (Philippines)

The Joy of Passing

I was struggling hard with my course in school and was very depressed because I had just left my family behind to move to another city in order to finish my course. It was such a difficult time in my life that I thought I no longer had hope in succeeding in one particular semester. I wasn't passing all of my quizzes/exams and my grades were hanging by a thread. But then one day, I picked up Blessed Alvaro's prayer card and started praying to him wholeheartedly. I did this every single day for many weeks, even until the semester ended and while I was waiting for my grades. I placed all my trust in Blessed Alvaro and I knew that he was listening to me. I was fully aware that if my prayer was indeed granted, it would have been a miracle due to Blessed Alvaro's intercession. When I finally gathered the courage to check my grades, I was overwhelmed with joy when I saw the word "PASSED" on all of my subjects. I immediately got the prayer card to Blessed Alvaro and thanked him immensely for this miracle. Today, I am fulfilling my promise of making known his gracious miracle. I will continue to praise and glorify Blessed Alvaro until the day I die, and I will surely encourage others to do the same. Thank you so much, Blessed Alvaro! I love you!

N.B. (Philippines)

"I will carry on with my studies"

My son is in his third year of university in Japan. He started a music band and got too involved in it, neglecting his studies. In July he began to say that he was going to give up his studies to devote himself more seriously to music. I was very much against this. At first I got him to agree that, instead of giving up his studies, he should take some time off, but he was still intending to leave the university in the following April and go off to a bigger city. I began to pray to Don Alvaro about this. I was fortunate

enough to be at his beatification in Madrid. During the trip, I prayed a lot through his intercession so that my son would change his mind and continue with his studies. Great was my surprise when, the day after I returned from Madrid, I talked to my son who told me: "I will carry on with my studies, find a good job and devote just my free time to music." His decision was very firm and I can't find an explanation for such a sudden change. That is why I consider it a favour obtained for us by Don Alvaro.

G.O. (Japan)

Laptop Fixed

A short power outage affected my laptop, corrupted the browser and slowed down the whole system such that I was unable to send email messages. I brought it to a nearby mall for repair; and the technician's recommendation was to reformat the whole system and to re-install all the programs. This is tedious and risky! I opted to ask other experts. But after trying all possibilities, none of them worked. So I tried copying the same browser program from another computer, and after praying to Blessed Alvaro, all the programs worked, dormant programs got revived and the whole system got better than before.

P.D. (Philippines)

The bacterial infection disappeared

My sister who suffers from kidney disease is going through the process of getting a transplant, which includes having tests and investigations. At a certain point she was found to have a bacterial infection in her stomach. The treatment she was given for that made her so unwell that it had to be interrupted. She was told by the transplant unit that she had to correct that condition and she started the treatment again which was due to last 10 days, but after 8 days she could take no more. She had to return to have her case studied again and asked me to pray for her, as she could not put up with another course of treatment as it made her so sick. I prayed to Blessed Alvaro and the result of the new test was negative, the infection had disappeared. She phoned me to tell me the happy news and when I told her I had entrusted the matter to Blessed Alvaro, she too was grateful.

M.C. (Puerto Rico)

FAMCOHSEF

Family Cooperation Health Services Foundation
Teaching a handful to make thousands better *

Inspired by Blessed Alvaro

Busy corporate women with families and demanding day jobs meet in a makeshift office that is a 40-foot container van in Muntinlupa. Most of them are middle-aged, while a few are more senior with a contrast of personalities and fields of specialization. But they come together during their supposed “free time” with a shared mission: to make communities, albeit poor, healthy in body and lively in spirit.

They meet at least twice a week to discuss issues, explore where to get funding, identify urban poor settlements needing their services, and spend another day in an underserved barangay to train volunteer health workers and talk to them on one-on-one sessions as friends and mentors.

Roseanne Gonzales, who goes by the nickname Nannie, recounts her misgivings before she joined the 15-member Famcohsef, or Family Cooperation Health Services Foundation, four years ago. She had to make time for unpaid volunteer work without letting go of her hands-on approach as a mother of eight and a property manager.

She also wasn't sure if she could adapt to the conditions involved: “I didn't really like the idea of working under the bare sun for long hours.”

Now president of Famcohsef, Nannie sheds a tear, calling to mind encounters with women health workers who don't have much materially but possess a priceless will to serve.

One relocation settlement near the New Bilibid Prison comprises 8,000 families with an average of five members each. Serving them is only one health center with one doctor, two nurses and two midwives who work eight-to-five shifts on weekdays. Women barangay and community health workers,



* By Camille Diola (Reprinted from The Philippine Star, 24th July, 2014 issue)

whom Nannie calls “good souls,” volunteer to be the arms of the health center, each with 150 families under their care.

In an ideal world, the volunteers would be instructed by the health department. “But the reality is, there's no such training. These women are only ordered around [by the medical practitioners] in the health centers. They're tasked to take vital signs with no real training,” the soft-spoken Nannie explains.

“So we come in with what we call primary healthcare to teach them all about disease-prevention, sanitation, taking vital signs like blood pressure, temperature and pulse,” she adds.

Upon request of the local government, Famcohsef teaches health workers to monitor elderly people in the area, remind pregnant women to have their pre-natal check-up, or contain a measles outbreak among children.

The women also undergo personality development classes and are taught to imbibe professionalism, respect for life, self-reliance, love for learning and a spirit of service.

Perhaps what makes Famcohsef a unique endeavor is what inspired its beginnings two decades ago, when Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, a well-loved Spanish prelate, asked an audience in Manila in 1987: “What are you doing for the poor?”

Moved by the query, a group of women looked into the needs in urban poor areas and created Famcohsef.

To date, the team of eight or so has trained hundreds of health workers in Muntinlupa, Las Piñas, Parañaque and Laguna as its contribution to a “national culture of excellence.” Bishop Alvaro del Portillo is the first successor of St. Josemaria Escriva as head of the Prelature of Opus Dei. He was beatified in Madrid on 27 September 2014.

Three years ago, the group “leveled up” their services, introducing programs on nutrition and care for children and the elderly that enabled trainees to get accreditation and to find employment elsewhere as caregivers or personal health assistants.

The initiative also sought to stem the untimely replacement of health workers upon the election of new local officials.

Nannie says the trainees, some of whom are senior citizens, have a newfound purpose. “They undergo so many hours of training and by the time they graduate, they know all about the dignity of work. They have attended catechism classes and values formation and mentoring,” she explains.

Mentoring entails members of Famcohsef talking to each of the 50 or so women in the program every two weeks and hearing out their personal concerns.

Nannie says the friendly chats are a key part of the program, where trainees not only familiarize themselves with basic health terms but also become emotionally and spiritually mature to look after the ill, vulnerable and suffering.

“That's what our program is all about – total care. We're trying to put together the ideal health worker who has all the virtues, may pagmamalasakit,” she says.

People like Nannie have become volunteers for other volunteers, complicating their full schedules to become yet fuller.

“I think the beauty of Famcohsef is we can't go beyond what we're doing at the moment, given that we are all busy with other things,” she says. “We wish we could grow bigger but we believe the next step would be for others to replicate Famcohsef.”

