

Marist School Marikina, Philippines marks the 25th year of its Evening High School Program

By Ms. Christine Stokes

Marcellin's call to make Marist education accessible to the "least favored" had indeed been a challenge to Marist School in Marikina. Unlike most schools of the Marist Brothers found in Mindanao and started as mission schools in the rural areas, Marist School is located in an urban setting with most its clientele belonging to the middle and upper income groups. For years, this call has been raised considering that it is part of the Marist Charism.

In school year 1993- 1994, when the school was celebrating its 30th anniversary, the school president. Bro. Brother Manuel V. de Leon, FMS, in one of its President's Council meeting, raised the issue on how Marist School can concretely respond to its mission of providing quality education to the least favored. He mentioned that for many years only those who can afford to pay the regular tuition fees are admitted to enroll. In this meeting that the idea of opening evening classes came about. In December 1993, Bro. Manuel had the opportunity to be invited to De La Salle, Greenhills in San Juan to observe the Adult Education Evening classes. The experience inspired him to push the idea and assigned a council member to gather more information from other schools offering the same program.

The following school year 1994-1995, a proposal was presented to the Board of Trustees for approval. A program director was designated to start communication with Department of Education Culture and Sports – National Capital Region. TRAS: The department furnished Marist School the checklist needed for all the requirements. Consultation meetings, revisions of the curriculum, ocular visits, took place until finally a one year permit for a ladderized program was granted in May 1995. The education department also recommended to offer an afternoon shift instead of an evening classes program; thus the name Marist School Afternoon Shift Program.

Prior to the receipt of the approval from the Department of Education Culture and Sports, information on the plans to open this special program was disseminated to the community through the local communities and parish church. And as early as April, screening of prospective students was conducted.

The program caters to the needs the depressed communities within the vicinity of Marist School. A number of depressed communities in Cupang, Antipolo are also part of the program. At the start of the Program, the parish priest of St. Paul of Cross under the care of the Passionist Congregation requested Marist School to allow the children of its church workers from Cupang, Antipolo to be given the chance to a Marist Education. To this day, slots are reserved for these identified communities.

The children of the Marist School personnel are also accepted to the program.

On June 10, 1995, forty seven boys and girls were admitted and started their first day of school under the tutelage of volunteer teachers coming from both the high school and grade school departments. Some Marist Brothers scholastics from MAPAC handled the Religion classes. Bro. Dominador Santiago, FMS, the current provincial of the East Asia Province, was the first Religion teacher of Class 99. On June 21, 1995 at 5 pm the first Holy Mass was held in the open on the longest day of the year. On March 21, 1999, eighteen young boys and twenty-four young ladies graduated from high school.

Every year during the months of February and March applicants from nearby public schools would begin to submit their applications for high school. There would be most of the time more than a

hundred applicants but the school could only take in 50 students. This went on until SY 2017-2018, when the school decided to take in two (2) sections in the freshmen year. Presently, there are 10 sections with 427 students.

Every summer teacher volunteers would visit the depressed area in Marikina and Cupang, Antipolo to verify the home situation of the applicants. Teachers somehow had a first hand experience of poverty in the urban areas. Most of the applicants come from non-fixed earner families. There were times in the past where they could not even afford the 30 pesos monthly fee. Teachers and other personnel would volunteer to pay the 300 pesos fee for the year.

The students' eagerness to learn new things and diligence in their studies somehow serves as inspiration for them to continue studies in college, although some of them may stop schooling due to financial reason. There are now teachers, nurses, accountants, businessmen/women, bank tellers, guidance counsellors and other graduates coming from the afternoon shift. To date the school has graduated some 5000 students from 1999 to 2020.

These graduates show their appreciation of the program put up by the school. On one occasion, an alumnus wrote, *"Thank you very much for conceptualizing the afternoon shift program. Thank you for inspiring us to be the best that we can be. We know that God will bless you because you have been an instrument of His love for us."*

A graduate of class 2004 Sherwin who was taking up architecture in college had to stop schooling due to financial difficulties. He had to look for work but later decided to join the military in 2010 to be able provide his family with a more stable income. He was one of the many soldiers killed in the Marawi City, Philippines siege in September 2017. During the wake his mother was so surprised to witness the show of emotions from a group of young people who came to visit. The group related that Sherwin was the president of their outreach club for the poor children in Taguig. Indeed, one can see this Marist quality evident in Sherwin "doing good quietly". Sherwin was paying it forward at this stage of his life. He wasted no time to take every opportunity to share what he could in his own little way. Truly a Marista! A few days before his death he sent a message to one of these teachers to pray for him. And his message ended with these lines.... *" if I should walk in the valley of darkness . . . You are there to lead the way. ... A Marista with such great faith indeed!*

This school year as Marist School celebrates the 25th year of its Afternoon Shift program, it is our hope and prayer that these youth whose lives we have touched will continue to touch other lives as well.

Our dream to have at least a member of the family in our identified communities study at Marist must continue – to make Jesus and Mary known and love and spread Marcellin's vision of educating particularly the least favored to become good Christians and virtuous citizen for we believe that their stay at Marist does not end after they graduate from Marist but will go on for a lifetime.