

UPDATE LETTER

December 2021, Philippines



Dear friends,

How are you and how are you faring in this time of long pandemic? We hope you are just fine and have already adjusted to the present situation we are all in.

As we take this opportunity to thank all the sponsors who have stayed on and continue to give support, we also give our warm welcome to the new ones.

The Pag-asa social center was born in 1997, almost spontaneously as an expression of the Focolare Movement's commitment to love the neighbor. Through regular district visits in the surrounding communities of the verdant hills of Tagaytay, its members came face to face with the harsh realities that afflict the lives of the many families that live there. The Focolare Movement started supporting children of families in need in the area by providing them health, educational, and livelihood assistance along with human and spiritual formation not only for the children but for their families as well.

To date our Center, with a staff of just 7 people, provides school, medical and nutritional assistance and other services to 306 children and young people (2-22 years old) from 181 poor families from different barangays in Tagaytay.

THE HOWS OF US IN TIMES OF THIS CONTINUED PANDEMIC

HOW IS THE VACCINATION AMONG THE BENEFICIARIES OF PAG-ASA?

At the early stage of the vaccine roll out, many Filipinos, even among the beneficiaries of Pag-asa were assailed by doubts and fears regarding the vaccine against Covid19 because of confusing news about side effects they saw on TV or social networks. In this specific context, fear and distrust have been fuelled by the previous experience with the dengue vaccine, which has been linked to more than 600 deaths in 2019.

To make the beneficiaries understand that the Covid19 vaccine is safe, the Pag-asa staff immediately took the chance and set the example, taking the jab the very first time the vaccine was rolled out. Aside from that, we made our beneficiaries understand that now more than ever, is the time when we should think of the people around us.

Our efforts did not go to waste. Many understood and had themselves vaccinated. To date, many of our children aged 12 to 17 have also enlisted themselves for the vaccination.

HOW DO THE BENEFICIARIES FARE AS THIS SHARED CRISIS BALLOONED?

In our January 2021 newsletter, we mentioned about the "virus of self-reliance", that despite the help they keep receiving from Pag-asa center, our beneficiaries tried their best to do their part and find new ways to earn some money while waiting to get back to their previous jobs. Thus, people engage in small livelihood activities and in online selling of food and household products. The little money they earn has helped them for their basic needs.

The pandemic has stayed longer than expected, however, and even if many of them have been doing their part, this time of their lives seems to be tirelessly testing their limits. More parents have added to the increasing number of the unemployed, and when some of them finally find a job opportunity, they have to tackle another problem: the expenses in procuring the documents required in order to be hired. This gives them no choice but to borrow money even before they get their first pay.

There are also those who may be positive with Covid19 but continue to work, thinking they have nothing to feed their kids if they reveal that they are infected and will therefore have to stop working. Then there are also those who despair due to lack of money when their children get sick and need to be hospitalized.

HOW ARE THE KIDS' EDUCATION?

Children's education continues to be a challenge for the students, parents, and teachers alike. A lot of families with many children who are studying all at the same time are using only one gadget. Other families don't even have their own gadget and rely only on the mercy of their neighbors if they will let them borrow theirs. How can they catch up with online learning in this situation? The elder kids serve as the tutor to their younger siblings while their parents are out for work. There are younger kids who have no choice but to wait for their parents to arrive from work so that they can start assisting them in studying. The most depressing situation is that many of the parents are lacking in education and, as a result, cannot adequately support their children's studies.

And because of the continued increase of Covid19 cases in the country, the Philippines remain to be the only country in Asia that have not yet gone back to face-to-face classes in school.

(From top to bottom) One of the children who received something from one of our Community Pantries.

Beneficiaries who received their school supplies from Pag-asa.

Some of the fully vaccinated Pag-asa staff and parents of beneficiaries.



Some of the many Donors of our Community Pantries.

HOW DOES PAG-ASA CONTINUE TO HELP IN THIS TIME OF CONTINUED PANDEMIC?

Pag-asa continues to give help in the midst of the continued pandemic depending on the strictness or leniency of the protocol being effected nationally or locally. This means that there are months when we are not able to visit the beneficiaries in their homes physically and we just make do with "visitation" through video calls. We make sure that the help we are giving is contactless and we set a preferred spot where the help is taken: rice, school supplies, medicines. In short, Pag-asa lives as a law-abiding institution making sure that the Center remains safe and a child friendly place.

HOW DO BENEFICIARIES HELP EACH OTHER AND THEIR NEIGHBORS IN NEED?

It is in times like these that we see a spirit of communal unity and cooperation among beneficiaries, selflessly helping others without expecting rewards, to achieve a certain goal. Not minding how late at night or early at dawn it is, they stretch out their open hands to help in times of need.

Here are some testimonials:

Obido family temporarily kept and took care of the four children of their neighbor, a couple who needed to stay in the hospital for weeks because of the wife's complicated childbirth. The Obido family itself has three kids who are all studying at the same time in their small house. They are also in need. In fact, there are times when they too are struggling to make both ends meet. Despite that, their love for their neighbor is stronger. They did not hesitate to take care of the four kids, give them shelter, food and assist them in their online learning.

The Malabanan family on the other hand, seemed to have been battered by life's

trials specially in this pandemic. Many of their family members and relatives have repeatedly tested positive with Covid19, some of them even died of it. Despite that, they did not tire of giving out even just food to their relatives as help, as well as to make them feel that they are just there ready to help; to make them feel that they are not afraid and that those who are Covid19 positive are not to be shunned. Helping has not been a walk in the park for them because of Covid protocol restrictions and the difficulty of finding a hospital with available space for new patients who need one. It came to a point when they had no other option but to do the treatment at home. They sacrificed a lot, like not showing up for work in order to watch over their patient. They surpassed all these because the will to help weighed more on them than their exhaustion and the temptation to give up.

In the past months Pag-asa Social Centre set up a community pantry with the support of many friends to provide food directly to locals suffering from food insecurity. Many beneficiaries answered the call to give whatever they could to help those in need, near or far. Many others including friends sent help: A little? Plenty? It was not important. The wonderful thing was to see and feel that each one was ready to help. The act of selfless love of one of our beneficiaries who contributed his extra root crops and vegetables caught the attention of many. His story spread far and wide and inspired a lot more people. We reached out to 2789 people, visiting the different communities and setting up the distribution programme each time (see Table 2).

Dear friends, those are the "hows of us" during this time of continued pandemic. How about yours? We read and hear news from your country and continent. Rest assure of our prayer for your well-being,



(From top to bottom) Beneficiaries who received their school supplies from Pag-asa. Some of the many Donors of our Community Pantries.



and for the precarious situation caused by the Pandemic to improve and eventually for life to be back to normal.

Take care and best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!

Your Pag-asa Family

TABLE 1
MANY THANKS FOR THE EXTRA DONATIONS RECEIVED FROM OTHER GROUPS:

United Riders Alliance Club	School supplies that we distributed to our beneficiaries in Noveleta, Cavite
Hero Angeles	For choosing Pag-asa as the beneficiary when he joined a videoke TV Show
Bangko Kabayan	The big donation of which benefited Community Pantries in Quezon province
Fragale Giuseppe and Graziella	For their extra donation for our Center
Friends of Natalina Pellizzari	Donations to upgrade our Dental Clinic and kitchen to reduce risk of Covid19 transmission
Carlo Antiga of Banca di Credito Cooperativo delle Prealpi	
Fr. Winfried Kuipers	For his donations gathered from the farewell gift he received from 6 churches as he was leaving for another parish

TABLE 2
HELP EXTENDED EVEN TO 2789 NON-PAGASA MEMBERS AS PART OF OUR COMMUNITY PANTRY ACTIVITIES

CANNED GOODS	10 BIG BOXES
NOODLES	10 BIG BOXES
SACKS OF RICE	200 SACKS
DRIED FISH	150 KILOGRAMS
VEGETABLES	2500 KILOGRAMS
BREAD	300 LOAVES
BISCUITS	15 BIG BOXES
FRUITS	8 SACKS
TOILETRIES	8 BIG BOXES



(From top to bottom) Pag-asa staff preparing goods for the day's Community Pantry.
Hero Angeles singing in a videoke TV show with Pag-asa as his partner beneficiary.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

If you wish to write to us or your child, please use the following address:

Pag-asa Social Center Foundation, Inc.
Focolare Compound, Calamba Road,
Iruhin Central, PO Box 78,
4120 Tagaytay City, Philippines

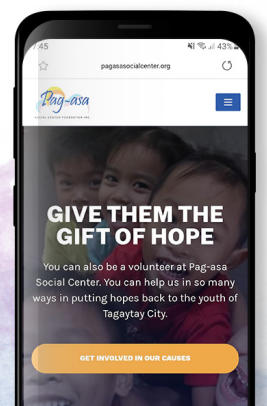
Or email us at: info@pagasasocialcenter.org
or pagasacenter@yahoo.com

- When sending a letter, put your address as the sender on the envelope and do not write it anywhere in the text. From experience and respect for everyone's privacy, we know that the exchange of supporter/child addresses is inappropriate.
- If you do not have the opportunity to continue helping the child, it is essential to communicate it before the renewal of your commitment occurs. The report must arrive promptly to our office with an e-mail (pagasacenter@yahoo.com). This gesture will allow us to continue helping the child by entrusting him to another supporter. We thank you in advance for your collaboration.



Obido family and the neighbors children whom they took care of while their parents were in the hospital for several weeks.

Visit our website
pagasasocialcenter.org



GET INVOLVED IN OUR CAUSES