



## Caring for the Community: How the Damayang Lasalyano Pantry Promoted the Culture of Compassion

Sharing is caring. And rather than focus simply on caring for their well beings, a group of Lasallian employees created an avenue for the community to extend compassion to those who need it.

Inspired by the community pantries that first became popular in Metro Manila, the core group of Ruthchelle Dineros (CoEd), Maria Luisa Abiador (CoEDGS), Marilyn Macario (PFD), Florence Cagas (RED), Alpha Alyssa Tiongson (PED), Amie Mejica (MSD), Katherine Bengil (ULFO), and Dr. Cristina Sayoto (PFD) first came up with an idea to reach out to DLSU-D employees who were affected by the pandemic.

According to the group, they were simply talking among themselves about the situation of housekeepers, groundskeepers, and other employees of the school, whose work schedules were affected by pandemic restrictions.

They learned of the situation of some Diars staff members whose work schedules have been reduced from five days to three days due to quarantine and safety protocols being observed by the University. Unfortunately, this had an impact on the income of the staff members.

The group initially set out to help the Diars staff because they only had a limited budget. They immediately set out to work.

The friends held regular group chat meetings to coordinate the logistics, the budget, the schedule, the beneficiaries, and ensuring the health protocols to be set in place. From what started as a simple idea, support came flooding when KABALIKAT ng DLSUD and LCDC gave their full endorsement and posted the initiative on social media. This encouraged even more organizations and individuals to pitch in.

Overwhelmed by the outpouring of support that they received from the Lasallian community which made the project a success, they recounted the sheer effort of those who still pitched in to help even though they were also suffering from the impact of the pandemic.

*"We were surprised by the people who were quick to respond to our call for donations. Even those whom we know to be spending for their medication were willing to share what they had help out. Former employees of the University, those who are sharing without expecting anything in return, those who wish to remain anonymous when they extend aid to the needy -- we have a lot of angels here on Earth, indeed,"* the group members said.

It was all worth it when the program was able to share goods not just to housekeepers and groundskeepers but also to security personnel, facilities/aircon maintenance, technicians, canteen personnel, Bahay Pag Asa residents, and even selected Lasallian scholars who were experiencing challenges amid the new normal. From the initial plan to distribute only the essentials, the pantry was able to include hygiene supplies, and even vegetables to help the beneficiaries' families stay healthy and strong.

The group still has their work cut out for them. While joint efforts with partners and donors have spurred six successful events, the group admits that one of the challenges of the program will be sustainability. For this, the group simply prays that the donors will continue to support the program so that it can continue to make an impact in the lives of others.

*"We always pray for the health and safety of everyone, especially those who are helping our fellow Lasallians in need. This is all that we can do to express our gratitude for their kind hearts -- our sincerest and most fervent prayers,"* they said.

May this culture of caring continue. Animo La Salle!

