

*By Sister Maria May Cano, OP*



*Sister Maria May Cano, OP, with Ricardo Reyes, officer in charge of the East West Seeds Philippines Corporation.*

*Executive Secretary, Caritas Kalookan*

**May 26, 2020, Caloocan City, the Philippines** – The formal experience of the Diocese of Kalookan – one of 10 Suffragan Dioceses in Metro Manila – began on March 14, 2020, when Bishop Pablo Virgilio David called a meeting of the women and men religious and diocesan priests. He announced our need to follow the advice of the Department of Health: to practice social distancing to avoid the spreading of the coronavirus. All Masses and other gatherings were canceled. Bishop David further asked the priests to respond to the various needs of the people, especially for confession.

The Diocese of Kalookan – made up of 29 parishes, two quasi-parishes, and 13 mission stations – is the poorest diocese in Metro Manila. About 90% of the people are the “poorest of the poor.” This is where we can find the peripheries, as Pope Francis mentioned during his 2015 visit to our country.

Many people lost their jobs because of the pandemic and do not have money to provide the basic needs of their family. We cater to people of all walks of life: people with

special needs, senior citizens, the sick, and families of those who were victims of extra-judicial killings in the war against drugs.

## Donations



*From left, Henk Hermans, General Manager of East West Seeds Philippines Corporation; Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of the Diocese of Kalookan; Ricardo Reyes of East West Seeds; and Sister Maria May Cano, OP.*

By the grace of God, two days after our meeting, we started receiving donations in cash and kind. The staff of Caritas Kalookan, Inc., was in charge of accepting those donations, as well as purchasing and disbursing goods needed by the people in the diocese. We received more than 1,500 cavans of rice and purchased 800 cavans of rice. In the Philippines, a cavan is a unit of dry measurement, equal to about 44 kilograms (97 pounds). We also received canned goods from individuals, religious organizations, and private companies like San Miguel Corp. We in the Diocese of Kalookan collected around 7 million pesos, in addition to the donations in kind.

The business sectors in Greater Manila donated around 1.7 billion pesos worth of gift certificates to Caritas Manila. Bishop David distributed the Kalookan Diocese's share of gift certificates – about 230 million pesos worth – to the priests and chaplains of mission stations, who gave them to families in need in our diocese. The gift certificates enable the families to purchase their basic needs. Sister Abegail Santos, OP, my community



member and companion, focuses on collating the gift certificate and reporting on their distribution to Caritas Manila.



*Vegetable seedlings were donated to the Diocese of Kalookan to help people feed themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

While I am busy accepting the donations in kind, ordering goods, and sending deliveries to various parishes, I also purchase milk for the children and distribute gift certificates for their medicines.

The East West Seeds Philippines Corporation approved our request to provide us with vegetable seeds and seedlings, since we are experiencing crisis. It is good to plant vegetables while we are in lockdown. We teach our people to produce their own vegetables in their own backyard. This is an application of the message of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* and is one way that we care for and nurture our Mother Earth.

The company also connected us to the farmers, purchasing fresh vegetables at a reasonable price. This benefited both the farmers and the people who received the seedlings and learned to plant organic vegetables.

## Ministry of Other Adrian Dominican Sisters



*Sister Abegail Santos, OP, works on gift certificates to be distributed to families and individuals.*

In Mining, Angeles City, Sisters Arsenia Puno, OP, Victoria Changcoco, OP, Liberty Mendoza, OP, Meliza Arquillano, OP, and Leizel Tedria, OP, have also been involved in ministry to people suffering because of the pandemic. They received donations of more than 300,000 pesos and distributed goods to 500 indigenous Aeta families. In addition, they cooked food for people on the front lines and distributed food packs to 500 families for four weeks – a total of 2,000 packs – through Caritas Manila.

Sister Ines Manuel, OP, also cooked for the people on the frontlines and distributed food packs to people with disabilities and other neighbors in Manibaug, Porac.

Sisters Jolyn Dungo, OP, Yolanda Manapsal, OP, Marifi Lugtu, OP, Antonette Lumbang, OP, Rosita Yaya, OP, and Filomena Manuel, OP, distributed food packs in San Fernando.

## Gratitude and Trust

I thank God, for all the experiences we had despite of many trials we encountered. God is good, sending generous benefactors in the midst of this COVID-19 crisis. We are blessed to have a bishop who is so compassionate, caring, and supportive, and who is always worried about the situation of our poor brothers and sisters.

I salute, too, all the people on the front lines: the doctors, nurses, media people, military personnel who are assigned in different checkpoints, salespeople, bakers, parish volunteers, the Curia staff, and all those reach out to our brothers and sisters. We also thank those who spend more time in prayer that we might overcome this crisis.

We have been in this situation for about two months and have kept on praying that we will survive and gradually return to our new normal. I know that God is with us as we unite all our prayers and sacrifices. I entrust everything in God's hands. I pray, too, that we will have the medicines and vaccines to combat COVID-19. God is merciful. I pray that He will heal our Land, and the whole World. God bless us all!