

PASTORAL LETTER
ASH WEDNESDAY
MARCH 9, 2011

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today marks the beginning of Lent, a period of time for introspection, self-examination and repentance for failures and sin as a way to focus on the need for God's grace. It reminds us to get our lives centered, our priorities straight and our hearts clean. We look into our hearts and pray for a clean heart and the renewal of the right spirit within us

As ashes are placed on our forehead we show our humility before God, realizing the consequences of sins and we reflect on what needs to change in our lives if we are to be fully Christian. Today, other than prayer, we are also expected to do fasting and almsgiving. We can do charitable deeds by helping those in physical need with food and clothing or by simply giving money to charities. One such charitable deed is to respond to a call to feed the hungry and malnourished children

In the Philippines, the 7th FNRI survey in 2008 shows that about 3 out of 10 children are underweight or under height due to prolonged hunger that leads to malnutrition. This translates to about 8 to 9 million children! What is more alarming is that 6.1% of these children are suffering from acute or severe malnutrition. Among 0 to 5 year old children, this condition causes irreversible damage to the brain; they become slow learners and unproductive later in life.

Many of these children if not saved are doomed to die. Saving the life of a child by defeating hunger assures him of a better life. This is what HAPAG-ASA Feeding Program does; it attempts to provide the child with opportunity to attain Fullness of Life, by feeding his body and feeding his spirit.

The HAPAG-ASA responds to the church's call to defeat and eradicate hunger and malnutrition in the spirit of Christ's Miracle of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes. It has three components that are anchored on Christian spirit of Sharing and Loving: Supplemental Feeding of 1 meal a day, 5 days a week, for 6 months or a total of 120 meals enriched with vitamins and minerals that will raise the nutritional status of every malnourished child; Parents' Education Classes that provide the parents of the children basic skills that improve their capacity to care for their children; and Livelihood and Skills Training that provide them access to employment and livelihood opportunities to sustain the gains beyond the six-month feeding program.

The Program benefits undernourished children 6 months to 12 years old and underweight pregnant and lactating women. Five years into its implementation, the program has fed more than 500,000 children, a small number compared to the large number of hungry and malnourished children in the Country. It takes P10/day to feed a hungry child or P1,200.00 for 6 months. That is all what it takes to save the life of a hungry and malnourished child.

Lent is a season of hope and with ashes on our foreheads and hope in our hearts, we go forth to love and serve. We enjoin you, my dear brother and sisters, to donate whatever you save from fasting to HAPAG-ASA's FAST . . . FEED 2011. Help us feed a hungry child!

Thank you and God bless.

Most Rev. Antonio R. Tobias, DD
Bishop