

Pastoral Letter
Ash Wednesday, 13 February 2013

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today, as we celebrate Ash Wednesday, ashes are imposed on our forehead as a symbol, as we begin our Lenten journey. Pope Benedict XVI said that receiving ashes should remind us of the passage in Genesis which says “Dust you are and unto dust you shall return”, a call to mind of our mortal state so that we sincerely take to heart the call to repentance. We are also asked to “turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel” as an invitation to conversion, to move away from sin, to profess our faith and to embrace Christ in our life.

These reminders also resonate with the call of the Holy Father in this Year of Faith to take it as an opportunity to turn back to Jesus and enter into a deeper relationship with him. Jesus speaks of three main disciplines that we can faithfully practice this Lenten season: giving alms, praying and fasting. All these spiritual activities, Jesus asks to be done without expecting anything in return.

A good opportunity to intensify the act of charity, which is faith in action, is for us to actively participate in the **HAPAG-ASA** program of the Church. Today, we are again launching the **FAST 2 FEED FUND CAMPAIGN** of the **Pondo ng Pinoy**, when we are required to fast to be able to feed at least 250,000 hungry and under-nourished children nationwide through **HAPAG-ASA**. This program feeds children, 6 months to 12 years old, once a day, 5 days a week for 6 months with nutritious food and their parents provided with basic skills that improve their capacity to care for their children and livelihood and skills training to provide them access to employment and income generating activities.

Since its inception, **HAPAG-ASA** has already fed more than 1 Million hungry and malnourished children nationwide. Last year, our diocese was able to feed a total number of 3,108 malnourished children. A total of P 2,217,400.62 was received as subsidy from Pondo ng Pinoy Community Foundation to feed these children. This year we are targeting to feed 2,000 and we need to raise P 2.4M to be able to feed them in six months. It only takes Ten Pesos (P10) a day or One Thousand Two Hundred (1,200) for six (6) months to feed one child.

We therefore appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to donate whatever you save from fasting to **HAPAG-ASA FAST 2 FEED** fund campaign. By so doing you give our children a chance for a better future. In our conversion journey this Lent, my dear brothers and sisters, let our “faith commit each one of us to become a living sign of the presence of God” (*Porta Fidei*, 15).

Most Rev. Antonio R. Tiobias, DD