

# Save the best for the least

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Last but not the least : The Assumption sisters have never neglected the seed they planted in the farmlands of San Simon, Pampanga that has since grown to become a sturdy shelter for the least in society. The Assumpta Technical School has successfully managed to be self-sufficient, too, with its students learning livelihood skills.

The MMDA invited controversy last week when they proposed the hiring of women drivers to solve the increasing number of vehicular accidents in the country. Although evidence still has to be gathered to prove female drivers are better than their male counterparts, the idea that the MMDA is driving at is that women are more responsible than men could ever be.

And that I think is true. A look at our economy would reveal that women dominate the service sector that we know demands responsibility and conscientiousness. Thus, we have more female nurses, caregivers, and teachers.

The Filipina though is not just for professions that merely serve other people. They have taken leadership roles in our country and have proven themselves to be much better at achieving something.

In the field of technical education, for instance, among the many religious orders that proclaim a life of service for the poor, it is the Assumption sisters that lead the way. We were fortunate enough to have Assumpta Technical School in San Simon, Pampanga accept our invitation for a campus visit. Assumpta managed to grab our attention because it is the only technical school and foundation institute that was able to attain a level 3 accreditation by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges & Universities (PAASCU). Level 3 accreditation is the highest level for basic education units and schools that are able to attain this are privileged with full autonomy from the Department of Education, owing to a proven track record in curriculum, instruction, and organization development.

Upon arriving at Assumpta, we were greeted by students cleaning the campus area. We were to learn that day that Assumpta survives with a few janitorial staff because of the sense of ownership that the students have for the school. It is an impressive feat as the school buildings are as clean as a convent. The students were also very courteous, greeting us spontaneously even though they had never met us before or didn't know we were teachers, too. It is the kind of courtesy that is inherent and not one that is forced or cued by teachers.

Assumpta's history is a dynamic story of continuous growth and progress. Each phase of their evolution is explicitly marked by prayer and discernment, no doubt taught and ingrained in them by the presence of the Assumption sisters.

There was an article last month written by an Australian who pointed out that Westerners have an impression of the Philippines as a "sponsor a child" nation. The Assumpta community used to be one of those schools that depended on solicitation and donors. Now, only a remarkable four percent of their expenses is taken from donations. They have successfully managed to be self-sufficient by accepting paying students into their school. This major shift in policy, brought about by prayerful discernment of the faculty and staff, has ensured the sustainable development and continuous self-improvement of Assumpta Tech. Were there conflicts brought about by a mixed population of poor and well-off students ? The teachers emphatically share the times when they were witnesses to the grace-filled moments of generosity. One time, the school was able to receive donations of shoes, which were sorely needed by most of their students. The problem was, the donations were limited and not everyone would be able to receive one. The administrators were able to solve this by entrusting the students with the decision as to

who among them needed the shoes the most. With admirable maturity, the students, who were only slightly better off than their friends, prioritized their classmates' needs first and passed on the chance of having new and shiny leather shoes. These stories, claim the teachers, are just one of the many inspiring anecdotes that motivate them to work hard for the school.

Every day, the students look out for each other and share what they have with their friends who are faced with financial difficulties. It is this kind of supportive school atmosphere that has produced quality graduates, including the current chairperson/principal, Irma Medina, and other Assumption sisters who have become established names in the field of Philippine education. Just a few years ago, the school's valedictorian, whose father is a tricycle driver, was able to pass BS Physics at the Ateneo de Manila.

At the end of our visit, what my fellow teachers deemed most admirable about Assumpta were its facilities and system. Personally though, I think the secret of the school's success is the presence of the Assumption sisters who have guided the teachers and students alike with deep religiosity and love for God. The Assumption sisters have never neglected the seed they planted in the farmlands of San Simon, Pampanga that has since grown to become a sturdy shelter for the least in society but greatest in the eyes of God.

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