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A Centennial Marked by Solidarity

At a conference at the Centro ELIS school in Rome recently, participants discussed Blessed Josemaria Escriva's teachings and heard about various social service initiatives begun in honor of the centennial of his birth.

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"These new initiatives are the best memorial, tangible and lasting, of the anniversary which we are celebrating today," said Marta Manzi,

spokeswoman for the Centennial activities."

Sociologist Pierpaolo Donati of the University of Bologna commented that "the teachings of Josemaria Escriva have moved many people to become conscious of the responsibility that all of us have, as members of the human family, to promote the material and moral development of the most needy." In Blessed Josemaria, Donati added, "work is essentially the place of one's personal encounter with God and a means of serving others." For this reason, "the initiatives promoted under the inspiration of his teachings have work as their keystone and foundation: centers of professional training, directed by workers, engineers and craftsmen, in which young people are formed to learn a craft which will give them entry to employment and a life of dignity; hospitals and clinics, promoted by

doctors and nurses, destined to provide medical assistance in places not served by the public structures, etc."

Education, Work, Immigration and Health

Leon Tshilolo of Congo explained the activities of the new medical-social dispensary "Moluka" in the Congo republic, a subsidiary of the Monkole Hospital, through which doctors and nurses offer health care to people who would otherwise find it unattainable. In addition, Tshilolo added, the dispensary would provide programs of physical hygiene and nutrition, home and neighborhood sanitation, family health, child care, literacy work, finance, domestic science and creation of productive activities. With the new dispensary it will be possible to take care of a population of 30,000 people.

Charles Osezua of Nigeria made a presentation about the Institute of Industrial Technology, directed to unemployed young men and adults of Nigeria's capital, Lagos, where the rate of unemployment among young people in some districts reaches 60%. Open to people of all religions, races and tribes, the IIT aims to be "an agent for the relief of poverty," providing technical training to these people to facilitate their access to the workplace. The center which was officially inaugurated this past October "as a birthday present to Blessed Josemaria," has 75 students in its first course, which will be increased year by year. The principal areas of training are electrical and automotive skills.

Isabel Charun, a rural worker in Cañete, Peru, illustrated the initiatives of the Condoray rural training center for women, an institution promoted by members of

Opus Dei some 90 miles from Lima, at which more than 20,000 farm women in one of the poorest regions of Peru have been trained. In this area some 83% of women between 19 and 39 are illiterate, while 70% of the families are so poor that they cannot provide for basic necessities. "The teachings of Blessed Josemaria," she said, "have moved us to take action so that our children will have a better life and therefore many of us farm women want to help in the development of our villages."

Isabel Charun is an indigenous farm woman who learned to read at Condoray; today she has become one of the promoters of the center.

Six other initiatives which were occasioned by the Centennial were the Guatanfur Farm School in Colombia; the non-governmental organization Raval Solidari of Barcelona, Spain, whose purpose is

the social integration of immigrants; the walk-in medical clinic at the Ciudad de los Niños in Monterrey, Mexico; the Dworek Center for the Advancement of Rural Women in Poland; Los Pinos Educational Center in Montevideo, Uruguay; and another walk-in medical clinic in Caracas, Venezuela.

The real treasure of the Christian

Monsignor Jose Luis Illanes, Director of the Josemaria Escriva Historical Institute, recalled that Blessed Josemaria, from the beginning of his priestly ministry, "went through city neighborhoods and hospitals filled with sick people, with a faith which led him to say that the foundation of Opus Dei, its treasure and its riches, were the poor who had nothing and the hopelessly ill." Over the years "Josemaria Escriva had encouraged the initiation of many projects: schools of professional formation,

training centers for peasant farmers, universities, high schools, hospitals and medical clinics, etc., open to people of all races, religions and social levels." Illanes remarked that Blessed Josemaria "always pointed out that the virtue of poverty lived personally and a preoccupation for those most in need are the true treasure of the Christian, the basis of his vocation of service to the Church and to society."

Upon concluding the presentation, Alberto Michelini, the personal delegate of the Italian Prime Minister for application of the G-8 plan for Africa, emphasized the importance of initiatives of this type, because "in order to transform societies in difficulties and to generate progress, the fundamental thing is the professional training of their citizens."

The meeting also heard about activities underway for a number of years in Chile (Nocedal), the Philippines (DAWV), Great Britain (Baytree), Guatemala (Kinal), Italy (ELIS), Kenya (Kimlea), Portugal (Criança e Vida), and the United States (Metro).

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