

OM Ministers to Cemetery Dwellers in the Philippines

About five years ago, Operation Mobilization Philippines started a feeding ministry among the street children who were found loitering near the OM office in the city of Cebu.

Initially, only 12 children arrived every Tuesday evening for a hot meal, followed by an hour and a half of children's activities, including Bible stories, games, singing and crafts. Since then, the numbers have grown steadily—and now around 120 children and adults attend regularly.

Cemetery Dwellers

"In 2008, after a year of providing hot meals to the children, our staff and volunteers decided to visit the communities where these children live," reports Sally, leader of the OM team in Cebu. "It was then that we discovered that about 80 percent of those who regularly attend our feeding program come from a nearby cemetery in the heart of the city, hidden behind high-rise buildings."

These children, along with other members of their family or friends, live in rough shelters on top of the tombs. The area is also occupied by goats, pigs, chickens, ducks and other livestock that roam around and intermingle with the community.

Pastor Emiliano Casinillo, commonly called Pastor Davies, is also a resident in this cemetery. He came to know the Lord through the ministry of Cebu City Church Alliance, where he eventually became an assistant pastor of the "church in the cemetery".

Three years ago, Pastor Davies came out of the Alliance church and started volunteering with OM's feeding ministry. He also assisted in leading the programs for the boys until more adults regularly came for food, when he started leading the

program for them.

A year ago, Pastor Davies began a church fellowship for some of the adults, children and youth participating in the outreach. Since then, more and more of the OM youth have started attending the church in the cemetery and some have assisted Pastor Davies' church-planting ministry as Sunday school teachers and worship leaders.

As time passed, the OM team in Cebu discovered that people also lived in another cemetery across the road. As they explored further, they got to know Pastor Ernie who runs a regular weekend outreach to the children. OM started several ministries in this cemetery and Pastor Ernie now helps them lead the youth during their feeding program.

Investing Into Their Futures

The OM team in Cebu runs an alternative learning system program for out-of-school youth, most of whom come from this cemetery. Recently, a number of these youth passed the government exam for secondary level accreditation. This means they are now qualified to pursue college degrees. The OM team is now looking for sponsorship that will allow them to continue their studies, or else enroll in vocational schools for skills training.

"We are grateful for the opportunity to minister to these young people," adds Sally. "Although they have lived among the dead for so long, they demonstrate the hope that someday they will truly see a difference, not only in their own lives but in the lives of their families and communities."