

St. Jeanne Antide Foundation

PRESS RELEASE

The Archbishop blesses the Antide drop-in centre

In the heart of the parish of Tarxien, the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide Thouret have opened a drop-in centre for anyone needing support in a quiet, calm and welcoming atmosphere. Named *Antide Centre* for St. Jeanne Antide Thouret, the indomitable French foundress of the Sisters of Charity, the centre is one of the services of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation open to families from Tarxien and neighbouring parishes.

At the official opening on Thursday 11th September, His Excellency the Archbishop Monsignor Paul Cremona OP blessed the premises and thanked the Sisters of Charity for having inspired this initiative of loving-kindness despite the lack of vocations for the consecrated life of a nun. The Archbishop told the gathering of 150 service users, nuns, volunteers and guests: “I always say that it is a truly difficult thing to carry around with you the name of charity; it is such a lofty ideal. Charity is God. It is purified love. It is about forgetting yourself. It is not easy. It gives me pleasure to know that this initiative is driven by the Sisters of Charity. To me this signifies that you are not stuck in an anonymous, consecrated, religious life lacking the sure timbre of charity. Thank God that you remembered the early beginnings of your congregation and the charism of your foundress – charity.”

The Archbishop’s moving address reminded all those present that: “a Christian cannot look at our Lord, when he was most vulnerable and in pain on the cross, without seeing in him the disfigured face of the image of God that is suffering. When you look at Christ on the cross you are seeing not only him but also the disfigured face of the image of God that is present in persons who are suffering. These are two things that should not be separated.”

Archbishop Cremona referred to the 55 volunteers active with the St Jeanne Antide Foundation as the “heart” of the organisation and went on to say that it is important that the heart be guided by professionals so that its expression gives dignity and love to persons and families in difficulty. He went on to say that “the reason why Christ fills us with His divine love is for us to have bountiful love to give to others.” The Archbishop encouraged the Foundation to encourage and nurture volunteering amongst youths because they too have much to give to society.

Referring to the Sisters of Charity’s decision to re-structure the St. Jeanne Antide Welfare Campaign which Sr Salvina Bezzina soc, the Superior Provincial, had earlier described, Archbishop Cremona said that “the Malta Province of the Sisters of Charity was very courageous in taking this decision. It is often the case that someone starts something and it fizzles out with their departure. Thank you for being courageous enough to adopt what Sister Laura started into a new structure capable of taking the initiative forward.”

One of the youths in the Foundation’s *Ahn’Ahwa* (We Are Kin) programme offering mentoring to youths at risk showed Archbishop Cremona’s art portfolio that she is developing through the support of her art mentor. Visibly moved, Mons. Cremona praised this initiative as a means of

nurturing hidden talents in youths lacking a support network to develop their creativity. This type of support gives dignity where it is much needed, he said.

Archbishop Cremona also presented certificates to youths who completed the Foundation's *Bridge Programme* at the Antide Centre – a programme that offers basic skills training to youths in difficulty so that, they too, find it possible to integrate in society.

In a quaint garden packed with stakeholders and guests Sr Salvina Bezzina soc, the Superior Provincial and Chairperson of the Foundation's Board of Governors, spoke about the mission and aims of the Foundation and explained that the sisters had allocated the best part of their provincial house for the Foundation's use. She also highlighted the collaborative spirit that is engendered by sisters and lay persons working side by side to reach out and work with vulnerable families. "Our wish," stated Sr Salvina Bezzina, "is to sustain our efforts to identify underserved and un-served categories of vulnerable persons so as to explore viable ways of being of service to them in the community." Sr Salvina also said that the motivation and spirit with which personnel and volunteers work is Gospel driven. "We hope that the Antide Centre becomes a peaceful hub of solace and peace where those who drop by manage to find a person of loving-kindness with whom they can talk about their heartbreak."

Nora Macell, CEO of the Foundation, explained the process through which the Foundation identifies unmet needs through research and dialogue with parish priests, pastoral workers and practitioners and how the organisation develops collaborative responses at grassroots level. She also described the Foundation's services and thanked the *NGO Project Selection Committee* within the Ministry for Social Policy for the financial backing that made it possible for the Foundation to open the Antide drop-in centre. She also thanks the National Family Commission for commissioning the Foundation to start a community work project in the social housing zones in Hal Kirkop.

The Antide Centre welcomes persons who feel troubled, lonely and in distress. It is a place where persons feel safe to divulge their problems in confidence in a welcoming, homey environment. It is a place where friendships develop and opportunities for volunteering encouraged and nurtured. Supportive group-work and non-formal learning opportunities are developed according to expressed need. Personnel and volunteers, nuns and lay persons, build relationships with those who turn up at the Centre. Such relationships are a source of strength and for a better quality of life. The Centre provides the space for persons from Tarxien, the surrounding parishes and beyond to engage in a meaningful way in social action.

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