

## Paola, fcJ



### The FCJ Learning and Development Center, Manila

My ministry is the coordination of the FCJ Learning and Development Center in Barangay Bagong Silangan, Manila, Philippines. The people I work with live in very basic small dwellings next to one of the main rubbish dumps of Metro Manila. There is high unemployment, and many people survive by scavenging what they can from the dumpsite and selling it. Others have casual construction work, or are jeepney or tricycle drivers. Some people are fortunate enough to have good permanent work outside the area, but they are few.

**“ I love my work in the FCJ Center. In spite of great poverty and hardship there is a wonderful spirit of joy and hope around.**

*Paola, fcJ*

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The Center offers a variety of services; a weekly clinic, educational programs for women, children and young people including computer, leadership training, a cooperative, a variety of income generating projects, programs to enable the women to grow in confidence and to develop their talents and programs for senior citizens. In addition we have projects to improve the housing of the families, to install toilets. We try to be aware of the environment, not an easy task on the edge of a dumpsite! As this is an area prone to natural calamities we also run Disaster Risk Reduction programs.



The FCJ Center is a busy place with people coming and going all day. We have a second Center in another part of the barangay, as well as small meeting places in three other areas. Celebrations are an important part of the life of the FCJ Center, and are always a source of enjoyment and great fun. The staff members are very dedicated, most of them are from the immediate area and have invaluable local knowledge.

**“ I see my main role as one of accompaniment and encouragement. Spending time with the people, walking around the area, listening to the stories is an important part of my work, even though I also teach English and baking and of course I am responsible for drawing up budget proposals and reports for the agencies which fund the FCJ Center.**

*Paola, fcJ*

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Together with the staff, I try to be in touch with the reality of the area, the needs of the people and their hopes for a better future. Together we make decisions about the programs we offer, and about the allocation of the resources at our disposal. More and more we encourage the people themselves to take ownership of the various programs.



There is always more to do, always a new need to meet, always some unexpected turn of events. Sometimes the sheer weight of human suffering and struggle can be overwhelming. The resilience of the people, their trust in God, their support of one another and their joyful spirit is what inspires me. There is always so much laughter, and much pleasure can be found in simple things. I love the ‘earthiness’ of the work I do, I love the daily ordinary interactions with people, and I am moved by their openness and trust. It is a real privilege for me to work with such warm and affectionate people and to be able, in a very simple way, to walk with them as they try to build a better life for themselves and their children.



**“ Chiediamo a Nostro Signore di darci lo spirito della Compagnia di Gesù. Siccome abbiamo le Costituzioni, è volontà di Dio che noi abbiamo il suo spirito. ”**

*Marie Madeleine d'Houët*

**Fedeli Compagne di Gesù**

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