



## DUAL APPROACH TO TECHNICAL TRAINING: A HEADSTART FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH



Brother Nolin Roy,  
Superior of the Philippine  
community of the France-  
based La Mennais  
Brothers

What is now a refurbished, spacious technical school in San Jose, Antique, currently run by the La Mennais Brothers, was once the electronic and mechanic section of the St. Anthony's College that was supported by Canada Fund in 1991. The building was built with the help of a private funding agency from Spain. Brother Nolin Roy, the Congregation's jovial Superior, motions to the building marker: "It has been awaiting a visit from important people of Canada Fund for some time now," he teases.

The school caters only to out-of-school youth, or in some cases, to junior-year high school graduate students of the province of Antique who cannot afford a college education. "Times are hard, and many have been dropping out and are unable to finish high school," Brother Nolin explains. Each school year, the outreach section accepts 50 students from the poorest of the poor families of Antique. They enrol in any of the 12 vocational

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courses offered including electronics, plumbing, carpentry, automotive, upholstery, welding, computer repair, refrigeration, tailoring, and dressmaking. One-third of the students are girls. “But most of them are in dressmaking and tailoring,” Brother Nolin says. “We want them to go elsewhere, and we’ve been waiting, but they all line up for the courses traditionally associated with women,” rues Brother Nolin. “Oh, but, some years ago there was a girl in woodwork and another in consumer electronics,” he adds.

The brothers are proud of that female student who finished electronics and is now employed by a mobile-phone manufacturer in Manila.

### **Huge Effort, Major Help**

The fifty students undergo a dual technical-vocational education program under which they spend a day and a half per week in the classroom for their basic arithmetic, bookkeeping and literacy (reading); at least 16 hours in the workshop, and the rest in one of 23 accredited establishments in San Jose for OJT (on-the-job-training). Tuition is mostly sponsored, and in some cases, a little transportation stipend is given to students living in remote areas. “As a rule, though, we expect the parents to show some counterpart money of PhP1600 (Cdn\$46) for the whole year. The miscellaneous expenses and living expenses are their responsibility,” the congregation Superior said. There are times when a student is invited to become a regular worker of the establishment he or she trained with right after graduation, but with the slump in business and economic activity in the past years, this has been less and less the case.

St. Anthony’s outreach program for out-of-school youth began as early as 1985. Brother André Poisson, director of the Technical Training Program, remembers teaching automotive out of a garage. “I did not know a thing in automotive, but I got some books from the other teachers and started off. We didn’t know how to go about it in the beginning, but we just knew we wanted to do something,” he said of the La Mennais Brothers’ determination to set up the outreach project. Brother André has been with St. Anthony’s College since the inception of the Technical Training Program.

The decision to offer poor students education stemmed from the desire to help the poor out of their poverty. “Antique is very, very poor. People die from diseases that are easily preventable because they lack adequate nutrition. Schooling would be the least of their priorities,” Brother André said.



Percy Joy Amar after sailing out once into the sea during a typhoon: “I knew I didn’t want to become a fisherman anymore.”

A student in front of his current project, the body repair of a range



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Antique was stricken off the list of the Philippines' ten poorest provinces only last year. From the '70s to the '80s, the province was a hotbed of rebellion. There were frequent clashes between government soldiers and communist insurgents who found in the mountains of Antique their cover and recruits. The congregation wanted to give the residents an alternative both to the despair of poverty and the chaos of extremism.

In screening some 125 applications received annually, the school looks at the family's financial situation and the applicant's disposition to learning. It prefers the middle children. "The oldest usually drop out because they are expected to help the parents earn a living," Brother André explained. The age limit is 25 years old.

Since the beginning, more than 360 students have graduated from the program, and from the last survey, 78 percent are working.

Maintaining the technical school is no easy task, familiarity with the students is imperative, as well as constant consultation with the accredited co-trainer establishments.

## Second Chances

Percy Joy Amar was a bit embarrassed when he began studying in St. Anthony's College last year for he was older than most at 21. He finished high school in 1996, and could not proceed to either college or vocational school for lack of money. Instead he would go fishing with the use of a banca borrowed from a neighbour, but given the alarming extent of overfishing in the entire Visayas, this barely helped in the family income. One stormy day that same year, Percy went out to fish as usual, but almost did not make it back to the shore. Three other bancas, he would learn later, capsized. He decided he would not be a fisherman anymore.

A neighbour suggested that he apply at St. Anthony's College. He was eyeing to be in electronics, this being the "employable" trade. But enrollment in the course was bursting, and he settled for refrigeration. "I was only too happy to be accepted," Percy said.

Training was with an accredited service centre of a major refrigerator brand in San Jose downtown. Percy was one of the shop's three helpers. When he graduated, he was asked to stay on, though still as an apprentice. His earnings were only the "tips" of PhP50 (Cdn\$1.50) to PhP100 (Cdn\$3) on days when he accompanied the field technician on home service. This was unsustainable, and Percy had to stop. Three months after, the shop asked him if he was interested in becoming a regular field technician. Percy now brings home PhP170 (Cdn\$4.80) daily, which helps send the younger siblings to school. Meanwhile, as he works toward his dream of having his own service centre someday, Percy also occasionally invests in the tools his shop will need. "The tools are the expensive part," he says.

In one part of the market, Brother Nolin pays a call on three of the dressmaking students. The girls are stooped over their sewing machines. Among the five regular workers are two girls also from St. Anthony's College, one from the batch that graduated five years ago and another, from the batch that graduated nine years ago! She is expecting a child soon.

"You have been with this shop since you graduated?"

"Yes, I like it here," the 'veteran' says. The pay, moreover, joined with her husband's own income, suffices for their needs.

Brother Nolin quickly takes off for another shop to



Brother André Poisson,  
director of Technical  
Training Program of St.  
Anthony's College

A workshop and the marker (*inset*) at the Technical Training Program facility of St. Anthony's College



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monitor the students. Maintaining the technical school is no easy task, given the huge overhead cost and the monitoring and attention this entails. Familiarity with the students is imperative, as well as constant consultation with the accredited co-trainer establishments.

Brother Nolin proves this when he weaves in and out of the maze of stalls of San Jose's public market with the speed of the vendors there, even though it has been only a year since he was assigned to the Philippines. He is cordial with the shopowners training the students, and friendly with the students themselves. The people he passes by greet him as if he was a neighbour. In a small town like San Jose, folks easily recognize an important asset to the community.