

Filipino Priest promotes arts therapy for the soul

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Silence. Space. Stop. For Fr. Loreto Jaque, this is the holding environment to prayer, sacred to the kind of therapy he practices that makes the soul experience silence, space and stop: in a world full of anxiety the soul needs to be grounded in the now moment in order to breathe.

Jaque, a priest since 1990, is an archdiocesan priest now in charge of the human development program of the seminarians. He had gone to Germany for media studies, but along the way, he trained in France for play therapy and in Switzerland for expressive arts therapy. He later returned to France for a short course on dance therapy.

He says expressive arts therapy is “a kind of psychotherapy that uses play to obtain optimal

(psychological) health of the client.” This, he explains, is not clinical psychology but archetypal psychology.

He uses this method in DUWA (deliverance and uplift with the arts), a therapeutic session he initiated two years ago in the Archbishop’s Residence premises where the human development program of the seminarians is based. It is a six-week program done Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. There’s a break of one week to give space for silence, for the soul to integrate the therapy, after which another six-week program begins. Though DUWA begins with the praying of the rosary, religion is not taught.

He says: “We look at you as a human being with a world of imagination and feelings we would like to say hello to. Some people are stressed. We teach them that life is still magic. We say hello for it is important that he is heard. We play, have relaxation exercises, and then we have expressive arts activity – drawing, dancing, singing. For this activity, there are guide questions that lead him to discover his inner life within his fantasies and dreams. We use art to make the person see himself.”

He emphasizes he is not a healing priest. “We use art, honoring the imagination, the soul, but I don’t interpret. I only explore, together with the client his art work, and it’s amazing that what he draws has a connection with his life. The art work is the thing-ly presence of his imagination, its visible, physical presence. Clients experience aha moments in analyzing their drawings after I facilitate with questions.”

The process can make one psychologically whole, “healed.”

DUWA is open to the public. There is no class distinction or age restriction, no obligation to continue with the session or to attend more six-week sessions. Jaque says this is the only program of its kind in the Philippines, and it is free.

Jaque also does workshops in Manila, in the Visayas and Mindanao, always in a costume.

After all, he anchors his workshop on play. He is a member of the Philippine Mental Health Association and the Philippine Association of Child Psychologists. He is also affiliated with Sto. Rosario’s Kahupayan for counseling women and children in crisis, with the Recovery Center run by

the Good Shepherd nuns in Liloan town, and the CD-Care (chemically dependent care) rehabilitation center of North General Hospital, the only hospital-based drug rehabilitation center in the country.

Sun Star reporter