

Survivors Helping Survivors

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Even after Tropical Storm Ketsana flooded the Philippines' capital, Manila, and the surrounding areas in late September 2009, the devastation wasn't over. It wasn't over after Typhoon Parma streaked through the northern regions of the Philippines just eight days later, either. The destruction wasn't over even after Parma reversed course and made landfall again just days later as a tropical storm, wreaking further damage.

However, Saints around the Philippines, even those struggling to recover from earlier storms, didn't wait for Parma's third and final destructive pass to begin helping those in need.

Donating What Was Saved

Parañaque City, near Manila, was hit by Tropical Storm Ketsana in late September. At the height

Vehicles lie toppled or half-buried where typhoon-caused flooding left them in Pangasinan, Philippines. Members of the Church reached out to help those in need, even when they themselves had been affected.

of the storm, the bishop of one of the four local wards floated across neck-deep floodwaters on a Styrofoam cooler lid to help evacuate three families. The next day sacrament meeting was canceled; however, many members of the affected ward, though dealing with the effects of the storm themselves, met at the meetinghouse in pajamas, shorts, and jackets, carrying food and clothes to be given to those in need. In about two hours, all the families in the ward were visited, checked on, and helped.

Then, only two nights after many of them had been wading through the wreckage of their own villages, members from the Parañaque area gathered at their local meetinghouse and assembled 26 bags of clothing, which they had donated, all sorted and individually packaged.

"It was one of the most memorable home evenings for many families in our ward," said Bishop Franco Advincula.

A sister from a poor family called the bishop to ask when they could give their contributions. "I was stunned, and I couldn't find the right words," said Bishop Advincula. "However, I was inspired that I should not deny this good sister the opportunity to help."

Helping Again and Again

When Ketsana hit Metro Manila, the Alaminos Philippines District president, Porferio Balute Jr., said he was impressed to ask the members in his district to help their neighbors to the south. However, many members in the Alaminos district were still recovering from Typhoon Emong, which hit four months earlier in May 2009. It was the costliest typhoon to ever hit that western Philippines city. Many of the members made their living as fishermen or farmers, and their livelihoods had been destroyed by the ensuing floods.

Though he was afraid to ask too much of those



PHOTOGRAPH BY NATE LESHMAN

who were still struggling to get back on their feet, President Balute asked anyway.

That afternoon the members arrived at the meetinghouse with 21 sacks of clothing, a bag of food, and Philippines \$1,500.

When Parma struck a week later, this time to the north, the members from the Alaminos district responded again and gathered more clothing, food, and money. Some of them even volunteered their time to go and distribute the goods directly.

“We just wanted to help,” said President Balute. “We never realized that we would gain so much. Our faith increased, our love for our fellowmen increased, our testimonies were strengthened, and our understanding of the Savior’s love and His Atonement was deepened.”

Selflessness and Optimism

Elder Kendall Ayres, who serves with his wife in the Perpetual Education Fund program, was called to oversee and organize the distribution of supplies. He described the union of the Filipino Saints in the relief effort.

“It has been a wonder to watch as those who have lost the most are finding much of their relief in turning out and providing help to others who have been equally hard hit,” said Elder Ayres. “I comprehend the mechanics of ‘losing your life to find it’ in a way that I never have before. For me it is no longer theology—it is actuality. There are far more requests to participate than we have needs to fill. The outpouring of goods and efforts is almost beyond comprehension—it has been a revelation.”

“Filipinos generally are very resilient,” said Elder Benson Misalucha, an Area Seventy in the Philippines Area. Rather than looking at the glass as being half-full or half-empty, “we have been looking at the glass and saying, ‘Well, it’s a great glass, even if there’s no water.’” ■