

JOY FOR MOURNING IN THE PHILIPPINES

For You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm ...

Isaiah 25:4a

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As seen from San Miguel Island, steam billows from nearby Mayon Volcano.

A few weeks after being hit with the worst typhoon in 20 years, the Albay Province in the Philippines was blasted by a deadlier, super typhoon labeled “Durian.” In the wake of losing their homes and livelihoods, survivors have been ministered to with the love of God—a power of a different kind, great enough to bring joy for mourning.

In late September, the largest of the Philippine Islands—Luzon Island, which contains the Albay Province—was hit with the worst typhoon in two decades. Power was knocked out and homes and crops destroyed. On November 30, Albay Province was devastated by Typhoon Durian. Ash and rockslides from Mayon Volcano buried entire communities, killing more than 1,000 people and destroying nearly 120,000 homes. Livelihoods were lost as fishing boats were smashed, crops uprooted, and the straw plant used in their chief export was almost totally obliterated. Nearly one-third of the homes on Cagraray and San Miguel Islands were destroyed, according to Pastor Dave Matthews of San Miguel Island Christian Fellowship (SMICF), the local Calvary Chapel-affiliated fellowship. Nearly every family in their church was impacted, with 43 homes destroyed and 26 more significantly damaged.

Two weeks later, a third typhoon blew through the Philippines, pouring torrents of rain on families living under makeshift houses of broken lumber and tarps. But in the midst of all the devastation and hopelessness, God’s amazing work of

redemption—overcoming evil with good—took shape.

Pastor Dave said, “Since we live in the middle of where the typhoon hit, we were strategically placed to help with relief work.” And God began to pour out His help as believers and churches sent relief aid and construction teams. With the combined efforts of SMICF and Christian volunteer groups, several communities received basic food needs and help with rebuilding.

Men whom Dave had been training in leadership were assigned to head construction teams. The first priority was to repair homes of SMICF believers who lacked resources to rebuild or repair their own homes. Next was repairing/rebuilding homes of unbelievers without other means. Although the local fellowship started with enough funds to rebuild 13 homes, the pastor testified that the Lord provided enough resources to rebuild or restore more than 150 homes and two high school classrooms.

Dave added that the result of this outpouring of God’s love has been an increased unity in the church, a stronger witness to the community, and countless opportunities to share the Gospel.

“Some believers who had fallen away have started coming back as we all worked together to restore homes,” Dave explained. “New people have become interested in what we were doing, and some have accepted Christ in the process of our relief



The winds of Typhoon Durian drove high waves into the Albay Province, destroying an estimated 120,000 homes.

distributions. On Christmas Eve, church attendance swelled by 40 new adults and 100 new children. Many of these were from families where God had allowed us to extend relief work.” Before the typhoon, the church’s average Sunday attendance was 100 adults and 90 children. By the end of

March, average attendance was 180 adults and nearly 150 children. “Weekly home Bible studies are all packed out, and every week more people are opening their hearts to Christ. This is phenomenal in an area where persecution against Christians is so strong, and it took almost 10 years to see

the church grow to 100 adults,” Dave said. “There is clearly a much greater openness to the Gospel in the aftermath of the typhoons, and God’s hand in it is not hard to see.”



A heavy influx of new worshipers has necessitated an outdoor overflow. Above, Gabriel Springael holds his son Jeremiah.



Believers rebuild the home of Sandy Bernardez, who now comes to church.



Pastor Dave Matthews, center, and believers help residents rebuild homes.

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