

# Typhoon in Manila



Typhoon Ondoy ravaged Manila when a month's worth of rain fell in six hours.

Story by Debra Smith  
Photos by Lito De Guzman

**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.** Psalm 46:1-3

"The Lord is on our side" is the recent testimony of Pastor Lito De Guzman of Calvary Chapel Manila, Philippines. This is just one of several Calvary Chapels affected by the recent tropical storms and flooding in the northern Philippines and Vietnam.

In just six hours, Typhoon Ondoy—also called Ketsana—dumped nearly a month's worth of rain on Manila, surpassing the previous record of 1967. In the resulting disaster, homes were destroyed, cars were swept away, and over 100 people lost their lives. But in the midst of this, Lito reports: "We are grateful to the Lord, who lavishes us with joy and ... the opportunity to share the Gospel."

## A Rising Flood

Many believers were gathered at CC Manila when the flooding began Saturday morning, September 26. The worship team was

practicing for church the next morning, and others were preparing for the church's street kids ministry. Pastor Lito's wife first noticed the invading water. She alerted the others, who rushed to rescue their equipment and begin serving neighbors.

The water swiftly reached waist height in many Manila homes. "It was gushing up from the floor like underground springs," reported Lito. People who couldn't leave the area quickly enough rushed to their roofs and were stranded there. Several mothers with small children were in this predicament in the area that the church is located.

John, the worship leader, and Noel, a man who came to Christ through the church's homeless ministry, immediately began helping others evacuate. They used a ladder to help neighbors come down from their roofs and then assisted them in getting to a safe location. The believers also passed out food to neighbors trapped on roofs. "We walked from our roof to our neighbors', encouraging people and letting them know that we wanted to help in any way we could," said Lito. "John & Noel were soaked from morning until evening," he added.

The believers served a neighboring family for whom they had been praying. "We had been wanting to reach them with the love of Christ,"



Edwin Ferrer, left, and missionary Justin McDonald remove debris from flooded homes of church members.



The church bus was flooded but later used to assist victims. Many people were stranded on roofs until rescued.

said Lito. "At first when we tried to help, they were suspicious because they thought we were thieves. But afterward, they were very grateful. A few days later they knocked on our door, bringing treats to thank us for the kindness in their hour of need."

The next several days were filled with the arduous work of cleanup. People all over the city needed help, but the church van was not working at first. "After three hours of work, it ran for only a short length," said Lito. "So we prayed, worked on it again, and we got there." In one afternoon, they finished work expected to take several days. "The men of the church really rose up for the occasion and came along to help," Lito said. "The faith of those we were helping was strengthened, and the neighbors started asking questions about who we were. It was a great opportunity to share the Gospel." ☺



Helpers from CC Manila thank God for strength to assist those whose homes were flooded during Typhoon Ondoy. More than 13 inches of rain fell on September 26.

**"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."** John 16:33b

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## Imprisoned Iranian Believers Share Faith

Story by Debra Smith

### Remember my chains.

Colossians 4:18b

"We will not deny our faith," was the bold testimony of two young believers recently in Iran's Revolutionary Court. Maryam Rustampoor, 27, and Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad, 30, were arrested more than seven months ago and continue to be held for refusing to deny Christ.

The police also searched the ladies' shared apartment and confiscated personal belongings when they arrested Maryam and Marzieh on March 5. The women were sent to Evin Prison, a Tehran facility known for its harsh treatment of inmates. There they have experienced blindfolded interrogations lasting for several hours and solitary confinement in two-by-two-meter cells.

The women's first court appearance was on August 9, after five months of imprisonment without charges. They were told just the day before to be ready the next day for the court's decision. Maryam and Marzieh's chief interrogator had recommended a verdict of apostasy, which would bring life imprisonment or death; but instead of giving a verdict, the court questioned the ladies extensively about their faith and ordered them to recant.

When the deputy prosecutor, Mr. Haddad, asked the ladies if they were Christians, they replied that they love Jesus. He repeated the question, and they answered yes. Haddad then asked them if they regretted becoming Christians. No, they replied. At this point he emphatically instructed them to recant and they replied, "We will not deny our faith."

At one tense point in the proceedings, Maryam and Marzieh referred to their belief that the Holy Spirit had convicted them. "It is impossible for God to speak with humans," responded Haddad. Marzieh then asked if he was questioning whether God was Almighty. Haddad replied, "You are not worthy for God to speak with you!"

Marzieh said, "It is God, and not you, who determines if I am worthy." Haddad then instructed the women to return to prison, think about their options, and return to him when they were ready to recant. "We have already done our thinking," they replied.

The women are suffering from health problems that have not been adequately treated. Both have experienced stomach aches, sore throats, and headaches, and they have lost weight due to sickness and malnutrition. Maryam had severe food poisoning recently that was treated only after much insistence.

Marzieh has endured acute pain due to a spinal problem and severe tooth infection. She has received only painkillers, so the untreated infection poses a serious risk to her. The prison is overcrowded with women, arrested during the recent political protests, who are similarly medically neglected. Because of this, contagious illnesses are a constant threat.



Maryam and Marzieh are imprisoned in Tehran for their faith.

This past fall, the two women were unexpectedly summoned to court again. They finally received three specific charges: anti-state activities, propagation of the Christian faith, and apostasy. The presiding judge was new to their case and more lenient than previous ones. He acquitted them of anti-state activities—a rare legal ruling that likely spares them from execution. Their case will now be transferred from the Revolutionary Court to a general court, which will consider the charges of apostasy and propagation of Christianity. ☺

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