

**REPORTS FROM THE PHILIPPINES:
AFTER THE STORM: ONE YEAR AND FOUR MONTHS AFTER
SUPER CYCLONE “ODETTE”**

The popular saying that “After the storm comes calm” is a verifiable adage. It has been one year and four months already after many parts of the Philippines experienced again the severe storm locally called “Odette” on December 16, 2022, which happened to be the first day of the nine days of intense prayer and preparation to celebrate Christmas. The storm was expected, but what was least expected was the severity or strength of the typhoon that left trails of destruction, suffering and agony in its wake. Throughout the night of 16, many people battled the wind and rain, even in their evacuation centers. It was only in the morning that they realized how much damage has been done to them. They woke up to the realization that they no longer had what they used to call their homes, some could not contact or be contacted by their loved ones because communication lines were down; power poles were also down and roads were inaccessible due to huge debris of fallen trees and blown roofs of houses. On that day, things got so mixed up that it seemed that no one owned a thing for oneself. We swung into action doing what we could, locally, gathering relief goods and food, and in some cases water too to send by boat to those without the essentials of life. One thing we are always reminded during and after natural disasters is that humanity is what matters; creed, race, color, sex or gender, etc. do not matter.

Upon realizing the gravity of the effect of the cyclone, we made appeals to our General Council in Rome and CESS-Kibanda in Brussel. Without delay, we got response from the Spiritan Office for Mission Advancement (SOMA) in USA and later from CESS and people of goodwill in Dover United Kingdom and other benefactors from the British Province. In total, we received support of PhP 1,773,272.84. These donations brought great relief to us and lots of people in different ways and provided shelter to many displaced families, but most especially the aged and unemployed.

**RESPONSE /ACTIVITIES
SOUTHERN LEYTE (ESPECIALLY PADRE BURGOS)**

Here the initial priority was food and water. Our confrere, Fr. James Kutav CSSp, who was then the Parish Priest of St. James Apostle in Padre Burgos organized and coordinated the feeding program and the distribution of immediately needed relief materials to the people both those at the evacuation centers and those who remained in their homes. Not less than

2,000 people were catered for in this area, thanks to other NGOs who also participated. This brought us to the next phase, which was identifying and discerning those people who had totally lost their house and those whose homes were partially damaged and have no way of repairing or reconstructing them. To those whose houses were partially damaged or had their roofs blown off, we either supplied building materials or gave cash donations for the particular material needed. But their own contribution is to provide the needed labour. To those who lost their houses, we built low income earning style houses for them. We will find some photos of the low cost shelters which are made of wood, with a concrete foundation. It is not a high class, but it is source of hope and the new beginning for the poor people.

CEBU PROVINCE (LAPULAPU AND TALISAY CITIES)

In Talisay City where Fr. Jean Marie Bassok, was resident, the focus was the repair of the Spiritan house that was badly affected by the strong wind. Part of the money was used to fix the house so that the confrere could have shelter after 3months of exposure. In Lapulapu, our effort was not only focused on the repair of the Spiritan house, but also to the neighborhood and the urban poor and local migrant who are our neighbors at the Deca Homes and its environs. Upon the request of the residents, we collaborated with them and paid for the repair of their community chapel, some people were given money to purchase galvanised sheets, nails, woods etc. Below are photos that show these accomplishments.

PRESENT SITUATION

One year after Odette, we can see that almost everyone has been resettle and things have return normalcy. However, this normalcy is not as it was before the tropical cyclone. It is a “new normal” where people have adapted and have moved on with the basic necessities of life that they have now. People now have shelter and have picked up the pieces of their broken lives and shattered dreams with determination to live. Listening to some people I have spoken to, they fear what would happen if they are visited again soon by another strong typhoons which has been one of the greatest fears of the poor in the philippines. Let’s not forget that the Philippines is located around the “pacific ring of fire” and constantly at the mercy of natural disasters such as recurrent earthquakes, typhoons or cyclones, flooding and landslide. We too as a circumscription are worried about lack of resources for quick response, in anticipation of future disasters.

CONCLUSION

I would like to use this medium to say thank you to all people of good will who supported the cause of the poor in the Philippines. Permit me to express Kibanda and SOMA who worked tirelessly to make these possible. My gratitude goes to who resounded our appeals and to those who permitted the fund-raising in places under their jurisdiction; the bishops, superiors of the United States, Parish of the Good Shepherd in Dover, the British Province, the General Council of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. We have received commendation on your behalf from two of the affected dioceses for our commitment to the cause of the disadvantaged and at the margin of society. Words indeed would not be enough to show our appreciation; but that is all we have coming from the deepest recesses of our hearts and those who have benefited from your generosity and goodwill. We assure you of our prayers. Maraming salamat po.

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