

the BRIDGE

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for Christ



Picking up the pieces . . . Typhoon Ondoy

by Jarrett Davis
The Bridge

September 26 will not soon be forgotten. For many, it was a day that changed everything as lives and homes were lost in the tragic typhoon. Within six hours, 14 inches of rain fell on the Metro-Manila area, causing waters to rise 20 feet (6 meters) in many areas, submerging entire communities, and causing the worst flood that the area has seen in 40 years.

In the midst of the crisis, nearly 300 evacuees who had been driven from their homes poured into the APNTS cam-

pus from surrounding communities to seek refuge from the flood.

The APNTS community responded immediately to prepare a place for the incoming guests. For two nights, faculty and staff provided a place to sleep, warm meals, and basic medical care for the evacuees.

The Student Body Organization (SBO) collected clothing and supplies from students and faculty to aid victims, and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries provided "Crisis Care Kits" for evacuees

as they returned to their communities to pick up the pieces left from the flood, both emotionally, physically, and otherwise. This process of "picking up" has been the continuing mission as life has gone on.

Now, nearly one month after the tragedy brought by Typhoon Ondoy, life is slowly returning to normal. Communities that, for a few hours, had become the bed of a raging river, are now filling once again with rebuilt homes and businesses and the bustle of daily life, as the wounds from Ondoy continue to heal.

Ate Mena's Story: Escaping Rowenas



Awakened early Saturday morning by the sounds of heavy rain, Mena never expected to find what she did. Looking out the window, she was shocked to discover the usually tranquil creek, breaking its banks, rising quickly to the level of the homes built along the creek.

Jimena Pernecita (Mena) is a long-time staff member of APNTS. She lives in the Rowenas community, situated just behind APNTS, on the banks of the creek that flows through campus. Her house is built at a particularly high level, some two stories above the level of the creek. No one would have expected that the waters would have reached her, but within only a matter of minutes, the waters had risen some 20 feet (6 meters) submerging the homes beneath her, and quickly encroaching on the first floor of her house. Mena began to pray, as she and

her son began moving their possessions to the second floor.

Before long, Mena and her family were forced to go to the second floor, as the first floor of their house was engulfed by water. Looking out their balcony, they watched as their neighbor's houses were swept away by the torrential currents.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the creek, Mena's son, Christian, was trapped in their apartment as well, with his one-month-old baby. Mena shouted across the creek, "Christian, go to the Seminary!" The way to the seminary would have been impassable, except that, a boundary wall running between Rowenas and APNTS was demolished by the rushing water and a small landslide. What seemed like destruction, turned out to be a blessing as the broken wall provided a means of escape for Christian, his baby, and other families from Rowenas as they fled to the seminary for a place to take refuge.

Back in Mena's house, the water had reached the second floor and Mena was forced to make an escape; however, the



bridges used for crossing the creek were deep below the raging water. The only way out was "up." Mena climbed out her second storey window onto the rooftops of neighboring houses, making her way upward to her daughter's house. Mena recalls, "Sky was so dark, even though it was daytime." Observing the devastation from her daughter's bedroom window, Mena continued to pray. She recalls, "it was God's grace that the rain stopped and the flood went lower and lower." As the water went down, Mena ran to the Seminary and was pleased to see that many of her neighbors were there already, eating, sleeping and taking refuge on campus.

Even after all that she had been through, after seeing that the people had been secured, Mena went to work, helping to take care of the nearly 300 refugees. Water lines had burst on campus, and electricity was out, Mena helped by collecting rainwater in large drums so that there would be water for flushing toilets and keeping the facilities sanitary. The effort was unparalleled, as faculty, staff and students came together as a single family, to bring some small measure of comfort to the victims of Typhoon Ondoy.



Mina points to the former water level during the flood caused by Typhoon Ondoy.

(Photos: Jarrett Davis)

APNTS Responds.

Following such sweeping devastation, returning lives to normal was a challenge faced by nearly everyone. Understanding this, APNTS cancelled a week of classes in order to assist the surrounding community to pick up the pieces, and help the victims of Ondoy to get back on their feet. They called together a meeting of students and faculty members and divided into groups to investigate the communities around them in order to see what needed to be done. Here are a few of the ways that they were able to help:



Rowenas & Balagot.



Rowenas and Balagot are two low-lying communities that border APNTS, sharing the same creek that flows through the campus. Many homes in these communities are makeshift, often times assembled with scrap pieces of metal and wood. As Ondoy ravaged through these communities, the creek quickly became a raging river, swallowing homes, and leaving many with only the clothes

that they were wearing.

The Tuesday following the flood, students and faculty from APNTS spent the afternoon visiting the families and surrounding community members to see how they could best help them. They found that clothing and food were the most urgent needs as people were trying to rebuild and repair.

Gathering together financial resources from faculty and students and partnering with Nazarene Compassionate Ministries

(NCM), APNTS was able to purchase and assemble relief goods for many of the affected families from Rowenas and Balagot.

Alongside of this, it was discovered that many of the children were without shoes and basic school supplies, which they would need as school resumed on the following Monday. With remaining funds, students and faculty members were able to set out to find a solution for this problem.

On Friday, the school invited 200 families to receive rice, canned food, noodles, and clothes. In addition, they invited another 236 children to receive school supplies (notebooks, pencils, and glue) sandals and additional clothing items. APNTS student Glen Loyola notes, "The week was tiresome, but the fulfillment supercedes the exhaustion. It was a real opportunity to test this year's theme of compassion—a chance to walk the talk."



Backpacks and Bangkas.

Lupang Arenda is a squatter-relocation community on the banks of Laguna de Bay in an area commonly called "Floodway." The area receives most of the "runoff" water from the Metro-Manila area and is notorious for the common presence of standing water. When the floodwaters rose, many homes were covered, but the problem was... the water didn't recede. Water remained at waist-level for weeks following the flood. Many families were forced to find temporary "resettlement" on higher ground.

In the middle of this town-turned lake, Arenda Church of the Nazarene had become an inviting spot for temporary, emergency resettlement; however, food and resources were becoming scarce. Several of the people staying at the church were becoming very sick due to undrinkable water and lack of nutrition.

One student, completing his thesis in the community, heard news of the situation and was greatly troubled. Working with Metro-Manila District Church of the Nazarene, he and a group of classmates decided to make the journey to the church. But there was one problem. The church was only accessible by boat. Supplies could not be brought on wheels, and any obvious-looking relief effort would run the risk of mobbing.

As a solution for this, the students filled 5 large backpacks with rice, canned-goods, medical supplies and 25 liters of bottled water and carried them through the swarming crowds to the edges of the water, where they took make-shift bangkas (small boats) through the flooded streets of Arenda, delivering temporary relief for the church members to use for themselves and to aid the people around them.



Several APNTS Students are seen "forging" the former streets of Arenda on rafts, delivering relief goods for local church members taking refuge in Arenda Church of the Nazarene. (Photo: Janary Suyat)



Photo: Arlene Fabros

Recovery on Campus.

Rushing through the hills and valleys that make up the APNTS campus, the torrential waters covered everything. Within a few hours, the campus sustained landslides which swallowed trees and damaged foundations, and a flood which caused the creek on campus to break its banks, flooding Wooten Chapel.

In terms of physical recovery, the APNTS community met for devotions and jumped into a day of cleaning and repairs immediately after seeing the evacuees back to their communities. The Wooten Chapel, after the water had receded, was left with a thick layer of mud covering everything. Furniture was removed and floors were power-washed. The baptistery was filled to the top with murky-brown water in which workers were able to catch a snake!

Although it was unfortunate, the day was filled with fun and not only physical recovery to the campus, but to some extent, inner recovery as the campus community bonded together.

The Creek flowing through campus breaks its banks, immersing Wooten Chapel.

(Photos by: Ngun Sui Thang, Arlene Fabros, and Jarrett Davis)

A bird's eye-view:

Reflecting on Ondoy Academic Dean, Lee San Young

It was a difficult decision to cancel all classes for a whole week. After giving 289 evacuees food, shelter, and medical care for three days, we were exhausted. I wish we could have captured with pictures the sunken eyes and haggard looks on the faces of students and faculty members— Frank, Dinga, Adam, Rober, Dr. Land, Prof. Hatcher and many more. They had done so much!!!

I thought we had done and gone through enough already, and it was time for our school to function as a school. Although our school was also affected by the flood, and it would cost us a small fortune to fix up the damages done to the walls and housing on our campus, we could still have classes. Going back to normal life on our campus would, at least, hasten the process of society at large going back to its normal life, I thought.

There was silence from the majority of people on campus after the announcement was made, about the decision. Although, when I was directed to read a note from the government recommending/declaring the suspension of classes, I had to change my decision. The letter finished with this sentence, "...so that schools can be a resource center" for the communities around them. After reading this, I felt compelled not to have classes so that we could help out our neighbors around us as community.

We did not waste any time from the moment the decision was reversed. We called for a meeting of all students and faculty members on campus to discuss how to help the affected people around us. We divided into groups to investigate the communities around us and to offer help to them, —cleaning, washing and fixing up. Some of us went out to help cleaning up; some of us went out buying and packing things to distribute. We wanted to communicate with those who have lost almost all they have, the love of God who is "compassionate and gracious" who knows what they are going through because our God also experienced the loss of His own Son for our sake. Thanks be to God!!

WOW! I got so many enthusiastic responses from students and faculty members in regards to the decision to cancel classes. It was overwhelming! Their responses were pouring in by text messages, "Thank you so much", "Smart decision you have made", "Weighty decision to make, yet, you are doing a good job", "Thank you".

I thanked God for such a healthy seminary whose members are interested in practicing what they learn and teach in their classrooms—to communicate God's love with people who are in need of God's love. Taken that those responses are a reflection of how well we are doing and functioning as we are supposed to as seminary, I could not help being proud of all of us at APNTS! I could sense that our campus had become revitalized from the state of silence and resignation, bringing back bright smiles on students' faces, cheerful spirits in everyone around campus! At that, I wanted to exclaim—and I did exclaim—"Long live APNTS!!"

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