

SVD-USC MISSION TEAM SWINGS TO NEGROS ORIENTAL FOR ANOTHER RELIEF OPERATION

The SVD-USC Mission Team launched another relief operation, only more than a week after Cagayan de Oro. This time its in Negros Oriental that had been ravaged by an earthquake 6.9 intensity in the Richter scale last February 6, 2012. The team was still largely composed of USC faculty and staff but mixed with JPIC staff members and SVD confreres and brother seminarians. The components of the operation were limited to only relief distribution and psycho-social training of trainers. Medical mission team could not be assembled due to the shortness of time.



The municipalities of Guihulngan, La Libertad and Jimalalud in Negros Oriental where the towns very badly hit by the earthquake. In Guihulngan and La Libertad, two barangays were buried by the



cascading rocks and earth from high mountains claiming close to a hundred lives buried alive on both areas. Along the streets, cracked roads, destroyed houses and infrastructures are evident. People are pitching makeshift shelters away from their homes for fear of eventual collapse. Signs like “SOS”, “We need food and water” and “Please help us” are posted in many corners in the area. As we passed by villages on our way to targeted beneficiary barangays, people were standing by the road side making hand signals asking for drinking water and food.

The road to Guihulngan, was long and unpleasant. The team left USC downtown campus in Cebu City very early morning of Saturday, February 18, to go to Toledo City to catch the 7:30 a.m. RoRo boat to San Carlos City in Negros island. Crossing the Tanyon strait on way to San Carlos City took one and a half hour. In San Carlos City we dropped by the bishop’s house to make a courtesy call to a diocesan administrator. From there the team was transported to Guihulngan, about 50 kilometers away on an Elf truck installed with a makeshift roof made of tarpaulin and seats out of wooden slabs. It took the team 2 hours to negotiate the distance. In Guihulngan, the team stayed at the parish convent where the hospitable parish priest offered a place to sleep and hold psycho-social trainings.



The relief distribution group was able to deliver two trucks and a bus load of relief goods to three barangays – Tinonayun Beach and P. Zamora in

Guihulngan town and Solongun in La Libertad. Two hundred fifty packages of goods were budgeted for each barangay to a total of seven hundred fifty. The packages consisted of a 10-liter purified water, 10-kilo rice, a big pail filled with noodles, canned goods like sardines and beef loaf, and packets of milo and coffee drinks. The distributions were completed but not without difficulties. Like in Cagayan de Oro, the immensity of need was simply overwhelming. Besides it's very hard to control a hungry and thirsty crowd.



The psycho-social component of the operation was held at home base in Guihulngan church. About 50 youth members were trained to be trainers themselves to carry on providing mental health care to victims. They got enthusiastic responses from the youth and church leaders. The psycho social team members that provided the training were university guidance counsellors, nursing clinical instructors and campus ministers.

If there is one best thing that could be said of the victims then it is their immeasurable capacity to cope. The whole situation is momentarily indescribable, with so many families left with literally nothing, but their determination to rise and continue to live remain unscathed. They were very grateful for the goods received but they fully realize that they are only temporary and that the long road to recovery is theirs alone to tread.



The organizational effort of the team was phenomenal. Repackaging, loading and unloading of goods and mobilization of team members were not simple tasks to do. It took the organizational team close to a week to put all things in place before launching the trip. Thanks again to Brennet Abrenica, the same immutable lead organizer of the Cagayan de Oro operation, who did the same terrific job in Negros.

The whole relief operation team is once again thankful for the very generous support from the University of San Carlos, the Society of the Divine Word, and the many faceless donors both local and international.

The whole team came back to Cebu in the evening of February 19 safe and whole, and happier than ever for another job very well done.

Fr. Eugene Docoy, SVD