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CEBU: When the Ground Shook, Hearts Moved

Stories of hope following the magnitude 6.9 earthquake in Cebu, Philippines

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It's one of those natural disasters which science says is completely unpredictable.

The magnitude 6.9 earthquake that radiated from a previously unnamed, little-monitored fault — now called the Bogo Bay Fault — and struck a

part of central Philippines at around 10 p.m. on Sep. 30 is now considered the country's deadliest and most destructive in more than a decade. Philippine and foreign seismologists immediately traced the quake's epicenter to a spot just 10 km off the eastern coast of Daanbantayan town at the northern tip of Cebu island, over 600 kilometers southeast of Metro Manila.

The quake killed at least 79 people and injured 1,271 others, damaged or destroyed nearly 152,000 homes and, according to initial assessments, \$63.7 million worth of infrastructure, including about 5,587 classrooms, affecting 19,000 students and 950 teachers and non-teaching staff.

Total damage to Cebu island's economy — including tourism — has yet to be determined. As of end-2024, Central Visays, the region to which Cebu belongs, had the fourth-biggest

contribution to the national economy at 5.7%, after the National Capital Region's (NCR, or Metro Manila) 31.2%, Calabarzon's (Cavite-Laguna-Batangas-Rizal-Quezon immediately south of NCR) 14.7%, and Central Luzon's 11.1%. At the same time, Central Visayas' local economy last year grew the fastest among the country's 17 politico-geographic regions at 7.3%, besting the nationwide 5.7% for the same period.

But perhaps symbolic of the expected long-term blow to the local economy is the substantial damage wreaked on the 139-year-old Archdiocesan Shrine of Santa Rosa de Lima church (about 70-80% of whose structure was damaged) in Daanbantayan. More than 140 heritage and other tourism sites suffered heavy damage, displacing about 2,000 workers just in this sector alone. Services — to which tourism belongs — accounted

for more than 70% of Central Visays' economy last year.

When the quake struck Cebu, the world seemed to stop. Houses collapsed, lives were lost, and what used to be peaceful coastal and mountain towns turned into fields of rubble and grief. Sinkholes opened in the earth — but even deeper were the wounds in people's hearts.

Pilgrimage of hope

In those dark hours, help came — not from those nearest, but from those whose hearts were moved from afar. The Kalinangan Youth Foundation, a Manila-based foundation immediately sent financial assistance for relief operations. Within days, teams of youth were on the road — braving the long, uncertain journey to the devastated northern towns of Cebu.

What was once a three-hour drive took twelve grueling hours. Roads were cracked and blocked; thousands of vehicles clogged the narrow highways, all trying to bring aid to the same suffering places.

But the volunteers pressed on — through heat, rain, and exhaustion — with only one goal: to bring help and hope.

“It wasn’t just a trip,” said one Kalfi volunteer. “It felt like a pilgrimage — a journey of love, pain, and faith.”

On the first trip alone, they distributed water, tents, and *trapals* (tarpaulin sheets). They cooked and served meals for over a thousand people — food prepared with love by volunteers who stayed up until 1 a.m., cooking through the night so the meals could be loaded by 5 a.m. for the next mission.

Those who couldn't join the convoy found their own way to help — repacking goods, collecting donations, and offering what little they had.

“Some gave a few cans of canned goods, some gave a few bottles of water,” one Kalfi organizer recalled. “But when everyone gave a little, it became like the miracle of the loaves and fish.”

Cries for help

The volunteers reached the mountain barangays of Bogo, Tabuelan, Medellin, Borbon, Tabogon, and San Remigio — places where few had gone and help had not yet reached.

On the road, families lined up along the roads, waving and holding up hand-written signs on pieces of cardboard: “*Daghang Salamat sa Tabang!*” (Thank you very much for

the help!) “*Amping sa byahe!*” (Take care on the road!)

Others simply pleaded: “Tabogon needs water.”

“You see sinkholes on the ground,” said a Kalfi volunteer, “but the hole inside you, when you see their suffering, is deeper.”

Among those faces were stories that will never be forgotten.

Shelter in the rubble

In Borbon, one of the students of Banilad Center for Professional Development stood before what used to be her home — now only portions of walls left standing and scattered memories. The eldest child, with a father who works as a security guard and a mother who stays at home, she didn’t know how they would survive.

When the Kalfi team finally reached them after that 12-hour journey, she and about a hundred of her neighbors received tents and *trapals* — a temporary shelter, but for them, a lifeline.

“We didn’t know where to go,” she whispered, tears welling up. “But that day, we had a roof again.”

That night, their family slept under a new tent, the wind still heavy with fear — but the feeling of safety, even just for a while, was priceless.

Under the sky

In Tabogon, Laliane and her family had been sleeping by the roadside with nothing over their heads. When a Kalfi organizer reached out to ask how they were, she sent a photo: families lying on the pavement, huddled together, under the open sky.

“We need *trapals* (tarpaulin), water, food,” she wrote.

That message became a mission. The team brought what they could, and distributed tents and trapals to the elderly, who held them as if they were gold. The journey to their mountain community was steep and long, but it was worth it. On that same day, a family offered the kalfi volunteers fresh coconuts, smiling through their loss.

“Gamay ra ni,” they said, “pero gikan ni sa among kasingkasing.” (This may be little, but it comes from our hearts.)

It was a gift that refreshed not only the volunteers’ thirst, but their spirits.

Thinking of others first

In San Remigio, the team met Cherylyn, the Kalfi organizer’s

former mentee. Her house had collapsed. Her brother suffered a fractured arm, and her mother's pelvic bone was broken.

Yet, when we asked what they needed, she didn't ask for herself.

“Can you bring folding beds and water for my neighbors?” she said.

And so the team did. The volunteers brought folding beds for the senior citizens — and, that night, shared water and dinner for the entire purok (small community).

One grandmother, whose home had been lost, handed us a bunch of bananas — her offering of gratitude.

“This is for you,” she said softly.

“When I saw them ripening, I thought of the ones who will come to help.”

The beds they received became treasures. For those who sleep on the ground, a folding bed means comfort, dignity, and hope.

Miracles in motion

As the relief work continued, small miracles unfolded. The supplier of folding beds, upon learning they were for earthquake victims, gave a large discount. A trucking company lent vehicles for free to transport goods.

When people received even a single bottle of water, a tent, or a *trapal*, they clung to it like it was their most precious possession. Gratitude radiated from their faces — tired but smiling, weary but full of faith.

“The earthquake broke walls,” one volunteer said, “but it built bridges — between hearts, between strangers, between those who give and those who receive.”

This ongoing mission — now on its third weekend — has become more than just a relief operation. It is a story of solidarity. A story of love that multiplies, of compassion that crosses islands, and of faith that outlasts tremors.

Because in every heartbreak, there is a heartbeat — and in every broken place, a seed of hope waiting to rise again.

Blazing a trail of love and service

“Don’t let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love.”

— Saint Josemaria Escriva, The Way, no. 1

These words continue to inspire the heart of KALFI — the Kalinangan Youth Foundation, Inc. Born from a vision to form young people who live

with purpose, KALFI is a private, non-stock, non-profit foundation dedicated to bringing out the best in youth — unlocking their creativity, igniting their passion for meaningful work, and awakening in them a love for true freedom.

The word “Kalinangan” means the rewarding challenge of cultivating rough terrain — a perfect metaphor for our mission. Whether in the classroom, the community, or amid calamity, KALFI seeks to shape hearts that serve and hands that build, even in the hardest of times.

In the wake of the Cebu earthquake, this spirit came alive once more. Volunteers — young professionals, students, and mentors — gave their weekends, their strength, and their sleep to bring hope where everything seemed lost. They braved the heat, the rain, and the long road not for glory, but for love.

Because to be part of KALFI is to believe that faith must move, love must act, and every life — no matter how young — can help rebuild what is broken.

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