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When the Ground Shook, Hearts Moved

Stories of hope following the magnitude 6.9 earthquake in Cebu, Philippines on 30 September.

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It was one of those natural disasters that science can never fully predict.

The magnitude 6.9 earthquake, which originated from a previously unnamed and little-monitored fault (now called the Bogo Bay Fault) struck central Philippines

around 10 p.m. on 30 September. It is now considered the deadliest and most destructive earthquake in the country in over a decade. Philippine and foreign seismologists traced the epicenter to a point just 10 km off the eastern coast of Daanbantayan, at the northern tip of Cebu Island, more than 600 km southeast of Manila.

The quake claimed at least 79 lives, injured 1,271 people, and damaged or destroyed nearly 152,000 homes. Early assessments estimate infrastructure losses at \$63.7 million, including 5,587 classrooms, affecting 19,000 students and 950 teachers and staff. The full economic impact on Cebu, including tourism, has yet to be determined.

A striking symbol of the quake's impact is the 139-year-old Archdiocesan Shrine of Santa Rosa de Lima in Daanbantayan, which suffered 70–80% structural damage.

Over 140 heritage and tourism sites were heavily affected, displacing roughly 2,000 workers. Services, including tourism, accounted for more than 70% of Central Visayas' economy in 2024.

When the quake struck, the world seemed to stop. Homes collapsed, lives were lost, and once-peaceful towns became landscapes of rubble. Sinkholes appeared in the earth... but even deeper were the wounds in people's hearts.

Pilgrimage of hope

In those dark hours, help came from hearts moved from afar. The Kalinangan Youth Foundation (KALFI), based in Manila, immediately sent financial assistance for relief operations. Within days, teams of young volunteers set out on the long, uncertain journey to northern Cebu.

What would normally be a three-hour drive took twelve grueling hours. Roads were cracked and blocked, and thousands of vehicles clogged the highways, all bringing aid to the same devastated areas.

But the volunteers pressed on through heat, rain, and exhaustion with a single 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 their first trip, they distributed water, tents, and plastic tarps (*trapals*). They prepared and served meals for over a thousand people, cooked through the night so the supplies could be delivered by morning.

Those who couldn’t join the convoy still found ways to help, repacking

goods, collecting donations, and giving what little they had.

“Some gave a few cans of food, some a few bottles of water,” recalled a KALFI organizer. “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: areas that had received little assistance.

Along the roads, families waved and held hand-written signs: “*Daghang Salamat sa Tabang!*” (Thank you very much for the help!) or “*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 even deeper.”

Shelter in the rubble

In Borbon, a student from Banilad Center for Professional Development stood before her destroyed home. Only portions of walls remained, memories scattered. The eldest child, with a father working as a security guard and a stay-at-home mother, wondered how her family would survive.

When the KALFI team arrived after the 12-hour journey, she and about 100 neighbors received tents and *trapals* for temporary shelters that were nonetheless 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*, water, food,” she wrote.

The team delivered what they could, distributing tents and tarps to the elderly, who held them as if they were gold. The mountain journey was steep and long, but it was worth it. That same day, a family offered fresh coconuts to the volunteers, 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).

The gift refreshed not only the volunteers’ thirst but their spirits.

Thinking of others first

In San Remigio, the team met Cherylyn, a former mentee of a KALFI organizer. Her house had collapsed, her brother had a fractured arm, and her mother suffered a pelvic injury. Yet she did not ask for herself.

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

And so the team did, distributing beds to the elderly and sharing meals and water with the entire small community.

One grandmother, who had lost her home, offered a bunch of bananas.

“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 represents comfort, dignity, and hope.

As the relief work continued, small miracles unfolded: a supplier offered a discount on folding beds, and a trucking company lent vehicles free of charge.

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. They were 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 multiplied, of compassion spanning islands, of faith outlasting tremors.

“Don’t let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love” (St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 1).

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

In the wake of the Cebu earthquake, this spirit came alive once more.

Volunteers, including 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.

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