

Super Typhoon Yolanda: A Year After

November 8, 2014.

The sun shone brightly. The sky was clear. The airport and bus terminals were busy welcoming the influx of visitors – local and foreign dignitaries, media, and tourists. Businesses were having a ball. Tacloban was a picture of a bustling city. Yet, amidst all the cacophony of sights, sounds and smells of a place coming to life, an atmosphere of solemnity and respectful reverence for what was and what could have been pervaded. Mass graves were cleared, and newly painted. Freshly planted blooms adorned its surroundings, warding off painful memories of the year past. In small newly-built bunk houses, resettlement areas and tent villages, pockets of people gathered in prayerful thanksgiving for the gift of life.

The stage was set for the first year commemoration of Super Typhoon Yolanda (international name: Haiyan). At Divine Word Hospital, the day began with a prayer service at the lobby in honor of relatives and friends of staff and employees who perished. A freedom wall was put up earlier for the names to be remembered. Though brief, it was nonetheless prayerful. Many of the staff who would be on duty later in the day were grateful for this opportunity to pray tribute to their beloved dead.

Later in the morning, Sr. Gabrielle Costumbrado, OSB and the Makapawa staff, made the rounds of the adopted communities and led them in a similar prayer service. (Sr. Martha Lugtu, OSB, who was flying in from a meeting with the Socio Pastoral Apostolate in Manila would catch up.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, the whole hospital community, together with the Community of Benedictine Sisters of St. Scholastica's College, Tacloban gathered for a Eucharistic celebration. In addition to commemorating the departed, it was also a thanksgiving mass in honor of the generous donors, benefactors, sponsors and volunteers – both local and international – whose help made possible the quick recovery of Divine Word Hospital. The Benedictine community was also grateful for the presence of Sr. Lumen Gloria Dungca, OSB, Vicereess General, and her companions, who were on a friendly visit of the communities in Leyte.

The gathering was followed by an agape – a simple sharing of *lugaw* (porridge) - reminiscent of the only sustenance many of them had in the days that followed the havoc of the Super Typhoon. Three large *calderos* were also wheeled out at the main gate along Avenida Veteranos. Sisters Lia Dizon, OSB, Florence Laroco, OSB, and Eliza Arpon, OSB spearheaded the distribution to the glee of unsuspecting onlookers and passersby.

As twilight drew near, the Sisters, employees and staff, volunteers, and guests lined up the streets for the much-awaited Candlelight Memorial. Being a major sponsor of the event, the Benedictine Sisters rallied its members and mission



Sisters leading the prayer vigil

partners to join the barangays of Tacloban City and its outskirts to go out into the streets, lighting vigil candles to form interconnecting lines along the main highways, spreading across inner city blocks and the downtown area. The one-hour vigil was the communal way of not only honoring the departed who perished, but also celebrating “the tenacity and fortitude displayed by survivors”, and gratefulness for the help and unwavering support from local and international agencies, religious groups, private donors and the government who remain committed to the recovery and rehabilitation of Leyte. Simultaneous prayer vigils were held among the parishes, households and barangays. The Sisters led the Divine Word community in praying the decades of the rosary. Employees of neighboring establishments joined in, lending number to the body count who lined up the streets.

As the last flicker of the vigil candles faded, people quietly dispersed to go back to their respective homes. With much hope and fervor, slowly but surely, they are gaining back the confidence to rebuild lives which Super Typhoon Yolanda viciously took away only a year ago.

Here at Divine Word Hospital, we too, have forged ahead. Bonded by that common experience and having gone through the crucible, like the proverbial survivor, there is no other way for us but to move forward. With the prospect of celebrating our fiftieth anniversary only a few months away, the Hospital Community is raring with joyful expectation of what is still to come - ever more committed to building a health-based Benedictine community thrumming with vibrancy and continuing to give the best healthcare in Region 8.

By: Sr. Angeline Arceo, OSB



Thanksgiving mass with special guest
Sr. Lumen Gloria Dungca, OSB
Vicereess General



Employees and staff for
candle memorial