

Xavier

Ateneo de Cagayan

magazine

Special Issue: SENDONG



SERVICE

at the Frontier

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Fr Eric G Velandria SJ

Convener,
Operation: Tabang Sendong

We all celebrated Christmas in a very unusual fashion in 2011. And the celebration of the season had been made more meaningful thanks to the spirit of generosity of each volunteer--most gave their time, others gave material goods, while others shared talent. Most if not all XU volunteers shared a wonderful combination of time, talent and material resource such that XU Tabang Sendong Operations evolved into the most organized relief and rehabilitation center to the amazement of many. Members of both local and international aid organizations who have seen so much relief operations in their career--could not help but be in awe at the coordination, dedication and efficiency of each one of you.

Volunteer leaders have been truly exceptional in modeling what it means to be a person-for-others. The relief processing area leaders had been visibly impressive. Many other team leaders were working just as hard making meaning of field reports and responding in a timely and appropriate manner to the needs of survivors in terms of first aid, trauma counseling, potable water, sanitation, and deploying properly oriented volunteers, etc. Other team leaders were almost "invisible" yet just as busy making sure we were served food on time, cleaning and equipping our work stations with proper tools, gathering information about the status of each XU community member, collating and writing news stories from the field and communicating XU operations through the world wide web. I could go on and on citing each

one's heroic deed. You all are the heroic leaders of Operation Tabang Sendong!

Thank you once again for spending a meaningful Christmas season with us at Xavier; our operations started with a small band of about ten students, mostly ROTC members and Mr Nestor Banuag. One of the first cash gifts we received was less than twenty pesos and a few bottles of purified water and some pastry. Our numbers grew and the gifts received multiplied many times over. Thanks to each one's generosity, I have personally witnessed God's miracle of feeding the multitude.

The first miracle (documented in the gospel of John) began with a young lad's offering of his "baon" that day. From the boy's offering of two fish and five loaves of bread and the Lord's prayer of thanksgiving, 5,000 were fed. In 2011, in our own lifetime here in CdO, you and I witnessed how God gave us the privilege to attend to the hunger and other needs of countless Sendong survivors.

Thank you for saying "YES!" to God's invitation to be truly persons-for-others. We thank the Lord for the privilege of having been called to serve others and be God's presence to God's own people in CdO and Iligan, ad majorem Dei gloriam--all for the greater glory of God. □

Xavier Festival Days 2011 Round-up



Xavier University celebrated its 78th Festival Days from Nov 29 to Dec 3 with the theme 'Xavier Engage: Creating New Possibilities.' The celebration accentuated heroic leadership alluding to the 150th birth anniversary of Dr Jose P Rizal and the change of presidents within the University. Fr George Esguerra SJ, Vice President for Mission and Ministry, presided the Opening Mass.

Xavier Festival Days 2011 was officially declared open by University President Fr Roberto "Bobby" Yap SJ. Fr Bobby related how St Francis Xavier set out from Europe to Asia in his mission of creating new possibilities to spread the gospel, and to proclaim the good news of love, compassion and service to the many peoples of Asia. "We are all invited to become heroic leaders and that's really how we create new possibilities." He also invited everyone not only to enjoy the many activities but also to "reflect on how we can become truly heroic leaders, how we can create new possibilities as we try to serve our church, our city, our country and our region."



Following the Diamond Jubilee celebration The field demonstration highlighted the participation of the Grade School. Students from all grade levels moved to the rhythm of our very own regional folk dances. The activity was also a celebration of the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels.



The XU Band staged their first concert as a bonafide student organization of XU. Although established many years back, the group was recognized as an official student organization only in 2010. The Band, made up of clarinet, trumpet, percussion, trombone, flute, saxophone, French horn and baritone sections, played March music, Christmas carols and contemporary tunes, including Filipino novelty songs, from the 70's onwards.

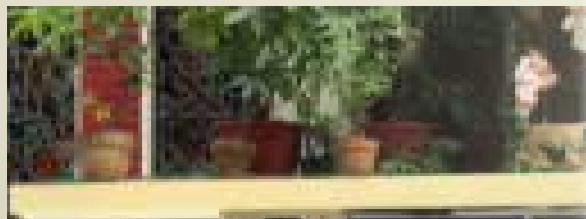


From the regular thumping beats of marches, to the scintillating melodies of pop and rock music, the IMOVE Concert, which followed right after the XU Band's performance, comprised songs promoting the values of self-awareness, ingenuity, love and heroism – the pillars of Ignatian leadership in Chris Lowney's book on heroic leadership. Toward the end of the concert, lanterns bearing messages of hope were released to the sky accompanied by the late Francis Magalona's "Kaleidoscope" playing in the background. The soft, yellow light of the lanterns shone like the stars in the sky as they floated away to the hands of God.



Bikes and tri-sikads owned the road during the community parade that launched Atenista Ako Movement's advocacy on promoting a sustainable environment and greener campus. The "sikads" were decorated with recyclables and organic materials.

After their sikad parade, the participants were welcomed with a sumptuous feast of native delicacies served on buffet tables along the University Main Lane. The food fest was part of the advocacy on environmental sustainability and used only biodegradable materials in serving food.



High School students took center stage in the Engage Variety Show designed to showcase and promote high school talent. The students, themselves, organized the show which carried teamwork as its theme. Although a competition, the song and dance performances were pure fun. In contrast, participants battled hard in the Engage Game Show, a quiz show organized for public high school students and XU college students, respectively. At stake was a scholarship grant worth P10,000.00 for the high school category won by Kristine Joy Ramos of Cugman National High School, and a cash prize of P5,000.00 for the collegiate level. Prizes like Smart cell phones, Spruce sandals, Smart Internet broadband, bags and key chains were also raffled off to the audience and participants.



Xavier University hosted friendly games with Silliman University (SU) and Corpus Christi School. XU played against Silliman University in college soccer and basketball, while XUGS and XUHS went head to head against Corpus Christi School. The Central Student Government also organized an All-Star Game featuring basketball star players from XU's colleges and schools grouped into the AMDG and Magis teams.

Patterned after the much celebrated noontime show, "Showtime," XU debuted XU Time, the first of its kind in the history of the Xavier Festival Days. Students showed what they got in terms of talent to an audience who held out score cards after every performance.

Seminarians and deacons of St John Vianney and some XU students staged, "Kalis," a play about the life of martyr, Fr Agustin Samson Consunji.



One of the most popular events during the Xavier Days, the Christmas Carol contest drew all the colleges to a night of joyous caroling inside the Immaculate Conception Chapel.



The cultural night dubbed Kinayuyokan (core) showcased OPM hits, and neo-ethnic and contemporary dances. The ultimate goal of Kinayuyokan was the promotion of Filipino Art and Culture. In the same line, the Xavier Center for Culture and the Arts sponsored CineMulat, which featured foreign films and aimed to give the audience lessons on film appreciation.



It was XUHS Batch '87's turn to organize the XUHS Homecoming 2011. The different batches took out and polished their old guitars to entertain their fellow alumni. The Alumni Awards and Fellowship Night highlighted the week-long celebration. Outstanding Alumni Awards were presented by the XU-Ateneo de Cagayan Alumni Association to the various XU alumni who have done an excellent job in the fields of professional service, public service, community service and religious service, among others. Alumni scholars were also treated to an event of their own. The Crusaders' Night honored alumni scholars of Xavier, including scholarship benefactors and donors. In response, current scholars pledged to donate P10.00 each year to help fund more scholars.



The XU community paid tribute to St Francis Xavier, patron of missions, by offering wreaths in honor and the recognition of the wisdom of the man Xavier Days are about.

The Atenean Mass followed the wreath-laying ceremony and served as the closing mass of Xavier Festival Days. Mass goers were introduced to songs arranged by XU alumnus Jed Balsamo and sung by the Glee Club.

Magnificent fireworks, regarded as the grandest ever in Xavier Days history, marked the closing of the 2011 Festival Days, but not before Xavier Victories were celebrated in a hip-hop dance party. As Xavier Days ended, anticipation for future engagements and creation of new possibilities only intensified. □



XUCL honored with Outstanding Law School award

The Legal Education Board bestowed an Outstanding Law School award to the Xavier University College of Law (XUCL) for being one of the ten best performing law schools in the country based on bar exam results in the past 10 years. Likewise, Dean Raul Villanueva was conferred a plaque for Outstanding Law Dean.

The awarding ceremony was held on November 11 at the Manila Pavilion during the celebration of the Legal Education Board's second anniversary. Members of the Supreme Court, other appellate courts, officers of the Philippine Association of Law Schools, Philippine Association of Law Professors and Integrated Bar of the Philippines, deans from various law schools in the country and other government dignitaries grace the event.

The Xavier University College of Law is dedicated to developing competent and socially-conscious lawyers who see the legal profession foremost as public service. As attested by the award, XUCL has consistently placed in the top ten performing law schools in the country based on bar exam results. □



Chem Eng's student named as BPI Top 10 Outstanding Expat Pinoy Child

Fourth year BS Chemical Engineering student and outgoing vice president of the Central Student Government Dean Cris Acabo was proclaimed one of the ten outstanding expat Pinoy children in a nationwide search by the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI). Dean was also chosen to give the privilege speech on behalf of the winners during the awarding ceremony on Nov 18 at the Shangri-La Hotel in Makati.

In his speech, he shared his struggles as a child with an absent father, not different from the struggles of many OFW children.

"The stories of OFW families are always a story of struggles. The happy ending will always come... as long as our faith in our Lord will remain unwavering."

Dean's father left the family to become an electrical foreman in Saudi Arabia when Dean was only in Grade 4. Despite the loneliness and the absence of a father figure, Dean was able to channel his energy in his academic and community involvement.

Dean is a full academic scholar and a recipient of a DOST scholarship, in which he is president of the DOST Region 10 Scholars' Guild. Adept in science and math, he has joined and won several competitions including, notably, the Southeast Asia Mathematics Olympiad.

His academic accomplishments encouraged him to join the BPI search under the Ibang Klaseng Talino category. The other categories are Ibang Klaseng Community Leader, Ibang Klaseng Entrepreneur and Ibang Klaseng Artist/Athlete.

Given the various categories, Dean hopes to inspire other Mindanaoans to join the search next year, as he was the only one from Mindanao selected in the top 10 this year.

"They should be proud to be Mindanaoans and coming from the province," he said. □

"Olympics of Debate" was held at De La Salle University in Manila from Dec 28 to Jan 4.

XU was one of only two Philippine universities to advance to the quarterfinals, the other being UP Diliman.

Philippine Statistics Quiz winners

Zamina C Sabenecio, 1st year BS Computer Science, placed 3rd in the national finals of the Philippine Statistics Quiz Show held at the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas on December 6. Zamina was also the champion at the provincial and regional levels.

Meanwhile, Paolo Araune, 1st year BS Math, placed 2nd in the Provincial Statistics Quiz held in October.

MOAPT BETI Skills Olympics 3rd placers

Center for Integrated Technologies (CIT) students Ron Reggie Lim and Aurlan Ostrina landed 3rd place in the Misamis Oriental Association of Public/Private Technology-Based Education and Training Institutions, Inc (MOAPT BETI) Skills Olympics held on December 2.

Ron and Aurlan competed in the Computer Hardware Servicing category. The event was organized and hosted by CIT. It involved participants from schools in Misamis Oriental with TESDA registered programs.

Voice of Democracy 2nd placer

Kirtham Novriel Dumpa of 4-Regis won 2nd place in the Inter-High School Voice of Democracy Oratorical Contest sponsored by the XU-Alumni Association on Dec 1.

Chemistry Olympiad 3rd placer

XUHS student Judd Vallente of 3-Bobola placed 3rd in the City level Chemistry Olympiad held on December 10. Judd will be competing in Regional level Chemistry Olympiad in January 2012. □

Engr Eugenio Caga, Engr Ariel Dablo, Engr Jose Valledor and Galicano Yeban, all faculty members of the said Department, obtained NC Level 3 for Electrical Installation and Maintenance from the TESDA Regional Training Center.

NC Level 2 for the same competency was also awarded to Olivia Lim, faculty member of the Computer and Electronics Department and Ma Lucille Pacamo, coordinator of the Modular Programs Department.

New Teachers

Xavier University ranked 5th best performing school nationwide in the Secondary Level based on results of the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) held in September. XU had a passing average of 85% in the BSED and 74% in the BEED. The total national passing average was 27% (23368/86900).

LET 10th placer

High School Principal Fr Joaquin Jose Mari C Sumpaico III SJ placed 10th in the Secondary Level of LET with a score of 85.60%.

Totus Tuus Outstanding Alumna Awardee

Development Communication professor and Research and Outreach coordinator of the College of Agriculture Dr Ma Theresa Rivera was bestowed the Totus Tuus (All that I am is Yours) Outstanding Alumna Award by the University of Sto Tomas Education High School General Alumni Association, Inc.

The award is given to Thomasians who embody the call for service to their fellowmen. The award came in the light of UST's 400th founding anniversary and Dr Rivera's alma mater UST Education High School's 60th anniversary.

Debating Circle takes 15th spot in the World University Debate Championships

The Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan Parliamentary Debating Circle placed 15th in the English as a Second Language category, making it to the quarterfinals of the World University Debate Championships. The annual tournament considered to be the

MILESTONES

New Chemical Engineers

Seven of our 2011 graduates passed the licensure examination for Chemical Engineering given by the Professional Regulation Commission in November. They are Christylene S Balagtas, Maria Niña C Bañares, Dexby P De Guzman, Ven Jordan B Diputado, Ben Isac A Escabarte, Catherine C Lagat and Ilea A Verano.

XU earned a passing percentage of 64 against the national passing average of 47%.

New Electronics Engineers

The October 2011 licensure exam for Electronics Engineering yielded XU a passing percentage of 64.71, higher than the national passing average of only 36.86%.

The new Electronic Engineers are Russel G Almonte, Darryl O Arevalo, Oliver Michael L Ching, Bryan Anthony C Degoma, Marymae P Hermoso, Willes Niño S Hong, Jan Vincent T Lim, Yves Clent Llausas, Keith John Reymart G Magsayo, Carlo C Miñon and Arnan Joey A Timogan.

New Electrical Engineers

4 out of 5 passed the EE Board Exam last April 2011. The new Engineers are Aga Louie E Abellanosa, Joshua A Dairo, Rommel L Tianzon, and Edward Nelson O Ty. For September 2011 EE Board, 14 out of 15 made it. These were Mark Daryll R Abadies, Harry F Albances, Jan Roy B Amparo, Bhomar T Bancale, Junas P Basco, Kristoffer Lou M Beltis, Christopher R Bilar, Carlo Angelo E Cahoy, Alexander S Estrella, Serge Michael R Oracion, Paul Januarius B Pabualan, Karl Kevin R Sario, Ace Renly T Tejada, Aljan P Uson.

New Civil Engineers

XU earned a passing average of 53% (17 of 32) in the licensure examination for Civil Engineering. The national passing average was 34%.

The new Civil Engineers are Manuel D Almanzor III, Laurimar Bernard D Angeles, James Oliver S Aquino, Ian Retchie G Awing, Rodil B Barbas, Brian R Bautista, Mark Vincent S Borong, Renaissance C Candia, Christy Anne Marie C Colanse, Loudane G Curig, Dale Aloysius M Dael, Ralf Joseph M Ebuña, Jofferdale Q Gallamaso, Laser Jake C Jalop, Frances F La Victoria, Jerry June L Noval, Aaron R Pamatong, Gerard Josen A Santos and Jiemar James C Tolitol.

First Batch of Certified Industrial Engineers

Congratulations to XU's first batch of Industrial Engineers Jowee Ann B Galeron and Lurina Andrea Lupango. XU's passing rate is 100%; national passing rate is 53.60% (52/97)

New CIT Trainors

Ms Jolly Guba, Engr Eugenio Caga, Engr Ariel Dablo, Engr Jose Valledor and Mr Galicano Yeban, faculty members of the Computer and Electronics Technology Department of the Center for Integrated Technologies, obtained National Certification Level 2 (NC 2) for Electrical Installation and Maintenance from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Training Center.

New National Certification Holders

Engr Erwin Li, Director of CIT, and his Mechanical Technology faculty member Louie Francis Naive earned NC Level 2 for Technical Drafting from the Cagayan de Oro School of Arts and Trade.

Likewise, Jolly Guba, coordinator of the Computer and Electronics Department,

The Morning After

by Anna Mary Ellen Obach

Between midnight of December 16, Friday until the early dawn hours of Saturday December 17, persistent pouring of rain from Typhoon Sendong (although not as heavy as Ondoy of three years ago,) aided by the inundated mountain slopes from reckless indiscriminate logging, kaingin, mining and real-estate development activities, managed to make its cruel decapitating presence felt in Cagayan de Oro as well as in Iligan in the west, Hinatuan in the east and Negros in the northwest.

Water levels rose to almost 6 or 7 feet in Cagayan de Oro areas.



Residents watch as the earlier fast flowing waters are calmed by dawn, hoping that these continue to ebb and not rise again to the preceding height of almost 7 feet, while remarking on the levels the waters had reached, in relation to the buildings by the riverside.

Talks in sights like these were of wonder at how the water levels went down, almost as quickly as they rose, that residents had scrambled as far away as possible, going towards safer areas, most of their last looks at their homes were of roofs and walls crashing down, furniture and equipment floating out of their homes, rendering them homeless for they couldn't-know-yet-until-when.



photo by Jose Carlou B. Odchigüe

Xavier University's pool of experts gathered to plan for disaster response and initiate relief operations for Sendong victims.

Early in the morning of December 17, the Xavier University community quickly converged at the main campus without prodding from anyone except their hearts of Cura Personalis, to confer among each other on the status of Cagayan de Oro and to offer their selves – time, skills, energy, and their big hearts, to fill in any identified need of the devastated area/s.

Immediately, the University's KKP through Fr Eric Velandria SJ, provided the early-arrival-experts with venue and other assistance as they gathered to plan for disaster response and to initiate relief operations for the victims and survivors of Sendong.

The first order of the day, though, was an announcement from Fr Roberto C Yap SJ, XU President. Although he was miles and seas away in Luzon, recuperating and undergoing rehab work on his injuries the month before, when he was apprised of the situation, Fr Bobby announced the cancellation of

the University Christmas Party which was scheduled to be celebrated that evening, Dec. 17, at the covered courts with all faculty, personnel and staff attending. At the same time, the prepared food was ordered to be packed for distribution among the survivors, those from the nearby areas of Macasandig already starting to come in slow but regular trickles for refuge in the campus.

Students from the different colleges and campuses, high school students included, trooped to the "old" canteen (the former Aggies satellite canteen which had been designated center of the XU relief operations) and were not far behind their elders in eager, committed and zealous response to the victims' and survivors' need for help, assistance and support.

Sr Marose of the Carmelite Missionaries briefed the volunteers to be deployed for distribution of relief goods in the devastated areas. All student volunteers had to sign waivers committing themselves and their time to the relief operations.

Deployment teams underwent debriefing sessions after the distribution of goods. The volunteers shared their experiences, articulated/verbalized problems encountered, reflections/realizations acquired while doing their deployment tasks. All concerns were noted and immediately addressed by the Execomm heads



photo by Kathleen Emilie Arana



Volunteers carefully unload boxes of relief goods from trucks and container vans coming from donors here and abroad.

Photo by Charisse Anne Anislag

Right after the 4:30 am Simbang Gabi masses celebrated all over the archdiocese's churches and chapels (December 17 was only the 2nd day of the yearly dawn or aguinaldo mass, otherwise called Simbang Gabi), by 6 am, people started entering the campus, on foot, in four and two-wheeled transports. They came bringing not only themselves but also items they knew would be needed, necessary or could be useful to the survivors or the relief operations.

Relief goods were distributed several times almost everyday to the different evacuation centers and relief areas. Some volunteers were pointed towards the gym area, with the task of receiving and documenting the relief goods which came in from, initially all over the city, later from various parts of the archipelago and much later, the globe.

XU Tabang Sendong Relief Center: the hub of relief activities.

XU, pool of experts comprised the coordinating group for the XU Tabang Sendong Relief Operations and they in turn were in charge of various teams of volunteers assigned to different areas of responsibilities like receiving donations, sorting and packing goods, and deploying goods. Volunteers who signed up for deployment work underwent briefing and debriefing sessions. Volunteer writers and photographers were assigned to document field reports, write stories, take photos and videos, and disseminate information through the Tabang Sendong website. Mundane tasks were not ignored, because these were equally important for effective organizational functioning: administrative, finance & logistics, communications, transportation, food/ sustenance for volunteers.

Volunteers were deployed to different evacuation centers to distribute relief goods. All material donations were sorted and packed for distribution. After briefing, the deployment volunteers were assigned to the different evacuation centers like Macasandig, Tibasak, Consolacion, Carmen, Kauswagan, church yards where the survivors had converged for refuge/ shelter.

The relief goods that were packed and initially distributed contained clothes, mats and blankets, canned goods and/or noodles. Later on, other needs were articulated or realized and these were put inside the relief packs – underwear, towels, bottled water, antiseptics, hygiene and sanitation kits.



photo by Jose Carlou B. Odchigüe



photo by Beryl Jane De la Cruz



A typical sight at the evacuation centers in the early days after Sendong. Survivors rushed to the usual places of refuge in calamities – churches, chapels, DSWD offices, public schools, usually the public elementary schools.

As they converged at the nearest evacuation center, the survivors searched for familiar faces – neighbors, friends, relatives. Usually, they are thankful to have their lives spared and exchanging stories of how they had escaped death.

This time, though, other exchanges could be heard or surmised – people asking around for a husband, wife, sister, brother, grandparent, parent-in-law, grandchild, nephew/niece, househelp, missing, separated from them, forcibly by the cruelly fast swirling torrents of the rising waters. Or informing each other of those they had “passed by” at the same time with the hope (said or unsaid) that those who had slipped from their hold, their grasp, had been pulled to safety by others, or had swam to safety themselves, or had grabbed hold of an empty jug, a piece of wood, a piece of house furniture or equipment to keep them afloat until they could be rescued.

XU faculty, students, staff and Macasandig residents stayed in the covered courts after the devastating flood.

XU has long established itself as an institution in Cagayan de Oro, not just a place for higher learning or a source of academic excellence. It is a center of city activities, where XU affairs would affect, include, influence the rest of the city.

Then and now, it is a place of refuge and shelter (not only for its chapel) but because the whole campus seems to exude an ambience of welcoming relief to the weary, downtrodden, despairing, devastated, lost. In this case, it seemed like a natural impulse not only for Sendong-devastated faculty, staff or students, but residents of neighboring areas as well, Macasandig, Carmen, Balulang.

The covered courts are the biggest roofed area in the campus so the homeless survivors were led there for their temporary shelter.

The seeming normalcy of the evacuees countenance belies their inner fears and worries of their next places of residence, especially for those which areas have now been pronounced no-build zones.



XU offered medical assistance to Sendong victims in different evacuation centers and distributed medicines to recognized organizations also conducting medical missions in different parts of Cagayan de Oro.

Medical assistance/support was also provided by XU's Tabang Sendong. Medicines were distributed to the survivors housed in the different evacuation centers and basic medical services were conducted on them by XU personnel and volunteers.

Other organizations which were performing medical mission in the Sendong-ed areas also availed of medicines and medications from the XU Tabang Sendong Operations. Some of these were civic or professional organizations, student groups from other schools, or natural groupings of friends or families who had decided to pitch in their services to help the survivors in any way.



Destination: DIGNITY



A little more than two weeks after, XU started on temporary resettlement measures and activities for the survivors. The XU Board of Trustees approved the use of 5 hectares of University property in Barangay Lumbia as relocation site. Xavier Ecoville, a joint relocation and resettlement project of XU and the Local Government of Cagayan de Oro, was born

More than 500 families are set to take up residence at Xavier Ecoville. They are chosen from the comprehensive list supplied by

the City Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the affected barangays and the Archdiocese. Priority is given to families whose houses had been completely washed out and those from barangays declared as no-build zones.

Shown above are the bunkhouses provided by the International Organization for Migration, Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the 52nd Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army as temporary shelter. To

keep the survivors comfortable, the temporary shelter has water supplied by Rio Verde and electricity by the Cagayan Electric Power and Light Company, restrooms (including sustainable sanitation toilets) and washrooms provided by the Humanitarian Response Consortium, laundry area, kitchen, waste disposal system and a multi-purpose center. A mobile school entrusted to Xavier University by the Department of Education and UNTV, and instructional materials from the Knowledge Channel provides out-of-school youth at Xavier Ecoville with non-formal education sessions.

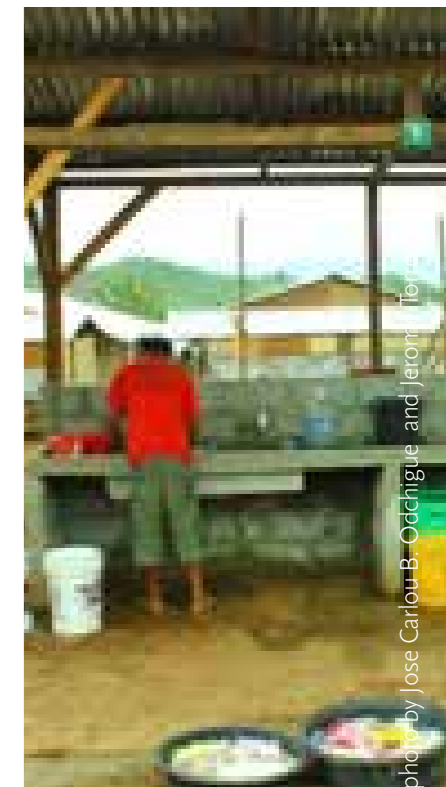




Photo by Johnny Cabreira

President Benigno Aquino III visited Xavier Ecoville in the afternoon of the Blessing. On the birth anniversary of his mother, Corazon Aquino, which coincided with the date of the Blessing, President Aquino was pleased to see people power being harnessed to build new homes, new communities and new lives for the Sendong survivors.

The President's party included Vice President and Chairman of the Housing Urban Development Coordinating Council Jejomar Binay, Social Welfare and Development Secretary Dinky Soliman, Public Works and Highway Secretary Babes Singson, Education Secretary Armin Luistro, Presidential Adviser on Environmental Protection Secretary Neric Acosta and Cagayan de Oro 2nd District Representative Rufus Rodriguez.



Photo by Johnny Cabreira

City Mayor Vicente Emano (left) graced the Blessing of Xavier Ecoville on January 25, 40 days after Sendong. With the mayor were Vice Mayor Cesar Ian Acenas, members of the City Council, heads of City Government offices and various organizations involved in the project. Mayor Emano assured the beneficiaries that the City Government will provide all kinds of assistance. Fr Roberto Yap, SJ, XU president, remarked that Xavier Ecoville is a clear example of a private-public partnership.



Photo by Jerome Torres

Xavier Ecoville has been blessed with the generosity and kindness of numerous benefactors and donors. The picture above shows representatives of Steag State Power Inc and Hapinoy donating solar lamps to the community. Steag, Hapinoy and the Ateneo de Manila University are giving solar lighting facilities enough for all families at Xavier Ecoville. Earlier, the Ateneo Innovation Center installed a solar water purifying system to provide the new resettlers with safe drinking water. Many organizations such as Peace and Equity Foundation, Gawad Kalinga - Ateneo, Hapinoy, National Youth



Photo by Haiko Magtrayo

Given their diverse background, the residents get to know one another through fellowship activities designed to foster trust, harmony and belongingness among members of the Xavier Ecoville community. Values formation sessions are also being conducted weekly. Here, the community forms two circles with the women in the smaller circle and the men in the bigger circle. They revolve in opposite directions while singing an action song. After every round of singing, everyone turns around to shake hands and get to know the person in front of them

Residents of Xavier Ecoville learn lessons on solid waste management and help dig the compost pit intended not just for disposal of organic wastes but also for their vermicomposting livelihood project. This is just one scene of actual present-day bayanihan. Residents will be actively involved in the development of Xavier Ecoville. They have signed up to help in various programs on sanitation, health, governance, education, livelihood, shelter and communication to ensure the development of their community. □



Photo by Jose Carlou B. Ochoyigue

TABANG SENDONG: FROM RELIEF TO REHAB

by Darlene Jane G Wabe

Sendong was a calamity of unexpected proportions for the people of Cagayan de Oro. What could've been the start of the much-awaited Christmas holidays instead became a period of grief, hardships and struggles to get back on our feet. However, another unexpected thing happened: the people of Cagayan de Oro showed a kind of resilience, generosity, and efficiency never before seen as Relief Operations quickly sprouted in the city to respond to the emergency. Among those operations was Tabang Sendong of Xavier University.

Immediately, after news of the devastation spread, Xavier University members gathered whatever resources they could give as relief to those who had been directly affected by the flood. As the weeks went by, the Christmas spirit was truly felt as volunteers and donors manifested their love for their fellowmen. Students, faculty, and



staff alike, some of whom were also survivors of the flood, gave up a relaxed Christmas vacation and showed up to volunteer almost every day. Nowadays, those same XU survivors have also benefited from assistance packages that were set up by the University to aid them in their recovery. As Tabang Sendong operations move away from handing out relief goods, the next step of rehabilitation and recovery is being undertaken by the University through providing the CdeO flood survivors with new homes and livelihood. Plans are also underway to make Xavier a center for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The first steps

December 17, 2011 was originally set aside for Christmas parties by

the numerous organizations and departments of the University. However, since the eve of December 16, frantic text messages for help were already exchanged between friends and colleagues as the rising waters placed a looming threat. The morning after, a decision had to be made: all Christmas parties of XU were cancelled. Heads of SACDEV and HR were tasked to immediately compile a list of XU members who were badly affected by Sendong. Student volunteers were tapped by SACDEV, under the leadership of Irene Guitarte, director of Student Affairs and Ivanell Subrabas, head of Student Activities and Leadership Development, to go into evacuation centers and search for fellow Ateneans. This first step was harrowing as the volunteers found it difficult to tread into the sensitive atmosphere of grief and trauma inside the evacuation centers. But they persevered and the initial list was ready by the first day of relief operations. This operation was speeded up when electricity and Internet connection returned the following day. Social media was particularly useful in the search for those purported missing.

The food and drinks that were supposedly for the parties were instead directed to the people in evacuation centers. It helped, in particular, that Army Trucks were on-hand because the NSTP classes were supposed to have parties for their adopted communities on December 17. Party food from organizations outside of XU were also offered and packed for the affected communities. Non-XU members also joined in to volunteer.

Tabang Sendong evolved into a defined structure as the need arose. KKP oversaw the Relief Operations. Goods were delivered through the gate leading to the Aggies Satellite Canteen and were sorted by an assembly line of volunteers according to food stuffs, water, clothes, toiletries and other household items. Those five types of items were then packed up in determined amounts in single bundles and sent to the affected communities with accompanying volunteers led by a Team Leader. A Communications team was on standby near the canteen to run the Tabang Sendong website, entertain queries, and coordinate with the distribution operations. XU members who had lost their homes because of the flood were allowed to stay in the Covered



Blessing of the bunkhouses



Masterplan of Xavier Ecoville permanent site developed with assistance from A Brown Company, Inc. 573 row houses will be constructed on the 5-hectare lot in Lumbia, adjacent to the temporary shelter. Partners in the house building are Habitat for Humanity Philippines with San Miguel Corporation, which donated more than P51 million, UnionBank Foundation, Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals and the Chinese Ladies Association of Cebu. The permanent site broke ground on March 3.

Xavier Ecoville is not just a housing program but a community building program. XU aims to develop a thriving and healthy community at Xavier Ecoville. In addition to the residential lots of 50 sqm per lot, Xavier Ecoville will have parks and community facilities.



FINAL SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RELOCATION SITE
XAVIER UNIVERSITY PROPERTY

EDD LOPEZ

PROPERTY PROFILE	
Total Project Area	3.2 Hectares
Area Occupied by Roads	10.8% (33,216 sqm per lot)
Area Occupied by Parks	2.8% (8,800 sqm)
Area Occupied by Other	0.8% (2,500 sqm)
Area Occupied by Community Facility	0.2% (600 sqm)
Area Occupied by the Remnants of Flood Victims	0.2% (600 sqm)

Courts where a committee was assigned to assist them with their needs.

The lack of water was a persistent problem during the first month after Sendong. Several water lines were badly damaged and it would take a month of working days to get them all repaired. In the meantime, drinking water for those living in affected areas was provided by donors. Water for other needs was offered by other barangays, public and private institutions, like Xavier, that still had running water.

Relief Operations didn't consist only of giving out goods but also of meeting the survivor's medical and psychosocial needs. The Medical Teams, consisting mostly of Medicine and Nursing students, were sent out to the Evacuation Centers to take care of the injured and the sick. The Psychology Department and Student Volunteers performed debriefing and counselling and held entertaining activities to ease the survivor's worries, especially those of children. When classes resumed in January 2012, Debriefing Sessions were held during Alternative Classes from January 9 to 11. Stories were shared and it was comforting to listen to stories of students and

colleagues helping each other amid the chaos of Sendong.

Beyond Sendong: rehabilitation

The Emergency Response of XU was winding down when classes resumed in January. Students had to switch their attention from volunteering to academics. The Office of Research and Social Outreach continued giving relief as the Secretariat for DSWD. The Philippine Army was given the task of distributing the remaining goods. The Operation: Tabang Sendong website is still up and running and keeping track of donations. It's now just a small part of XU's three-pronged approach to Sendong. Focus is shifting to Recovery and Rehabilitation programs and Disaster Risk Reduction.

A new home

Xavier Ecoville is a resettlement area built on land owned by XU in Lumbia, Cagayan de Oro. This long-term joint project was initiated by The Board of Trustees and President of the University, and the City Government. The land is granted usufruct to the families of Sendong survivors and eventually, according to Fr. Bobby Yap, SJ, donated to them. As usufruct, the settlers are allowed to use it for livelihood for



an indefinite period for as long as it is not damaged or used for illegal purposes. The settlers have gone through a selection process and are now residing in bunk houses at Ecoville. These temporary shelters have common bathrooms, comfort rooms, and cooking areas. These dwellings, which are Phase One of the entire project, were officially blessed on January 25, 2012, the 40th day after Sendong, along with a school bus donated by UNTV and the first 40 families of settlers. The blessing was attended by Mayor Vicente Emano of Cagayan de Oro, Mr Elpie Paras, Chairman of XU Board of Trustees, members of the XU Board of Trustees, city councillors, XU administrators, faculty and staff, partners, donors

and benefactors, and members of the press. Eventually, more settlers will arrive, and enough permanent houses will be built for 500 families.

The resettlement area has received good reviews both from non-XU international organizations and from the settlers themselves. Several clusters are present to help in the smooth flow of the project. These clusters are WASH (Water and Sanitation Hygiene), Health, Livelihood, Governance, and Education. The goal is to prepare the families for permanent settlement, sustainable livelihood and self-administration.

XU has not forgotten about helping its own flock build new homes. Grants and loans specifically designed to help employees rebuild their lives are now available. These were also launched on January 25, 2012. Among these assistance packages are Sendong Calamity Grant, Multi-purpose Loan, Housing Loan, and Rent-to-Own plan. Affected employees of XU and its affiliated units also have the option to transfer to Xavier Ecoville following the process of availment.

Back-to-school

The loss of school materials, aside from the loss of homes and the trauma, was one of the main problems of XU students affected by Sendong. Uniforms,

textbooks, computers, etc. were badly damaged or simply washed away and lost forever. The University responded with an assistance package specifically geared to address this problem. Affected students went through a selection process, including a personal, one-on-one interview with the Office of Student Affairs, and granted an Access Card that allowed them to get inside the school without the XU uniform, waiver of Midterm tuition, a free set of uniform and printing of ID, and a gift certificate of 500 pesos from National Book Store for school supplies.

Cash and tuition assistance were also provided through the Office of Student Affairs to students who have been affected by Sendong or, worse, lost their parents in the flood. Moreover, grants-in-aid on top of any discount and scholarship already availed by the student are available from the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid for the collegiate level, and the principal for the elementary and high school levels.

Unfortunately, a few students were lost to Sendong. A 50,000 peso Death Aid Grant was awarded to their families and Memorial Services were held for those who are still missing. On the 40th Day, a Memorial Mass was held for all of those who had lost their lives in the calamity.

Preventing another Sendong

All the other efforts of Relief and Rehabilitation and Recovery will be for naught if people stuck to the same old system that led to the tragedy of Sendong. We must admit that we, the residents of Cagayan de Oro and the academe, also had a role to play. Disaster Risk Reduction consists of making every one aware of the risks they are taking when settling in a certain area and the steps they must take to prevent or prepare for any possible natural calamities.

XECON, an environmental forum in which Sec Neric Acosta was resource speaker, was one of the first steps taken by the Research and Social Outreach (RSO) in spreading information on the state of the environment and what we can do about it. RSO, led by Dr Hilly Ann Roa-Quiaoit, also aims to initiate more geological surveys and research on the fluvial patterns of the Cagayan de Oro River and connecting rivers. These studies will be used to push forward environmental policies that will also benefit the community with increased safety and quality of life.

"Sendong closure"

Newer calamities in other parts of the Philippines and the world have taken over the news, but the memory of Sendong persists in



XU. A Thanksgiving Mass was held last February 14, 2012 in the Immaculate Conception Chapel. The University Chaplain, Fr Eric Velandria, SJ, presided over the liturgy to celebrate the life, love, and hope that were given not only to the survivors but to the whole community. As the days go by,

we move forward with our plans to make a better, safer, and more environmentally sustainable life than that before Sendong. □



The first batch of families to be transferred to XU Ecoville

Avoiding a Strike 3

by Rechelle Ann Tolinero



cities in the Philippines have undergone rapid development. Although this may be favourable, this may also “trigger haphazard urban development,” which, during disasters, may claim more fatalities.

Given that disasters require the overlapping of hazard, exposure and vulnerability of population to occur, they can, therefore, be entirely preventable. “We can painstakingly move people out of harm’s way,” said Lo during the Xavier Environment Conference last February where he spoke to an audience composed of the academe, delegates from the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, an alliance of political parties in Asia assisting in the formulation and propagation of a liberal climate change agenda, and Sec Nereus Acosta, presidential adviser for the environment.

“Disaster is a development issue,” drummed Lo. He said exposure of people to risk is great because of their location. “Policy should not be limited to political jurisdiction,” he continued, “because floods do not respect boundaries.”

While there may be Disaster Management programs in the city, they need to be integrated if they are to lessen the impact of tragedies. “We need to start talking comprehensively.” He suggests for these programs to be “locally crafted” and should involve the people in the community. Community organizing activities, he said, will bring “better chances of unprejudiced and indiscriminate participation of stakeholders.”

By comprehensive, Lo means that disaster mitigation must connect with development. “It is not enough to focus on earthquake-resistant construction,” he says. “The program should also aim at increasing access to housing through the provision of finance and land.” He adds that policy-makers should not focus on flood management alone, but pursue it in the context of water resource management. Lo cites natural resource management, urban development and sustainable agriculture as some of the anchors where disaster mitigation and development connect.

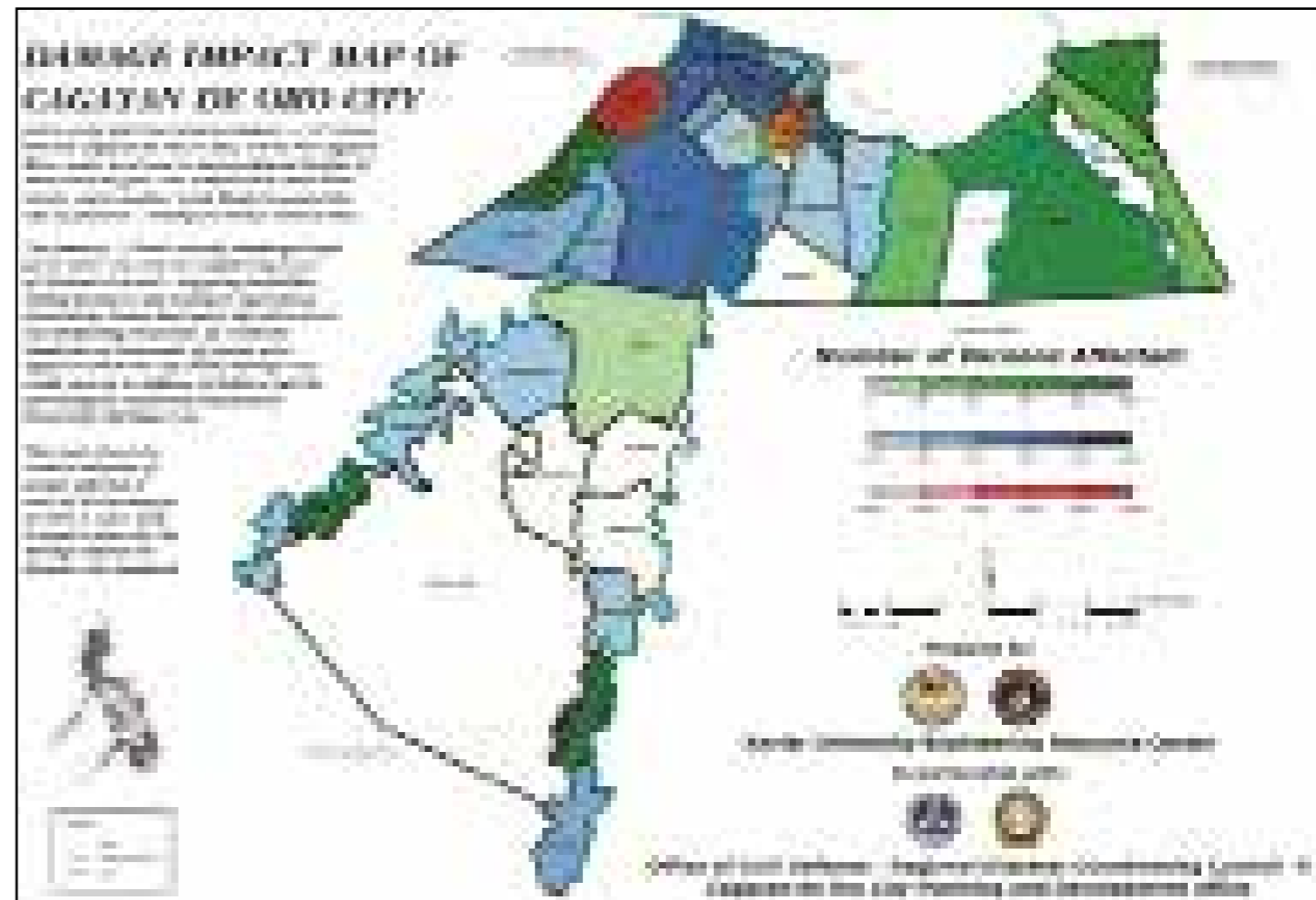
Lo is not alone in his recommendations. Dr Nathaniel Bantayan, professor and administrator of the GIS laboratory at the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, also called for “collaborative natural resource governance.” During a forum organized by the United Architects of the Philippines on building disaster resilient communities in January, Bantayan, a forester by profession, advocated for the protection, conservation, and restoration of forests in the watersheds and proper land use for “clean, sufficient and regulated water flows.” Just as Lo insists on integrating disaster risk assessment in the planning analysis, Bantayan asserts that the Comprehensive Land Use Plan must be treated as a planning document, not merely a “compliance document.”

Andres F Ignacio, geomatics manager and director for planning of the Environmental Science for Social Change, echoes Bantayan’s call for integrated management of watersheds. At the same forum as Bantayan’s,

It was in January of 2009 when Cagayan de Oro was hit by floods that claimed a few lives and damaged many livelihoods and infrastructure. On December 16, 2011, less than three years after, the city was once again swamped in floods – this time leaving an unimaginable devastation a tragedy the city has not heard of in the last 50 years.

With two floods in a row, the last one tragic enough to have put the city in a state of shock, what went wrong-again? Did what happened what we allowed to happen to us? It seems that little has changed in people’s awareness of disaster risks since 2009.

Engr Dexter Lo, founding director of the Engineering Resource Center at Xavier University, defines risk as the probability of loss, either of lives, property or both. It is the product of the interplay of the elements of disaster: hazard (a natural process such as earthquakes and storms), population (exposure) and vulnerability (structural, physical, socio-economic). Floods and earthquakes, for example, don’t automatically qualify as disasters. “Disasters happen because there is some kind of geologic or meteorological phenomenon that hit a people who cannot withstand it.”



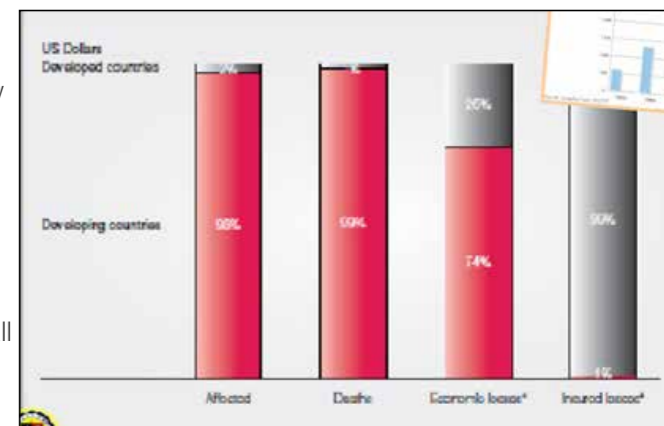
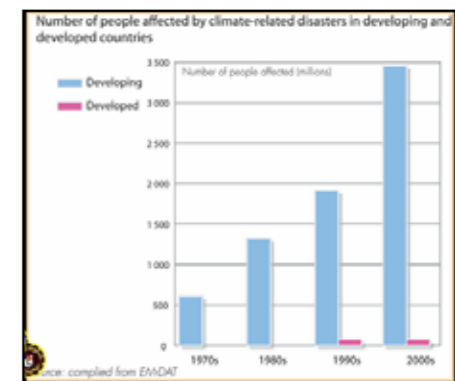
Ignacio underscored the importance of mapping out high risk areas and measuring safe zones not from the stream banks but considering the entire flood plain.

The technology for accurately predicting disasters already exists. Back in 2009, the Philippine Imperative for Climate Change, World Wide Fund and Filipino scientists developed simulations of the effects of extreme weather patterns to climate change hot spots in the country, which included the cities of Cagayan de Oro and Iligan. As it turned out, the flood simulations were frighteningly accurate. When Sendong hit, the most flooded parts of the city (west) were the same areas shown in the simulations.

Building a GIS database for ecological profiling and hazard mapping is something Bantayan, Ignacio and Lo support. Lo adds that forecasting instruments should also be local-friendly – something the locals understand well for them to exercise a sense of ownership and care.

Having the technology in place is just half of the story. What’s needed are

disaster-resilient communities. This is where building capacities, building new standards and building partnerships come in. Our infrastructures have to be prepared for the worse. People need to be educated and constantly reminded to plan ahead for floods, sea level rise, earthquakes, tsunamis and other imminent hazards. Evacuation drills and continuous information-education-communication campaigns are essential for long-term survival. Perhaps the most important piece of advice in disaster preparedness was the one pointed out by Bantayan. People should not grow desensitized to disasters. People who have been used to floods shouldn’t grow cynical and instead learn how to self-evacuate in time. Two devastating floods, millions worth of damage, thousands of displaced families, and nearing a thousand fatalities after, it’s time we learn from our complacency before we all strike out. □



Graphics from Engineering Resource Center

SEEN AND HEARD



Photo by Jose Carlou B. Odchigui

Rep Risa Hontiveros -Barraquel (center) introduces her colleagues in Akbayan to Fr Eric Velandria SJ, head of the relief operations. Akbayan donated canned goods, used clothes and offered their time to help in sorting and packing goods for deployment. The congresswoman also visited the temporary shelter at Xavier Ecoville to hand out goods to the residents and children.



Professional Opera Singer Wayne Yeh serenades the volunteers at the XU relief center. The Hong Kong-based performer visited all the evacuation areas in Cagayan de Oro City and Iligan City on December 19, two days after the flood.



Issy Tanaka, a University student from Tokyo, plays with a kid in the evacuation area at the University Covered Court. Tanaka flew all the way from Japan to help in the relief work. Prior to this, he did volunteer work for victims of the volcano eruption in Indonesia and the flooding in Thailand in 2010. Tanaka was later featured in Yahoo! News for his altruistic endeavors.



photo by Khendy Zuleta

Social Welfare and Development Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman visits the XU Tabang Sendong Relief Center before proceeding to the DSWD Command Center for a multi-sectoral meeting. She greeted and cheered up the crowd while congratulating Xavier University volunteers for a job well done.



Photo by Johnny Cabrera

Pres Benigno Aquino III with Vice Pres Jejomar Binay and Social Welfare Sec Corazon Soliman at Xavier Ecoville in the afternoon of the blessing of the Temporary Shelter on Jan 25. Pres Aquino commended the work done and assured the beneficiaries of Xavier Ecoville that the government is doing all it can to extend housing and livelihood programs to the survivors. He also mentioned the construction of a Sabo dam to prevent further occurrence of devastating floods.



Photo by Arwedda Navarra

Apl.de.ap of the Grammy Award-winning hip-hop group Black Eyed Peas thanks the donors and volunteers of Operation: Tabang Sendong. The Filipino-American staged a mini concert for all his fans and gave cash a donation of more than P300,000.00.



Photo by Xyla Mercedita Gualberto

Rep Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito of the lone District of San Juan City presents a check worth P300,000 to the representatives of Xavier Ecoville. He also gave medicines, food items, mattresses, bed sheets, slippers and clothes. With him were delegates from his district and some members of the Junior Chamber International (JCI) where he was the former national president.



Former chairman of the National Youth Commission, and co-founder and president of MicroVentures Inc Bam Aquino shares on the Hapinoy program for micro-entrepreneurs at Xavier Ecoville. Bam also gave out solar lamps with Steag State Power Inc and the Ateneo de Manila University.



Journalists (from right) Patricia Evangelista, Chay Hofileña and Maria Ressa of Rappler.com talk to the camp manager of Xavier Ecoville before proceeding to a journalism forum for communication students. □



OF FINDING HOPE & FAITH

By Mary Ann Chiong

Thanks to our neighbor who shouted, “Pangmata mo! Taas na ang tubig!” at around twelve midnight. In less than 10 minutes after I roused my sister and parents, water started to get into our house from all directions, and for the first time in my life I panicked. I had a very bad feeling it wasn’t just an ordinary flood. I grabbed my wallet, my sister and our dog out of the house; I realized with horror that the knee-deep water had risen up to my hips in less than a minute. Outside our gate, the current was so vicious I lost my balance and gulped floodwater and mud before my cousin managed to help me up.

Having climbed to an elevated area, my sister and I were temporarily out of danger. Amidst the darkness, panic gripped me again when I noticed that my mother was nowhere in sight while water was engulfing our house. I was half screaming to my father that I couldn’t find my mother and that she was still probably inside the house. My father immediately went back. I was screaming like mad at the thought that I could lose both of my parents in that moment. I felt so helpless; I knew I would only endanger my life if I went back inside our house. It felt like eternity before my parents made it through.

Our house lay on a very flat plain barely 50 meters away from the riverbank, making it among the first houses to be flooded. We stayed at the UCCP church near our house. It was quite elevated and we thought we were all safe since the church was spared from the flood in 2009. There were around fifty of us: children, adults and domestic animals, who took refuge in the building.

We were all wet and shivering from the cold; not one of us was able to save anything except the clothes we had on our bodies. The Pastor of the church was very kind and offered their blankets and towels to us. I should have felt safe. But there was this voice nagging at the back of my head saying things were far from over. I went out of the church and looked around. The rain was still pouring heavily and it was still pitch dark. My head suddenly felt heavy with incoherent fear when I saw water, like *deja vu* from our house earlier, coming from all directions toward the church. I saw my cousin grab his two sons to a nearby unfinished two-storey building, he was urging us to come with him.

I made a quick survey of the church. It was constructed more than twenty years ago and the years had made its roof fragile and unreliable. It could collapse under the weight of over 50 people. I urged my family to transfer to the other building; it was the longest 20-meter journey of our lives.

When we arrived in the building, everybody was in chaos. I was puzzled at why those who arrived first were not yet upstairs. I asked no one in particular where the stairway was. I almost laughed when a voice answered that there were no stairs. The building was left unfinished. Frank Sinatra’s song *My Way* started playing in my head. *And now, the end is near....*

It was pitch dark and the water was very high. Neighbors, relatives and friends improvised. We piled up two tables to reach the second floor. But it was not high enough. Somebody had to wait upstairs to help pull up those from the ground floor. The men climbed

first so they could help everybody up. We prioritized my sister since she’s pregnant, and our dog. Everything would have been all right then, except that my mother could move, not even her foot; she was paralyzed with fear. She kept on telling us to save ourselves and leave her; I was aghast at the idea and angry at the same time. Everybody was on board except me, my mother and my father. The water continued to rise. The table could not hold much longer, I could feel its legs giving away and the current getting more vicious, carrying debris, dead bodies of cows, goats, dogs...people.

I saw my father being slowly engulfed by the water; he did not climb on the table since it would collapse under his weight. If we didn’t do anything fast the three of us would drown or be carried away by the current. In desperation, I crouched and told my mother she better step on my back or the three of us would die; I became her ladder. My father was the last person to board.

The water continued to rise and I had a sinking feeling that many would die that night. We heard screams coming from all directions. Not one of us uttered a word. I felt numbed. After a few minutes the screaming stopped. It was so silent you could have heard a pin drop. I stood there under the wind and rain, half-naked, shivering, like the rest of my family and neighbors. I asked repeatedly like a madman, “Wala nay nag singgit, unsa ang buot ipasabot? [No one’s screaming anymore, what does this mean]” Nobody answered.

Our dilemma was far from over. At around 2 am, the water had reached the flooring of the second floor, kissing our bare feet. Flashes of floods reaching 30 to 40 feet high kept playing on my mind. I knew we would all die if this would happen. I had never felt so helpless in my entire life; I didn’t know what to do. And so I prayed; I didn’t even know what I was praying. I have never been religious; in fact many would describe me as an atheist. But at that moment nothing was certain. And when nothing is certain I realized there’s nothing more to do but to hope and have faith.

The water subsided and we lived. But our lives have been forever changed. Ironically, it took a flash flood that nearly ended our lives for me to encounter the hope and faith I thought I would never find. □

Mary Ann Chiong is an administrative assistant of the Governance and Leadership Institute at Xavier University. She was a non-believer until Sendong effaced her doubting faith.

TSUKULIT: a bittersweet remembrance

By – Iman Alonto



I’ve never been afraid of death. For me, life is a story; like any other, it will eventually come to an end. But, during the night of the flood, the thought of dying haunted me. I could not bear the idea of possibly dying without even having truly lived. As this regret seeped further into my senses, it became my license to survive.

A struggle for survival

Push. Push. Push.

There were four of us pushing our front door, our only available exit, but still the door was unshaken. We ran around the house screaming for help as we looked for another possible exit. But, there was no help or another exit. We could feel the cold water cruelly rising up the length of our bodies. Miraculously, the elder of my aunts, the frailest among us, was able to turn the knob of the door.

We rushed into my uncle’s house next door to wake them up. He wasn’t around. His two helpers were trying to wake his family who were deeply asleep inside. We banged on their door, shouted their names and alerted our other neighbors. But, silence answered us. Then, the door opened. I saw my uncle’s wife, totally in shock, carrying my two-year old cousin while my ten-year old cousin was gripping hard on her shirt.

All nine of us were trying to run, but we couldn’t, the strong rapid was pulling us away. We held onto each other for support. We couldn’t lose anyone. Suddenly, I couldn’t see my elder aunt anymore, my younger aunt was running towards our car to escape with it and my 10-year old cousin, Asia, was tiptoeing for the water was reaching her neck already. I didn’t know what to do or whom to help first. Good thing, I saw that my elder aunt was already banging on the gate of our neighbor’s two-storey house. I grabbed my younger aunt and struggled against the water’s flow just to reach our neighbor’s place.

“Ayo. Ayo, tulong.”

But, there was no reply. The water was cruelly trying to engulf us. Then, one of our helpers climbed up the gate but it was locked. Finally, the owners opened the gate to us. They were confused and half-asleep. If it weren’t for our frantic shouts, they wouldn’t have known it was already flooding. My younger aunt went into short-span mental freeze, she was immovable, no matter how much we convinced her to get inside, she just stayed there weeping so hard. We had to shake her and drag her inside or else we would all be swept away by the current.

We found our refuge, we are almost safe, was my thought.

Refuge in prayer

“Allahuakbar. Praise the Lord. Lailahailallah. Jesus is our Saviour”

We were already on the second floor; both families were sitting and praying together. Their grandmother, an eighty-one year old Christian, started to utter prayers alongside our family. For the first time in my life, I heard the unison of Christian and Muslim prayers. If it were a normal night, it would have sounded awkward, but, that night, it appealed our anxious souls. I knew this time that I wouldn’t die yet. All throughout that night, I was praying for a less tragic death. But, I haven’t done anything worthy in this world yet. If I died, I’d be sent directly to Hell. I cannot let that happen! I have to survive!

Then, the water suddenly rose up to their second floor. So, we hurriedly forced ourselves, all seventeen of us, to fit inside a 10-foot high manhole to be able to climb up toward the ceiling beams with piles of wooden furniture. The night was pitch black. There was a deafening silence. We were cramped. We could feel fear and cold creeping into our veins. We could see the water swallowing our whole neighborhood like a giant pac-man.

“I keep on praying already, man. But, nothing is happening. What will I do?”

This was the hardest question asked of me in my entire existence. I couldn’t tell my cousin that we would be okay when we could hear the voices of people screaming for help, getting softer as the rain poured incessantly. All I answered her was not to quit praying and to wait.

So, we just waited and prayed.

Morning delight

When sunrise came, we could already see our house, the flood had subsided. It was the most beautiful sunrise I’ve ever seen. It brought back life into us. We are alive!

So, we went down, which turned out to be more difficult than going up. We were cold, stinky (we peed while we were in the ceiling beams), and tired. There was no more adrenaline rush. Then, we called our other neighbors to check if they were okay, and they were. I saw my uncles walking toward us in the thick mud to rescue us. We were jumping in joy to see them. We were worried that they had lost their lives trying to rescue us.

When we went to our house, we saw our things buried or stuck in the mud. Our cars were broken, our house unrecognizable. Then, we looked at each other. We were all alive. What right have we to complain?

Then we broke into laughter when my two-year old cousin said, “Mommy, look, plenty tsukulit. (pointing to the mud).”

What happened to us is not a punishment; it is a gift and a lesson. A gift of life and a lesson to live better. Life is still a story. God has given me a chance to live more chapters. This time, I’ll work harder for a much better ending. □

Mis Iman Alonto is a 1st year BS Psychology student. Their residence in Tambo, Macasandig was submerged in floodwater that rose up to the ceiling of their elevated one-storey bungalow.

REFLECTIONS

Being a Sendong Volunteer

Bagyong Sendong left every Kagay-anon, in one way or another, changed. Many lost family members, friends, possession, or know of somebody who's suffered either or all. As a student and a Kagay-anon, I felt a strong pull inside me to help, so I devoted almost all of my Christmas holiday volunteering for XU's Operation Tabang Sendong. I thought, we couldn't wait for help from other places; we had to manage to help one another. Bit by bit, goods arrived in the relief center. I and the other volunteers started sorting out clothes, packing rice, canned goods and water in plastic packs and deploying them to evacuation centers. It was a heartbreaking sight at the evacuation centers, but it was also heartwarming to see young people, professionals, international groups and non-government organizations offering help to ease the crisis. We gave out the relief while a separate group, the Psychosocial Team, held debriefing sessions for all the direct victims of the typhoon. Medical missions intensified when cases of leptospirosis, flu, diarrhea and pneumonia were reported in the evacuation centers. Even though it was non-stop work on what was supposed to be a Christmas break, the joy of opening our hearts and hands to the survivors and families of the victims is irreplaceable. □

*Marc Paul Adame
BS Psychology - 2*

A Christmas to Remember

The Christmas break was my most awaited holiday for 2011. Not for its long duration but as an opportunity to do overdue reports, have my medical check-up, and even the possibility of spending New Year's Eve by the Siquijor beach. I planned to fix my schedule for that two-week vacation and happily thought to start 2012 more organized and somehow on a lighter work mindset.

But Sendong changed all of my plans.

It has been SOP for the [KKP] office to respond to natural disasters which need urgent help/assistance. I accepted the assignment to be the finance officer thinking it would be the same from previous relief operations we had had.

I was wrong.

Walk-in donors came in droves from as early as 6 am until way past 10 pm. Normally, I, together with volunteers, would finish work for the day at 12 midnight – from counting donations, liquidating expenses and inputting donors into the website's donor's list. Due to its rapid and hectic pace, I chose to sleep in the office for the first three weeks after Sendong and spent Christmas Day in XU with some of my officemates who were assigned in receive relief goods and in managing the evacuation center.

Another concern I also had to deal with was not following the food and sleep hours my doctor required me to do. I thought to myself, I'd rather eat what's not allowed than collapse of hunger!

And yes, all the plans I left made for the Christmas break were unfulfilled. However, despite those changes and the demands of

the relief operations, the experience has given me a lot of learnings and realizations.

Personally, I am not the kind of person who would take the initiative of greeting people especially the ones I am not close to; but during the relief operations I was drawn out of my comfort zone. I had to learn to become more friendly, extend more patience and be always available in answering queries from as big as how to donate to as small as where's the cartolina, the staplers, food and even Biogesic! Our team eventually learned to take it in stride and we would joke that we were the finance-slash-bookcenter-slash-purchasing-slash-clinic all rolled into one!

The overflowing generosity of people, both the donors and volunteers, also gave me the much needed energy boost during those rigid three weeks. A simple joke and a smile from friends, acquaintances and strangers also became significant.

Even though the break I planned didn't materialize, I found that Christmas to be more meaningful and discovered joy more real in learning to handle pressure in a "proper" way-agere contra, in the name of cura personalis and magis! □

Kris Buntag is a program officer of the Kristohanong Katilingban sa Paggakabana-Social Involvement Office at Xavier University. She was in charge of the walk-in cash donations during the Tabang Sendong relief operations.

Seeing God during the Sendong Flood

It was 6 o'clock in the evening of December 16 when a certain premonition came upon me. It was as if somebody was forcing me to buy goods from Ororama. I did not know why but I had a strange feeling that moment. The rain had already started falling, but I decided to brave the rain and go to Ororama. When I went out of the store after, the weather was already very bad. I got totally wet and rained on even when I was inside the motorella. The motorella could hardly move because the rain got heavier and heavier, the

wind was very strong and the water on the ground was already one ruler high. I worked on my assignment when I reached home that night. As the rain kept pounding on my window and the lights went out, I continued writing oblivious of what was happening outside. Then I slept soundly.

When I woke up at around 6 am, a tragic event changed my morning outlook. There was no water coming out of the faucet! When I picked up my cellphone, I saw a text message from my best friend which she sent around 1 am. She was already on top of their roof because their house had been flooded up to the second floor. I was so shocked and angry at myself for reading my best friend's message too late. It took many attempts to reach her before she finally answered my call. I was so relieved when she told me that she was safe and together with her family.

I was also very worried about the situation of my 3 exchange students who lived in Emily Homes (where floodwater rose to the 2nd floor), Balulang (where floodwater was neck level) and Barra, Opol (where floodwater was shoulder level). Their home countries Switzerland, Japan and Belgium had been calling to see if they were okay. I was relieved when I learned that they were safe.

I volunteered for the relief operations of Xavier University and I also went to each exchange student's home and to my classmates who were affected by the flash flood. I gave them basic commodities such as canned goods, noodles, rice, bottled water, soap, etc. I realized that those goods that I bought from Ororama were for the flood survivors. I felt happy that I was able to help many people; however, I was traumatized by the sight of dead bodies I passed by on the street and saw on tv. I went back home to General Santos City after three days of helping in the relief operations. I thought I had escaped the lack of water in CDO as well as the tragic event but I was wrong. I was traumatized and had fever every night for almost a week. I couldn't sleep. I just cried and cried because images of dead people and even the flood survivors that I saw stayed on my mind. I finally talked to my mom and she was the one who comforted me.

There were many factors that caused the flash flood. However, it was the greed for money, greed for power and greed for material things that aggravated it. Everything boiled down to the destruction of the forest and nature. Mother Nature had finally asked people to payback the damage that's been done.

In the aftermath of the calamity, I realized the need to value God's creations. Nature should be protected, mining and logging must stop. There is a need for the local government to improve on disaster preparedness so that people are ready and know what to do when hazards strike.

I was very fortunate that the floodwater was only a foot high in my dorm and I was living on the 2nd floor. I realized that life is short and no one can predict the extent of our life on earth. Thus, there is a need to live life according to the way of God because we were created by God with His love and grace. And although we are not affected by any catastrophe, we should always put to life the works of mercy as what we have been taught and experienced. □

*Mazuin Quiachon
AB International Studies - 4*

Cry, my beloved hometown

*(with apologies to Alan Patton's "cry the beloved country")
by Anna Mary Ellen Obach*

cry, my beloved hometown
now seemingly a ghost town
after the ravages of sendong
aggravated aided by careless reckless greed

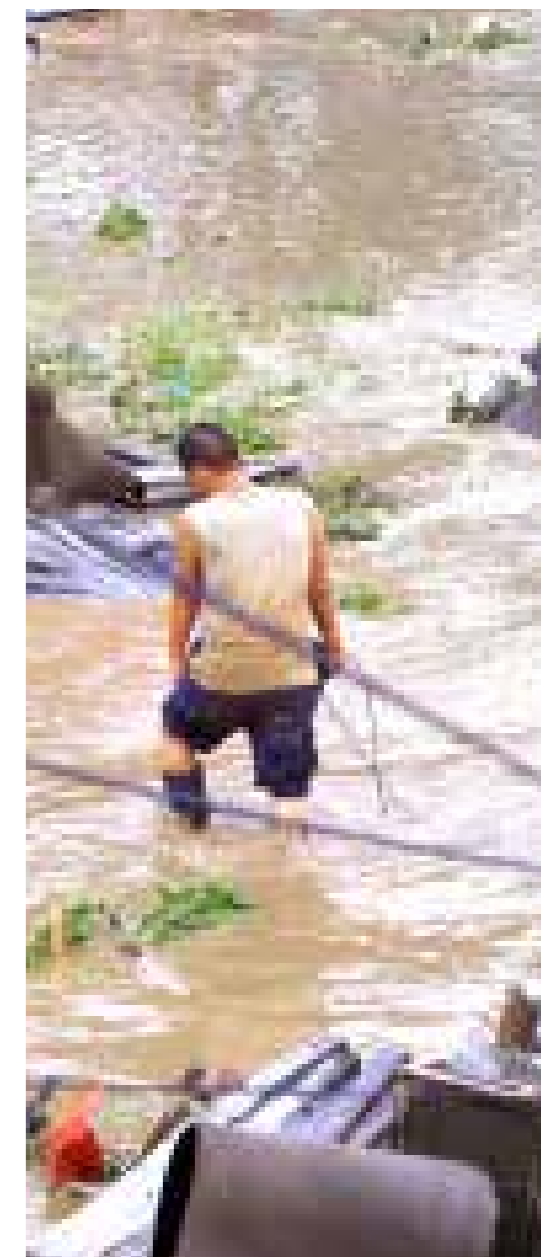
of loggers, business men and government
thousands dead
thousands missing
creating widows and orphans much too soon

cry, my beloved hometown
for self interest had prevailed
over common good
selfishness over care for creation
indifference over concern for one another

cry, my beloved hometown
for the hungry homeless ailing
and almost hopeless
waiting for succor and comfort
coming from the most unexpected sources
and places

cry, my beloved hometown
this time with survival and joy
for your people are becoming as one
rushing flying riding walking to your rescue
to feed clothe comfort and strengthen your
weakened ill and despairing

cry my beloved hometown
your people will carry you out
of these dregs of debris
of logs concrete steel mud and broken
deformed tossed bodies
to rise again... □





HELP CDO

MEET THE PERSON BEHIND THE OVERNIGHT SENSATION

by Rechelle Ann Tolinero

Before there were fun runs, benefit concerts, and other fund raising activities dedicated to the victims and survivors of Sendong, there was HELP CDO. A day after Sendong left unimaginable devastation in Cagayan de Oro, these two words with "CDO" in block, red letters were all over Facebook. Not long after, it appeared on t-shirts (and other merchandise) that raised funds for Sendong survivors. The shirt was a runaway hit. Ordinary people wore it, the president of the University walked around in it and celebrities modelled it.

Behind the popularity of the design though is a man who, to most of those who've bought and worn the t-shirt, remains anonymous – until today.

Ramon Lucas B Jimenez is the man behind the call. Known to his friends as "Mong,"

this third year Development Communication student majoring in Educational Communication at Xavier has been designing since he discovered Photoshop in high school. But his interest goes way back when he was a kid. He recalls seeing his father's drawings. "His compilation of sketches and collages really amazed me," he shares. "It is my father's artwork that I look up to."

At 19, Mong has done many graphic designs. He usually makes typographic posters, t-shirt designs and photo post-processing. He uploads all his works in his website, but none of them has ever caught on as much as HELP CDO did. "I've made complicated designs before and posted them on my Tumblr account, but no one seems to notice them," he says. "This one was different."

Owing perhaps to its straightforwardness, HELP CDO populated the Internet for many weeks. At the height of the relief operations, it became the icon of the call for help. Mong conceived the design after joining rescue missions and seeing the situation in the evacuation centers. "I decided to make HELP CDO because the victims really needed help."

For Mong, it was a personal appeal, so he was surprised to find out that many people picked it up and made it their own personal call as well. "I never expected my design would go viral. I just made the design for my profile picture so that my friends in Facebook would help and donate." He was overcome

with astonishment when it proliferated. "After a day, all my friends were using it, and my friends' friends were using it too, and their friends also."

From the screen, the design leaped to life in t-shirts. It became a vehicle for raising funds for the Sendong survivors. The shirts sold tremendously well and proceeds were donated to Gawad Kalinga. As of this writing, Mong relates that "there are already 32 houses built." Although he couldn't tell exactly how many have been helped since other individuals and groups also used the design for their own products with the same goal of extending assistance to those who have been affected.

Whether people recognize his contribution or don't, Mong is happy being the invisible partner. His message was heard loud and clear. Countless people did HELP CDO. □



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