

Benjamin Cinco's Haiyan Story

Three days before Haiyan, after a whole week of warnings, grim weather forecasts, and preparations, I took about a thousand people into our local church building for shelter. We converted the building into an evacuation center, receiving both members and non-members of our denomination.



I have never experienced a calamity as strong and terrible as Haiyan. As the storm began and the winds picked up to speeds we could not comprehend, we closed the church doors and braced for the worst. Everyone in that building was afraid. I was afraid for my family. We were all sitting in darkness, waiting for the inevitable to happen. After some

time wallowing in darkness, I felt strongly prompted to gather all the people in that building for a prayer. I felt that we desperately needed divine comfort and assurance amidst the storm. I called on my wife and kids then asked them to speak to the families in the rooms to gather at the main church hall. The families came one by one. The children clung to their parents, their eyes wide. Their parents appeared shaken. Fear and helplessness were thick in the air. I asked everyone to gather round. We then knelt in prayer while the winds of unexplainable strength beat on the building outside. I felt a sense of peace and reassurance permeated within the room as we said amen. People stood up, looking a little hopeful. We heard loud crash a few seconds after. We found out that the ceiling in some rooms caved in and crashed into the room. I looked at the families who were in that room in awe. They were spared. I whispered a prayer of thanks.

The moment we went out of the church building after the storm, we were greeted by destruction upon destruction. Trees littered the streets. Homes were destroyed. Roads were inaccessible. Some bodies laid crumpled on the ground. Nothing is familiar. I felt like we were in another place. My family and I traced the path back to our house and my heart sunk. There was nothing but a pile of rubble and a fallen tree left of what we once called home. I felt hopeless. We have to start from nothing.

We went back to the chapel to check the evacuees. For almost a week, we stayed in the chapel with the others trying to budget and share our emergency supplies. Our food from our emergency kits was depleted after a day. We were isolated, wet, and without food. At night, we only have darkness.

As soon as I felt that we were able, we began planning to repair homes for our congregation and the community. All the members of my congregation voted that our family be the first to have a house built. I refused, telling them that other families need it more than we do. We then started rebuilding houses for families in the community. Relief from the government as well as other organizations came days after the typhoon. My family and I were grateful that we were spared.



One day, IHHELPP came with relief goods, hygiene kits, and tools and equipment for house repairs. We were very grateful for the assistance. We divided the supplies to the various communities throughout the area. IHHELPP then informed me that they wanted my family to be the recipient of the first disaster-proof house in Tacloban. I never expected anything like this. I was overjoyed. Having lived in the chapel for six months, this was the ultimate blessing that my family and I needed. My wife and children need a home. I learned that day that service brings blessings. God does not forsake his children.

My family and I now live in a comfortable house that withstood two storms after Haiyan. Tacloban had 24 hours of strong winds but in our disaster-proof house, we barely felt it. We felt secure and safe. We are grateful for IHHELPP as well as the boy scouts who contributed their time and resources, and endured intense heat in building us a home. Although Haiyan has ravaged and flooded us, we were also flooded with love and support by kind and generous people.