

Tzu Chi Holds Cash-Relief Program for 1,600 in Flood-hit Manila

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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The Tzu Chi Foundation organized a cash-relief program for nearly 1,600 people in the Philippines capital of Manila to clear mud and filth caused by days of relentless rain. The program is expected to last three-five days. The local governments provided logistical support to the program.

On August 16, the Tzu Chi Foundation Philippines initiated the flood relief program. In exchange for a full day of cleaning homes and communities, participants would receive Php800 in cash assistance to help them replace bare essentials lost in the floods caused by Tropical Storm Karding (Yagi).

While Karding did not hit the country directly, its impact on the southwest monsoon brought weeks of rain to Metro Manila and adjacent provinces. As a result, the water level of Marikina River rose too quickly for families to save most of their belongings. When the disaster finally abated, people faced scenes reminiscent of the aftermath of Tropical Storm Ondoy (Ketsana) in 2009.

On the first day of the program, 1,575 residents from four barangays in Marikina and San Mateo joined the clean-up drive. In Marikina, the barangays involved included Nangka, Tumana, and Malanday. In San Mateo, Banaba was the only barangay taking part.

In Banaba, when they learnt of the generous aid they would receive, the crowd of participants erupted in applause. In his address to the crowd before the clean-up, Tzu Chi volunteer Michael Siao said that the aid of Php800 was at Dharma Master Cheng Yen's recommendation. "Our Master [Cheng Yen] has a lot of concern for you. She does not want you all to see [the cash aid] as a kind of salary. This is not salary but aid for every family," he said.



Leading the clean-up effort in Banaba, Tzu Chi volunteer Veneranda Funtaniel stressed the need to clear out the mud as soon as possible. The longer the mud stays, the more vulnerable will the residents be to disease. With children and the elderly taking part, she ensures their safety while they do so.

"We should care for everyone cleaning in our community in San Mateo, especially the elderly, because they might collapse under the unbearable heat," she explained. "We should also assist the children if their tasks are too much for them to handle. We should all help each other because this is for our community."

Another participant was Ancheta; she agreed with the importance of unity within the community.

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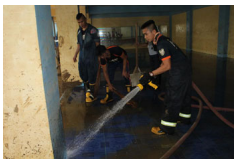
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After cleaning her own house, the 59-year-old mother of five set out to assist the clean-up of the entire neighborhood. “We want to clean our community as one community,” she said.

The program is expected to last between three and five days, depending on the amount of work needed to clean the communities affected.

Government support

The local governments of Marikina and San Mateo pledged support for the clean-up in the participating barangays. In Banaba, dump trucks from the San Mateo local government arrived to carry waste from the floods for processing.



The local government of Barangay Nangka, Marikina City did even better. Along with heavy equipment like pay loaders and dump trucks, it also sent firefighters and policemen to help.

In addition to the streets of Nangka, the local high school was also a center of Tzu Chi’s clean-up efforts. Tzu Chi volunteers and residents wasted no time preparing the school for the children to be able to resume their studies. Together with the residents, the volunteers have a common interest to see children return to school as if nothing happened.

“It’s important [to clean this school] to help mitigate the trauma experienced by the locals. That is the wish of our mayor. When children return to school, they should not feel like victims of flooding at all,” explained Ralph Espinosa, assistant head of the city government’s School Repair and Maintenance Office.

For Tzu Chi volunteer Richard Tan, who is overseeing the work in Nangka, the cash-relief program is more than just to help the affected families. He stressed that cleaning one’s house of mud must also mean cleaning one’s heart of afflictions. He hopes to see the spark of volunteerism reignited among the hearts of local people whose lives have been guided by the teachings of Tzu Chi.

“As we are blessed, we should help these people recover as soon as possible. We should also rekindle their volunteerism spirit, so that they can continue to help others in need,” said Tan.