

New Life in Wake of Deadly Philippine Mudslide

story by Christmas McGaughey
photos by Erin Winemiller

The air was filled with chaos and death. The entire village of Guinsaugon in southern Leyte had been buried under nearly 100 feet of mud and fallen boulders a few days earlier. Bereaved family members thronged as close as they could to the site where rescue workers were waist-deep in mud, digging to find nearly 1,000 people buried alive or killed by the February 17 landslide.

“Calvary Chapels were the first responders,” said Pastor John Michaels, who oversees CC ministries in the Philippines. Calvary Chapel pastors had been ministering on a nearby island when the disaster struck and immediately went to Leyte. Filipino pastors from the area worked with the American pastors. With government permission, the men prayed with American and Philippine military and rescue workers in the unstable terrain. Thousands waited every day for any news about their loved ones or about the submerged village primary school. Over a five-day period, hundreds of victims, military personnel and rescue workers accepted Christ. Filipino pastors stayed to disciple and minister.

On the first day, there was hope. But the third day brought heavy rains and a somberness to the group. Pastor Gerry Brown, CC Romoland, noticed an elderly woman weeping, and he gently asked if she had loved ones missing. With another pastor interpreting, she told them her daughter and two grandchildren were missing. He talked to her about God’s love and how life is a gift from Him. As they talked, he perceived she had a religious background but not a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Gerry explained repentance from sin and faith in Christ’s sacrifice and God’s grace. He shared from John 3 where Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” to have eternal life. “I explained what being born again means, and asked if she’d like

CALVARY PASTORS REACH OUT TO HUNDREDS ON THE ISLAND OF LEYTE



Pastor Gerry Brown of CC Romoland prays for U.S. Marines.

to pray and receive Jesus as her Lord and Savior.” She said yes. The pastors prayed with her and spoke to her about walking with the Lord.

At a nearby hospital, Pastors Angel Baez, from Mexicali, Mexico, and Cisco Velasco, an American missionary from a neighboring island, were ministering to victims. They approached a young woman who had lost her parents, two brothers and her younger sisters. The 18-year-old had been able to escape being buried alive, but a large bandage covered extensive scars on the left side of her head and face. What Angel noticed was not the bandage or the scars—rather the radiant smile she beamed at them.

“Something told me that the Lord had already been there,” Angel said. “She was

filled with this fire, this amazing joy; it was unbelievable.” Suitably, her name was Joy, and her heart seemed already prepared to hear the Gospel. They asked her beliefs about God and Jesus Christ and shared Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Angel said, “We told her God had given her another chance, and she seemed to already know that. She was ready; she accepted Christ.” They returned for visits to find her in good spirits and laughing with them. It was evident she had been touched by God in the midst of her loss.

The Philippine government had asked the pastors to minister to a group of 11 orphans in their teens. The men searched schools, hospitals and the crowds but could not find the children. After a long day, Angel

was sitting in the hotel room when he felt prompted to go down to the lobby. There were 11 teenagers sitting together. He approached and asked if they had lost family members, and they all nodded and stared at him. “When those kids told me they had lost everybody, I had no idea what to say.” Silently thanking God he had found them, he asked if they would like to have a Bible study; they agreed.

For the next hour, he shared from the Gospels about how Jesus called the children to Himself and blessed them. He told how one can have a personal relationship with Jesus instead of a religion. “They asked me, ‘How do we do that?’ So we prayed together, and they all accepted Jesus.” The children were invited to live with Christian Filipino families who offered to support them as they walked through the days and years ahead. ☺



On the island of Leyte, the Philippine village of Guinsaugon was buried under 100 feet of mud and fallen boulders. The debris covered nearly 100 acres.



CC Pastors cross a river to minister to rescue workers digging for survivors.



Gerry prays as rescue teams begin relief and recovery efforts.

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