

24,000 Attend Year-end Celebration in Manila after Ravages of Typhoon

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Monday, 28 December 2009 00:00



More than 24,000 people of different races and religions gathered in a large sports stadium in the east of Manila on December 27 to celebrate their survival from a typhoon that devastated the city and pray for peace and harmony in the world.

The Tzu Chi Foundation held its Year-end Blessing and Prayer Vigil at the Marikina Sports Centre, a venue that was flooded up to waist level on September 26 when typhoon Ondoy struck the city, transforming the streets into rivers of mud and causing 78 deaths. Of all the areas in the Philippines affected by the storm, Marikina was the worst hit and the place where Tzu Chi concentrated its relief effort.

Leaders of the country's three main religions -- Catholicism, Islam and Buddhism -- attended the event, as well as city leaders and thousands of ordinary people touched by the foundation's efforts to help them survive the typhoon and rebuild their lives. It provided free relief supplies and medical care and, at the wise suggestion of [Dharma Master Cheng Yen](#), a cash-for-work program. This paid 400 pesos (US\$ 8.8) a day to people to clear the streets of mud and debris, prevent the outbreak of epidemics and return life to normal.

The evening also included song and dance, the distribution of red envelopes to bring wisdom and blessings -- a Tzu Chi tradition at the end of the year -- the passing of giant jars for donations and a prayer vigil.

Kicking off the event was Marikina Mayor Maria Lourdes Fernando who warmly welcomed the crowd as she took the stage and greeted thousands of her constituents. "This year-end blessings and prayer vigil organized by Tzu Chi Foundation, who helped us day and night in the rehabilitation of our community, is truly a sincere gesture in building a stronger relationship between our community and their organization. We must truly treasure this moment as this can be a way to realize how blessed we are to have been helped by a foundation so caring and loving."

Bayani Fernando, former secretary of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), also took the opportunity to thank Tzu Chi for its efforts to make the residents of Marikina realize the value of helping each other and make their work easier and faster. "The Tzu Chi Foundation was a guiding light during the darkest time of our community. They not only provided equipment and manpower, they also motivated us in doing better and working faster."



Next was Lee Tsuan Tong, the representative of the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Office in Manila, who spoke about the relief aid provided by Tzu Chi. "We (in Taiwan) were worried when we learned of the terrible condition of the Filipino people after the typhoon hit Manila and nearby

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areas. Taiwan right away sent bowls, tumblers and instant rice to the Philippines. We also helped with the rehabilitation of the Marikina community by helping to buy units of heavy equipment that were used to clean major roads and residential areas drowned in flood and mud.”

Responding to these expressions of gratitude, Alfredo Li, chief executive of Tzu Chi in the Philippines, expressed his deepest thanks for their good wishes and explained to the crowd that the success of Tzu Chi in Marikina was not only to clear the streets but also to cleanse the hearts of people and teach them to realize their blessings.

“Tonight, I want to let you know that I am grateful for three factors. First, I am grateful that Typhoon Ondoy came in our midst because we were able to unite our efforts and pursue one goal -- to rehabilitate your community. Second, I am thankful to the Ramon Magsaysay Awards for recognizing the influence and compassionate work of our founder, the venerable Master Cheng Yen. And lastly, even though she cannot be with us tonight, I want to thank Master Cheng Yen because she is our great motivator and teacher. Not only did she guide us in fulfilling our mission in Marikina, she has also taught us to move forward and extend our limits.”

Next to speak were three residents from two of the worst affected areas, Nangka and Malanday. They expressed their appreciation for the selflessness of the Tzu Chi Foundation which rescued them from their misery. The three were Nangka residents Dong Arojado and Angie Villanueva and Carmen Rejano from Malanday. They have changed from being helpless victims of typhoon Ondoy into volunteers for the foundation. Other survivors of the disaster expressed mixed emotions -- tears from the loss of their belongings and happiness at being able to survive such an ordeal with their family and loved ones. To comfort them were moving renditions of “Love Heals the World,” and “The Universal Three No’s” by Cheng Yang Yin, who made the long journey from Taiwan to take part in this remarkable event. His soothing voice and the message of his songs touched the hearts of his audience and moved them to tears.



“It was really a very beautiful performance. I am really touched because it felt as he was singing a message of love from the heavens,” said Eduardo Etang of Libis Bulelac in Malanday district. He was one of the beneficiaries of the foundation’s Cash-for-Work program and attended the event with his family. “We want to show our gratitude to the Tzu Chi Foundation,” he said. “I am happy and at the same time amazed at the huge number of the audience. I think this is the very first time the sports center has been filled with so many people. I think they have all come here to show their gratitude to Tzu Chi and listen once more to the good lessons in life the volunteers will share with them. Malanday loves Tzu Chi very much!”

The audience were treated not only to Yin’s heartwarming songs but also to a Filipino cultural dance performed by students of Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Marikina and a traditional Islamic dance Taalal that expressed the gratitude of the Muslim community in Tumana district for their blessings.

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Then Tzu Chi volunteers and local volunteers from Marikina proceeded to their designated places for the distribution of “the red envelope of wisdom and blessings.” This is Master Cheng Yen’s way of thanking the community with wisdom and blessings.

Representing Master Cheng Yen was Stephen Huang, co-ordinator of Tzu Chi volunteers worldwide, who arrived from Taiwan that day to witness this remarkable prayer vigil and thanksgiving event. “Since the Philippines is just south of our country, making an effort to relieve your suffering was like giving help to our neighbor,” he said. “In addition, I want to let you know that I love the Filipino smile. The smile of the Philippines is like the smile of Tzu Chi. So keep smiling to keep the Tzu Chi spirit close to your hearts.”

Assisted by Marikina residents, Tzu Chi volunteers went to their appointed posts in the sprawling stadium and distributed the red packets in a swift and orderly manner. “It is a great blessing from Master Cheng Yen,” said Helen Mallari of Mandalay district. “The apple symbolizes peace for our family and the grains of rice the love that is spread around us. That is why I tell the members of my group to love this packet, for it will be a very good blessing in our lives.” Mallari was an aid recipient who has become a volunteer.

Asked if she was disappointed with the small amount of money in the packet, she shook her head. “As volunteers, we are not expecting anything in return. Actually, we are thankful that Master Cheng Yen remembers us with this gift, not to mention the many kinds of help that she and the Tzu Chi volunteers gave us.”

While the volunteers were distributing the red envelopes, members of the audience also were invited to approach 41 big jars scattered around the venue, where they could make donations and so contribute themselves to Tzu Chi’s charitable missions. The ceremony gave them an opportunity to express their compassion; they poured coins into the urns. Among the donors was Celina Rodeles, a student at Nangka Elementary School. She and her mother were beneficiaries of the Cash-for-Work program and on December 16 accepted a coin bank from the Tzu Chi. She filled it with five pesos from her daily allowance of 20 pesos (US\$0.4). She said she was excited that she was able to pour her savings into the jar. “I am happy that, even though I am still young, I can help the needy through my donations,” she said. “I do not regret saving up for Tzu Chi instead of for myself, because I know the money will benefit a lot of poor people.”



Another resident who was happy to wait in line to make his donation was Felipe Perdiz, 50. “When I come home from work, I drop a coin in the coin bank because Tzu Chi has inspired me to save some money to help others in need. I am really happy to be here today and give its contents to Tzu Chi,” he said. Also among the donors were 45 survivors of the typhoon from Tatalon district –even though they had already donated the contents of their banks on November 8, during the celebrations of Tzu Chi’s 15th anniversary in the Philippines. Sixty-year-old Maria Galema brought the banks she had refilled after November 8; she said that she wanted to express her boundless gratitude to Tzu Chi for the help it gave her, when her

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neighbourhood was being hit by fires and floods. "Every time I contribute, I pray that no more calamities will ever strike us again," she said.

After the distribution of the red envelopes and the pouring of coins into the jars began the high point of the program -- the prayer vigil accompanied by the lighting of candles. In the dark of night, thousands of tiny candles lit the giant stadium; they were a symbol that even the smallest ray of light -- a small donation or act of kindness -- can, when joined together, be a major force for good in the lives of many people trapped by uncertainty and misfortune.

The prayers were led by leaders from three religions -- Catholic priest Father Emanuele Borelli, the leader of the Marikina mosque Imam Amir Macaurog and Tzu Chi CEO Alfredo Li, a Buddhist. The vast crowd, members of these three faiths, came together in a solemn moment of prayer for world peace.

"We pray for peace and harmony in the country and around the world; and, more importantly, awareness of environment protection, because the past disasters are not punishment from God but merely the effects of man's neglect for our environment," said Father Borelli. "We pray to you, Allah, to cleanse our hearts and save our souls. I pray for the peace of mind and hearts of everyone. And I pray for the salvation of everybody who lives righteously and compassionately," said Imam Macaurog. "We convey our three vows that more minds will be purified, that there will be peace and harmony in society and that there will be no more disasters in the world," said Mr. Li, in conclusion. In the silence of their hearts, members of the audience also said prayers of gratitude and kindness.

"We are very happy because there are so many people from different religions who participated in this prayer event. This only means one thing -- that everybody is cooperating with each other to recover from the tragedy," said Lailani Sultan from the Tumana Islamic Community shared. "What binds us together is a sense of unity and a desire to rebuild our lives."

"It is such a wonderful moment because three religions unite in the spirit of love and compassion," said Imam Macaurog. "The most beautiful thing I saw in this Buddhist organization is that they are full of compassion toward people."

Teodulo Granada, a volunteer from Nangka, said: "I feel really happy to be given the opportunity to be a part of this monumental event that united thousands of people from different backgrounds. My heart was filled with so much joy when we all lit the candles and filled the dark arena with bright flickers from thousands of individuals with different religious faiths. Then I saw that religious differences cannot hinder the Tzu Chi Foundation from uniting this large number of people." He was one of 1,250 volunteers who participated in the event from start to finish.

Next came a performance in sign language on the stage by the leaders of the groups and a rendition of "We are One Family", sung by the Tzu Chi and local volunteers and people of Marikina together, a way of showing that compassion bound everyone, whatever their faith. As they sang, members of the audience got up and held hands.

As they went home, each resident received a souvenir bag with a booklet of Jing Si (Still

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Thoughts) to guide them with the wisdom of Master Cheng Yen, a copy of a Tzu Chi publication to further introduce the foundation and update them on its latest activities and an apple and orange to symbolize peace and goodness.

It had taken the volunteers weeks of exhausting preparation to organize such a major event, that involved so many people and a large number of items. As they watched the audience walk away, they felt their hard work had been rewarded – in uniting 24,000 people in their hopes and prayers for peace, love and compassion.

Source: Tzu Chi Foundation, Philippines
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