News
EarthBeat
A man sits on hospital bed; next to him are the priest and two others.

Father Anthony Vu Thai San, director of Caritas in the Diocese of Hung Hoa in Vietnam's Phu Tho province, is seen in an undated photo assisting a person affected by floods caused by Typhoon Yagi, the most powerful typhoon to hit Asia in 2024. In the aftermath of the storm that wreaked havoc in northern Vietnam Sept. 7-11, "Caritas workers are distributing instant noodles, milk, rice and clean water to victims in the diocese," the priest said. (OSV/courtesy Caritas in the Diocese of Hung Hoa)

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HANOI, Vietnam — September 16, 2024
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More than 100 people, including a Catholic religious sister, are still listed as missing after Typhoon Yagi, the most powerful storm to hit Asia this year, left at least 233 dead in northern Vietnam.

Sister Maria Nguyen Thi Bich Hang from the Lovers of the Holy Cross congregation is believed by her family to have been killed in the storm.

"We have not yet found" her body because the "river is still flooded on both sides," said Anna Nguyen Thi Linh, the nun's younger sister.

On Sept. 9, heavy rain collapsed the Phong Chau Bridge over the Red River in Phu Tho province and eight people, including 35-year-old Maria Nguyen, were washed away.

However, Linh said the family had found her motorcycle and luggage that contained identification cards and her driver's license, approximately six miles from the bridge.

With winds of up to 92 mph, Typhoon Yagi, the most powerful typhoon to hit Asia in 2024, wreaked havoc in northern Vietnam Sept. 7-11. Besides the death toll, the subsequent landslides and floods also left 807 people injured and 103 missing, according to government figures.

In a Sept. 12 telegram signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, Pope Francis said he was "deeply saddened" to learn of the destruction wrought by Typhoon Yagi, offering his "spiritual solidarity to the injured and to all those suffering the continuing effects of this disaster."

The church and government agencies have provided aid to victims of the storm that hit 20 out of Vietnam's 25 northern provinces.

"Caritas workers are distributing instant noodles, milk, rice and clean water to victims in the diocese," said Father Anthony Vu Thai San, director of Caritas in the Hung Hoa Diocese in Phu Tho province.

Accessing some areas is difficult due to inundated roads, the priest added.

A lack of electricity, water and communication systems has exacerbated the difficulties, San noted.

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In his Diocese of Hung Hoa, dozens of volunteers rushed to help the affected, with the diocesan website pointing to "thousands of people unable to turn back, facing the scene of loss, mourning and extreme pain."

"Thousands of houses, clinics, schools ... are submerged in the rushing floods, and hundreds of thousands of cattle and poultry are washed away in the fast water. The villages that used to be peaceful now become scary, desolate to the heart," the website said.

The website, however, also said that in recent days, victims of the flooding have experienced "the golden hearts."

"The beautiful gestures have been constantly pouring in, bringing with it warmth and hope to those who are in a miserable situation," it said. "Each convoy follows each other towards the flood zone, (bringing) not only the necessary relief ... but also the compassion, sympathy and love of the people of the whole country, join(ing) hands to help people overcome this difficult period."

The website also shows the diocese's Church of the Ancient Blessed Parisicamers flooded by deep water.

The capital Hanoi, Hai Phong and 13 northern provinces were severely hit, damaging 188,125 homes and nearly 618,000 acres (250,000 hectares) of crops.

Hung Hoa, Vietnam's largest diocese in terms of territory, spans nine provinces and includes a part of Hanoi. The diocese recorded the highest number of casualties and missing people, totaling 248.

On Sept. 12, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh visited Nu, a village in Lao Cai province's Bao Uyen district, after landslides buried the village three days earlier. At least 63 villagers have been rescued, 45 have been confirmed dead and 50 were still missing.

Teresa Do Thi Lien, one of eight Catholic volunteers from Vinh City, said they used three trucks to deliver emergency relief supplies to victims in Tran Yen district in Yen Bai province.

While relief supplies may not be enough for everyone, "it is a gesture of solidarity with our brothers and sisters," she told UCA News.

The Hanoi Archdiocese and the dioceses of Bac Ninh, Lang Son Cao Bang and Hai Phong have asked people to support the victims.

Father Peter Sanen Nguyen Van Hieu, head of Caritas in Hai Phong Diocese, said fishermen, farmers, those who have lost their homes and people with HIV will face significant challenges in the coming months.

"We plan to provide financial assistance to help them rebuild their lives," he said.

Bishop Joseph Chau Ngoc Tri of Lang Son Cao Bang said the local church was mobilizing benefactors to help ethnic students in remote areas.

Vietnam had already recorded 104 deaths due to landslides and floods in the first eight months of 2024, which caused property damage totaling $80 million.