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Lent in a Philippines cemetery village

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NCR Today

MANILA, Philippines -- More than 300 flood victims who have moved temporarily into bunkhouses in an old cemetery in Cagayan de Oro City are giving others an opportunity to share of themselves during the Lenten season.

The people from 67 families came from two evacuation centers set up for residents whose houses were washed away or ruined by the flood unleashed by Typhoon Sendong (also known as Tropical Storm Washi) in December. More than 1,000 people were killed and about 1,000 more remain missing after Cagayan de Oro River swelled out of its banks on the evening of Dec. 16.

Archbishop Antonio Ledesma of Cagayan de Oro, who said Mass on March 6 and blessed the houses, urged survivors to help each other. He cited Pope Benedict XVI's Lenten message, which reminds Catholics, "Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works." (Hebrews 10:24)

Mary Jane Edrote, a camp leader of Cala de Oro, thanked everyone who shared and helped rebuild a safe community. Senior Inspector Elmer Robas urged survivors to follow the rules and regulations set by the residents in order to have a peaceful community and appealed to them to resist hopelessness after news of suicide among people in the village.

Ledesma has said he expected a prolonged rehabilitation period that would take much of the archdiocese's attention. He said out of 21 city parishes, the storm extensively inundated 17 riverside parishes, and he estimated up to 6,000 families need a place to live. The city government's 9 hectares in Calaan and the 5 hectares at Jesuit-owned Xavier University in Lumbia could accommodate about 1,500 families.

The archdiocese with the Department of Social Welfare and Development has played the role of convener

of government agencies, civic groups and humanitarian organizations bringing relief and other aid to victims of the flood. He said the church's main role is building communities of hope.

Workers and volunteers of the U.S. Catholic Relief Services, International Office for Migration, Social Action Center of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Cagayan de Oro City government and many other non-governmental organizations are helping to build the bunkhouses.

On Tuesday, foreign dignitaries who visited Sendong survivors in Canitoan village were impressed by people's "resilience."

Swiss Ambassador to the Philippines Ivo Sieber, UK Ambassador Stephen Lillie and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Country Representative Ugochi Florence Daniels observed community activities and talked to people. Daniels personally thanked Ledesma for his and the church's efforts to help women, particularly mothers, through his Natural Family Planning advocacy.

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