



# peace and reconciliation journal



Mennonite Church Canada  
WITNESS

A MONTHLY PRAYER LETTER PUBLISHED BY DANN & JOJI PANTOJA  
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## NATURE'S FURY AND HUMAN GRIEF: THE ILIGAN TRAGEDY

17 December 2011— In the middle of the night, as families were sound asleep in their homes, muddy waters quietly seeped through their houses, entering every room and space, rousing others to experience the worst night of their lives. As they scampered dazedly to hold on to their loved ones, the rushing waters that seemed to come from nowhere relentlessly swept away the ones who were unable to brace themselves from the rage of the rushing waters.

The lucky ones who were able to cling to safety witnessed the horror in front of them and heard the pitiful wails of those who were drowning fast. Inside some of the homes, people opened their rooms to be met by rushing waters instantly converting their rooms to large aquariums of muddy waters drowning adults and children.



Children survivors of the typhoon Sendong  
(International name: Washi)

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## A SEASON OF RELIEF-GIVING



*"I could choose to panic right now--no gifts yet for my family, no ingredients for the requested meal for the 'Noche Buena', no 8-hour sleep for weeks already. But how could I? When I just touched the elbow of a child who lost her mother, talked to a family who has no shelter to spend the night, and walked through the mud that washed out hundreds of people and led them to death. How could I?"*

This statement came from PBCI's Mindanao Peacebuilding Coordinator and Healthcare Specialist, Mei Solocasa. It was three days before Christmas and she was walking along the mud where hundreds of people were killed by the harsh typhoon that hit Iligan City and Cagayan de Oro City on December 17.

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## NATURE'S FURY...

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The worst of their fears was confirmed on the daybreak of December 17, 2011. As the flood slowly receded, the image that welcomed them was incomprehensible. The nightmare just a few hours back left so much devastation, so much shock, and so much grief.

People were missing, fathers and mothers clutching their children in tight embrace found dead, vehicles new and old overturned and buried in mud, animals and livestock dead, 2-story houses filled with mud, light houses completely gone, even concrete houses were not spared. The scene and imagery was total chaos as cries for missing loved ones filled the streets.

As survivors were rescued afloat at sea or perched on trees and rooftops, dead bodies equally increased in numbers day after day. The number of missing persons also increased. A week later, more lifeless bodies were found, crushing the hopes of those who believed that their loved ones are still alive.



The catastrophe was blamed mostly on illegal logging. The denuded watersheds feed the major rivers that overflowed enormously on the midnight of December 16. With the heavy rains brought by typhoon Sendong, the raging waters with debris and logs rushed down destroying villages and properties, killing people and livestock.

Man's improper use and abuse of nature's bounty ricocheted and as always in such magnitude that it seemed incomprehensible. Man's sheer stubbornness to heed warnings of possible catastrophe resulted to the loss of lives, many of whom were innocent children. Twenty years ago, it was Ormoc, but people seemed to forget the grief and sorrow of dead bodies piled in dump trucks as Leyte experienced its worst floods.

As Cagayan de Oro and Iligan experienced its share of grief, many remembered Ormoc but were the lessons learned? Where will be the next showcase of nature's fury?

 Reported by Lorelei Madrona Panacawan

**We welcome your contributions for our support and invite you to send these to:**

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COMMUNITY

## A SEASON OF RELIEF...

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That day (17th), the rest of PBCI Field Staff headed home for their usual Christmas and New Year break. The staff based in Davao City, however, immediately responded to the disaster (typhoon Washi) by organizing and coordinating relief response operations in the affected areas.

Bennette Tenecio, Support Operations Director, immediately coordinated with local partners to work together in gathering donations and relief funds.

Kriz Cruzado, Director of Field Operations, also worked with other partners in determining strategic locations where PBCI is most needed, especially in terms of Health care and Psycho social intervention.

Mei Solocasa, Mindanao Peacebuilding Coordinator, worked as the advance party and prepared the areas for relief operations, as well as the network of volunteers, before the arrival of the team from Davao City.



The Give Love Save Lives Volunteer Team



The Give Love Save Lives Relief Operations—Wave 1



On December 22-23, 2011, PBCI conducted the first wave of relief operations which they called "Give Love Save Lives". Together with Mindanao People's Caucus, VSO Bahaginan, University Peace and Reconciliation, Davao Bible Community Church, Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute, Coffee for Peace, and Hineleban Foundation-Save the Philippine Forest, they were able to serve 500 families, 203 medical patients, and 150 children received Trauma Intervention.

During the Relief Operation, most people were busy buying gifts, ingredients for their holiday meals, and spending time with their loved ones on luxurious places. Yet, the Give Love Save Lives Team chose to spend their Christmas break by helping the survivors of typhoon Sendong, rubbing elbows with poor children who lost their parents, ministering to mothers who lost their children, and sharing smiles to people who will celebrate Christmas for the first time—without a house. 🌱

## CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

This Christmas season, PBCI celebrated the book launching of Love, Joy, and Peace Coloring Book set designed in partnership with Kublai Milan and the University Peace and Reconciliation. The coloring books promote the values of love, joy, and peace in culturally appropriate illustrations. Individual books cost Php 200.00 each, and a set of three books only cost Php 550.00.

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The PBCI family committed to celebrate Christmas simply but truly. A few days before Christmas, some of the staff spent time responding to the survivors of typhoon Sendong that hit Iligan and Cagayan de Oro (CDO) cities. They offered medical and psycho social intervention, and were able to raise donations for relief goods. They worked with a network of volunteers who related that this experience was life-changing for them.

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Kriz Cruzado, Director of Field Operations, shared how she sacrificed most of her time with her family just to be able to respond to the disaster in Iligan and CDO. Though her family missed her a lot, she expresses the fulfillment after realizing that she celebrated the true meaning of Christmas... sharing the love of Jesus Christ to the needy.

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As we begin the year 2012, we are committed to continuously be a part of responding to the typhoon survivors. The relief phase may be over, but we will continue to offer help during the rehabilitation, restoration, and reconciliation phases. 🌱

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## PRAY FOR THE PBCI STAFF



**Dann Pantoja.** Pray for a meaningful celebration of the birth of Jesus as each of us spend time with our loved-ones during this Christmas Season. Praise God for the birth of the Prince of Peace! By faith, let's thank God for the advancement of peace and reconciliation in our land and in the whole world.



**Joji Pantoja.** Please pray for PBCI and CFP staff who were affected by the flash flood in Davao City. Please pray that we may raise Php 40,000.00 to help some of the staff rebuild their homes which were washed away by the flood.



**Bennette Tenecio.** Please pray for good health; wisdom and discernment in her work especially in evaluating and assessing applicants for the new ministry in Bukidnon; for the Coloring Books to be published and launched. That through these coloring books, many people will embrace Peace, Joy, and Love in their lives.



**Kriz Cruzado.** Pray for more wisdom as she directs our Field Operations, patience as she deals with untoward events, good health so she could always function well, economic stability for her family so she does not have to worry for her finances, creativity and resourcefulness so she can continue innovating new approaches and strategies in achieving Field Ops goals.



**Mei Solocasa.** Please pray that God will give her wisdom in leading the new staff assigned in Bukidnon.



**Regina Mondez.** Please pray for guidance as she moves from Nueva Ecija in Central Luzon, to Bukidnon in Mindanao. Pray for strength and courage as she deals with emotional adjustments, as well as wisdom in dealing with her new tasks.



**Arjay Freg Balabag.** Please pray for him and his family, as they rebuild their home which was washed away by the recent typhoon.



**Joy Betios.** Please pray for renewed strength for her work from day to day, as their home and everything they possess were washed away by the recent flash flood in Davao City.



**Freddie Abelitado.** Please pray for energy and strength as he continues to be a good member of PBCI family. Also pray for his health and his family's needs.