

Dear Peter,

Thank you so much for your email. Yes, we need all the help we can get for the victims of the latest typhoon (Typhoon Ketsana or Typhoon Ondoy (philippine name)). I have seen several major disasters in our disaster-prone country, but this is far and away the most devastating. Gawad Kalinga (GK) is at the forefront of the work for relief and we are working closely with GK national. GK Ateneo (the GK representation at our University) is a major center of the work. So we would be happy if funds can be given for this work.

What are we doing at the Ateneo de Manila and with GK Ateneo?

Stage 1: Immediate help

Since Saturday, Sept. 26, when the typhoon struck and incredibly heavy rains fell on Metro Manila (more than 400 millimeters in about 10 hours, more than the whole previous month), we started monitoring the situation and seeing how to help. Our first concern was how to keep people we were in touch with safe. We have a permanent disaster response and management group at the Ateneo that is able to mobilize immediately. They call themselves the DReaM Team (DReaM is for Disaster Response and Management). They met immediately on Sunday morning, Sept 27, after the typhoon and started receiving relief goods – food, water, clothes, blankets. We started delivering these relief goods in the afternoon and evening of Sunday. I went with a group Sunday evening to a very poor area near us where we brought 2,000 food packs and several boxes of clothes and blankets (people had lost everything, only the clothes on their backs and they were wet and cold).

This first stage of relief goods has been ongoing since Sunday, Sept. 27, and has been the major focus of our work. Our large basketball covered courts have become a center for donations, sorting out of donations, packing, then loading into trucks and vans for delivery. About 2,000 students, parents, alumni, and friends are part of the volunteer group working in 3 shifts from 6 am till 12 midnight. We have been delivering about 15,000 to 20,000 foodpacks a day to various sites.

Stage 2: Cleanup

We also started organizing volunteer groups for cleanup of the one-foot (or more) thick mud and debris in the affected areas. We started with our own housing for Ateneo faculty and staff. This is more complicated as we need equipment (trucks to haul the mud and debris and payloaders to load the mud and debris to the trucks). Mark Lawrence (GK Builder at Ateneo) and GK Ateneo are spearheading this effort. We are now working on cleanup of a housing area not so far from us that was one of those most devastated, the water went up to the second floor of houses and in some cases to the roof of the houses. Once the equipment is able to clean up the mud and debris on the streets, the student volunteers can help in cleaning the houses.

Stage 3: Rehabilitation

This is the most complex and we are able to start this only for our own community. We are now doing an inventory of affected families among our employees and students. Some have lost everything – their homes were swept away in the floods. Others have lost appliances, furniture, books etc. that were in the flooded areas of their home. We are beginning by partnering them with other families who were not affected and seeing how to help them in the immediate future. We are trying to put together a financial package to help them rebuild.

Trauma counseling.

Our psychology and counseling departments have also mobilized to handle trauma counseling. As you might imagine, a number are still in shock. They have seen people they know carried away in the floods. They see their car, computer, furniture, home – for which they had worked so hard for so many years – all gone. They feel that a major part of their life is gone. We will be spending at least the month of October to listen to our students and members of our community tell their stories.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 may be finished in a month or so. But stage 3 and trauma counseling may go on for quite a while – more than a year in my estimate. You can get some other information and images from the Ateneo website www.ateneo.edu

Thank you again so much. My best to Cornelia.
Fr. Ben