

## TYPHOON MORAKOT UPDATE

August 17, 2009

Thank you to you all for your concern and prayers regarding the tragic situation in southern Taiwan as a result of Typhoon Morakot last week. As the disaster unfolds, it is clear that many lives have been lost, homes and buildings buried, crops and livelihoods destroyed. Communications have been severely disrupted and many mountain villages even now remain inaccessible. People are very angry over the government's slow response and the excuses made by government officials trying to justify their incompetence and arrogance. However, rather than resorting to protests and vandalism to vent their anger, rather the people of Taiwan are instead standing up and volunteering



to go to the affected areas themselves and help. By car, by train, by bus and bicycle, the people of Taiwan are on the move. All are heading south to volunteer in the relief effort, wellington boots on their feet and shovels in their hands. Homes and schools inundated by thick layers of mud are now being cleared by students on their summer holidays, by

older people newly retired, by church congregations, by groups of neighbours who have come together to help others. Look at our new friends here in the photo, they told us they have no money to give, but they want to help.

All disasters have a certain amount of chaos in the relief effort and this one is no exception. Where to go, how to help, what to take, where to stay, who to consult? The best place is one particular website set up 'because we are fed up with the government, and if we wait for them to act, we'll be waiting for ever.' It makes fascinating reading. Offers from people in the north to dig, to translate, to cook, to entertain children, to help in any way ~ are matched by organizations in the south looking for volunteers, by local people who offer a bed for the night, by recommendations and suggestions. The attraction of going south to volunteer is greatly added to by the free High-Speed Rail tickets available to all volunteer organizations. It cuts hours off the journey and oh, it is so much more comfortable!

When Typhoon Morakot arrived last weekend, Saturday August 8 was the day Taiwan was celebrating Fathers Day (8/8 is pronounced ba-ba, the same sounds as for 'father'). We were expecting the north to get the worst of it as the centre was due to pass right

over us. While the rest of the country was getting soaked, I was here at home on the north-west coast enjoying hours of sunshine in the very centre of the typhoon. While the rains soon stopped in the north, they continued on and on in the south, in the mountains especially. And just imagine 2-3 metres of rain falling in only 1-2 days...

There is no doubt that when it comes to relief efforts in Taiwan that the Buddhists have got their act together in a big way. Every day 300-400 volunteers are going south to help and to replace those exhausted by the heat, sun and the physically demanding nature of the work of cleaning people's homes and digging out the mud from villages. They work by strict rules, have distinctive uniforms and a regular schedule to follow. In comparison, the Christian relief organizations are tiny, but they do try to make up for it in enthusiasm!

We thank God that all our clergy, church members and church buildings in the diocese escaped unscathed from the typhoon. Now, the Bishop of Taiwan, the Rt. Rev. David J. H. Lai is encouraging all the churches in the diocese to send teams of volunteers to help. Unexpectedly I found that this past weekend I was suddenly going to be free. I felt moved to offer my services and after a whole day of chaos and wondering whether I would be able to go at all, it suddenly all came together at the last minute and I went off down to south central Taiwan on the High-Speed Rail taking a student with me. We ended up in Chia-Yi, staying at St. Peter's Church, joining a group of students from St John's University and a few other hangers on. A great group to be with!

There followed a weekend in the **Chia-Yi County Tax Building**. Yes the very same place where everyone goes to pay their taxes, and no I am not joking, we really did spend virtually the whole weekend there. And as it was a Saturday the air-conditioning



was off, so it was sweltering hot. There in the midst of all those Tax offices is the Chia-Yi County Red Cross, and what a marvelous organization it turned out to be. By the end of the weekend we had moved almost 4,000 boxes of all shapes and sizes sent by the general public (free postage) as donations to the relief effort. The Post Office vans

spent all day driving back and forth delivering boxes to us, and we spent all weekend moving them up to the third floor, recording the sender's details, checking the contents

and sorting them all out. Boxes of clothes, baby items, cans of food, milk powder, rice, instant noodles, candles, water bottles, toothpaste, you name it, it was there. We worked in pairs, one recording, the other slashing open the box and sorting the contents. Have knife will cut, that was my role!

On Sunday, yesterday, 2 of us went with the Red Cross up into the mountains to deliver some of the goods. Chia-Yi County stretches from the coast, where the Tax Building, County Hall etc are located, right up into the central mountain range as far up as the top of Taiwan's highest mountain, Yu-Shan. We drove for well over 2 hours. Helicopters were constantly flying overhead carrying supplies. As we went up, so the road worsened, in many places only cleared enough for single file traffic.

We took mainly plastic containers for petrol, instant noodles, cans of food, and candles.

When we reached Da-Pu Village, up beyond Tzeng-Wen Reservoir, we could go no further. Up and beyond, the road was impassable except by jeep, and even then everything would have to be carried by hand for more several hours up to the mountain villages.



Beyond Da-Pu the people are from the Tsou tribe of indigenous people. Many of the people severely affected

by this typhoon are indigenous people, and most are Christians. Many have shared their testimonies in front of news cameras on TV in the last few days, and can testify to God's amazing grace in the face of Taiwan's worst typhoon in 50 years. They mostly belong to Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches, and there must have been severe damage to many church buildings and communities. Restoration and repair will take months and even years.

We were up at Da-Pu, while meanwhile back at the Tax Building, Bishop Lai called in to encourage everyone and to pray and bless the work. He had spent the morning at St. Peter's having a confirmation service, and was on his way home to Taipei by High Speed Rail. He has been most supportive of all our volunteer efforts throughout the whole weekend.

I too had to be on my way back to Taipei. This month I am based at Good Shepherd Church in Shilin, Taipei, teaching summer holiday classes Monday to Friday. Where

else in the world would a group of kids, virtually all from non-Christian families, pay money (not much money but some) to study in an English Bible class for 4 weeks during their summer holidays? Amazing! I would have loved to have gone back to Chia-Yi next weekend, but we are taking the high-school part of the group to a camp at St. John's University, to relax together and to share the gospel.

As well as this weekend's camp, we would appreciate your prayers for the relief efforts. At St. John's University, there are over 100 students who live in the typhoon-affected area, and whose homes are damaged and whose families need help. We also have a group of students going off to Taitung, on the east coast, this week to help clear mud and clean up a primary school ready for the start of the academic year on September 1. And do please pray for the government of Taiwan, that they might have wisdom and learn from this experience. Typhoon Morakot was the first of this year's typhoons and the typhoon season has hardly begun. We expect more to come and usually they get more serious as the season goes on. And just in case the people of northern Taiwan are getting complacent, we were shaken by an earthquake this morning at 8:00am. I was on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor at Good Shepherd Church, and it seemed to shake for ages. Fortunately we later heard that the epicenter was out at sea and there was no damage. Next month, September 21, will be the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the big earthquake that killed more than 2,000 people. I had been in Taiwan for 9 months at that time. Between typhoons and earthquakes, this is a very unstable place to be. But it is oh so beautiful, and when God calls us, he does give us the energy and stamina and perseverance to keep going! So thank you for your e-mails, letters, prayers and support, and please do continue.

With love and many many thanks,  
Catherine Lee,  
CMS Mission Partner in Taiwan  
(seen here in exhausted state on Saturday night!)

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