

Perth goes all out for the Philippines

By ROBERT HIINI

THE SOH family, founders of Buckets for Jesus, have been happily overwhelmed by the generosity of the Perth community, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, after a colossal amount of goods was donated to their Philippines typhoon appeal.

The family and a group of dedicated volunteers have collected three shipping containers full of clothes and medical supplies to ship to Sebu where they will be distributed to the hardest-hit areas.

Ruby Soh, who was in Bohol in the week before Typhoon Haiyan to help people recovering from the October earthquake, departed Perth for Sebu to coordinate the distribution effort.

She said she was "extremely grateful" for the show of support for her home country.

Volunteers associated with the Soh family also launched an appeal in Singapore, collecting eight container loads of goods for the effort.

Speaking to *The Record* last Friday, Mrs Soh said she was happy to be returning to the Philippines to contribute to the aid effort but was also slightly apprehensive about the level of devastation she expected to find there.

"I am quite anxious and concerned just from what I have been reading; a priest I know on the ground is giving me updates," Mrs Soh said.

"He is hoping that more people will come and help, worried that the plight of the Philippines will drop off the radar as time goes on."

The appeal has also received support from companies, including Coates Hire which donated six generators and has offered to supply 50 temporary mobile homes or dongas for which the Sohs are attempting to secure shipping.

The Soh family closed their furniture business, Mode Studio in Subiaco, for the duration of the appeal which ended on November 22.

"It has been a sacrifice, two weeks of trade, but it is worth it if we can save lives and help," Mrs Soh said.

The priest in Bohol with whom Mrs Soh has been working, Fr Khing Vaño, sent this eyewitness account of what is happening in the region to *The Record* on November 22: "I was at ground zero of the 7.2 earthquake that hit Bohol on



Volunteers Mark and Mat load donations into a truck for transport at Mode Studio, the Soh family's business in Subiaco.

PHOTO: ROBERT HIINI

October 15 in the town of Carmen. It was like the end of the world. I was lucky my house survived but not my neighbour's. As an act of thanksgiving to God, we organised relief operations bringing water, food and tents to the victims in the evacuation areas. Generous friends and donors from here and abroad provided the money and supplies.

"One month after the quake, we are working on rehabilitation, helping people go back to their homes and rebuild their houses. This is a longer process and we are coordinating with the local government and local Church. Hopefully, we can link our relief efforts and rehabilitation towards development. Those affected in our area are mostly poor farmers.

"Carmen sustained strong winds but damage was minimal. It was very bad in Leyte and Samar

Islands, next door neighbours to Bohol. Coming on the ruins of an earthquake and the earlier, smaller typhoon, it brought more fear and desperation to the populace.

"Our nerves are broken, but not our spirits. The biggest challenge after the earthquake and typhoon relief efforts are over, is how to sustain the momentum of help for the victims.

"Usually, people are ready to help at the onset of the disaster and a few weeks after but for the long haul, which is needed for the victims who lost homes and property, hardly anybody cares. How can we link relief rehabilitation and development for those who suffered the devastation?

"Australians have been very helpful to the Philippines in the past and the present. We are very thankful for this," Fr Vaño said.



Above, from left, Mick, Mike, Kamila and Ruby Soh.

PHOTO: ROBERT HIINI

Hundreds gather to give and to pray for the Philippines

THERE was a large gathering of Filipinos and Australian friends, civic and family, in Bedford last Saturday evening to raise funds for the survivors of the recent Philippine disasters in the central Philippines.

The event was spearheaded by the "Visayan Group" and various community leaders and was hosted by the Filipino-Australian Club of Perth with the support of its president, Nestor Jongko.

Proceeds from entrance fees, raffles, cash donations and pledges totalled approximately \$30,000 which will go, in its entirety, to the survivors.

Donated clothes and other non-perishable goods will be transported to the affected islands.

Philippine food and musical entertainment featured throughout the evening and the Filipino Chaplain of the Archdiocese of Perth, Rev Dr Armando Carandang, gave the following as an opening prayer:

O God of Power and Mercy, Was

that your direct will and power which devastated our homeland so recently and left thousands of dead, many more missing, and corpses putrefying and still unburied?

Is it your direct will and power which even now keeps in misery millions of the living barely surviving, homeless and helpless, hungry and thirsty, sick in body, in mind and spirit? Yet we know that you are the God of love who cannot directly will evil, but allow it for a good we cannot see.

Still we cannot help but ask why. And yet we understand that you are God of mercy, always giving, always forgiving, even if Nature is not.

Physical Nature has indeed been out of order through wrong choices of our fallen human nature. God of Mercy, Look down upon us, as merciful Father.

Protect the Philippine survivors from further harm. Give them, we pray, true freedom of spirit, the spirit of freedom from despair and utter hopelessness, the spirit of faith and hope. Give them, we pray, relief

and health in mind and body.

And yet, let us not just pray in the comfort of this lucky country. Lead us to action. Open not just our hearts but also our hands to help provide material means to those in great need even if at some sacrifice on our part.

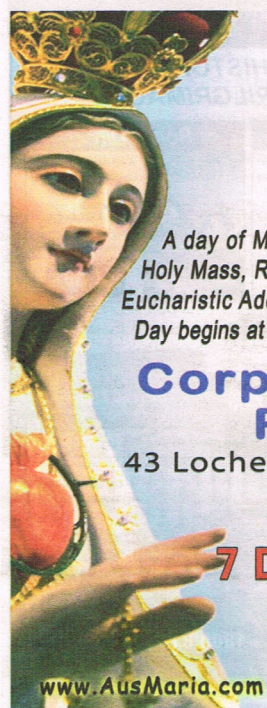
For it is actual giving - in almsgiving - that, beyond prayers which knock on the gate of heaven, beyond personal sacrifices that open the gate of heaven.

Yes, it is almsgiving, selfless giving to the truly deserving, that speaks of heaven.

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