

Peru's Deadly Floods

Towards the end of January floods ravaged different parts of Peru including the Province of Piura where Chulucanas belongs and it has been one of the worst hit regions. Flooding in Piura has left at least 24 people dead where millions of people have been affected. As many as 4500 houses have been damaged while close to a million people are without shelters. Families have evacuated to shelter in tents, church halls and schools. Villagers need to be permanently resettled away from flood-prone riverbeds. The roads and many schools have been damaged. The bridges have

been washed out too. It is really a major disaster. A large part of the population have lost everything, their homes, livelihoods and even some members of their families. Yet, it is very difficult to convince them to relocate as they love their land.



The province of Piura and its regions were immediately given a state of emergency when the rain was intense. The schools were closed down till the end of April but still some school grounds are submerged under water and perhaps will have no school until May. The Bishop of our diocese, Daniel Turley, OSA responded immediately to attend to the needs of the people as the are tremendous. He called various respective members of different groups of the diocese especially the Ayudar Fraterna (Fraternal Help) for several meetings with coordination

of the municipality of Chulucanas. The group was formed with the name of 'Colectivo Chulucanas da la Mano' (Collective Chulucanas give a hand). And they were divided into 4 commissions: Diagnostico (Diagnosis), Logistica (Logistics) and Atencion y Distribucion (Attention and Distribution) and Colectivos (Collections). Both Sr. Viviana and I are in the commission of Attention and Distribution. There were more than 60 students and teachers from the Catholic University of Chulucanas together with other voluntary youths of the diocese went around the town of Chulucanas appealing for help, of either food or



Voluntary students-Catholic Univ.
Chulucanas

clothing. Help was also given from the diocese of Haine, Caritas Lima, and Caritas Peru.

The Peruvian army and police provided the most visible rescue operations but was overextended with massive rescue efforts, shoring up and breaching dykes. They were also helping out and assisting our distribution groups in going to the outskirts and outlying areas of our diocese, even accompanying the group to some risky areas with thieving particularly at this time there is a rise of stealing. Food is very scarce and the price is rising. The malls in Piura are still under reconstruction and only small retail stores and the market are available for people to buy from.



Catacaos: Armies helped
evacuation of people.

Changing weather patterns brought about by climate change need to be examined with even greater urgency. I hope that all these terrible experiences of this natural disaster will bring challenges here for each one of us. The question is how do we contribute to the care of our

for our environment.

Health is also very risky here and it is a great concern. There are lots of infections especially respiratory, sanitation and an unhygienic environment. The mosquitoes are multiplying in millions and there is a great deal needed to be done for fear of the recurrence of the deadly diseases of dengue fever, chikungunya and zika.



Families sheltered overcrowdedly in tents-Piura

As I was watching the body language of people and listening to them from various outskirt areas as they expressed their vulnerability in longing to meet their basic needs, I was deeply moved and could not help being disheartened. It is extremely upsetting to see people really suffering. I am sure our presence makes a difference to them by us being there to share the little food and clothes we offered them, by our presence just to share their griefs and share in their painful experiences. I wonder if God feels the same pain especially at this special time of our liturgical journey of the year. May our presence bring a tangible evidence of God for these vulnerable people and their shattered dreams. I prayed for and with them that God will restore them to have hope and faith in God once again.



Bishop Daniel Turley, OSA offered mass for the people of Quebrada de las Damas.

My experience of helping the flood victims has made me see how laborious and challenging the task is yet how fulfilling it is. I hope it continues to make me more compassionate and understanding of human resilience and frailty during such tragedy. And being present makes a difference.

In the midst of this disaster, it has been a joy and comfort to realize that many people are also working together to help meet the great needs. People of Chulucanas wanted to help from the very little they have in their homes yet they still share as the need is so great but we have very little to meet everyone's needs. The team spirit is very important as we collaborated with one another among the different commissions and volunteers. Together as we reach out to the victims may they be encouraged to know that they are not alone. May they also see hope in every helping hand, loving gestures, listening ears, and words of comfort.



Collection Commission at their tent in front of the Cathedral - Chulucanas.

May they see Christ in us: "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?... 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'" Mt 25:37-40.

Wishing you a blessed and grace-filled Triduum. Happy Easter everyone!
Sister Kieoma Finau, SMSM