

Christmas in a Birthing Tent

Dear Supporters and Friends of Mercy In Action,

“Fear not”, the angel said, as he broke the news of the Savior’s birth to cowering shepherds. The apostle John wrote “Perfect love casts out fear”.

It's hard to “fear not” when calamity strikes, and the very foundations of your world are shaken. Such is the case now here in the Philippines, in the aftermath of the largest typhoon/hurricane the world has seen to date. Lives shattered, homes destroyed, people left destitute; and everywhere, grief and fear.

I am writing this Christmas letter from the epicenter of the Disaster Zone on Leyte island, where November 8th the most powerful storm to ever make landfall devastated the country I call home. Reports coming from the disaster zone said that tens of thousands were left without food, clean water, shelter, or medical care, including thousands of pregnant women due to deliver in the storm’s aftermath.

So with fear and trembling, our staff of Mercy In Action loaded our ambulance with supplies, split our midwife team in two, and went to offer what disaster relief we could to the most hurt part of this country.

My Christmas this year is sleeping on the floor in a tent, delivering babies in a broken down school building that we converted into a maternity hospital, and weeping with those who mourn.

It is also laughter as we scramble to sweep out the water that floods us each time it rains, happiness with each new little life born into our birth tent, gratitude for each kindness shown us by other disaster organizations from all over the world who supply us with food supplements to give out, help us with x-rays or operations, or set up clean water filters and fix our broken roof.

Fear not.

I realize that for that seems hard here to us, the dirt, the smells, the lack of basic plumbing and electricity, the tent instead of a beautifully decorated birth room, we Mercy In Action midwives have the GOOD job in this disaster.

I admire the relief workers who are out doing clean up and recovery and are still finding 8-10 bodies every day in the rubble. I am happy to instead be helping new life into this disaster zone, instead of digging death out of it.

The surroundings are so grim, yet life goes on, and we are a part of that new life every day.

Rose and Vicki Penwell led the team down, Ian will join us after Christmas, Scott is handling logistics, and literally dozens of our present and past staff joined or will be joining us in caring for the survivors. In thinking of these exceptional individuals I feel so privileged to work with, I think of the words I read in my Advent devotional today, an essay about living in light of our instruction to fear not.



Can't beat a good canvas wall tent from Montana for a birthing tent. Vicki and Rose Penwell



Using lifesaving Non-inflatable Anti-Shock Garment (NASG) to treat shock after hemorrhage.



On Dec 11, Vicki delivered a baby girl... same day as her sister Terri's birthday!



Found twins, born pre-term and malnourished. We are taking care of them now.

Johann Christoph Arnold writes “I have witnessed the remarkable peace that radiates from those who have not only battled their fears, but found strength to ask God to intervene on their behalf. Without exception, these are ordinary men and women who at some point in their life decided to spend their energies reaching out to people around them, rather than focusing on themselves.

Through this, they received a special gift: the ability to hear the angel’s words, “Fear not!” Such a gift can only be given to a surrendered heart, one that knows itself to be held in the palm of God’s hand.” *

Fear not.

The “glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people”, mean that fear’s grip on human hearts can and must give way to the far greater power of love.

My many years of witnessing suffering and loss has made me certain that love holds the deepest answer to all our fears. I am convinced Jesus is here at ground zero with us, in distressing disguise, as Mother Teresa used to say, in the face of the poor and needy. It is to Him we give our cup of cold water, our wound care, our food and vitamins, our love.

As I end this newsletter, I just want to say, enjoy your family, friends, hearth and home this Christmas, but also please remember the ones who, like Mary, find themselves homeless, scared, and with no place to lay their weary bodies when contractions begin and birth is imminent.

It is these people Mercy In Action serves, at Christmas and all year round, in our clean neat birth center in Olongapo, and now also in tents set up amidst the ruins left by Typhoon Haiyan (known as Typhoon Yolanda here in the Philippines.)

Thank you to all our donors who constantly show your love with generous gifts to help the women deliver safely.

Your gifts help us ease the fear of the survivors of Haiyan/Yolanda, help us help them recover, and help Mercy In Action staff continue to prove that God’s love here on earth is more powerful than fear, death, or any storm nature can unleash.

God Bless you, and Mercy Christmas.

Peace and love,
Vicki Penwell, for the team

*Quote is from Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas

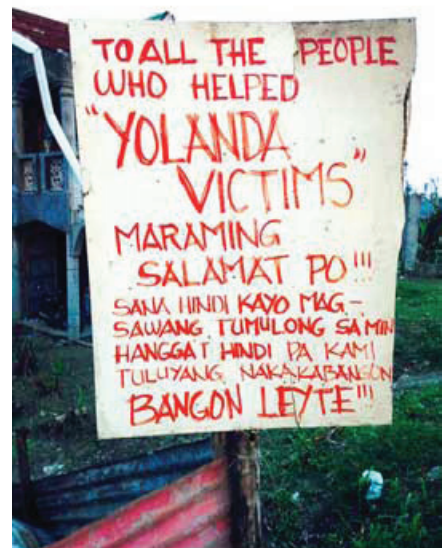
Please follow Mercy In Action on Facebook to keep up with new photos and reports daily.



Vicki with new baby ... Family is going home to temp shelter now...



Gas for sale...



Heartfelt sign Vic spotted along the main highway - Translated it says: To all the people who helped Yolanda Victims, thank you very much. Please do not grow sick and tired of helping us. We still have a long way to go to make a full recovery. We will rise again, Leyte.