

Christians' Covert Aid to Cyclone Victims Continues

An underground church leader said believers, storm-ravaged themselves, are on the front lines of relief efforts.



Despite media reports last week portraying Myanmar's military government as possibly more helpful than previously considered, an underground church leader in Yangon is telling *Charisma* that behind the scenes it is Christians who continue to be the main source of help to victims of Cyclone Nargis—a deadly storm that struck the impoverished nation May 2.

"We Christians are the only ones helping on the front lines and the most suffering people," said Brother Bo Min (not his real name), the pastor of a large underground church in Yangon.

"Whenever we are on the front line, we never see any other religious groups or soldiers helping," he said. "Only Christians and mission organizations are helping. Our Buddhist friends and government were not happy to hear this, but we Christians took an opportunity to share the gospel by helping them and showing the love of Jesus Christ."

Min said after one of Myanmar's worst cyclones in recorded history, he was surprised to hear the government estimate that only about 130,000 people died.

"I've been down there many times," he said. "The local people estimate 1 million people died. All of these people and cows and buffalos and goats and all kinds of animals were killed."

He said he knows of 87 towns that were wiped out by the cyclone and that 2.6 million people remain homeless.

A disaster-relief expert and missionary pilot based in the U.S. recently told *Charisma* a similar story after returning from a humanitarian mission to Myanmar. Joe Hurston, founder of Air Mobile Ministries, said Myanmar's government hasn't taken a census in years and has no idea how many people live in the Irrawaddy Delta—finger-like stretches of land in southern Myanmar that are at or below sea level.

"For them to say the death toll is 133,000—I absolutely don't believe it, not for a second," he said in June. "The storm had no resistance. There were no structures [nor] mountains to stop" the nearly 20-foot walls of water driven by 120 mph winds.

Because of the restrictive military junta in Myanmar, peasants and rice farmers near the Indian Ocean who managed to survive the storm were apparently shut out from international aid during the days and weeks following the storm.

Min, who oversees 158 underground churches in Myanmar, said the government is too ashamed to allow foreigners in because they're afraid the world will see

how little has been developed in Myanmar since 1962, when the military junta began its rule.

But unimaginable damage and suffering after Cyclone Nargis has opened many doors for Christians to not only share their clothes or food—including potatoes, onions, garlic and rice—but to also share the gospel, he said.

“Myanmar churches are not rich. But, as much as they have in their hands, they donate it to the church and the church brings it to the [village] center,” he said.

One church planter whom Min referred to as “Maung Din” has already baptized 123 new believers since the storm. “This is the fruit of helping to meet the needs of our Buddhist brethren,” he said. “We believe helping them is a bridge and partnership for evangelism, so we’ll keep on doing it.”

Min said that just days after the devastation of Nargis, Din reported 62 people accepting Christ in the village he was working. Cyclone victims who had never even heard the gospel even claimed to meet Jesus in their dreams prior to accepting Christ, he said.

“They said Nargis killed many, but Nargis also brought many people to Christ,” Min said happily. “Young people are even composing songs like that.”

As Christians in Myanmar continue meeting the spiritual and physical needs of their countrymen, a Virginia-based ministry is also aiming to assist relief

efforts, even if only by raising awareness in the West.

“The Christian community in Myanmar has been the primary vessel God has used to go down in that area,” said Court Wood, founder of In Jesus’ Name Ministries (), which advocates for persecuted Christians worldwide.

“It’s been wonderful to see what the Christian community is doing there with what little resources they have.” **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**