



CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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TO ALL MSFS CONFRERES ALL OVER THE WORLD

CYCLONE GAJA WREAKS HAVOC IN TAMIL NADU, INDIA

The past week has shocked us once again with the furious cyclone GAJA, damaging houses and buildings (including some of our MSFS properties and institutions), uprooting trees, taking away the lives of people, disconnecting transportation and communication system, having no access to drinking water, destroying fishing boats and nets, and worst of all depriving people of agricultural crops. We are all pained and saddened by the natural catastrophe.

I am in contact with Fr. Ignacimuthu, the Provincial of Southeast India Province, who has given me a gloomy picture of the real situation from his survey, though he himself had no means of communication for few days.

A good number of our confreres come from these cyclone-affected areas. The parents, relatives and villages of our confreres from these areas have also been badly affected. We express our solidarity with our confreres and their families, and also with all our brothers and sisters in this most difficult time. We hold them up in prayer and beg for the mercy and comfort of the Lord upon them. Our brothers and sisters should not lack our compassion and solidarity with them.

I am reminded of what St. Paul speaks about the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. “... *All the members may be concerned for each other. If one members suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members share its joy*” (1 Cor. 12: 26 -27). Let us use the gifts the Father has given us, if not for our own sake, then for the sake of others.

Fr. Ignacimuthu, the Provincial has updated me with the latest data on damages and loss to the Province communities. I quote:

1. Minor Seminary - Pudukkottai

Since we have many institutions in this affected area, many of our institutions have suffered heavy loss. The minor seminary is the worst hit. The second floor was with sheet-covered floor. It has been extensively damaged. All the things that were in the second floor have been affected. That apart, staff quarters, and other store-rooms were heavily damaged. Many of the trees have been uprooted. Basketball court iron poles have been damaged. For about 6 days, there was no electricity. Yesterday night only, the electricity is restored in the minor seminary area. Minor seminary has incurred maximum damage.

2. SFS parish – Thirukogarnam

The church in the sub-station of our parish has been damaged. The parish church did not suffer any damage, as it is a new church. But most of the trees have been uprooted in the parish campus.

3. SFS School – Pudukkottai

The school at Pudukkottai did not suffer any damage to its buildings. But most of the trees in front of the school building is uprooted.

4. ITI /Press – Chattram

The ITI has also suffered losses, as sheet covered area has incurred damage. Many of the trees have been uprooted. All the cultivations have been destroyed.

5. Children's Home – Vayalogam

The cowshed in the children's home has been damaged. That apart, a lot of trees have been uprooted.

6. Provincial house

Provincial house did not suffer any damage, except around 20 trees have been uprooted.

7. The extent of damage in our own institutions

At the moment, we are unable to calculate the damage, as all are involved only in clearing the campus and the areas. It will take some time, before

we could have an estimate of loss suffered by our institutions. Our priority is to restore normalcy in the minor seminary.

Our response

As of now, the province as such is finding it difficult to respond to this catastrophe. There are three dimensions to this.

One is that our province itself has suffered heavy damage to our own institutions, which requires immediate attention.

The second is that the parishes that we are administering in these affected areas.

The third is the other areas affected including some of the villages from where some of our fathers came from. At the moment, we are focusing on minor seminary so that it could function normally.

I wanted to write to you immediately. But I could not get information, due to loss of connectivity and unreachable etc. I have visited all our institutions. I have asked our fathers from the affected institutions the details of the damage. I am waiting for the details. Since they are only clearing the area, it will take some time to get the details. That is the reason, I could not write to you immediately. I will get back to you once I have more details. (unquote)

Dear confreres:

- I appreciate the relief work already offered by our confreres of Southeast India Province under the leadership of Fr. Selvaraj, the Director of Province M.D.O., with their limited available resources. Please know that we are with you.
- In helpless moments like these, we need common action at the congregational and international level to ensure that nobody is left behind
- We cannot remain in silence in front of destruction and loss of human lives
- Protecting the dignity of every human being is priority for us. We need to place people at the centre of our lives
- **I earnestly appeal to all the Major Superiors and individual confreres for your prayers, collaboration and good will offering to the cause of the victims of cyclone and of the immediate needs of the Province.**

- **Please contact Fr. Ignacimuthu, the Provincial of Southeast India Province, with your support and messages of solidarity. He can be reached at provincialsoutheastmsfs@gmail.com**

Praying for thousands of our suffering brothers and sisters and our confreres in the Southeast India Province at this time of loss and shock, I remain united with you in prayer,

Fraternally in Christ,



Father Abraham Vettuvilil, MSFS
Superior General

November 24, 2018