

Churches: Human failures caused Manila floods: More than 240 died in metro Manila

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Philippine church leaders have blamed “man’s sins” of neglect as the cause of massive floods in September following a tropical storm that claimed more than 240 lives and adversely affected almost 2 million people.

The floods submerged most of metropolitan Manila and neighboring provinces following the nine-hour storm Ketsana on September 26.

The damage was caused primarily by “man’s sins of social irresponsibility, neglect, opportunism, laziness and lack of vision,” said Bishop Benjamin Justo of the United Methodist Church.

Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chief Bayani Fernando listed poor city planning, illegal structures and geography as the major causes for the floods. “Our problem is we live where we should never have lived,” he told reporters.

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines, a group composed mainly of Protestant bodies, has documented cases of drainage systems being clogged with tons of garbage, mostly plastics. It said the floods could hardly recede because of the blocked waterways.

Bishop Justo laughed off the suggestion that Manila and other flood-prone provinces each needed some kind of “Noah’s Ark” to rescue residents during storms.

“What we need is a spiritual ark mind-set,” he said. “There’s no substitute to lasting measures such as massive drainage systems, mass education for preserving forests, proper waste-disposal and the like.”

Still, the biblical story of Noah’s Ark “could give us a lesson or two in disaster preparedness,” said Tong Kong Ng, a minister from the Missisanga Southern Chinese

Baptist Church in Toronto who was visiting the Philippines. “That Noah built his ark for 40 years gives us a clue on long-term urban planning,” Ng said in an interview.

As they braced for more tropical storms, the government, churches and aid organizations have been overwhelmed by the urgent need for food, drinking water, medicines, clothing and housing for the victims. -*Ecumenical News International*