

Distress Unmeasured Due to Kowloon Fire

SMALL GENEROUS ACTS CAN BE THE FOUNDATION FOR WIDER RELIEF

"If their lack of clothing, their homelessness does not touch us we cannot claim to be christians."

When Tung-tao Village, near Kai Tak Airfield became a chaotic hell of flames and smoke and frenzied people, one evening last week, 15,000 persons were left homeless. To relieve the plight of the people became a public responsibility. For Catholics the responsibility is even deeper. As soon as news reached St. Teresa's Rectory, Father Orlando went at once with some of the parishioners to the scene of the fire, to be on hand, as he said, "for any spiritual emergency."

Well, there were many emergencies, both material and spiritual, which the Pastor of St. Teresa's met. He spoke to the terrified people, who became panic stricken as the flames spread; he helped women and children drag their bundles to safety. Finally, the party from St. Teresa's gathered 15 lost children and headed by Father Orlando took them back to the Rectory. A weeping mother and three youngsters brought up in the rear of the sorrowful procession. On the way back, a nurse called to Father Orlando from an ambulance, and asked him to baptise two dying abandoned babies. That night, the lost children slept in the Rectory and the next morning, one by one, they were claimed by their parents. One small boy, whom Father Orlando had found wandering about on the outskirts of the fire, was a leper. He was sent at once to hospital.

On Thursday morning, there seemed to be a never ending line of dispossessed persons who came knocking on the door. Fifty families were given help to tide them over the first day of loss. Members of St. Teresa's Ladies' Association came to the church and helped to distribute clothing. One thousand persons received monetary relief from St. Teresa's. Thanks to Rev. Paul Duchesne of the Catholic Welfare Committee of China, Hong Kong Office who, as soon as he heard of the disaster, at once sent H.K.\$2,000 for use by St. Teresa's Pastor. As well, many of the faithful parishioners, unasked, brought gifts of money, food and clothing for distribution. Some of these donors were very poor people themselves. One woman gave Father Orlando \$12 which she had intended spending for meat for her family that day. Last Thursday her family ate no meat . . . and so on, the good deeds were multiplied throughout the parish.

Maryknoll Sisters Help

The morning after the fire was American Thanksgiving Day. Happily some of the Maryknoll Sisters celebrated the great day with a holiday! Early in the morning some Sisters went down to the fire area, to investigate and see what they could do to help. They took names of 130 completely dispossessed fire victims. On their return to school, they appealed to the student body to help with clothing and food. That afternoon 200 packets of relief were brought back to Maryknoll by the school children. These included 22 rice tickets. With these packages and 30 'min-t'ois' sent from the office of Father Paul Duchesne, the sisters made up parcels which rehabilitated at least some families for the time being. Food was given to more than a hundred people who called at the convent. One of the Sisters who had a friend on the "President Cleveland", which was then in port, received a gift of 100 cabbies of rice. This was immediately given out.

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Assisting the Sisters with untiring energy was a new convert, a young man of about 20 years old. He sheltered, on the night of the fire, 106 persons in his own small shop. His usual working hours are from noon until ten at night. Since the night of the fire he has spent every morning working with the Sisters, investigating and distributing clothes.

Plans To Rebuild Some homes

Maryknoll Sisters have advised 30 complete destitute families who have lost their all in the fire, to look around for a good plot of ground and to get the necessary government permission to build homes on it. Already the Sisters have HK\$4,000 in hand for this purpose. HK\$2,000 of this money came from the Catholic Welfare Committee of China, Hong Kong Office. While the other HK\$2,000 was sent by a friend of the Sisters in the United States. Any other cash that they receive for the fire-victims will be directed to this most lasting relief. It has been estimated that HK\$1,000 will build a house which can accommodate ten people. If this project works then at least some families will have been given a new start in life.

University Students Collect Relief

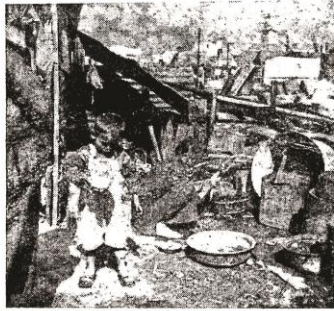
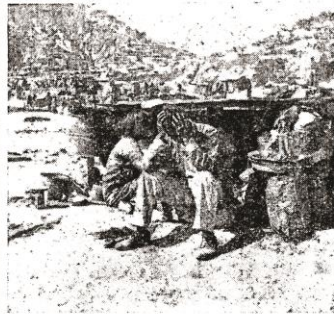
Members of the Hong Kong University Social Welfare Group collected H.K.\$300 to be given for relief of the fire victims. These young men and women hope to add to their collection during the coming week. As well they sent two large-bales of used clothing to the needy people.

The Catholic Centre

On Friday evening last at the Chinese Catholic Club marriage lecture, one of the members of the Catholic Centre Staff made a spoken appeal to those present to bring clothing, and other relief to the Centre, for distribution to the fire victims. The response was immediate. Already at 9 a.m. the following morning many bundles of clothing were received. Two anonymous gifts of HK\$100 had been donated. With his to 'min-t'ois' were bought and sent at once to St. Teresa's for distribution. A Portuguese lady worked far into Saturday night, sewing warm Chinese-style jackets from used European clothing. This Catholic woman as well collected 10 new blankets in as many hours. A young non-Christian student who had heard of the appeal took one of her two warm jackets from the cupboard and gave it to the fire victims. A teen-age Chinese boy who helps to support his family gathered up some of his own clothing and took it himself and gave it to a destitute family in the fire area.

All of this may sound like a grain of sand on the sea-shore. But it is on the foundation of such small generous acts that widespread giving from people who have more than the necessities of life can be built. It would not be impossible for the Catholic community of Hong Kong to rebuild homes for 100 families who lost everything in the Kowloon fire.

It is good for us all to remember that if "the lack of clothing and the homelessness of others does not touch us, we cannot claim to be Christians". It does not touch us, if it does not hurt us to give, money, food, clothing, time and energy. Each one who reads this knows in his heart the answer.



1) Canossian Sisters from St. Mary's School were early on the scene of the disaster. They brought with them what relief they could gather and distributed rice, clothing and money. Here the pleading outstretched arms of a woman can be seen appealing to one of the Mothers. A policeman is helping to keep order. Later in the day an appeal was made to the students of St. Mary's and the sum of H.K.\$1,200 was gathered. The children also collected clothing, and rice. Three hundred women and children went to St. Mary's last Monday to receive relief. 2) A man sitting outside his makeshift home was dazed with his loss. 3) An old woman prepared a meal for her family of eight outside her charred home. 4) Little Hui-ping looks sorrowfully at his empty bowl. 5) A family gratefully divide out the rice which they have received from Catholic school-children. 6) "Ting-sin" gladly told his name to the "Sunday Examiner" staff photographer and pointed to his empty food tin! 7) Lau-fu-wing is collecting nails from the burnt huts. He can sell them for 4c. a catty! He said he can make 80c. a day working hard at it!