

## ***Christmas Message 2013***

***Jose L. Bacusmo  
VSU President***

Tonight we are once again gathered here to light our University Christmas tree, the manger, and other Christmas symbols. It took us sometime to decide whether we should push through with this or not and in what manner shall we push this through. Of course we all know the reason of this hesitancy. We have just been hit by the Super Typhoon Yolanda that brought so much damage and suffering to us as an institution and as a family.

As an institution, all the VSU campuses sustained various levels of damage. Our Tolosa Campus was hit by both the strong wind and surging ocean that all buildings (except two) totally lost their roofs, windows, doors, and whatever inside the rooms. Our Isabel Campus has not escaped the fury of Yolanda as some of its buildings collapsed and rendered roofless. Same can be seen to other campuses including the main campus.

We have confirmed deaths of one of our students, one faculty member, and another faculty member who just recently retired from government service. More painful are the stories of our graduates who lost their love ones. One couple who are both graduates of VSU lost all their children and 13 relatives in just a few minutes of ocean surge. Another alumni couple also lost one of their children in another site. These are just some of the heartbreaking stories of the sufferings inflicted by typhoon Yolanda on the VSU family.

The biggest concern of the University, however, is its students. Some of you have to go back to the University at a time when your parents have lost not only

properties but also their livelihood. How can your family sustain you in school? Some of you came back to the University in spite of the hardships your family is undergoing because the sure way to get over with the situation is to finish your studies and land a job. To some, I know, it is more fun to be in the University than to be at home. At home *“sigihan pa ug sugo, kasab-an pa gyud.”*

There is a Russian saying that goes this way “If you are caught by a storm in the middle of the sea, pray to God but row the boat.” We pray to God but we should do our share and not wait for miracle to happen. We look up to our government for assistance but we should not wait for the government to do the job as it is also overwhelmed and maybe one thing I have repeatedly said in this past four weeks that, “Crisis is not time for crying but the time to show courage and strength. It is not the time to step back but the time to buckle down to work and move forward..”

The University, therefore, embarked hours after the impact of Yolanda a clearing operation to restore access and water supply. We worked together to clean up our streets, to restore our electricity and repair our damaged infrastructures, thus forced normalcy back in our lives.

We do not forget the affected students though. Our partners, friends and alumni sent donations and relief goods for our affected students and these were all distributed. We opened classes sooner than other SUCs and immediately put in motion a plan to enable our external campuses to open by January 6 next year. We sent crews to VSU-Tolosa and VSU-Alangalang where they are now doing clearing operation and repairs. For VSU-Isabel and VSU-Villaba, we trust that their respective deans can bring about restoration of the campuses.

We are also busy appealing for support from our partners, friends and alumni to build funds for a cash-for-work program that we will implement to support affected students. We are also actively seeking grants-in-aid and scholarships for affected students.

Tonight, we choose to hold this lighting ceremony, in spite of everything, to provide everyone a glimmer of hope, to remind us of the love and the greatest gift of our creator, and to lift our spirits as we celebrate this Christmas. It will not be the same as before where we were all in a very joyous mood and we anticipate the fireworks display. Yet, it will be memorable as this is a lighting ceremony full of prayers and remembering.

Everything is not lost. We have to be thankful that the Almighty spared us and gave us the chance to regain the life that we used to have. As a family, we should be united and resolved to act and rise again. Together, we will show to everyone how remarkably resilient the VSU family is and the best to show it is NOW.

Have a happy Christmas everyone.