

WPC Puerto Rico Mission:
The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it!
-John 1:5



Photos from Puerto Rico (from left to right): Pastors praying for Puerto Rican Pastors; Pastors Dan, Eber, Pablo and Margaret; house that still had a tarp for roof; Pastor Dan preaching.

I had the privilege of going to Puerto Rico June 11-18 with 26 people ages 11 to mid-60's from the San Jose Presbytery to do hurricane relief work. Three from our church went which included my son, Ian, and his friend, Kris Church (ages 18 & 17).

Puerto Ricans speak of Sept 20, 2018 like the rest of the United States speaks of 9/11. It changed everything. Hurricane Maria was the 8th strongest storm in Atlantic history. As a category 4 storm it had sustained winds of 130-156mph with gusts that were much higher!

We have heard news reports that electricity is on in almost 100% of the island and this is close to true as about 90% is on. However, it took until February for many communities--which is 6 months without light, refrigeration of food, medical devices and more. Pastor Eber who works with the Disaster Response Team said 30,000 are still without power.

We went to Puerto Rico to do hurricane relief 9 months after the hurricane, and I was shocked at how much more recovery is needed: roads washed out, and many displaced families with destroyed homes. We saw firsthand how the hurricane would blow the doors and windows out on a concrete home and then swirl all the contents inside the home like a salad spinner destroying everything inside—even the interior doors would be shredded! In addition, roofs were torn off and the interiors were flooded with rain. We would drive down the road (and this is months after the hurricane) and we would still see piles of rotted things on the side of the road from the interior of the home. In addition, if a person had a house made of wood, it was often totally obliterated--nothing left in its place!

Furthermore, the loss of life has been updated according to a Harvard study to be over 4,600 rather than the initial 64 that was reported.

I was told that about 30% of the homes were destroyed or unlivable! Nine months after the hurricane we came to communities that were in deep mourning. Many residents, who now had no home to live in, had moved to other places and many had just left the island altogether for mainland USA. Farmers saw their crops and mature trees flattened. Neighborhoods and churches are mourning the loss of community, loss of loved ones, and loss of homes, loss of employment due to destruction of business and farms, loss of their former lives. The suicide rate has gone up 29% and during the first 3 months after Maria it was up 39%!—adults, children and even pastors!

Despite this darkness, we saw much light! We met several individuals who had lost much but were lights of hope in their communities as that sought to care for others in the name of Jesus. We met Wilmore, the director of a Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center on the West side of the island, who was able to get a generator and provided ice for local families to keep their food from spoiling, procured several washing machines so people could come do laundry, found a psychologist who would provide free counseling, and was a ray of hope in many other ways to her community!



Photos (from left to right): Ian and Chris repairing a roof; Youth performing a skit at church in Puerto Rico; two photos of our team with members of the Puerto Rican community.

We got to work in a very poor community of the East side of the island, which took the worst hit from Maria. We met Millie who has organized her community to help each other rebuild homes while she herself still has her own home sitting in disrepair and uninhabitable. She helped us lead a Vacation Bible School to bring hope to the children and had us fix other peoples' homes through sealing roofs, painting walls, and installing doors. I got to lead, with 2 other pastors, a retreat for about 10 local pastors who just needed some care and someone to listen to their stories of grief. Almost all of them cried as we listened to them and prayed for each of them one by one.

We saw much despair, destruction and darkness, but we definitely saw that,
“The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it!”

All who went on this mission trip were profoundly impacted by the power of Christ's love made incarnate in the lives of those who sacrificially loved their neighbors! Many Puerto Ricans told me that a benefit of the hurricane is that Puerto Rico is now known by most in the U.S. to be not another country but part of our country as a commonwealth. I hope that we will now better embrace and care for our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters as our own. My hope is that our Fall Harvest Banquet will be a benefit for several of these recovering Puerto Rican communities. Please keep our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters in your prayers, especially as they are now in yet another hurricane season.

I appreciate you, and may you each be Christ's light and love to all those around you who are in darkness and despair!

Pastor Dan