

A LIGHT OF HOPE

CALVARY CHAPEL PUERTO RICO SERVES THEIR ISLAND IN CRISIS

Story by Christmas Beeler
Photos by Justus Martin unless otherwise noted

Like a light on a hill, Calvary Chapel Puerto Rico (CCPR) has become a channel of God's love and provision for hundreds of families in the U.S. territory which is still enduring a humanitarian crisis a month after Hurricane Maria. Pastor Jason Dennett of CCPR reports that God has given them favor with leaders—including Puerto Rico's governor, the U.S. president, and customs officials. Believers from around the world have sent donations and goods, and more are coming to help in person. Mercy Chefs, a Christian non-profit organization that serves hot meals in crisis areas, is building out the church kitchen to feed hundreds of people daily, including survivors and relief teams.

"This is the worst natural disaster to hit Puerto Rico in 100 years," said Pastor Jason. His father-in-law, Pastor Dan Crespo, founded CCPR 20 years ago, and Jason became pastor 7 years ago. "As soon as this hit us, Dan flew to Miami and started coordinating a relief supply chain—filling up cargo trailer after trailer with supplies—just so we could survive."

Based in Guaynabo, on the northern coast of the island, CCPR had funneled out 13,000 pounds of water, food, and supplies in the first three weeks. "Every Tuesday and Thursday, we are distributing food to between 500 to 750

families," Jason said. "We pray for them, counsel them, give them food and water, and invite them to come back to the church."

God's Love and Light

Though thousands have evacuated, Jason reported, "Our church services on Sunday are swelling to about 370 people each service—that's double our regular attendance. That's what God is doing. We fix people's roofs and care for them as they weep, showing them Christ's love in a tangible, personal way—and then they come." Nearly 85% of the population in Puerto Rico is Roman Catholic; one woman of that faith remarked on the CCPR believers' genuine love for people. Jason recalled, "I told her, 'That's Jesus. We have been transformed by Christ.'"

Most of the 3.4 million residents still lack electricity. Candice Mishkin, a believer from CC Fort Lauderdale, FL, working with the nonprofit group Watts of Love, helped distribute more than 2,000 hand-held solar lights. "We look for the elderly and the poor—those who are most devastated—and police and rescue workers," she explained. "Our main concern is that they should know that Jesus is the Light of the world."

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." JOHN 8:12

One family in Piñones had difficulty caring for their bed-ridden, elderly mother, as they were unable to see to give her medicine at night. Candice recalled, "They had a baby too. They had been praying for help, and then we came and brought the light. They were so grateful; they said we were the answer to their prayers." Another woman who came to CCPR for food was visibly troubled. "She was so shaken by everything that happened, and she was afraid of not having what she needed to survive," added Candice. "I sensed she needed to be comforted, to know that she was loved by God. ... Afterward, she was so relieved."



Bottom left: A man walks in standing floodwaters in Puerto Rico. Photo by Sgt. Alexis Velez, National Guard

Top right: Candice Mishkin of Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale comforts a traumatized flood victim.

Center: Volunteers at CC Puerto Rico (CCPR) pass out supplies to hundreds of residents.

Bottom right: Victims of the storm stand in line outside CCPR for food and supplies.

Favor with Leaders

Pastor Jason praises God for provision and open doors. “We have really seen God’s favor—just like in the Book of Nehemiah, when God gave Nehemiah connections to the kings and rulers to get his provisions and infrastructure set up so they could build a city wall. The Lord has been connecting us with influential people on our island,” Jason explained. “The mayor and his wife visited our church on a Sunday morning. ...Then we got connected to the governor’s office—we’re sending them food to distribute and requesting assistance from them.” A man who once attended the church and now works for the U. S. president found out that CCPR was a relief center, and soon the president’s visit was scheduled. Pastor Jason spoke with President Trump and gave him a New Testament. “I wrote him a handwritten message about giving his life to Jesus,” Jason added, grateful for the rare opportunity.

A few days later, Jason and another believer met a man named David on the docks. “We asked him how he did in the storm, if he needed any food or water. He lives with his mother-in-law and said she had lost her roof. I told him that we had a team coming who could help fix it and asked for the address. Half an hour later, we found out that he is the head customs inspector. ... He said he’ll make sure our shipments can come in. God keeps bringing us these neat connections because, I believe, He really wants to help the people of Puerto Rico and show them His love.”



Pastor Jason Dennett

But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.
PSALM 86:15

Pastor Jason has been teaching about loving one’s neighbor during a crisis. “We have been praying and wanting to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community, and this is our opportunity,” he said. “And the situation is temporary—estimates are from six months to a year—so we need to be His ambassadors, used for His kingdom now.” Referencing his previous military background, Jason added, “We don’t get to pick and choose our mission; that’s up to the commander. So this is the mission and the calling, as it says in the Book of Esther, *for such a time as this*” (Esther 4:14b).

Candice Mishkin added, “So when the world sees us working together for His glory—Calvary Chapel, Mercy Chefs, Watts of Love, missionaries from Haiti, so many believers coming together for His purpose—they will believe in Jesus. He is the reason we are here.”



Left: Volunteers at CC Puerto Rico carry in cases of water. CCPR distributed 13,000 pounds of supplies in the first three weeks.

Top right: A team from CC Philadelphia, PA, puts a tarp on a Puerto Rico resident’s home whose roof had partially blown off.

Middle right: Senior Pastor Jason Dennett of CCPR (center) prays with hurricane victims at the church-turned-relief center.

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