

CHRIST BRINGS HOPE TO BATTERED ISLAND

CALVARY CHAPELS MINISTER ALONGSIDE CC PUERTO RICO

Story by Margot Bass
Photos courtesy of CC Puerto Rico



Top: A team clears a large tree from a resident's yard after the damage created by Hurricane Maria.

Bottom left: Believers from Xenia, OH, help repair the roof of cancer patient Roberto Carpio who now attends CCPR.

Bottom right: CCPR serves as a key relief center. They have given away 1.3 million pounds of food, water, and supplies to hurricane victims.



Though heartbreaking news coverage from Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico has largely disappeared, the need for help continues. Four months later, although conditions have improved, the island is still devastated. Calvary Chapel Puerto Rico (CCPR) in Guaynabo, supported by CCs in the U.S., began showing God's love through meeting physical and spiritual needs immediately. Relief work will continue indefinitely.

In early January, CCPR Senior Pastor Jason Dennett noted that power and water had been largely restored in metropolitan areas. Island-wide, however, he estimated that 40 percent of the population still lacked electricity; 35 percent didn't have clean drinking water. While gas stations were functioning, several other businesses were still running on generators. Many homes remained uninhabitable, their missing roofs awaiting tarps or repair. Large downed trees blocked yards.

"People whose homes were flooded and gutted are still sleeping in their concrete shell of a house. They might or might not have a roof or a tarp," Jason explained. A single mother and her three children who came to CCPR for help lived in their car for a month after the hurricane.

Since October, CCPR has served as a major relief center. "By the grace of God, we've been able to give away about 1.3 million pounds of food, water, and supplies [locally and beyond]," Jason stated. The church holds at least two large food distributions per week; lines are 300 to 1,000 people deep. "Our church has been flooded nine times in its 20-year history. The amazing thing is that during this hurricane, it was 95 percent dry. We believe it was spared to be a center of hope and light for the community," Jason related. Outreach teams have traveled from Guaynabo on the northern coast to more than a dozen other localities throughout the island and two outlying islands—also serving at homes for the elderly, abused women, and orphans.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be the glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations. EPHESIANS 3:20-21a

"Puerto Ricans are blessed to see the larger Christian family caring for them, even though they're isolated on a little island in the middle of the Caribbean," Jason asserted. "Even if FEMA pulls out, the body of Christ will not. The Lord is taking care of them tangibly."

Short-term mission teams have come since the beginning: Between 10 to 30 believers from CCs and other denominations have come weekly to fix roofs, clean homes, run electrical lines, remove trees and debris, distribute supplies, and pray with those in need. "It's been a beautiful picture of the body of Christ working together. When one part suffers, the rest also suffer," Jason said. Teams were booked through February. But Jason encouraged more to get involved: "We have definitely seen a drop in donations and teams wanting to come. We're praying the Lord keeps [bringing help]."

God Reveals Himself in Puerto Rico

Jason asserted, "We're trying to seize the day. We don't want to look back and feel like we've squandered this opportunity to preach the Gospel and to represent Christ faithfully, biblically, and accurately."

Touched by God's love during the relief effort, at least 50 families now attend the church. "If not for the hurricane, we would never have reached these people," Jason said. Attendance has grown by about 125; about 10 to 15 people respond to every altar call. He estimated that 100 people have accepted Christ as Savior since the hurricane struck. Some told him they had previously thought the church was "full of rich white people," he related. "Now they say, 'We know that's not true. You are just regular people who love the Lord and love us. We're so glad we've come.'"

One mission team with CCPR fixed the roof of cancer patient Roberto Carpio of Guaynabo. Now he walks—with a cane—an hour and a half every Sunday to attend two services. "He receives the Word, participates in worship, and is always joyful. He's a great brother," Jason said. Gloria, an 87-year-old Cuban immigrant who speaks only Spanish "came to this English-speaking church because we visited her home for the elderly. She felt loved, accepted, and drawn to the Lord. She hears God's Word through the church's translation ministry. She loves Jesus and is growing in her faith," he added.

A Gospel tract is placed in every food bag. "We make it very clear that this food and water is from Jesus, telling them the Lord loves them, wants to help them, and will save them if they turn their lives over to Him," Jason concluded. "He doesn't want to give them only temporary relief, but eternal salvation." 🙌

calvarychapelpr.com
ccpr.reliefteams@gmail.com