



HURRICANE FIONA

Thank you for your prayers and concern as Hurricane Fiona came across Puerto Rico on September 18th, 2022. We greatly appreciate each one of your messages and support for us and our church members. To answer many of your questions, we would like to give you a comprehensive update about what happened before, during, and immediately following the hurricane.

Storm watch started on September 15th, when we met as a mission team online to review our hurricane response plan. We made sure each of our team members and church members were ready with supplies they needed to weather the storm. I spend one weekend a month in Ponce attending all the weekend activities there and the weekend of Fiona was my Ponce weekend. I therefore weathered my first hurricane with the Lehman family in Ponce.

In Ponce, during the service at the end of fellowship night on Friday September 16th, we prayed a litany for protection and strength in the anticipation (of what was at the time) Tropical Storm Fiona in lieu of a Sunday service. In Mayaguez, church members and visitors gathered for Sunday service on Saturday morning as the storm was to come later that day. We were strengthened by God's Word and Holy Supper. We also were prepared with water, food, and supplies to use after the storm had passed.

Tropical Storm Fiona was set to arrive Saturday evening and progress into the night but it progressed slowly and strengthened into a hurricane arriving on Sunday afternoon with rainstorms overnight into Monday. The wind reached hurricane force with sustained winds around 80mph and gusts up to 115 mph and knocked over many trees all over Puerto Rico. The rain was strong and the most damage was caused as a result of flooding. We thank God that already just a few days later, the water has subsided significantly.

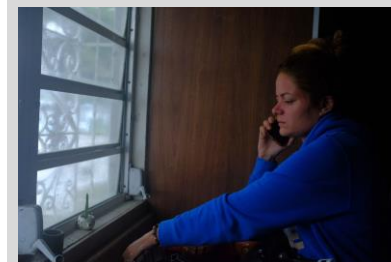
The church members and visitors of both congregations are all safe and well, although some appear to have damaged homes and property, and all are currently living without water and electricity which can be draining and there is still clean up that needs to be done. We pray that power and water are restored quickly.

Tuesday was the first day we were able to get out and assess the situation following the hurricane. The teams in both Mayaguez and Ponce met separately on Tuesday because the road between the cities was blocked, however, each group met to assess the damages of the churches and to make a response plan.

In Ponce, the church and mercy center are fine. They both had water come in through the roof and windows, nothing major, but there are things that need to be fixed before a potential next storm. In particular the zinc portion of the roofs. We were able to open the mercy house on Tuesday for church members to come, charge their devices, eat a warm meal, and be together with their family in Christ. We also cleaned up most of the debris and big branches around our property and mopped up remaining water in the buildings and put everything back into order.

One of our church friends in Ponce had to be evacuated from her home because her roof was blown off during the storm. During the storm Deaconess Christel Neuendorf was on the phone with emergency services to help coordinate the evacuation of our friend. The team is hoping to help her in some way after they continue to assess the damages.

Once it was safe to do so, Christel and Ashley were able to visit her at a refugio (shelter) at a local school on Tuesday. While there, they met a man who was in the same room of the school as our friend.





PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- Those who still need water and electricity restored.
- A church member, In Ponce whose house was damaged in the Storm
- A Church member, In Ponce whose roof was taken off during the storm.
- Those in the path of Hurricane Ian.

GIVE THANKS FOR:

- That all the missionaries and church members are safe after Hurricane Fiona.
- That no large damage occurred to our churches
- Thanksgiving for water and electricity
- For the many opportunities to share Christ's love and Mercy in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona.



During the visit this man started talking about Hurricane Maria because Tuesday, September 20th, was the 5-year anniversary of that storm. He mentioned that when Maria hit it was the worst day of his life, but then he said, "Yeah... it was my birthday." The friend who they were visiting has a birthday on the 23rd and Ashley's soon after. Christel came up with an idea to have a little party to celebrate their friend's birthday. Pastor James, Pastor Adam, Christel and Ashley returned to the shelter with cupcakes that were shared after singing happy birthday to their friends, with others at the shelter, the local police officers and government personnel that were working at the shelter. It was a small and impromptu celebration, but their friend messaged them after saying that the man did not expect anyone to come back. These are the kinds of connections to our church that our mission team is making our top priority in our response to the needs of the community.

Another member of our church community lost the whole backside of her house that was on lifted up on cinder block. During the storm her house was pushed off the blocks and the roof was blown off. Our team sees this as an important need that we can meet as a part of our disaster response. They were not home during the storm, and we thank God that they are safe, but we ask you to pray for them as they return.

In Mayaguez the church and mercy center are in good condition, although the grounds surrounding it were heavily impacted. Evangelist William Torres and his family cleaned the church of the water that entered. On Tuesday, Pastor Gustavo and William were able to get out into the community and connect with community leaders and church members and visitors, as well as to bring cold water to the police officers who are busy directing traffic at all of the intersections.

The Mayaguez team and church members are working on clearing fallen branches at the church. Throughout the week they will continue the cleanup and add a sealant to the new church window which leaked water during the storm. On Friday, the team is planning to make a hot meal and deliver it to the neighborhoods who have lost everything due to flooding.

Mayaguez appears to be very different from Ponce with regards to the type of damages. Wednesday was the first day the whole team was able to meet in Mayagüez after the route was opened and cleared of debris. Although Mayaguez didn't receive as much water as Ponce, they did have a lot of flooding. There were members and friends of the church in Mayagüez who live in neighborhoods that were severely flooded and water came into their house, and they lost a lot of things. The property in Mayaguez has quite a bit more to clean up given the location of the church with many fallen trees.

Both congregations have already opened their facilities to the community to charge their phones, enjoy some air-conditioning, and spend time together. The activity schedule that has been in both congregations is opening wonderful opportunities to bring friends and community into our facilities. A week after the hurricane, 58% of the island has power restored. Most of our church members have power now.

Please continue to keep us in your prayers as we assess the situation more fully and find more ways to share the love of Christ with the people of Puerto Rico.



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