

Email from Pastor Gabriel

10/2/17

Thank you for your message. I'm very sorry you didn't have this time a "miraculous fishing". The lakes close to where my father grows up, at the southern of Argentina, are full of trouts and rainbow trouts. ¡Delicious!

The conversation with Pastor Twiton was very good. I wanted to thank him for his support and prayers in our favor and in favor of the Divino Salvador community during these difficult days.

I want to send you this report to give you more details about how we are doing. It could be useful for your Tuesday meeting. If you understand that details are missed, we can talk by phone on Monday afternoon with the help of my "official translator": Lory (my wife).

We

Lory and I are doing well. We live in a town named Vega Alta, about 40 minutes from Cataño. After the hurricane Maria, we were isolated and uncommunicated for more than a day. This made me very anxious because I wanted to know how was doing the families of our church. The three roads that connect us to the next towns, were closed because of the fallen trees, fallen power poles and for the floods.

Close to our home, were houses destroyed and flooded, buildings with broken windows. All the electrical structure was on the floor. But this was the same situation in every towns of Puerto Rico.

In our neighborhood, thanks God, we didn't have big damages. Our home is constructed of concrete, so is enough strong. But the intense winds blow up one of the windows of my office, so we lost all the furniture of this room. Other than that, nothing big happened. During the most intensive time of the hurricane, Lory was taking care of her mother (she lives alone and is our neighbor) and I was secluded with my two little dogs in the bathroom because the intense winds started to hit the interior doors and walls after the window was broken.

As many of our people, we don't have water, power, signal for our cell phone and no much gasoline. For everyone, the supply of basic things as gasoline, drinking water or ice bags implies to do long (sometimes very long) lines during many hours in gas stations and markets. For not understandable reasons, the local help as well as the private help aren't arriving to the general population.

Temple

During the hurricane, we only had one radio station transmitting uninterrupted to all Puerto Rico because it had a generator and its building didn't collapse: AM 680. By this station, it was

heard the news that Cataño was “the town with the no roof church”. At that moment, I didn’t know that it was referring to our church.

It was very sad to arrive to Cataño and found out the reality of not having roof in our church, all the exterior full of rubbish, and the interior of the temple with abundant water coming in by the windows. Just on the previous Sunday of the hurricane, it was finished the sealing work in the beside meeting room. Thanks God, in this meeting room we didn’t have any damage and didn’t come in any water. The assembly proposed to pay \$8,000 dollars to seal the roof with the savings of the church and, at the same time, we started in September a campaign to gather money in order to put it back in our saving account (80 families giving 10 dollars monthly and for 10 months). The response of the congregation was very good, and at this moment, the campaign has collected something more than \$2,000 dollars and we continue with it, in spite of the crisis.

The roof of the temple requires a major reparation, which implies to take out the roof remaining and to replace it with a new one. At the beginnings of this year 2017, the assembly asked to make an asbestos study to the roof. We did it and the result was that 5% of the roof of the Divino Salvador temple has asbestos. The company that made the study assured us that the interior of the temple was secure if it didn’t have parts of the roof falling or if the roof was not exposed to water / rains. After the hurricane Maria, we lost the zinc in the exterior, so now the roof is exposed to the humidity of the rain and the interior of the temple is not secure anymore to continue having our services inside of it.

The decision we had made was to close the temple until we can work with the roof, and meanwhile, we are having our Sunday services in the next room. We know that we are going to be there for a long time and we need to adapt to this new situation.

This week, we reported the situation of the roof and exteriors in the police station, which is a requirement for FEMA. We also need to report the situation to our insurance company, but because of the paralysis we had had in our island for the last 11 days, it has been very difficult to make some steps.

Our people

God blessed our brothers and sisters from the Divino Salvador of Cataño because they are resilient people! Even though their personal crisis or situations, our Sunday service was held in the meeting room (transformed as our present sanctuary), and it was full of people who came to praise and thank God for His blessings.

At this moment, we had identified 8 families that have been lost everything (houses, cars, clothes) and other 11 families who have suffered major damages in their properties and have different needs, specially food.

Today, I met with the executive committee and the finance committee and decided to manage immediately the most urgent needs. Meantime the help of FEMA arrives, we separated temporally from our church savings \$3,600 dollars to buy food and first need stuffs for the identified families. We are going to do that with Econo Supermarket since I know the manager because she helped us with food vouchers before.

Tomorrow Monday, I will meet with the manager of this supermarket to pay her with a check of the church to get the food vouchers and to deliver them to the families in need during the day.

A second phase managing this crisis, will be to help the families that lost everything buying them clothes. In money matter, the finance committee sees itself limited because all the operating system of the Cooperative where we save the money, it has also been damaged by the hurricane.

Eleven days after the hurricane, families who lost everything, haven't received a big top (tent) from FEMA. Some still staying in shelter (public schools transformed in shelters) and our church will be the first institution helping them in a concrete way.

ELCA

I received the news that the national church will send an airplane with provisions to be delivered in the different churches in Puerto Rico. I don't know when this will be. The limited communication because of the poor signal, makes very difficult to coordinate this effort at a synodal level. I only have news from three of the Pastors of our synod. I'm concerned because I don't know how the rest is doing, including our bishop. I don't have any information about them.

Needs

The property committee of the church asked me to transmit you the need that we have of an energy generator for our services and office works at the church. A generator will allow us to connect fans and to have a small audio system and a keyboard. In addition, we could use our photocopier to print out our bulletins and make some office works.

Last week, we had our worship service a capella. Today, we had a small speaker connected by a bluetooth and sang hymns using MP3. Even though we were suffocated because of the heat in the meeting room, it was a gift from God of being together.

Because of the crisis in the island, it is not possible to get a generator at this moment. Again, the signal is limited and the connection is very poor and slow, but I'm committed to send you all the photos that I have when it will be possible.

Please, let me know if you need additional information.

Prayers

I'm sending you the list of the families of Divino Salvador who lost their homes.

Please, pray for them:

Families who lost their homes because of the intense winds:

Edgardo De León

Esther Rivera, Aníbal and Litsaura

Antonia Rosario

Luis (Antonia's nephew)

Families who lost their homes because of the floods:

Horbin García and Jannet Báez

Nilda Feal

Belcy Mellot

Lugeria Pagán

These are other families who suffered significant damages or have special needs related to the hurricane (food, medical, etc.)

Rosa D. Rosa

Nancy Figueroa

Jorge Rivera

Julia Rodríguez

Sylvia Vega

Iris Rivera

Ana De Jesús

Lucesita Rosario

Myrna Cruz

Evelyn Cruz

Domingo Apellaniz & Ivanz

It is possible that more people will be added to the lists in the next days.

Thank you for your companion and support in all this process.

God bless you abundantly,

P. Gabriel