

To Our Churches in Vermont and New Hampshire
A Plea to Support "Tita's Church"
July 2018

Puerto Rico is still a disaster and the new hurricane season officially began June 1st. My wife, Judy, and I were in PR for 2 1/2 months helping to coordinate the combined rebuilding efforts of the United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico and the United Church of Christ. The rebuild focus is on houses, not churches. But, we saw one church that must be rebuilt so the neighborhood where it stands can begin to rebuild. This is a remarkable opportunity for our churches to take one piece of Puerto Rico back from Hurricane Maria.

The project is to establish a Mission Center by rebuilding four rooms in the Iglesia Evangelica Unida Puerto Rico de Santurce (The United Evangelical Church in Santurce, PR). The church is in the poor section of the business center of San Juan. The pastor is a woman of amazing energy named Arcadia Ortiz Ramon, a/k/a "Tita".

The four rooms were damaged by Hurricane Irma and then torn apart by Hurricane Maria (H. Maria). Ceilings, walls, flooring, electrical and everything within the rooms were essentially destroyed. These rooms are critical because they are the only space available to the church to continue the powerful ministries Tita and her congregation began almost four years ago.

When Tita came to the church, it was a dying gathering of the old and poor surrounded by neighborhoods of the old, poor, young people on drugs, homeless, etc. I am sure you get the picture. Tita began, with her tiny, old congregation to feed people at the church and in the neighborhood. This program grew, along with membership, until before H. Maria the church was serving and delivering from 1500 to 1700 meals per week. Tita also began taking food to local senior housing units, delivering hundreds of meals to seniors each week. The church continues to feed the immediate neighborhood.

After H. Maria, when there was no food, power, or transportation, Tita turned the energy of her congregation (now a much younger group with high energy) to meet the needs of hundreds of its neighbors. Tita's "neighbors" live in eastern Puerto Rico from San Juan all the way down to Ponce in the south. Out of this wide-ranging outreach grew an awareness of very specific, long-term needs that the church can meet only with its damaged space repaired. These needs, which existed pre-Maria, have now been greatly exacerbated by the hurricane and its impact on the neighborhood, the government, the schools, and hospitals.

A few vital facts: There are scant social services available in Puerto Rico. Very few government programs and non-governmental programs are up and running. There is no government help to rehab Tita's rooms. Money to rebuild churches from any source is essentially non-existent.

In short, here are the outreach projects Tita's church will focus on once the building is made safe and ready for use:

- Create an after-school tutoring program for children. The public schools in PR are underfunded and face a significant drop in enrollment in part due to Hurricane Maria forcing people to move to the States. In April, the government ordered the immediate closing of 280+ existing schools. The need for after school programing is greater than ever.
- Provide English lessons to foreigners (many are undocumented refuges from the Dominican Republic) currently in Puerto Rico and to Puerto Ricans with little or no English to give them a better chance to obtain immigration status and better jobs.
- Train people to work with seniors who suffered greatly from the storm and are now experiencing the loss of family members fleeing to the States post H. Maria.
- Provide safe and secure space for emotional and psychiatric support for all survivors of the storm. Special attention will be paid to mothers, many of whom are without family support. A local medical center has agreed to let its interns serve in the church once space is available.
- Create a small half-way house for women to support re-entry into society after release from jail.

A trusted local contractor and Pastor estimates the cost, including labor, to repair the rooms to be \$30,990.00. However, non-skilled labor will be provided by volunteers from the church and the neighborhood. Volunteers have already cleaned up and removed debris from the damaged space. The cost of materials, minus labor, to rebuild should be \$20,000. This is our goal.

In addition, the plan is for people who use the new facilities to pay as they are able for services received. Tita believes, based on her experience, that those who use the services will want to pay something. This income will be funneled back into the projects to keep them operating.

Renovations cannot be paid for by Tita's church. There is no extra money. The UCC's disaster relief program is directed to homes, not church structures.

Judy and I have been to the church. We have met and worked with Tita. She is the real deal. Her ministry, when up and running, will help scores of people for a long time. If this is something you are called to support, please make your check out and mail it to:

Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico
 Memo Line: "Tita's Church"
 Attn: Angel Cepeda
 Oficina de la Dominación
 PO Box 8609
 Caguas, Puerto Rico 00726-8609

Sr. Cepeda, the CFO, will account for the funds received and hold them in a separate account under the IEUPR. The funds will be released by Sr. Cepeda to pay for each incremental step of the project: repair of roof, re-framing and hanging ceilings, framing and replacing sheetrock walls, replacing doors, windows and hallways, electrical installation and painting. Periodic reports on fundraising and progress on the work will be sent from the IEUPR to me and to each donating church. This project has the full support of the UCC Disaster Relief Ministries and the IEUPR. The IEUPR is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation.

I assure you that if this effort fails to raise the full \$20,000, whatever is lacking will be found. This project must be completed.

Judy and I will be pleased to come and speak with your Mission Committee and/or to the congregation about our efforts in Puerto Rico and the amazing church that is being lifted up in Santurce.

Yours in Service,

Doug and Judy Moore

Sharon, Vermont

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