

## ***Puerto Rico Mission Partnership News***

A year ago, the island of Puerto Rico was hit by back-to-back hurricanes, Irma and Maria, which left thousands of people without adequate housing, power, water, food, clothing... Many, of course, were left without hope, and the suicide rate has skyrocketed. But there is hope!

In keeping with the Synod of the Northeast's initiative for Puerto Rico Partnerships, there are plans underway for four back-to-back relief work opportunities this winter. These opportunities will be in Lares, a town in the northwestern mountains of the island, listed by the US census as the poorest municipality in Puerto Rico. The organizers of this trip are **Elder Joanne Tunison** (1<sup>st</sup> Church Elmira, Presbytery of Geneva) and the **Rev. Leslie Latham** (1<sup>st</sup> Church Tonawanda, Presbytery of Western NY). They recently visited with the **Rev. Evelyn Torres**, pastor of the **Iglesia Presbiteriana en Lares** to determine worksites and firm up dates. There are four overlapping trips planned for 2019:

- 16-23 February
- 23 February – 2 March
- 2-9 March
- 9-16 March

The three projects being developed alongside Iglesia Presbiteriana en Lares are:

- The renovation of kitchen at La Iglesia Presbiteriana de Lares, so they can continue their ministry of feeding the community
- Working on the homes of two women, one concrete and the other wood, which need urgent repair of walls, ceilings, and roofs

Committing to boost the local economy, there are plans to contract with a local onsite construction site manager who will oversee the three relief projects being planned. We also plan to buy all construction and other materials locally.

There are some for those considering travelling to Puerto Rico. Zika and Dengue viruses are very real threats in this region; therefore we are not including youth on these trips. Likewise, men and women of childbearing age should be very careful, and consult with their doctors. Anyone with a compromised immune system should do the same.

### **What kind of help do we need?**

- People with experience in building and repair
- Accredited mental health workers (e.g., social worker, psychologist, family therapist) who will be available to speak with hard-hit people of all generations
- We hope each group includes a pastor/preacher, and someone fluent in Spanish to translate during worship
- Those whose hearts are willing and able to work in difficult situations, who are flexible and humble and able to take direction

### **What if this trip isn't right for you?**

We need prayer partners! And we need people who are willing to host fundraisers because we need...

- **\$50,000.** While that number looks very large, if each of our 1100 churches in the Synod contributed just \$200 we'd be halfway there! These funds will ONLY be used for the building projects (including compensation for the hoped-for project manager). We encourage anyone who wishes to donate to send funds to
- ***Our Presbytery office***, who can forward funds as we need.
- ***The Synod of the Northeast, 5811 Heritage Landing Dr. 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, E. Syracuse, NY 13057.***)

We also need funds for basic need items that have been hard to come by, including underwear for all ages and genders, diapers (children and adult), and sanitary items for women. Pastor Evelyn knows the needs of every single person in her parish, and we'd love to help her provide school supplies for kids, bug spray for everyone, and of course the food and other ministries her church provides to the community.

We know in our hearts that God is calling us to this mission to serve the least of these, our sisters and brothers in Christ in Lares. We hope you will join us.

For more information, please email [PRmission19@gmail.com](mailto:PRmission19@gmail.com). God's blessings go with you!

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