



A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

THE JEREMIAH JOURNAL

January 2018

Welcome to the first Jeremiah Journal of 2018. I'm Jerry Iamurri, standing in for Jeff this month. All of us at the Office of the General Assembly hope that you had a very Merry Christmas, and that your new year is off to a great start.

As we begin 2018, we want to thank you for what you did in response to the three devastating hurricanes last fall that continue to affect so many people. Your incredible generosity has made a huge difference after Hurricane Harvey swamped Texas, Irma hit Florida, and Maria devastated Puerto Rico.

You've heard Jeff and others say that in the EPC, we are "better together." Here is just one reason why: Collectively, you gave more than \$1 million to our three hurricane emergency relief funds. None of our churches could do that on their own, but just by being better together, we are making a difference. I'd like to take a few minutes and update you on our hurricane relief efforts.

Of the million dollars, about \$600,000 was donated to the Hurricane Harvey fund to help our churches in the Houston area. A little more than \$400,000 of this has been sent to our churches as they requested financial help for specific needs.

Our pastors in Houston have now told us that they have almost completed their work in restoring damaged homes and lost property suffered by their church members. Obviously, there is a lot of work still to do in the Houston area; this just reflects the status of our EPC churches and their members.

The Irma fund has received about \$175,000 to date, of which roughly \$60,000 has been sent to our churches in Florida that were affected. As we did with Harvey, we dispersed Irma funds to our churches as they documented specific needs that needed additional financial help. According to feedback from our pastors there, work is just about finished in getting their folks back to a normal life as well. Thank you for helping that happen!

When we confirm that we've done all we can do for those affected by Harvey and Irma, we will ask churches who gave to those relief efforts if we can transfer the remaining balances from the Harvey and Irma funds into the Maria fund. Both Jeff and I visited Puerto Rico recently, and we saw firsthand how immense and ongoing the need is.



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The Hurricane Maria fund has received about \$260,000 so far, and we've been able to send \$166,000 of that to our churches in Puerto Rico.

We have three congregations on the island. Westminster-Bayamón is in a suburb of San Juan, on the north shore in the central part of the island. It's the largest city in Puerto Rico and is a typical metropolitan area. Our other two churches—Añasco and Mayagüez—are on the west side of the island. This is a distinctly different region from the capital of San Juan, and is easily a three-hour drive even though it's only about 100 miles.

All three churches are likely to need continued assistance through 2018, and the ability to transfer money from the Harvey and Irma fund will certainly help. We will keep you informed as this develops. If the Lord prompts you to help, please give generously to our Maria fund. Every penny donated goes directly to hurricane relief.

When I visited the west side of the island, I met a woman whose home was flooded. She had just received a very difficult diagnosis from her doctor, and was cleaning out the mud from her first floor with a garden hose and a broom. When I asked her how she was holding up, she said, "God is so good. He always provides. We pray for something and it just appears. God is so good." It's hard to express how encouraging it is when the worst of circumstances bring out the best in believers!

A number of churches have asked us about sending short-term mission teams to Puerto Rico. One of the major obstacles to that up until now has been the ability to simply house volunteers. Hotels have been filled with relief workers, and when there are vacancies they are very expensive. And because of the devastation and lack of electricity, church members haven't been in a position to host anyone in their homes.

However, I am glad to report today that our churches there are now equipped for volunteer teams through a partnership with Praying Pelican Missions. This organization has worked with local churches for the past 15 years or so, and in fact started by working with churches in Central America and the Caribbean, so they understand island life.

Our World Outreach staff has told me that Praying Pelican "does missions well," in part because they partner with local churches in the mission fields they work in. God has blessed their efforts, as they are now one of the largest facilitators of short-term mission opportunities. They have enabled more than 40,000 short-term missionaries to serve. You can contact them directly at kevin.gamradt@prayingpelicanmissions.org. When you do, let



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them know you are an EPC church wanting to work with our Westminster-Bayamón, Añasco, or Mayagüez churches.

You also can contact Juan Rivera, the Pastor of Westminster (pasjrrivera@gmail.com), or Abraham Montes, Pastor of the Mayagüez congregation (amontes@gmail.com), for teams interested in serving on the west coast. Both of these pastors are bilingual, but only a few of their parishioners and leaders are. It would be very helpful for volunteer teams to have at least one member who is fluent in Spanish.

When Jeff and I were on the island, we lost count of how many people asked us to say “thank you” to you—their brothers and sisters in the EPC—for what you have done. That’s another reason why we are better together. We step up when help is needed. In fact, our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters would say we are MUCH better together.

So thank you for your continued prayers and help for those who continue to be affected by storms that, to many of us, are largely forgotten. I can promise you that in Puerto Rico, Maria will not be forgotten any time soon.

God bless you, and as Jeff likes to always remind us: Christ is risen!