

DISASTER RECOVERY CORNER

OPERATION SAN JUAN IN FOCUS

SVDP-USA
DISASTER
SERVICES

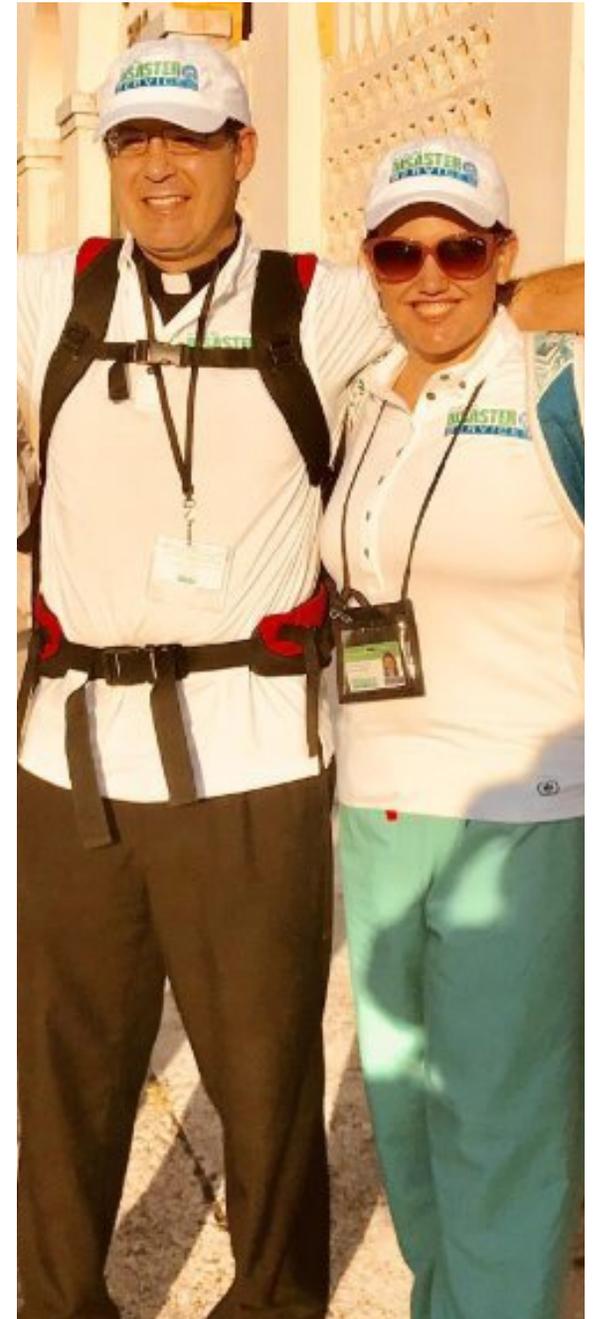


DR. CHERYL'S EXPERIENCE SHARED

Image Shown: Dr. Cheryl McIntosh and Fr. Ramon on one of the first days of the San Juan, Puerto Rico Deployment. Dr. Cheryl is a Vincentian of Iowa City, Iowa.

I was truly blessed to have the opportunity to serve with the SVDP Disaster Services Rapid Response Team in Puerto Rico early in December 2017. As a physician, I knew there was a need for medical services, but I was still shocked to see the extent of the needs of the people nearly three months after Hurricane Maria ravaged the island. It was immensely gratifying to be able to evaluate and treat over 200 patients over five days at the Parish Recovery Centers. I saw both chronic health issues that had become out of control due to lack of medications, poor living conditions and stress and acute injuries resulting from the conditions left by the disaster. People came in with some of the following conditions: asthma made

worse by the mold in their homes and the inability to use their electric breathing treatment machines, untreated diabetes from a lack of refrigeration to store or access to insulin, injuries from navigating the wreckages of their homes, and sky high blood pressure from lack of medication and stress. It was my privilege to be able to use my training to provide some temporary medical aide to these desperate patients. Even a simple check up and some reassurance that they were healthy or listening to their stories was meaningful, and I could see some tension leave their eyes and shoulders as they exhaled with relief. While I had a translator, I tried to use my basic medical Spanish, the patients appreciated the effort, *continued...*



Dr. Cheryl McIntosh of Iowa City, Iowa shares her experience being deployed with the Disaster Services Corporation, SVDP-USA in San Juan, Puerto Rico where she provided light medical care and check-ups to the local community. We truly appreciate Dr. Cheryl's time and service to support those in need.



...shared a laugh as I stumbled through. When I wasn't seeing patients, I was able to assist the rest of the team by helping with water and food distribution.

I thoroughly enjoyed living in the rectory for the week and getting to know all the team members. They are all amazing, positive, service oriented individuals from a variety of backgrounds, but united in the mission to help our neediest citizens. It was wonderful to start the day with Mass every morning with Padre Ramon and pray, eat, share experiences and live in community with the team. The spirit of the local people was inspiring; while facing devastating loss, they never expressed defeat, but consistently reinforced the communal feeling of hope to rebuild their lives and a stronger Puerto Rico. I am looking forward to the next deployment with this fantastic organization.

FR. RAMON'S EXPERIENCE SHARED

Image Shown: Fr. Ramon Decaen of Lincoln, Nebraska in action serving as a Disaster Case Manager on the ground in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

I was invited by the society of St. Vincent de Paul to be part of a team of volunteers to go down to Puerto Rico December 3-9th. The team was comprised of members of the Society from 9 states. They were very diverse in their background: a medical doctor, a high school teacher, a retired fireman, a former college executive, and others. The Society works around the world in disaster relief. When a major natural disaster hits, they will often times go to help with recovery efforts. They are currently working at over 20 disaster sites in North America alone, including hurricane relief in Florida and

Texas as well as the fires in Santa Rosa, California. Most people know the Society for helping locally through the parish conferences. Vincentians are best known for their spirituality based on their patron St. Vincent de Paul. This spirituality moves the members to meet the needy where they are at, both figuratively and literally. They visit the needy at their home, sharing compassion for those who are going through difficult times. They work to foster systemic change that is a "hand up" rather than a "handout". This helps to lift them out of poverty by giving them the tools they need to stay out of poverty. While helping with the immediate needs, Vincentians also work toward the long haul to help build long term stability.



FR. RAMON'S EXPERIENCE SHARED

The society has been working down in Puerto Rico through the local conferences on the island. US mainland conferences have been sending food, water, generators, and other much needed supplies.

When Hurricane Maria hit the Caribbean in late September, it devastated the island countries. It is regarded as the worst natural disaster in Puerto Rico history. This category 5 hurricane had winds hit at over 170 miles per hour. Although only 66 fatalities are reported, this number is in question due to missing people and accuracy in reporting methods. The powerful winds blew water into neighborhoods, putting houses under 9 feet of water in some places. Those who had cement roofs

were fortunate; they had their homes filled with water but at least they had a roof. Those who had wood frame roofs or metal roofs lost them and many of them had nothing to return to. The antiquated electrical grid was already limping before the hurricane hit; the hurricane dismantled it.

The national office planned for weeks before the deployment. Coordination with FEMA was critical. Arrangements for water, food, and generators were purchased and shipped from US mainland. Most of the island was without electricity and clean water. We had the goal of showing Christ to the people. Each day began with Mass at 6am, followed by breakfast at 6:30. We had a short meeting at 7am. **Continued**

Image Shown Below: Vincentians loading disaster recovery items on to a truck that is departing to one of the local P-RACs in San Juan Puerto Rico.



FR. RAMON'S EXPERIENCE SHARED

At 7:30am we drove out to our two Parish Recovery Center (P-RAC) sites. The first site was the town of Canovanas, which is located about 30 minutes east of San Juan. This town was hit especially hard by the hurricane. We worked out of Parroquia de la Resurreccion del Señor (Resurrection of the Lord Parish). The parish did not have electricity. The parish garage served as our home base. There we registered people for FEMA relief, assessed their needs, offered Christ's consolation, gave them food and water, and had them visit the doctor if they were in need. One of the stores that was up and running was Walmart. We are able to distribute \$25 gift cards to the people in need. These cards were restricted use cards so that they were not misused. From the time we began to the time we ended the day, there was always a line of people waiting to get help. We worked non-stop; our only break was the short 15 minutes rotations for lunch. The second site was at the town of Manati, located about 45 minutes west of San Juan. Like Canovanas, we registered people for FEMA relief, assessed their needs, offered Christ's consolation, gave them food and water, and had them visit the doctor if there was a need. The greatest joy for me was being able to serve these people who had so little and yet were so grateful. They were so grateful for the food and water they received, the smile that greeted them, and the faith in our Lord that is getting them through this. One woman I interviewed said with tears in her eyes "I have lost everything." But " But then she smiled and said, "But I've got my life and my family." I added, "and the Lord is helping you through this" at which she said, "Amen!" with a

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bigger smile. The people loved to receive blessings and prayers. I was blessed to be a part of this effort.

In the evenings we drove back to the rectory of Parroquia San Augustin (St. Augustine Parish). This is where we had our residence. There we would share our experiences and evaluate how we can do better the next day. We prepared and ate dinner together every evening. By the end of the 5-day trip, we served over 700 families. One of the next steps will be done by the local conferences to follow-up on those that we interviewed to see what we can do keep things going in the right direction. Some will rebuild their homes. Others will move away. Over 1,000,000 have applied for FEMA. Over 200,000 have been evacuated to the US mainland. The country suffers from 38% unemployment and massive debt. They are in the process of rebuilding their electrical grid. This will be a long-term effort. The Society will be serving the recovery efforts for a while. You can help the efforts of the Society of St Vincent de Paul by [making a donation to Society of St. Vincent de Paul and labeling it for "Puerto Rico Disaster Services"](#).

Image shown: Deployed and local Vincentians load up a truck full of donated goods being prepared to depart to an alternate P-RAC operation site.



VINCENTIANS RESPOND

The Disaster Services Corporation, SVDP-USA Parish Resource Center Operations were co-managed by Vincentians deployed from state-side, the local SVDP Council of San Juan, and the local Clergy. Shown below is CEO, Elizabeth Disco-Shearer with Father Canice at the Parish Recovery Assistance Center in Canovanas.



The image shown below is of the line of community members waiting to be seen by Vincentians and the clergy at the second P-RAC operation in Manati, Puerto Rico.

A deployment to the US Virgin Islands is slated for February. Anyone that may be interested, please contact us for information. Both the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are still declared under a State of Emergency.

We will feature more about the US Virgin Islands and provide you with an update on where we are in our current disaster operations around the United States and US Territories next week.

You can always reach out and talk with our National VOAD Partner through the Disaster Distress Line if you've been affected by disaster and are having difficulty coping this holiday season, please remember that they are available for you 24/7 at 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.

Please stop by our newly updated website at:
www.svdpcdisaster.org

You can donate directly to the disaster fund by clicking this link.

You can contact us at: info@svdpcdisaster.org

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