



Pax Christi

LITTLE ROCK

Peace Offerings

Mission Experience Binds Pax Christi Hearts to Puerto Rican People

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Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Seven members of Pax Christi Little Rock recently completed a ten-day mission trip to Puerto Rico. The mission ran from July 27-August 6 and involved projects in two different cities, Humacao and Miraflores (Oracovis municipality). The group was mentored by the team from Collegiate Churches of New York. Reverend Dr. Damaris Whittaker and her husband, Sabas Whittaker, from Middle Collegiate Church and Reverend Dr. Jacqui Lewis and Deacon Edna Benitez from Middle Collegiate Church walked with Pax Christi every step of the way, connecting them with the organizations on the ground that had already begun the process of recovery assistance in Puerto Rico. In Humacao, on the far eastern coast of Puerto Rico where Hurricane Maria first made landfall, Ruthe Towne of Palmas Community Church has made it her mission to



provide for the needs of many families in her community. She has earned the nickname of the “shopping queen”, as she is known in all the local stores for buying up large volumes of items to supply to those in most need. On Wednesday night, the Pax Christi team was invited to dinner with Ruth and other donors in Humacao who are active in supporting disaster relief.

Once the team arrived in Miraflores on Thursday, they were introduced to the staff of [Proyecto Matria](#) and [Casa Solidaria](#). Leaders and volunteers from these organizations worked side by side with Pax Christi for two days, renovat-



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ing two homes in Miraflores. Amarilis Pagan and Kamille Pagan are both attorneys who, as leaders of these organizations, assist the people of Oracovis and surrounding barrios, including Miraflores, where their one room office/classroom is located. Currently, they are housed in a donated space provided by Capilla (Chapel) San Martin de Porres, but seek donations to purchase a container to make their new home on adjacent land leased in Miraflores.

Pax Christi LR physically completed work projects in the towns of Humacao and Miraflores. The first home in Humacao was owned by Dona Maria Luisa. PCLR invested in a waterproof sealant "carton" that served to completely seal her concrete roof. Damage was repaired and the affected areas were repainted. Our investment in this home was financial. Dona Maria Luisa fed us lunch every day we were there. Physical efforts were focused on Teresa de Leon's home. There, the team cleared out the significant overgrowth in her front yard, removed hundreds of pounds of debris, painted part of her outside house and did some gardening and landscape work. In the process, a beautiful concrete patio was uncovered and we found many different plants and pots to decorate her outside garden

areas. (see article on Dona Teresa). After working on Teresa's house for two days, we moved to Miraflores, where there were two homes needing work. However, one of the homes had some delays, so the majority of our time was spent working on Maria's home. She was a 73-year-old woman who lived alone and had sustained significant water damage to her roof. She was also in need of all new appliances and it was necessary to work with her to discard many useless items that she had collected over the years. Pax Christi prepped inner and outer walls and doors for painting and painted and replaced door knobs and light bulbs over two days. In the process, we made many friends, both volunteers of Casa Solidaria and townspeople who helped.



Pax Christi's Monthly Mission



Our custom is to contribute to a different peace and social justice cause at each of our monthly meetings. At

our August meeting, we will be supporting **School Supplies for Pine Bluff**. These funds will be used to provide \$500 worth of school supplies to the Pine Bluff School District. Supplies will be distributed by a Pine Bluff neighborhood group focused on. Pax Christi LR continues to work towards moving its presence throughout the state. You may mail donations to **415 N. McKinley, Little Rock, AR 72205** or **make a donation at our next meeting**. Please be generous with your contributions. Thank you.



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PEACE PARTNERS

Peace Partners highlights various peace and social justice organizations that share our vision: active promotion of peace in our neighborhood, state, country and world. The goal is to increase awareness of the many organizations in our area that work for peace through social justice and invite joint ventures between these groups to increase the effectiveness of our mission.

**CASA
SOLIDARIA**

Casa Solidaria is a pilot recovery program initiated by Proyecto Matria to address economic, physical, educational and health issues following Hurricane Maria. The program is located in Miraflores, Puerto Rico. The program includes entrepreneurship workshops, individualized technical assistance, search for seed capital and consultations that help people take the first steps in setting up businesses. It also offers psychosocial support, free legal advice, and after school programs for their children. Additionally, the community works on housing reconstruction, agricultural development and development of a community kitchen. The ultimate goal is to work with the barrio towards self-sustainability.

PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK

IS SPONSORING

WELCOME HOME:
A GROUP FOR CATHOLIC LGBT MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES/FRIENDS WHO WISH TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

THIS IS AN ONGOING DISCUSSION GROUP FOR CATHOLICS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBT AND ALLIES WHO MAY HAVE LEFT THE CHURCH AND WISH TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF RE-CONNECTION WITH THEIR FAITH THROUGH PRAYER, CONVERSATION AND SUPPORTIVE INTERACTION. THE CHURCH FAMILY IS DIMINISHED BY YOUR ABSENCE. WE INVITE YOU INTO A DYNAMIC CONVERSATION. WE HOPE YOU WILL JOIN US IN LEARNING ABOUT ONE ANOTHER AND GROWING OUR FAITH TOGETHER.

WHEN: THURSDAY, AUGUST 16, 2018 7 PM

WHERE: DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK-FITZGERALD HALL

CONTACT: SHERRY WITH PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK AT paxchristilr@gmail.com

SAVE THE DATE

Sonya Vinson, a representative from [PATH-Partners Against Trafficking Humans](#), will be speaking at the PCLR meeting on Sept. 14 at 7:30 pm. This program, which assists females affected by sexual trafficking, sexual assault and prostitution, serves the entire state of Arkansas. They have a 24-hour helpline (501-301-4357). They provide emergency as well as long-term physical and psychological care for women and youth coming out of sex-trafficking. PATH provides residential trauma care as well as progressive life skill education to facilitate independence.

Peace Works

Pax Christi Little Rock worked with their Puerto Rican and New York City partners repairing homes, sealing roofs, donating seeds and recovering landscaping in four hurricane devastated homes in Humacao and Miraflores, Puerto Rico. The following pictures tell the story of what happens when people put love into action by giving of themselves to others. The most beautiful aspect of this story is that it is impossible to know who gave the most as it seemed much more was received than was given.



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Dona Teresa Talks About Hurricane Maria

Maria Teresa de Leon Vasquez (Teresa) is a 69-year-old woman who grew up in Humacao, Puerto Rico, and was the last of 12 children. Pax Christi LR worked with her and others to restore her home after the damage by Hurricane Maria. In exchange, she gave us her heart and her history.

Teresa went to college in Puerto Rico and then applied and completed a master's degree in Urban Planning and Environmental Development at Columbia University in NYC. She taught for six years at Columbia and was later appointed to the Environmental Protection Board in San Juan as a planning specialist. She was promoted several times and eventually worked for the Dept. of Labor in Puerto Rico.



Unfortunately, her mother grew ill and she returned to Humacao to care for her. She was never married and has no children. Dona Teresa was alone in her home when Hurricane Maria struck the island initially on Sept. 20, 2017 in Humacao. She stated that it was the "toughest time I ever lived." She said that the bad weather started on a Tuesday but went on for four days. She described the house "rattling" and she demonstrated the sound of the wind keening through her home as it blew all of the slatted window protection off the windows. Teresa said that she took her little dog

held him tightly, praying to God and believing that this was her final day of life. The hurricane finally abated and she was able to leave her bathroom only to find that it was very difficult to leave her home. The wind had blown trees and debris into the roads and she could not get out of her house easily. She had no close neighbors who could help her, as many of them were elderly women and most of the homes around her were abandoned.

Teresa said that the Red Cross came in and brought food and water to her town, so she was able to survive. However, she is a diabetic and was unable to get her, as all of the computers in the pharmacies went down when the power went out. For four months, she was unable to obtain any medicine and, due to her diabetes, became legally blind. Sometime in January, 2018, Teresa stated that a woman she didn't know came to her home and asked if she

needed anything. She told her she needed insulin for her diabetes and the woman gave her enough to get her through until the electricity began to work again in June, 2018. Teresa said that she is sure she would have died without the woman's help.

Throughout our conversation, Teresa was intermittently tearful and philosophical. She said that she grows anxious when it rains now. She stated that "my preoccupation is that I will lose everything and I won't be able to find my medication or any food to survive." However, she also takes great pride in the fact that she has been able to care for herself throughout this ordeal. She said that her proudest moment was when she finally paid off her funeral expenses. She said, "most people don't know that we all must die sometime."

Missionary Team Reflects On Experiences in Puerto Rico

George Simon-We just happened to set up base in a small town celebrating the feast of Santiago Apostol. And we literally stumbled upon their parish's annual festival on our first day. To say the townsfolk welcomed us with open arms would be an understatement. And while it was abundantly clear from our surroundings that there was much disaster recovery still to do, it was also clear how much living our hosts were determined to do despite it all. These humble folks know the secret. And they not only keep the secret in their hearts they live it. The secret, of course, lies in community and in the bonds that make for a true community. We are all connected. Our interdependence is in fact, the ultimate reality of our existence. Some seem to understand this reality and lovingly embrace it, whereas others proudly reject it. It's always the poor in spirit who worship God and not the idols of the world. And it's always the rich and powerful who in their vanity feel justified to exploit those they see as lesser. Puerto Rico is rightfully called a US possession because it has been treated just as America has treated so many of the other human groups it has enslaved or oppressed. What came to me so clearly in all my interactions with all the beautiful people we have met here is that this disaster would never have been so long in overcoming had we seen ourselves in community with these dear souls who even in their time of dire need so eagerly opened their arms, their homes, and their very selves to strangers.



To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to me.

Gay Knight-We came to Puerto Rico to do recovery work for damage from the hurricane. And we have done so. But what I found more than that is what I have learned about Puerto Rico and the people themselves. First of all, they are wonderful Americans. And it has been eye-opening to learn more about the benefits that they have and mostly don't have, as American



CALENDAR OF PEACE AUGUST/SEPTEMBER EVENTS

**August 9 - PCLR Board Meeting (6 pm) and Speaker
Puerto Rico Mission Team (7:30) Fitzgerald Hall**

**August 16 - Welcome Home: An Invitation from the
Catholic Church to Its LGBT Brothers and Sisters (7 pm) Fitzgerald Hall**

**September 13 - PCLR Board Meeting (6 pm) and Speaker Sonya Vinson (PATH) addressing
Human Trafficking Issues**

**September 20 Welcome Home: An Invitation from the
Catholic Church to Its LGBT Brothers and Sisters (7 pm) Fitzgerald Hall**

September 16-23—Peace Week—ARPeace Week is coordinating a week of nonviolent action focused on young people in the schools. This includes the institution of a Peace curriculum in the LR school district and several Catholic schools.



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citizens. Hurricane Maria has given us from the states an opportunity to spread the information to others and we should. The other absolutely amazing part of this journey is our mission group itself. There are four Catholics, one Muslim, and one me, from Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock. All staying in a little condo with bunk beds, only two bathrooms, etc. Living, riding and working hard together for one common goal. To help God's people. So, this is a first for me. I have never been introduced to a Muslim before. Never stayed in a condo with one or worked closely with one. And it was a wonderful experience in so many ways. We have had great conversations about so many things and for this mission we are all on the same page. What a blessing and what a way to promote peace in our broken world. Praise God.

Sandee Haslauer-It did not take long to fall in love with Puerto Rico. The amazing thing is that when you are a missionary, and the people you serve are needy, it doesn't really matter where you are. . .in Honduras, Haiti, or Puerto Rico, the experience is the same. No matter what role you play, the overwhelming emotion is love. Love for the people you serve and love for your fellow missionaries. We always come home feeling that we have received so much more than we have given. The unique thing about this experience is that we are seeing our American flag fly everywhere we go. We are in America and it shouldn't be like this! This beautiful island and these amazing people have been abandoned by our government. We



Sandee and Maria 5:47

need to be here, they need our help, they are our brothers. God bless the people of Puerto Rico.

Sherry Simon- I had so many experiences and emotions on this mission trip that it has been difficult to find the words to express what it meant to me. Funny



enough, though, I ran across a quote from the Jewish mystical teacher Rabbi Rami Shapiro while on the trip that says something of what I learned:

"To me, religions are like languages: no language is true or false; all languages are of human origin; each language reflects and shapes the civilization that speaks it; there are things you can say in one language that you cannot say as well in another; and the more languages you speak, the more nuanced your understanding of life becomes. Judaism is my mother tongue, yet in matters of the spirit I strive to be multilingual."

This quote speaks to something I learned while I was in Puerto Rico. My Spanish is not the best although I just kept trying. But it was in the trying that I realized that keeping open to knowing the words and ways of others is the secret. Connection. Keeping our hearts open always to connection with even those things we cannot comprehend. We mustn't be afraid of those things we don't understand. Because they might just open us up to a whole new way of seeing God. And I saw God clearly in the eyes of Dona Teresa, Dona Maria, Amarilis, Kamille, Eddie, Emil, Javier, Edna, Andrew, Sur, and most particularly my fellow missionaries. We were all quite different, as we soon learned in our little condo! Yet over and

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over, each of them did things that helped me and gave me strength. They helped me when we were working. I got lots of warm hugs from them. I shared lots of great food with them. Communion. So, in many ways these people live in me now, in all of their differences, and I know my life will never be the same.




Tamara Tahat-The most meaningful part of the mission to me was when people would tell me stories about what happened to them during the hurricane. They all said that it lasted much longer than they thought it would. They talked about having to get up on their roofs to escape the water. And there was **nothing** once the hurricane was over. They had no electricity, no food, no water. They stood in lines to get food, water and gas. How did they survive? I wouldn't have known what to do. I was amazed at their strength and courage and that they've come back and are very positive about their future. Listening to what people went through, and then knowing how we didn't help them upsets me. I simply don't understand how we could stand by and do so little while they were going through this disaster. And that is why I am here. To help as much as I can and to show them that there are those of us in their country who care.

Ahmad Tahat - For me, this trip functioned as an aspect of prayer. It's as though the prayer is the words and this trip is the action of these words. You see, prayers are





Arkansas
Pregnancy
Resource
Center
The Ministry of St. Joseph's Helpers



LEGACY OF LIFE 2018

Save the Date

Thursday | October 18, 2018

Our scheduled guest speaker, **Deacon Harold Burkes – Sivers**, will share insights on the relationship between the sacredness of family life and the brokenness of today's culture, and will tie in how our ministry is evermore necessary today. Held at the Embassy Suites in West Little Rock, make plans to experience this uplifting event! The committee will form this June. If you are interested in helping make this event successful, contact our office at 501-227-7944 or email Development@PregnancyLittleRock.com. ■

filled with teachings, but we must take action in order to fulfill the teachings. The trip was a product of the teachings in my life, widening my understanding of things. I think that actually doing these different projects for others left an imprint in me that reinforces the things I have been taught so that I won't forget.

There was this energy flying around between all of us as well. This bond gave us energy and strength to do what we did. I don't think we would have been able to accomplish all that we did otherwise. I will never forget this experience.



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PCLR and Friends Throw a Backpack Party. . .

Pax Christi LR packed 654 backpacks with school supplies on Wednesday, August 8 for Rockefeller Incentive Elementary, St. Theresa's Catholic School and St. Edward's Catholic School. Over 30 people met in Fitzgerald Hall, manning stations and working for 2.5 hours to complete this daunting task. Additionally, PCLR members, under the direction of Sherry Martin, spent the entire day organizing the material in the room, so that the process would run smoothly. It was beautiful to see. Lots of smiling faces, fun conversations, and at one point singing! These are the folks that show up all the time to help others. We are indeed blessed to be in the midst of such generous spirits.



. . . And Deliver The Goods



Pax Christi members Sherry Martin and Sherry Simon delivered backpacks to all three schools on the morning of Thursday, August 9. Smiling faces and helping hands greeted the deliveries at all of the schools, with school personnel gladly helping unload in the rain!

