



Peace Offerings

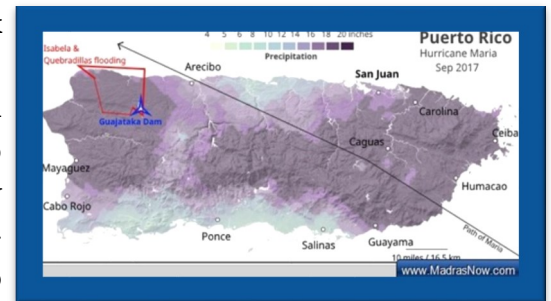
Overview of Conditions in Puerto Rico Following Hurricane Maria: PCLR Explores Mission Opportunities

PCLR Board Members

- Sherry Simon (President)
- Betty Jo King (V. President)
- Marian Paquette (Secretary)
- Sherry Martin (Treasurer)
- Sandee Haslauer
- Mary Hunt
- Becky Mullican
- Jerome Ngundue
- Sarah Ngundue
- George Simon

Drs. George and Sherry Simon, Pax Christi Little Rock board members, will be presenting information on disaster relief efforts in Puerto Rico following the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria last year. The Simons have been gathering data to determine the viability of a PCLR mission to Puerto Rico to assist in recovery efforts. This discussion will take place on **Thursday, March 8 at 7:30 pm at DOLR's Fitzgerald Hall (2500 N. Tyler Street).**

Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico on Wednesday, September 20, 2017, devastating the island and plunging all of its 3.6 million residents into a desperate humanitarian crisis. This was the worst storm to strike the U.S. island territory in over 80 years. Initial damage reports showed that there was 100% loss of electricity to the island. Access to clean water and food was extremely limited across the territory. After almost five months, roughly a third of Puerto Rico's residents—around 1.2 million people—are still



Hurricane Maria Path of Destruction

without electricity. Some residents, particularly in the more rural areas, still don't have access to clean water, and even where water service has been restored, many neighborhoods still have a "boil water" advisory in place. As of December, an estimated 60,000 houses remained without roofs and thousands of people were still displaced, living in shelters or with families and friends. According to Patrick Gallagher of Catholic Charities, over 300,000 people have left the island to date and it is estimated that around 1,000,000 will move away eventually as a result of this disaster. This is expected to further devastate the economy (cont on p. 2).

Contact Information

- **Website:**
www.paxchristilittlerock.wordpress.com
- **Facebook:**
Pax Christi Little Rock
- **Address:**
415 N. McKinley, Ste. 1040
Little Rock, AR 72205
- **Phone:** (501) 663-5075
- **Email:**
paxchristilr@gmail.com

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

Peace Offerings

PCLR Mission to Puerto Rico (cont)

Although initial reports from Puerto Rico indicated that only 64 people died as a result of Hurricane Maria, new reports from the Center for Investigative Journalism and the New York Times put the death toll at over 1,000.

The massive scale of Maria's destruction has been devastating, with an estimated \$94 billion in damage across the territory. Sadly, this is in addition to the decade long recession that Puerto Rico was immersed in prior to this disaster. Even before Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico was already billions of dollars in debt. Although the United States had initially decided to provide a \$4.7 billion disaster relief loan to the territory, Governor Rossello said that federal officials recently reduced the amount to \$2 billion without providing an explanation nearly five months after Congress approved the loan.

As with most natural disasters, this storm disproportionately affected Puerto Rico's poorest residents, those who have fewer resources on hand to help them recover and rebuild. The leading edge of this Category 4 hurricane (155+ mph winds) passed through the rural central part of the island that is more mountainous and harder to reach.

Children and young people were particularly vulnerable to the physical and psychological impacts of this disaster. The lives of 350,000 public school students were disrupted as it took nearly five weeks before the first public schools began to reopen after the storm. Even then, most were operating without power. Although many of the schools are re-opened now, five months after the disaster, there is at least one school in every city that still has no power and



many schools are only open part-time.

In reviewing disaster relief information thus far, the Simons envision a hands-on mission in conjunction with an organization that is already on the ground in Puerto Rico such as VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters). Additionally, there is a need for financial support as well as supplies such as solar lanterns, water filtration units, food, hygiene items, etc. Mission plans will continue to be developed.

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 March meeting, we will be supporting **PCLR's Puerto Rico mission** fund. These funds will be specifically used to purchase supplies such as food, hygiene items, small generators, etc. to donate to the people of Puerto Rico. These contributions will not be used by missionaries for travel or personal expense. 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.

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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.



The mission of SettledSouls is to aid homeless men and women transitioning to permanent housing by providing many of the staple home furnishings that make their apartment or house feel more like a secure and welcoming home. This group works in conjunction with Jericho Way Day Resource Center for the homeless. Jericho Way identifies the individuals that qualify for housing and SettledSouls helps them move into a home by providing their basic needs in the home.

PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK

IS SPONSORING

WELCOME HOME: AN INVITATION FROM THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO ITS LGBT BROTHERS AND SISTERS

THIS IS AN ONGOING SUPPORT GROUP FOR LGBT CATHOLICS 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. OUR CHURCH FAMILY IS DIMINISHED BY YOUR ABSENCE. WE INVITE YOU TO COME HOME AND JOIN US IN GROWING OUR FAITH TOGETHER.

WHEN: THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2018 7 PM

WHERE: DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK-FITZGERALD HALL

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

SAVE THE DATE

Stephanie Byers, President of **SettledSouls**, will be the featured presenter at the PCLR meeting on Thursday, April 12 at 7:30. She will share her vision of this organization that works with Jericho Way to provide furnishings and essential items for the homeless as they transition into permanent homes. Stephanie founded SettledSouls with Lindsey Taggart in October, 2016. They promote the philosophy of "housing first" as the most practical means of combatting poverty. .

Peace Offerings

PILGRIMAGE FOR PEACE, 2018



Pilgrimage for Peace, 2018, organized by a coalition of ecumenical faith and community organizations, will be held on **Sunday, April 8 at 2:00 PM**. Walkers will gather in the circle outside of **Heifer International Village**, 1 World Avenue, Little Rock. They will walk past the Clinton Presidential Library and the River Market, cross the Junction Bridge and walk to the **Beacon of Peace and Hope** at 120 Riverfront Drive, NLR. All will gather there for:

A Remembrance Service at 3:00 PM to “mourn the violence committed in our community, nation, and world, and to walk together as active peacemakers.” The brief service will consist of groups of young people saying prayers, providing reflections from literature and scripture, and singing songs related to peace. Finally, the names of all the victims of homicide in Pulaski County over the past year will be read. All ages are welcome.

For more information, call **501-232-7283** or visit the website where you’ll find a list of sponsoring groups from last year, the program and photos of the 2017 Pilgrimage.

www.pilgrimageforpeace.com

Pax Christi Little Rock is partnering up with the CTK Honduras Mission to run a soft drink booth at the 2018 Christ the King REXfest. All friends of Pax Christi are invited to come help us volunteer for this wonderful cause. PCLR will also be selling t-shirts and book bags to help raise funds for our Puerto Rico mission. Come hang out with us!



Sunday, May 6

Noon-5 pm

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Our Youth Lead the Way: Transforming Rage into Activism

There has already been so much written and discussed regarding the events that occurred on February 14, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. That terrible Valentine's Day when a 19-year-old troubled ex-student used an AR-15 rifle to kill 17 people and wound 14 more while they were in the middle of their normal school day. Sadly, this is only one of 34 mass shootings that has already occurred in the United States in 2018. And if recent history proves predictive, there will be many more shootings before this year is over.

These incidents have become increasingly commonplace in our society. We have become desensitized to the horror experienced by others as we are inundated by the reports of violence on a daily basis. Our rage lasts for about the same amount of time that it takes a 24-hour news cycle to come up with a different, more dramatic story. And as always, the various corporate and political entities work to maintain the status quo by adopting their usual positions and turning a blind eye to the factors that contribute to these killings in our country, particularly if any part of the solution would affect their bottom line.

Yet, there is one bright light in the midst of all the violence and trauma that is growing in our nation. The young people in our country have entered the fray and are leading the fight to reshape both state and federal gun laws. This drive has been fueled by the high school students who survived this most recent mass shooting in Florida. They called for a national

movement to walk-out of the classroom on February 21, when students stormed the halls of both state and federal lawmakers to demand stricter gun laws, increased school security and funding of mental health care. In addition, they continue to employ social media to connect with others and invite them to join this crusade. There will be a national march led by students to address the issue of gun violence. The Little Rock MarchForOurLives will take place on Saturday, March 24 at 10 am. in solidarity with other protests across the country. This march to the Capitol will start at 500 Woodlane Drive and we urge all to attend so that our legislators will know of our position in this matter. It is time to make our voices heard so that our country can become the beacon for freedom and peace it was meant to be.

Pax Christi Little Rock stands with these young people as they find ways to transform our national rage over increased violence in our world into solutions that lead to peaceful co-existence and social justice for all people.

One of the survivor's of last month's shootings, Sophie Whitney, had a question for the NRA: "Why is your right to own an AR-15 more important than a kid's right to feel safe?" She answered her own question: "It's not. It is just common sense." These are the questions we should all be asking not only the NRA, but the people controlled by the NRA, our legislators who continue to allow the unrestrained use of assault weapons.

Pax Christi Little Rock believes that *nothing changes unless something changes*. And that something that needs to change is our hearts. Do we truly believe Christ's message of nonviolence and securing peace? If so, we will secure it not at the point of a gun, but through dialogue, implementation of social justice, and the meeting of the needs of our brothers and sisters. In that spirit, until our nation decides to enact comprehensive gun control laws, people will kill, people will die, and families will suffer. Pax Christi USA advocates that Congress will require, at the very least, the following:

Background Checks: It is common sense to require that owners of deadly weapons meet certain criminal and mental health standards. A sound mind and a person's criminal history are indicators of a person's potential for responsible gun ownership and use.

Illegalize assault rifles, especially those available at gun shows or on the internet. No one needs to own a semi-automatic weapon. These are designed to kill as many people as possible at one, and there is no practical reason that any civilian needs to own an assault rifle.

Certainly, there also needs to be much more funding made available to provide for the mental health needs of our most vulnerable individuals. Providing treatment (medication and therapy) as well as appropriate housing and community support for the mentally ill in our country is of paramount importance.

Additionally, we must develop the means to make our schools safer for our children. It is amazing that the first thought that comes to the mind of our government is to arm our teachers with even more guns that have the potential to be used violently against others. Surely, there are more commonsense procedures that can be implemented to keep our school campuses safe.

Finally, it seems shameful to me that one of the

wealthiest, most powerful countries in the world should put more emphasis on the right to own a gun than to care for those who live on the margins of our society. It seems that many of the problems in our country stem from the fact that our priorities are completely disordered. We need to be more about promoting life rather than, in our fear and anxiety, emphasizing our right to take life away. Life is sacred, and all of our actions should be directed towards protection of that life with which we been gifted.

Sherry Simon

CALENDAR OF PEACE

MARCH/APRIL EVENTS

March 8 - Overview of Conditions in Puerto Rico Following Hurricane Maria: PCLR Mission (PCLR Meeting-7:30 pm)

March 18 - Parade for Peace (Walton Arts Center-Fayetteville) 2:30 pm

March 22 - Welcome Home: An Invitation from the Catholic Church to it's LGBT Brothers and Sisters (7 pm) Fitzgerald Hall

March 24 - March For Our Lives Arkansas (10 am) 500 Woodlane- March to the Capitol)

April 8 - Pilgrimage for Peace, 2018 (Heifer Int'l) (2-4 PM)

April 12 - Settled Souls- Stephanie Byers (PCLR-7:30)

