



Santurce Puerto Rico, 11 October 2017

***“Wood hath hope”, said Job.
We Puerto Ricans say the same.***

Three long weeks have passed since hurricane Maria unleashed its fury and destroyed us. Still we wake up amazed at the destruction that surrounds us. Puerto Rico is a very small island, and since Maria crossed it diagonally, not a corner of the island was left untouched by its fury. We cannot say much about the rest of the island, since only two or three RSCJ have made the trip to Barranquitas and Ponce. The rest of us have not seen the devastation firsthand. You have seen more than us in the media. We want to share how we have lived and are living these days in the three RSCJ communities in the island.

Monteflores (the house for the elder sisters), the Philippine Duchesne community, and the University of the Sacred Heart

are located in the highest point of Santurce. The winds sheared – or rather, burned – the leaves, and took down many trees, among them the hundred plus year old mahoganies which welcomed students to the Sacred Heart School since its early days. The landscape looked like the aftermath of a forest fire. But green leaves are beginning to sprout, a panorama that now speaks of hope. Although our neighborhood has had its share of the suffering, the fact that we are part of the Greater San Juan area makes recovery just a bit easier. Telephones are working – somewhat – and internet is available in some spots. The University has set up an emergency network, and thanks to them we can be connected sporadically. Water comes ...and



PROVINCE OF ANTILLAS

goes... We are among the most fortunate. Neither our houses nor the University buildings have major structural damages. However, many of our staffs, professors and students have suffered major losses.



The House of Monteflores

Monteflores: Around the house, the most significant damage is that the fence that separates our property from the University is down in several places. Now we have direct access to the campus! Our biggest worry is the high voltage electricity post that fell on our back gate. It will be a difficult job to repair it, and this is our source of electricity...



The high voltage post

The sisters are all right, “alive, thank God”, as each and every Puerto Rican says these days. All have news of their relatives, even of those scattered in the mountains, so everyone is reassured. Our families and many alumnae are concerned about us and we receive daily visits and gifts that reflect the love they have for the Sisters. We know that we are much loved, and this helps us not to lose courage and in turn, encourage others.



Around the campus of the University of the Sacred Heart

The Philippine Duchesne community: Although the sisters have no water or electricity at home, they have united their efforts to those of the University staff and students in order to assist neighborhoods communities, which were needy before the hurricane and are now destitute.

The University of the Sacred Heart

“The community of the University of the Sacred Heart, rooted in its values, centered in the service and transformation of the Puerto Rican society, set up a project of solidarity and assistance to families and communities affected by hurricane Irma. Thus was born the project ‘Sagrado contigo’ (Sacred Heart together with you).

The event of Hurricane Maria reaffirmed the commitment of the University to work as one with others in order to help Puerto Rico rise up again. From September 20th onwards we have witnessed the pain and powerlessness of our people in face of the devastating

panorama of total or substantial loss of homes and belongings. Through the project ‘Sagrado Contigo’ we have been working hand in hand with families and community based non-profit organizations, accompanying them so that they do not lose hope nor the strength to rebuild. The face of poverty after the hurricane is that of grandfathers and grandmothers. As we assisted the communities of Cantera, Playita, Barrio Obrero, Villa Palmera and others, we met old people who cry with gratitude when offered a case of drinking water, or who beg for a plate of food. It is our old men and women who are the hardest hit by the crisis. Many have no means of transport, nor the strength to stand in line for hours, nor do they understand about mobile apps to file requests for Federal assistance (FEMA). We have helped with food, clothing, personal hygiene products, sheets, and even toys for children.

Then there are our young people. Many university students have lost their homes, employment, and even relatives who have moved to the mainland. Our youth is all the poorer because of this crisis. Students have come to us who no longer have the means to study and go back to their homes, and many have no income with which to buy food for themselves and their families. Some are heartbroken, others seek some help in order to keep struggling.

The University has become for them an oasis of welcome and assistance. We have welcomed members of the university

community who have biked from their towns in order to look for the only help they can trust. We have wept with them and comforted them with a hug, assuring them that they are not alone. We continue to stand firm in our mission to make Puerto Rico a solidary community, in justice and in peace. God reveals himself in the hand of a friend that we extend to each person and to our people.”

In the *University*, the staff is working nonstop and very creatively in order to reopen classes next Monday 16th. Branches, trees and debris have been cleared, and 25 tents, outdoor classrooms where lectures will be held, dot the campus.



In the *Sacred Heart School in Ponce* there was no substantial damage to the buildings, but several families of students and staff suffered significant losses.

The house in *Barranquitas*, perched on a hilltop in the middle of the island and surrounded by vegetation, suffered the loss of many trees. One of them fell on the part of the building for retreatants that is built of wood and zinc, seriously damaging it. Thankfully the sisters had left the day before, or they would have been isolated for days, as the roads were impassable.



Barranquitas: The retreat house



Barranquitas: The front gate

This Puerto Rico that Maria
has left us,
with its destruction and
opportunity
is our new frontier.

We count on the love
and support of our
sisters in order to cross
it with courage and
love.



*The Sisters
from the
communities
of
Barranquitas,
Philippine
Duchesne, and
Monteflores*