

St Thomas Reformed Church

Hurricane Relief Update – November 27, 2017

It has been a little over a month since our last update and we give God the glory for how much amazing work has been accomplished in that time.

At the end of October, we finally received our long-awaited trailer of supplies from Food for the Poor, Inc. Thank you to this wonderful organization out of Coconut Creek Florida! The countless delays in getting access to it were a test to my patience but I am reminded again of God's time which is the perfect time. God's will, not mine be done. This trailer made our last few distribution's possible! We were greatly assisted by off-island volunteers, the Jordans and Forrests, Donna, Brian, Art, and Lonnie. Our distributions were a busy but beautiful cycle to behold. Volunteers assisted with the sorting, distributing, cleaning, clearing, stacking, transporting, moving, and helping in monumental ways. The sanctuary pews grew filled with supplies, which were packed into boxes, and in less than 2 hours it was completely empty again with 470 families walking away with food and supplies to help sustain them through this recovery period. By the end of the day, pews were empty again (mostly) and filled with parishioners Sunday morning as we gathered to worship and to give thanks to our God and to complete the circle of giving as we gather around the communion table to gratefully receive all that God gave to us in Jesus, the Christ.

November 8th marked the end of one chapter and the beginning of a new one. We distributed food and supplies one last time from our sanctuary to over 450 families. It truly was a ministry of miraculous proportion. Even the heavy rains did not dampen people's spirits. So many people were genuinely grateful for the past 2 months of supplies and surprisingly understanding of why we needed to transition out of this phase of our recovery process. We received a huge thank you card from the folks at Seaview (thank you Kim BV for your tireless efforts there!). I had a surprise visit from my former associate Rev Will Brooks' grandparents, a random visit from cruise ship passengers who dropped off T-shirts, and the last person I saw as I walked away was an elderly woman who stopped me in the middle of the street, hugged me and would not let me go, saying something in Spanish most of which I did not understand except for "gracias!" We now shift our focus to other areas of need and continue to distribute as we are able.

On November 9th, our first work team arrived from Holland, Michigan and with their help we began the process of renovating our own church and getting our house back in order. Our focus has been, and will always be, outward into our community and across this island spreading the love of Christ to a world in need. We have been blessed to be able to share what we have been given and also to widen our circle of faith throughout our community. Our kids camp program remains a bright spot in the community. We are praying for ways to expand and continue that well beyond this recovery period. We will also continue working with My Brothers Workshop, the Salvation Army and other non-profits to serve our community. Your prayers and support have sustained us through this first phase of recovery. We covet your prayers and support as we continue this work. I hope we can continue to love and serve one another like this in this wonderful island neighborhood.

Fellowship Reformed Church was a true blessing to our congregation and the island as a whole. They were in so many ways a shining light and an example of the compassion of Christ...hard at work. They spent a week of their vacation, came here at their own expense, spent their hard-earned money eating at local restaurants and supporting local businesses and worked hard all week in the hot sun clearing

roads of debris still piled high in the streets of Blackbeards Hill near one of our main tourist attractions and mucking debris out of our undercroft. Thank you, thank you for giving of yourselves!

The island was blessed with a visit from Robin Roberts and a crew from Good Morning America who filmed here yesterday to share the story of hurricane recovery in the Virgin Islands live from Puerto Rico. Though time continues to bring restoration to the island, there is much work to be done and the continued awareness across the country is uplifting.

Our Thanksgiving holiday was especially meaningful this year, as we realize we have much to be thankful for. A big shout out to Antilles School Honor students for completing a generous Thanksgiving food drive to support our hurricane relief efforts. We appreciate the support! Also thanks to the Salvation Army for help with transport and distribution! Many hands make light work. I was blessed to be able to witness several of our church family joining hands and hearts together on Thanksgiving Day to share some love (and lots of turkey) with our neighbors. Special thanks to the Salvation Army for preparing and serving the meal. And very special thanks to Noel and Lucy who spent the day with their new extended family at the Long Path Community Center. Lucy came home this past week with suitcases full of donated school supplies from friends and family in NJ. Giving knows no boundaries.

As we look forward to the season of Advent, we have a lot to look forward to, thanks to the generous donations of so many. Robin and Linda put together toothpaste and toiletries bags to share with UVI students next week. We received gift cards and letters from my brother's school, Brinkerhoff Elementary in Fishkill NY to distribute for Christmas. We have volunteers from Marble Collegiate Church in New York City on their way with more gifts and gift cards to help us throw a community Christmas party, and huge boxes of Christmas presents arrived from Christ Community Reformed Church in Clifton Park NY, where my father used to be on staff. I have only good things to say about all of these wonderful people. Your gifts of time, treasure and toothpaste are a blessing. Let the blessings flow from our mouths, hands and hearts and make all our smiles brighter!

Ways to Donate:

Through our website (this will take you to a Paypal link. Add in Memo: Hurricane Relief) -

<http://stthomasreformedchurch.org/g-i-v-i-n-g/online-giving/>

Mail a check payable to St. Thomas Reformed Church - PO Box 301769, St. Thomas VI 00803. Please add in Memo: Hurricane Relief. Any monetary donations to St. Thomas Reformed Church are tax deductible. Also, we are humbled by the outpouring of support and offer of volunteer crews. If you have a desire to come to St. Thomas and work on this effort, please contact us! We would LOVE to have you. If you're interested, please contact Nicole Jackson, our Youth and Retreat Center Coordinator at youth@stthomasreformedchurch.org.

You can check out more info about MBW by visiting their website at www.mybrothersworkshop.org or their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MyBrothersWorkshop>

I know many of you may not be on Facebook, but I encourage you to visit our page periodically (it is a public page, so you don't even need a log in to view) to follow our transformational journey, fully replete with highs and lows and just as many miracles. Here is the link for that: <https://www.facebook.com/stthomasreformedchurch/>

This email is just a snapshot of a few of the things we continue to do working together and it all hinges on your support from afar. Thank you!!