

2021 VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION TRIP RECAP

Submitted by Cheryl P. Smith of LaPorte UMC

ReHace - Arecibo, Puerto Rico November 6-13, 2021

The 2021 Volunteers in Missions participants have been small this year. Despite COVID, though, 2 Northeast Ohio Teams from Hudson UMC and Strongsville UMC traveled to Puerto Rico. They worked with ReHace Methodist Church of Puerto Rico to help with recovery efforts from Hurricane Maria. These were the first teams permitted from the US to offer assistance since the COVID shutdown. ReHace was able to continue working through COVID and have helped over 1,200 families return to their homes.

The Strongsville Team was located in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Tom King led the group with Debbie King, Dave Thomas, Cheryl Smith, Margaret Javens, Kim Nelson, Lee DeyErmand, and Rick Shoemaker helping him out. Their home for the week was Camp Cumbres del Calvario in Arecibo (Northcentral PR). The camp was set deep in a beautiful, remote area – no AC, geckos on the walls, coqui frogs singing during the night, very limited cell service, very generous amounts of delicious food (the cooks thought we didn't like the food), limited hot water – all OK as the week wasn't about them, it was about serving others/being Jesus' hands, feet, and heart.

The group was divided into 2 teams of 4 – 2 homes to work on. Dave led one team (a distance from the camp) and Rick the other (a short ride from camp). Rick's Team finished up a home – roofing, hung cabinets and interior/exterior painting. They encountered dogs, snakes, and having to use a neighbor's bathroom. The neighbor had offered the use of her facilities as a thank you to ReHace for repairing her home. She recently was able to move back home.

Dave's Team worked on a young mother and daughter's home, about a half hour from home base, located above her grandfather's cement dwelling. The structure to be repaired was wood and suffered much damage. Taking time off from her job the first day allowed the team to meet the homeowner and her daughter. One could see the holes that were knocked out (looked like large mouse holes) around the base board to allow for water to go out. Donning required safety gear - hard hat, sweatband, safety goggles, face mask, gloves, long pants/jeans, safety vest, cold water – they were ready to face each day and the warm weather – OK, 90+ degree temperatures. The team was able to remove and replace 3 of the outside walls of siding, remove and replace windows and doors, remove damaged interior walls and build new covering them with wall board, install a new kitchen counter and cupboard. Augustine, Rey, and Luis – ReHace construction workers in charge of this site - were very patient, caring, kind, kept them very involved in reconstruction and never made the team feel they were in the way – let them do things and if messed up, they laughed and started over/just moved on. That brought much joy to the team. Martiris, the cook, would bring out hot coffee for afternoon breaks. MarySol, the social worker, shared a coffee custard treat - usually served at Christmas – her mother had made. Thursday brought out a camera/video team to interview and film a promotional spot for ReHace. Finishing up on Thursday, Augustine played “The Blessing” by Elevation Worship (in Spanish) on his phone. WOW!! So powerful! All were blessed!

Evenings were filled with dinner, devotions, debriefings, communion, and trips to ice cream stores. This time was just as joyful as the day. During the communion service the last evening, scripture from Paul's letter to the Corinthians was shared.

2 Corinthians 3:2-4 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known, and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ before God.

This very much summed up the week.

Time was limited due to an orientation meeting Monday (therefore a late start) and a holiday (Veteran's Day) Friday. The team truly felt and wanted to do more, but time and a holiday did not allow. So, visits to a cave, beaches, and Old San Juan/El Morro Fort before returning to the states were in order. The folks with ReHace, the homeowners, and the people of Puerto Rico were so appreciative of the help. God's daily presence was felt. New relationships developed. Language barriers challenged and overcome. Despite all the COVID restrictions and protocols, the teams were grateful to have made it through the week and home safely.

Volunteering for mission trips gives one a true sense of how blessed we truly are. Being able to share faith, service, listening ears, and time with others, especially folks in need, is quite special and hard to explain. Blessings just overflow for both the servants and recipients.

As is said, "God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called". Yes, there is always something one can do on a mission trip as God has it all planned out. All one has to say is, "Here I am Lord. Lead me to do your will."