

Sisters struggling in hurricane-stricken Puerto Rico

Divine Providence nuns living without electricity and water

By JOHN FRANKO
Staff Writer

In an e-mail to her congregation last week, Divine Providence Sister Elsa Medina Rivera said that in the month since Hurricane Maria had hit her island of Puerto Rico, it seemed like time had not passed.

They were still without lights and the water came and went — four days without, three with very little. She wrote by the light of a lantern, with distressing news coming over the radio.

“The day starts earlier and ends later than usual and many hours of waiting,” Sister Elsa Medina said. “We do not sleep in peace. I get up before the sun and I go to bed after the moon. We have to take advantage of the day.”

Unemployment grows daily, she added, and the ranks of people struggling does not end.

“We have definitely changed,” Sister Elsa Medina said. “We are not the same. Maria touched every human being on this island, those who are here and those who are outside.”

So many things have been done in the past month that there is no way to list them, she noted. The one certainty is that everyone on the island has learned a lot. That a water bottle is used to the last drop. That table games still exist and can still be entertaining. That they can live without their cell-phone. And they have rediscovered their neighbors.

“We are learning that waiting in a long line you make friends, you

“We do not sleep in peace. I get up before the sun and I go to bed after the moon.”

— Sister Elsa Medina Rivera

can listen and comfort others and you can be comforted and listened to,” Sister Elsa Medina said.

While the electricity is off in her country, its hearts are illuminated in solidarity, in love, in the struggle to help the brother and the sister, she noted. She is thankful for her fellow sisters, their associates and their many friends.

Sister Elsa Medina closed by pointing out that the people are now beginning to rest and regain their strength, adding, “We, your sons and your daughters, love you and will continue to rise.”

The Sisters of Divine Providence in McCandless Township have continued to monitor the status of their community members in wake of the Sept. 19 hurricane that hit Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands. Communication is still sporadic. There are 11 sisters living there. Six — including Sister Elsa Medina — live in Arecibo. Five others live about 45 miles away in Bayamon.

Their ministries include education, pastoral ministry and nursing, working in social services, parish ministry, diocesan ministry and in the ministry of prayer.

Those wishing to contribute to recovery efforts can visit <https://cdpsisters.org/support-us>. Checks may be mailed to: Sisters of Divine Providence, 9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, Pa. 15101.

Contributions also may be made



CNS PHOTO/BOB ROLL

Catholic dairy farmer Gustavo Toledo stands near his destroyed farm buildings Oct. 22 in Hatillo, Puerto Rico, more than a month after Hurricane Maria devastated the island.

‘Today I am living with what I have’

This Oct. 12 e-mail from Divine Providence Sister Elsa Medina Rivera offers a glimpse into what’s occurring in Puerto Rico.

Dear Sisters,

Thank you for your prayers. Today on weeks after Hurricane Maria, I still feel in my ears the noise of that day of an atmospheric phenomenon that with its fury took everything that was in its path. It carried away the dreams, the hopes, the dwellings and, the worst of all, the life of many who did not think of Maria’s strength and fury. We are in the struggle. We still have no light. I live one day at a time. I do not want to think about tomorrow.

Tomorrow I live it, tomorrow with whatever it brings; today I am living with what I have. Today I gave food to the birds because they have so little to eat, and wash the clothes by hand. I put water with sugar to the bees; there are no flowers for them to feed. I went to see what the neighbor needed, talk to the mailman and share with the workers of San Felipe College. I did my prayer, and the day ends up trusting in the prayers of you, my Sisters, who give the strength to receive the day of tomorrow. We are fine, hoping it will normalize a little the situation. God bless them, and we entrust ourselves to their prayers. You are left in mind.

Love, Elsa

to Catholic Charities of Pittsburgh (www.ccpgh.org), Catholic Charities USA (catholiccharitiesusa.org) and Catholic Relief Services (support.crs.org).

Bishop included in book of sermons