

A note from LCMS Missionaries, James & Christel Neuendorf

And who is my neighbor?

The question which motivated Jesus to tell the story of the Good Samaritan is an interesting one. You can find the account in Luke 10:29, but I'm sure you are quite familiar with it. A lawyer is having a discussion with Jesus about the law, to which Jesus points him to the summary of love for God and neighbor that we know so well. Then the man, "wishing to justify himself" says to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Who are we supposed to love and to show mercy to? Where does this law stop? What are the limits?

The last few months I have been working on realigning our strategic plan for the next several years, analyzing our current circumstances and the road ahead, and considering, in a strange sort of way, who is our neighbor? I feel like I can sympathize a bit more with that lawyer, even though Jesus answer is surprising and wonderful for us.

When we consider our abilities and our capacity, we have to admit that our capacity to show love and mercy has limits. We can't have selfless and sacrificial love for the entire world, not even for an entire city! Or at least, we cannot act on it. We are painfully aware of our limitations. And yet, Jesus in His reply removes all the limits, and shows that the real keeping of the law includes one's enemies! Only Jesus can love like that, without limit and for the entire world. Only on the cross can love for the whole world be shown and enacted. We cannot love our neighbors unless we are simply loving them as a part of the body of Christ.

So, if Jesus has loved our neighbors like that, who are the neighbors we are called to serve? Where are those limits for us? Is it the shores of our island? If even our enemies are our neighbors, where do we start?

Prayers:

- Thanksgiving for a great Virtul VBS!
- Continuing of rebuilding the church on Calle Salud
- Hurricane Season

Tropical Storm Isaias was small as Caribbean storms go, but it was just enough to help provide some clarity. The area around Mayaguez was the hardest hit, with some pretty significant flooding in many neighborhoods, including the street on which William Torres and his family live. They had about an inch or two of water enter the first floor of their home, along with mud and debris. The DiLibertos had their road blocked because of fallen trees, and most lost power and water for about a week. The team sprang into action immediately to help. One of the other couples in the congregation in Mayaguez lives at the bottom of a street that turned into a river and swept tons of mud and debris down to the houses where they lived.

We showed up with a chainsaw, power washer, buckets and other tools, but when we arrived they weren't home. Not wanting to enter their property without them, we went and checked on their neighbors, who had mudslides in their homes and fallen trees that needed trimming, as well as someone to talk to after a terrifying experience. We spent a few hours helping them, when the family from our congregation returned home and we could also help our own church family. While we were shoveling mud, a sentence came to me that I think captures the task ahead:

When you have a neighbor from our church, the church is your neighbor. When the church is your neighbor, Jesus is your neighbor. Jesus is the kind of neighbor you need! There is no limit to the number of neighbors that we have, but we do have a place to start! As we respond to the current storm, we are beginning with our congregation members and their neighbors. As we meet new neighbors, we have new opportunities to serve them in body and soul, to be neighbors to them. Who is my neighbor? Jesus!

Thank you for serving your neighbors in Puerto Rico through us!



Christmas in July!

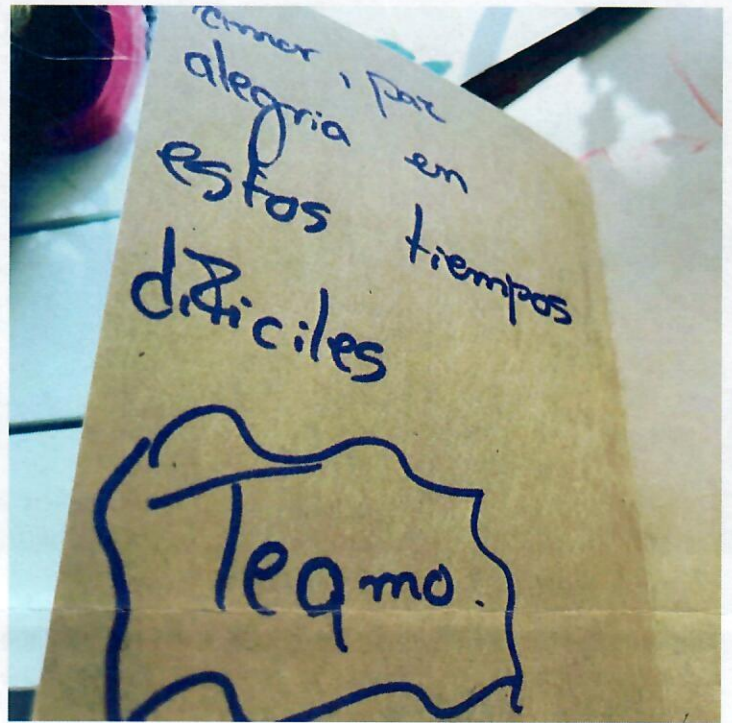
July 25 marks six months to Christmas. July 25 also marked six months of intense living here in Puerto Rico. Earthquakes, the pandemic, and now hurricane season. We also happened to be learning about the Christmas story in Sunday school through our mail home packs (from Un Jardín de Historias Bíblicas Para Niños), so a party was in order!

Our Sunday School group gathered together for some Christmas card writing, craft making, and Christmas story re-enacting. We ended with a small cook out and a video on Christ's birth.

Everyone left their cards (that we passed out to church members), so I read through them once everyone left. One of them (pictured top right) said in the inside "Love, peace, happiness in these difficult times, I love you." The kids who wrote these cards were only able to go to school for maybe two weeks this year. They are awaiting what will happen this year.

Many members of Fuente de Vida have faced their own personal hardships amongst the island and world-wide disasters. My hope for this time was to be a time of fellowship, of being together as God's family, and giving support to another, remembering who holds us in His hands every single day.

Merry Christmas, Emmanuel.



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