

Doing Hands-On Missions

Cave Spring Baptist Church returned to meet peoples' needs in a physical way and to share the Gospel too.



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~ Mark Gauthier

Just days after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in September

2017, Disaster Relief (DR)

volunteers from the SBC of Virginia mobilized to provide tangible support in the form of food and home repair. From October through January, more than 130 volunteers from more than 20 SBCV churches participated in the relief efforts, and teams are continuing to go.

Mark Gauthier, SBCV’s director for Disaster Relief and Virginia Global Response, traveled to the island close to four months after the storm and said there was still much recovery work to be done, as the majority of the island still had no electricity.

“Driving down the roads, there [were] still trees and power poles that [were] broken and on the side of the



road,” Gauthier says. “There [were] tangles of wire that [had] just been pushed off the side of the road. Large areas...of the island [did] not have safe drinking water.”

The SBCV partnered with the North American Mission Board and chose to focus its efforts on the city of Arecibo. There are eight churches in Arecibo who are a part of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Gauthier says he hopes to create a two-year partnership that will help strengthen the existing churches and plant new ones in the region.

“During times of disaster, we have found that people, in many cases, have lost not only a lot of their possessions—a lot of their property—but in many cases, they’ve lost hope,” shares Gauthier. “We have a desire to bring help in the form of physical relief...but also hope. The hope is what we find in Christ.”

Much of the work done by teams includes cleaning up homes, distributing food, and putting together relief baskets that are distributed throughout the community and taken to peoples’ homes. Groups also host block parties, says Gauthier, “to bring some semblance of relief...to children in

the community.”

Allen James, associate minister of community and missions at **Cave Spring Baptist Church** in Roanoke, VA, traveled to Puerto Rico, December 2–8, with a team from his church. The church in Arecibo had a building that was still in need of renovation, so the team repaired leaks, painted, and performed electrical and plumbing work. Their work prepared a place for future DR teams to stay without the main church building having to house teams.

While much of their work was within the church, James shares, “some other [groups of] twos and threes were out in peoples’ homes and were able to have some pretty significant spiritual conversations that way.”

Regarding DR work, James explains, “We just feel like it’s a great way



to do missions in a hands-on way, in a way that [doesn’t just] help peoples’ needs in a physical way, but gives us a good opportunity to share the Gospel as well.”

He says the impact that mission work has on the volunteers is “invaluable.” One team member, who had attended Cave Spring for about a year but had not yet joined the church, came back and said, “We’re ready to join, and I want to be



baptized. This is the kind of church I want to be involved with.”

Some of the most important moments for discipleship happen on mission trips, which is one of the reasons why three of Cave Spring’s pastors traveled with the team.

“We had more time to invest in church members in that week than we would in a year or two just back in normal church life,” James explains. “It is probably the most significant discipleship thing we can do in the church in terms of a short-term basis.”



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