

Thank You!

You are receiving this packet of information because you signed up to travel to Puerto Rico in support of the recovery efforts following Hurricanes Irma and María. This kind of experience is often described as a “mission trip.” It is our sincere hope that, by the time you finish reading the information in this packet, you will come to describe your journey as a “mission pilgrimage.” More than a difference in semantics, we believe that by undertaking to make a mission pilgrimage, we more easily shift our perspective from “what am I going to do?” to “what is God going to do in and through me and those I meet?”

The response that you are participating in is a unique hybrid of learning and serving modeled on both the traditional disaster response Mission Stations of Disciples Volunteering (a ministry of Disciples Home Missions) and the People-to-People Pilgrimage Program offered by Global Ministries. It is also a new partnership between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (CCDOC) and our friends in faith, the Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo) en Puerto Rico (ICDCPR). Our related denominations committed to respond together immediately following the storms. Staff from several General Ministries of the CCDOC and the Centro Cristiano of the ICDCPR collaborated to identify needs and resources for relief. Relationships grew stronger as plans were developed for the recovery and beyond.

There will still be plenty of “doing” on this journey: homes need repaired and our Puerto Rican neighbors need assistance. We simply want you to understand that this mission is about a different kind of serving. ICDCPR has requested ambassadors and friends to offer support. Repair and rebuild work is an important part of the journey and so, too, is a commitment to building relationships and to learning about life and the church in Puerto Rico. Those who are able to make the trip can return and share the story with others. The relationships that you form and carry home with you, along with the stories of your experience and the things you learn and do, will shape you and your faith community. As you travel, it’s important to be open to what God is doing in your life and the lives of those you meet along the way. Be open to receiving that blessing, and the blessings offered by the new friends you will make. Don’t expect to be the hero in anyone’s story; instead, be open to the ways that your stories intersect and move forward in new ways because of your meeting.

The ICDCPR is committed to helping the people of Puerto Rico recover while strengthening their networks and preparing their people for the next disaster. Disciples are invited to work with Discípulos in support of their recovery as they seek partners who will come as pilgrims, ambassadors, and friends. Thank you for responding to that invitation.

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What You Need to Know

At its core, mission is about sending. Most of the time, the places to which and the people to whom we are sent are not exactly like us. This is a good thing! Being in a place that is too familiar or with people with whom we are too comfortable makes it difficult for us to truly open ourselves to new experiences of the Spirit. At the same time, the greater the differences, the greater the risk for our shutting down and shutting out what God is doing, or trying to do, in our lives. Preparing for any trip is important, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The better prepared we are for the differences we can expect, the more easily we'll be able to handle the things we don't expect.

Culture

For most participants, a mission pilgrimage in Puerto Rico will feel significantly different from day to day experiences at home. Key cultural distinctions will mark those differences. For example, the dominant culture in the mainland United States is time and task oriented, or monochronic: time is linear; events are scheduled one at a time; and productivity is measured largely by how many tasks are accomplished over a set period of time. Most Latin American communities, including Puerto Rico, are relationship oriented and hold a polychronic view of time: events can happen simultaneously or overlap each other; there is more room for spontaneity and change to a schedule (which was likely never intended as a hard and fast rule in the first place); and being present with colleagues is an important element of any task (in other words, being is valued over doing). This is exactly the kind of difference that can frustrate those on a mission trip who are focused on completing a project and don't understand the longer-than-necessary meal times or frequent stops at the homes of persons who are involved in their assigned project. Of course, as ambassadors on a mission pilgrimage who are relationship focused, you'll be better prepared to navigate the time for being with others and the time for doing with them.

Over the course of your journey, you'll experience differences in food, language, music, and more. The better prepared you are, the more you'll learn not just to anticipate but to appreciate the differences. Resist the impulse to judge those differences; instead, open yourself to the new experience. At the same time, don't over-generalize the differences that you encounter ("This is just like back home," or "They remind me so much of my family."). While recognizing the common humanity that binds us across cultural differences is important, minimizing the differences diminishes the qualities that make our communities unique. It may also prevent us from recognizing the opportunity to learn from another, to establish healthy relationships, and to enrich our worldview. Finally, know your limits: it's important to recognize when the differences have become too much and you need to retreat to something familiar. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, step back and recover your bearings. Read news from home, touch base with a friend or family member, or simply check in with someone you are journeying with and share how you are feeling. Then, get ready to fully invest in being present again.

To help with cultural preparations, you're receiving a separate packet of information that contains information about Puerto Rico and our ministry partners, a suggested reading list on a broad variety of subjects, some basic Spanish words and phrases, and another resource that provides more information about the people of Puerto Rico and their history, culture, and society. As you review these documents, make notes of subjects you'd like to learn more about or questions that you want to answer.

Logistics

Discípulos were active across the island in early relief and response efforts. Their long-term recovery work will focus in the municipalities of Toa Baja and Bayamon on the northern part of Puerto Rico, Humacao on the east, and Ciales in the middle of the island. **Housing** for groups (as of late 2018) will be at Campamento Morton, ICDCPR's church camp. The camp has beds and showers; bedding and towels will be provided. **Meals** will also be provided while staying at and working from camp. Please ensure that any dietary needs and restrictions are communicated to José Molina, Program Director, in advance of your trip so that meals can be planned accordingly. Meals during travel and any time off during your trip will be on your own. If your group would like to plan some time on your own, please communicate with José. It's important to work out these logistics in advance, both for transportation purposes and so they know what meal(s) not to prepare for your group. You are responsible for your own travel to and from Puerto Rico. Flights should be made through the airport in San Juan (airport code SJU). Be sure to also communicate with José regarding your arrival and departure specifics. José will be arranging your ground transportation so it is very important he has these details.

Transportation will be arranged for airport pick up to take you to the Camp, and then back and forth to work sites each day. If you need other arrangements, and to plan some down time, please communicate with José ahead of your trip. José can advise what works within the anticipated schedule.

Work will be on hurricane affected homes. Details will vary, depending on the status of ongoing projects. Throughout the recovery, there will be both exterior work (for example, roofing and installing windows and doors) and interior work (for example, framing or finishing work, flooring, and painting). Tools will be available on site. Your construction coordinator is unlikely to know specifics about what projects you will support until a week or two prior to your arrival.

With general questions about your trip, please follow up with Josh Baird, Disciples Volunteering: jbaird@dhm.disciples.org and 985-778-6915

To coordinate specifics for your group, please be in touch with José Molina, Program Director: ijmolina.resto@gmail.com and 787-403-2611

A **map** of the island with markers for the airport, Campamento Morton, the Central Office, and the four communities where ICDCPR is currently focusing recovery work can be viewed here:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1C4wIRFeH3jgYdyYZUVaeGQUbWFtQ7iFr&usp=sharing>

Values & Best Practices for Mission

- Know what a Mission Pilgrimage is.
 - Ultimately, it's a journey of faith on which you tend to your relationship with God and are attentive to what God is doing in your life. How is God challenging you, stretching you? What is the Spirit revealing to you? What responsibility do you have to share that with others?
 - Of course, you could do this faith work alone and at home, but a pilgrimage also requires being open to new people, new cultures, and new experiences (the journey!) in a way that probably will feel uncomfortable or challenging at times. These feelings are a good indicator that your life is being changed.
 - It's practicing love of neighbor by being present with others – traveling companions and those you meet along the way.
 - It's making and deepening healthy relationships marked by mutuality and reciprocity - giving and receiving gifts such as hospitality, time, knowledge, wisdom, skills, and resources.
- Know what a Mission Pilgrimage is not.
 - It's not about you. (Repeat as needed: "It's not about me. It's not about me.")
 - It's not about what you are going to do (and you'll likely do good things).
 - It's not about giving back or how much you can give away (no matter how much you give away).
 - It's not about the warm fuzzy feeling you're inevitably going to get.
- Make time to prepare.
 - Learn about the people you are going to be with and the place where you will be.
 - Learn some basic skills if it will be helpful for the work you will be doing.
 - If the common language is not one you are familiar with, learn what you can ahead of time, even if only rudimentary phrases; on the journey, pay attention – you'll be surprised what you can pick up from others.
 - If there is a plan or agenda, learn it. Prepare for it. Execute it as a member of a team. Be prepared to abandon it when appropriate. Good preparation makes it easier to be open to spontaneous, Spirit-led moments which may take you and your team away from what you think you're supposed to be doing. The most important moments on many pilgrim journeys are the most unexpected.
- Be intentional about the things you carry.
 - Pack lightly, taking only what is necessary.
 - Leave distractions at home – in their place, take curiosity and attentiveness.
 - Leave expectations at home – be open to the journey.
 - Leave biases at home – take an open mind and a commitment to get to know the people on your journey without preconceived judgements.
- Wherever you go, be a gracious guest.
 - Remember that you represent a lot more than yourself. You are a representative of your community and your church, possibly even *the church*.
 - Fair and unfair, people will make generalizations based on how they experience you.
 - They may also already have prejudices or biases which you can help alleviate. The "ugly American"? The "self-serving Christian"? These are stereotypes that, unfortunately, exist for a reason. Your presence and your actions can reinforce those stereotypes - or give people reason to reconsider and maybe even reject them.

- Honor your guides, hosts, and local leaders. It takes more work than you know to receive a group of mission pilgrims.
 - Be gracious. Express gratitude.
 - Trust your hosts and guides and heed their instructions.
 - When in doubt, ask for help.
 - Never give money or other gifts without asking a host or guide first. Your kind gesture (big or small) could be an insult to a host, an invitation to a thief, or a further complication to a problem you think you are solving.
 - Always tell a leader before separating from your group. Never wander alone.
- Expect that the journey doesn't end when you return home.
 - Commit to maintaining relationships you develop.
 - If you identify specific needs or justice issues on your journey, become a supporter and an advocate. Don't let the change end with you: speak out, write letters, make phone calls.
 - Most importantly, share your story with others. In this way, you extend the impact of your journey and honor those you meet.

Global Ministries Giving Guidelines for International Travelers

***modified for disaster recovery**

There is a good chance that people will ask you to help them out. Truly, the need is great and the resources are scarce. And in a community recovering from a significant natural disaster, the needs are obvious and everywhere. Pre-existing challenges with infrastructure and the economy hampered the recovery and continue to impede progress. Even if you are not asked directly for help, you might feel compelled to give more. If you are asked to provide financial assistance and/or are moved to help out in a particular situation you encounter, please think first about these things...

❖ **Be aware that as a guest in a host church you are the receiver, not the bearer, of gifts.**

Learn to accept the hospitality and friendship of your host graciously. Be open to the many gifts they offer you, such as their insight to the Christian faith, their strength in adversity, their joy in living. Your willingness to receive what they have to offer you is the highest compliment you can pay them.

❖ **No matter how great the need may appear to be, do not let the impulse of the moment prompt you to offer assistance.**

Your visit is not meant to be an occasion for establishing direct financial links between you or your group and a local individual, institution, or congregation. Week of Compassion, Global Ministries, and Disciples Volunteering are working with our partners at Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo); we have established healthy and helpful means of sharing resources. What we from the U.S. mainland may intend as a spontaneous expression of generosity on our part - we who have so much - may be demeaning to those who do not have our abundance.

❖ **Respond courteously without making a commitment at any time.**

Do not promise something you cannot deliver, then or in the future, to get out of an embarrassing situation. The person making the request probably does not expect an immediate response from you. Furthermore, some conversation about the circumstances prompting the request may be in order with some general expression on your part of understanding and sympathy regarding the need. You may want to say that you would like to talk with some other persons about this (such as your group leader, host church leaders, or a Global Ministries, Week of Compassion, or Disciples Volunteering staff person).

❖ **Always consult with someone who knows the local situation well.**

Visitors must be very careful about selective generosity. A gift to a particular person, group, or congregation can create difficulties for the local church or community leadership. For example, neighbors talk to each other. If your group gives money directly to one family with whom you are working, another family who is also receiving support from the church will likely come to response leaders and ask where their money is. If you pay for furniture, others will want to know when they will get furniture, too.

Moreover, those who request assistance may not be those who most need assistance. Some people are better at, and more willing to request help than others. Partner churches and programs usually know who is in most need in their midst and have priorities for the use of any assistance that may come their way.

Most of all, in a situation where the economy has deteriorated, you might be disempowering the people by solving an immediate problem that is the product of a larger economic problem for which they need to find alternative solutions. You may also unintentionally be promoting a dependency on external assistance.

Once you are home, you may direct ongoing support through any of the connected ministries. As the refugee, resettlement, and disaster mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion is best positioned to work with you to channel any monetary gift you would like to make toward the recovery in Puerto Rico, in such a way as to avoid any hint of disempowerment and/or dependency.

You can direct designated gifts to Week of Compassion, marked "Puerto Rico Hurricane Recovery." For additional information contact Week of Compassion Associate Director, Caroline Hamilton-Arnold.

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Guidelines for Taking Photographs

It is important to remain present in all activities of your journey by paying attention, listening, and participating. Always ask persons for permission before taking their picture. But before you ask, ask yourself: Why do I want to take this picture? Who will I share it with, and why? Do I really need another selfie to show off the good work I'm doing, or the poor people I'm rescuing? (That may not be your intention, but that very often is the message that is being conveyed.) Many tourists rudely take pictures of people and children without asking permission. Remember, you are traveling as a pilgrim and an ambassador. The pictures you take and share with others should be a part of the story you tell about how God is working in your life and through this experience. Yes, that absolutely will include many of the people you meet and work alongside. Just remember, if your story makes you the hero (refer back to the opening letter in this packet), you're telling it wrong.

Consider assigning ONE lead photographer to the group (this person can also maintain the laptop for e-journaling, communicating with your home congregation, and photo documentation) and have a plan for sharing pictures after the journey. Practice particular sensitivity and restraint when photographing children or other vulnerable populations. Refrain from taking photos of children's faces without consent from a parent or guardian.

What to Bring (the basics)

For the Work Site:

- Appropriate Work Clothes
 - *must be covered from shoulders to knees*
 - (some projects may want you to have a pair of pants)
- Solid, Closed Toe Shoes for Working
- Sunblock, Insect Repellent, Rain Gear
- Safety Glasses, Work Gloves, and a Nail Apron

For the Rest of the Time:

- Tennis Shoes / Sandals
- Casual Clothes & Sweatshirt
- Pajamas, Flashlight
- Toiletry Items & Washcloth
- Bible & Devotional material to share
- Journal
- Personal items (cards, games, books) for evenings
- Camera & battery charger / Cell phone & power cords

Forms & Waiver

These are in a separate attachment. Group leaders, please pass out the “Release and Waiver of Liability” and “Contact & Skills Sheet” to your group members prior to your trip. It is suggested to gather the completed forms at least three weeks prior to your trip. Carry the “Release” forms with you as you travel (and remind participants to carry their health insurance cards with them). Also bring with you the “Contact” sheets. However, when you collect those forms, transfer the appropriate information from each participants’ sheet onto the “Mission Team Skills Assessment” (use more than one copy of this page if you have more than 20 people in your group). Communicate those skills assessments to your site contact as early as possible, ideally at least 3 weeks prior to your trip. Also make note of any special dietary needs on the “Contact” forms and share that information with your site contact several weeks prior to your trip.