



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Remembering Hurricane Maria 5 Years Later; Catholic Extension Leading Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico**

Chicago, IL — Five years ago, Hurricanes Maria and Irma devastated Puerto Rico, damaging more than one thousand Catholic Church properties, including Catholic schools, across the island. In early 2020, earthquakes in the southern portion of the island resulted in additional devastation and corresponding recovery needs. On the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Maria, progress has been made, but more must be done to ensure that the Church can continue to be responsive to the island's needs now and in the wake of future disasters.

In response, [Catholic Extension](https://www.catholicextension.org) continues to lead the ongoing recovery efforts with the goal of helping the Catholic Church's six dioceses to provide the Puerto Rican community with the spiritual, educational, and charitable outreach they need, in addition to rebuilding historical Catholic churches.

To date, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved \$95 million in funds toward the repair of Catholic facilities that were damaged by natural disasters. An additional \$50 million has also been approved for "mitigation measures" to build more resilient church structures to withstand future storms. This month, a small but significant milestone has been reached in the Church's recovery. The first 55 project bids to begin repairing churches and schools have gone out with many more to follow.

Throughout the past five years progress has been met with great challenges, including bureaucratic government delays, the crippling COVID-19 pandemic, and worldwide inflation.

"As we reflect on these last five years since Hurricane Maria, we must not forget the suffering of the Puerto Rican people, and we must continue to work in solidarity with them to rebuild their lives and communities. For its part, Catholic Extension will continue to accompany the Church in Puerto Rico through this arduous process," said Fr. Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension.

Recovery for this community will have an impact on the entire island for generations to come. The Church's nearly \$400 million-dollar recovery program will not only create jobs but also create a resiliently-built Catholic infrastructure, allowing increased spiritual and charitable care on an island where nearly 45% of the people live below poverty. The Catholic Church's fortified buildings will provide increased shelter and safety to save lives during any future disasters.

To learn more about Catholic Extension's recovery program and ways to support the ongoing Puerto Rico recovery efforts, please visit [catholicextension.org/puertorico](https://catholicextension.org/puertorico).

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**About Catholic Extension:** Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension works in solidarity with people to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities among the poor and in America's poorest regions. For more information visit [www.catholicextension.org](https://www.catholicextension.org); follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/catholicextension](https://facebook.com/catholicextension) or on Twitter at [@CathExtension](https://twitter.com/CathExtension).

**Addendum to the press release regarding Hurricane Fiona, current as of 9/19/22**

Today, Catholic Extension has been in touch with our on-island disaster recovery team and our diocesan contacts across the island, to understand the impact of Hurricane Fiona in Puerto Rico. The situation is still developing.

Should the President make a major disaster declaration that authorizes funding, our recovery team will work with FEMA to identify damage to Catholic properties caused by Hurricane Fiona that may be eligible for repair funding under its Public Assistance (PA) program. If FEMA had previously awarded funding to repair damaged Church facilities from Hurricane Maria or the earthquakes, but repairs are unfinished, then we will work within FEMA's process to identify new damages and fund additional repairs.

This latest storm only highlights the urgency and necessity of Catholic Extension's recovery efforts to build a more resilient Puerto Rican Church that can help shelter, serve, and comfort the poor and vulnerable during future natural disasters