

Update after Hurricane Maria (from Sister Nilda)

Sr. Iris has been in Nagua since Wednesday before hurricane Maria arrived in the DR. Today, Sunday, Isabel left with several others toward Nagua and they had to turn back at the toll booth because everything is covered with water, there is no way through on the highway. Isabel says that everything looks like an ocean. All the rice fields are under water. You can't use the highway to get from Monte Plata to Santo Domingo because there is a river before the first toll booth and it has overflowed its banks so much that the only way is by boat. And that's even though we were lucky, because the hurricane did almost nothing in Monte Plata, it was more to the North. I don't know when the sisters will be able to get back.

On another track, I am worried because as of today I haven't been able to contact my family, because almost all of Puerto Rico is without electric power and there are few working cell phones, even though the news from Ponce, on the South of the Island, where the majority of my family is, it seems that they had no deaths. Today, the governor (president) of Puerto Rico continued the curfew which is now indefinite because the waters are not receding. There are three dams in various parts of the island with very high water levels and some have broken, they have been evacuating many families. I am seeing on the latest news that they think they might have to take out all the inhabitants of three towns, including the city of Ponce where my family lives, because they are afraid that the dam will break. Everything is uncertain. We can only hope, trust in the Lord and keep our faith and our calm. God will have the last word. He knows the why of this situation.

Pray for us and we will do the same for you.

Update after Hurricane Irma

Thank you all for asking about the effects of the hurricane in Monte Plata. We talked to Sr. Nilda and are happy to report that the storm path was so far north of the island that our sister parish was not affected. Up in Nagua, where the women's college residence is, there was more rain and a storm surge that came inland. Many of the poor and flimsy houses were destroyed. The dorm itself is on a hill and very solid, and was not affected. This is good piece of news after a string of bad luck for the dauntless team of Missionary Sisters of Jesus:

1. This summer there was a break-in at the Portal de Belén school. The authorities have the night watchman in custody, but hearings have been postponed and nothing has been done.
2. Sr. Iris has been extremely busy with the opening of the new school year, following the legal case regarding the break-in, and mobilizing parental demands for action.
3. Someone stole Sr. Ysabel's motorcycle, and she has been unable to recover anything. A suspect is now in custody ("everyone knows who did it"), but for other crimes. There is no proof that he had anything to do with the motorcycle, so there is no chance of redress yet.
4. Sr. Teresa is still having continuing reactions to her case of shingles from earlier this year. She feels terrible irritation/itching in her face. The sisters have taken her back from Nagua to Monte

Plata to take better care of her. Instead, Aleyri's mother is now staying with the students in Nagua.

5. Finally, Sr. Nilda broke her foot about six weeks ago. She says that she wasn't paying attention and stepped in a pothole in the sidewalk. She twisted the left foot and got a big gash in her right knee when she fell. When the pain did not go away after a day or two, she got it X-rayed and saw that there was a fracture. So she is getting around with the help of a walker for a few more weeks.

Sr. Nilda was laughing by the time she finished telling us so much bad news. Keep them in your prayers, that they maintain their strength and sense of humor.

Sr. Iris added this additional information in a second phone call:

1. Some details on the robbery: the amount of money stolen from the Portal this summer was USD 4,200. A lot of that was money sent by St. Catherine's. Sr. Iris had already put other money in the bank for safekeeping, but this amount was set aside to finish paying for some home repairs that St. Catherine financed years ago as part of our 10 years/10 families donation from the 200 Club. Another part of this was money that the mothers of the Portal had collected to buy their kids gym/sports clothes.
2. The Portal de Belén School now has a new English teacher sent by the Ministry of Education. She is the sister of a disabled boy that used to be at the school. Iris says that the family is pretty poor, so this should help them out. The young woman is very new at this, and Sr. Iris says that she might not be very good in English, but they're hoping that she can take advantage of the many beginning English-language books that we have sent in the past.
3. Thanks to donations from St. Catherine's, the school has finished building a roof over the outdoor recess/play court. It's only a roof now, but Sr. Iris is already thinking of how to work with the ground surface to allow the kids to play volleyball, too. I have asked her to send pictures when she gets a chance.