

Houses of Worship on the Island to be Repaired with Nearly \$498 Million from FEMA

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A federal share of about \$275 million corresponds to the Catholic church and its various dioceses on the island

San Juan, Puerto Rico –After the impact of Hurricane Maria, hundreds of churches and houses of worship opened their doors to lend a hand in their communities. People came to these places of worship for food, basic supplies, and even assistance in picking up debris and replacing tin roofs that did not withstand the wind. Amidst the large amount of fallen vegetation and the need for provisions, "the churches are a beacon to encourage people to keep going". This is how Pastor Dalma Pérez of the *Iglesia Cristina Discípulos de Cristo* Río Lajas in Toa Alta described her experience of the first days after the storm hit.

Today, more than 800 houses of worship like this one have funding allocations to repair their damage or have already completed their construction work with the help of about \$498 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), most of it earmarked for permanent reconstruction work. The projects not only include spaces that were damaged by Maria, but also by the 2020 earthquakes. This will help these emblematic entities in every community on the island to continue their social relief work.

"It's important to recognize the significant number of facilities that will be rebuilt and preserved through these funds, some of which have a rich cultural history that dates back hundreds of years. These obligations will help ensure residents can continue to visit their faith-based venues and that they are safe for the congregations who visit them," said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, José Baquero.

According to Víctor Manuel Ramos, pastor of the *Discípulos de Cristo* church in Los Llanos sector, Barrio Ortiz in Toa Alta, one of the great benefits of the FEMA



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funds is that the church can rest assured that it has a fund to repair what was damaged, so they can use more resources to help the community. "That's the way we have done it. As we have finished the repair of the building, now the resources are used to help the community, such as basketball tournaments for children and a social club for the elderly".

This church received an obligation of over \$55,000 to repair the air conditioners, the roof, acoustic ceiling and replace spotlights, fences and lamps. Of these funds, nearly \$3,000 went to mitigation measures to prevent damage in future disasters, such as an anchoring system for air conditioning units.

Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, Director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3), said, "Faith-based facilities are important for social development, as they offer various community support services. The reconstruction of these spaces will give resilience to the infrastructure, which will allow for the continuity of services. Our work team will continue to assist them in the necessary steps to keep these projects on track".

Other houses of worship received obligations to repair walls, windows and doors, administrative offices, kitchens and other components, such as the *Movimiento de Iglesias Unión Cristiana Misionera* located at Barrio Sabana Hoyos in Vega Alta, that received funding for nearly \$91,200, and *Iglesia Metodista de Puerto Rico*, with an allocation of \$96,000 for two of their churches located in San Juan and Caguas.

To date, FEMA has obligated over \$29 billion in Public Assistance funds for roughly 10,500 projects that will support the rebuilding of a more resilient Puerto Rico.

For more information about Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 y recovery.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

