

# FRESH Start

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT CHARLOTTE SDA CHURCH



**"The Lord's loyal kindness never ceases; his compassions never end. They are fresh every morning..." Lam. 3:22,23 NET**

## THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

When we make the decision to praise God, even when our lives are not going the way we want them to, we honor our Lord even more than when we praise Him during easier times. We were all given this opportunity when, on September 28, we were hit by a category 4 hurricane named Ian. For many of us, this was our second hurricane. Yet, praises are being sung and promises claimed as we, together as a church family and community, recover and move forward in trust and faith.

*"I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
And will call upon the name of the Lord."*

*Psalm 116:17 NKJV*

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Editor: Laura Dancek

# KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE

BY BEN SHURTLIFF, SENIOR PASTOR

Years ago, when Tria and I first joined the Port Charlotte SDA Church family, as the associate pastor, we were somewhat surprised by what we found, as we visited with members in those initial “getting to know each other” visits. Inevitably, if the member had lived through Hurricane Charley the family would share their story of how they weathered that memorable storm. We came in 2009 and Charley hit in 2004. Even though five years had passed, the memories of that event were readily recalled by those who lived them. I never imagined that we ourselves would be able to share similar lived experiences, but here we are due to Hurricane Ian.

You may remember the song lyrics from the Carter family from yesteryear, “Keep on the

Sunny Side of Life.” This storm helps us determine what manner of people we choose to be. Are we overwhelmed with the devastation?

Everywhere we look, do we see more and more disfigurement of the trees, shops, homes and places we know and love? Or do we look closer and listen a little longer to witness that while much damage was done, it could have been much worse. Am I the only one surprised that power was restored as soon as it was? With the restoration of power came groceries, gasoline, and many of the things we depend on for life. I realize that some were hit harder than others, but when the wider community comes back to life, those resources and blessings become that much closer to those still in need.





My family has a story now, too. Tria was supposed to start her job the very week Ian made landfall. This would have put her in our travel trailer in a resort in Fort Myers. Her job was delayed and those plans fell through and now are we ever thankful they did! However, at the time we were concerned with the ramifications of her not being able to start that week. As the storm passed over and we witnessed the upheaval experienced by the resort and the hospital Tria would have been staying in and working at, we realized we were very blessed by the delay.

Do you believe the Bible when it states in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" ? With a God watching over us like ours I think we can all confidently sing, "keep on the sunny side of life." Just like before, when we came so many years ago, I am looking forward to sitting in your homes and around your tables one day soon and witness how God's mercy protected you and yours during this incredible storm. May God bless and keep you as, with Him, we rebuild, restore, and refocus on what is most important at this time.



# Praising God Through a Storm



Former members, Mark Hanson and Elvin Krueger drove from TN to deliver generators and lend a hand.

## *Don and Betty Pierson*

We live in a Vel Gardens condo in Port Charlotte. The Cultural Center is next to us and was badly damaged. We are two blocks from Fawcett Hospital where the roof over the ICU blew off. All the condos around us were seriously damaged. Our condo buildings were built like a fortress and sustained only minor damage. Our condo sustained only a slit in one screen. Esther Ryan was with us. We prayed and left it all in God's hands. We don't feel that we had more faith than others who had more dramatic rescue stories. God no doubt recognized that we were not able to handle that much trauma at our stage in life and we are grateful for His blessings.

It is said that every cloud has a silver lining. A hurricane has countless clouds, and we have countless silver linings, or blessings that have come along with them.

Thank you to those who were willing to share their hurricane stories, and their praises, with our church family via the newsletter. Even though more and more of us are worshipping together on Sabbath, it is still difficult to catch up with everyone.

May God continue to bless each and every one of us as we serve Him and seek His will through the storms of life.



## Psalm 46:1-3

God is our place of safety. He gives us strength.

He is always there to help us in times of trouble.

The earth may fall apart.

The mountains may fall into the middle of the sea.

But we will not be afraid. The waters of the sea may roar and foam.

The mountains may shake when the waters rise.

But we will not be afraid.



*Pastor Art Grayman shared his experience and an uplifting sermon at our first worship service in the school gym.*

## *Sarah and Emmanuel St. Cloud*

Emmanuel, Camille, Luke, Stella and I stayed with my in-laws, my mother and one other family (twelve people in total) to ride out the storm. We were all talking and playing games for most of the day on Wednesday. It was not until after the eye passed over that we started to see leaks in the roof. Then we were just trying to keep things out of the water that was coming in.

We live in section 50 in Port Charlotte. There is damage to the roof and some drywall, but the house is largely in good condition. One of the biggest blessings that we experienced was just the way the community came together and helped with the cleanup removing trees and providing necessary supplies after.

## *Rosina Pascual*

I live in Deep Creek and evacuated to Fort Lauderdale with two of my daughters and son-in-law. We were able to watch all the news from there. I'm thankful we evacuated, and we could watch it rather than be in it. I'm thankful our area was not hit as badly and my home just had some roof and screen damage.

I was totally blessed that I had a home to come back to, and that my daughter took me to her home in Tampa while all the phone, internet and power were out. My other part of the family came to help us get things returned to almost normal. God really blessed me with my safety and a great family.



## *Barb and Wayne Goffin*

We sheltered in place at home with 2 other family members Priscilla and Manny, watching the storm pummel our tree filled yard for nine hours. At hour six or seven we blamed Yogi for a puddle on the floor only to find out the roof was leaking. We had lost a few end cap shingles , our lanai screens, fence, and lots of trees.

Our business did not fare as well. Flying debris severely damaged the roof and intruding water from this ruined ceilings, walls and floors so we have been closed since. Fortunately, construction is under way, and we will hopefully be able to open soon.

God was with us in a special way several times. Once up on the roof as I was trying to tape the gaping holes on the business the day after the storm, I heard a voice asking

what I was doing. Looking around I saw a man on the roof of another building. He turned out to be a roofer and within two days we had our roof covered. Then on a gas run, we crossed over the flooded River Road with water up to the headlights, it was only by the grace of God that we made it through. We heard on the radio two hours later that this bridge washed out and was impassable.

We will be clearing our property for months to come but are very fortunate to have our home and our lives to thank God for.



*Ten days after the hurricane, 125 people gathered for an outdoor praise and worship service.*



## Jessie Waite-Richards

We live in Port Charlotte and were at home -- myself, husband, granddaughter and sister. It was scary and funny. I never experienced a hurricane that lingered so many hours -- two hours may be the longest before this.

A practice that is done in Jamaica is to go outside to check on neighbors and friends and look at damages (during the passing of the eye). That's exactly what my husband and I did. We went outside to check the exterior damage to the house. We were at the rear of the house, that's where the wind, sounding like a freight train, came next. So here we are hurrying to get back inside only to find out the door was locked! Yes, we got locked out of the house during Hurricane Ian!

My husband had decided on the onset not to cover my sister's window because it was hurricane proof windows. So, he crawled at the side of the house to her window, banging and shouting as my sister is a sound sleeper. She finally awoke, opened the door and let us in. By this time the oak and pine limbs started breaking and flying through the air along with shingles and soffits. We lost our avocado tree and other fruit trees also but thank God our lives were spared.



*A ServPro team of more than 60 workers immediately began to tackle the water intrusion in our church.*



## *Millie and Felix Kelmes*

We live in the Deep Creek neighborhood, north of Punta Gorda. Our feeling while the hurricane was being announced on TV was "It's not going to happen." But just in case, I cooked some meals with things that could potentially go to waste, and Felix bought things we might need, such as batteries, water bottles, some canned food, and bottled drinks. We searched for things that we rarely use in daily life but could possibly need during a storm, such as a portable radio, candles, matches and lighters. We also prayed and asked our friends and relatives to keep us in their prayers.

As the day turned into a very scary, long and anxious night, we could feel God's loving arms wrapped around us. While we could hear, and almost feel, the roaring of the monstrous storm passing over us, God's peace that surpasses all understanding was with us. We were able to go to sleep, and were actually able to sleep soundly for a few hours, although I occasionally opened one eye to make sure we still had a roof.

In the early morning of Thursday we could feel what I suppose Noah and his family felt when they (we) saw the bright sun of that new day. We praised our God. The devastation was incredible, but there was very little damage to our house. Some shingles flew away and some precious fruit trees fell down, but our house, like the house built on the Rock, stood intact. How can such a damaging storm be a blessing to anyone? What an experience and what a blessing it was! Feeling God's presence was very, very real. We love our Lord and give Him all the praise and all the glory.



*Nicci Long shared her testimony and their harrowing experience ' at our first indoor worship service since the storm.*

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## *Susie and Richard Hilton*

I was so so blessed by marrying Richard Hilton four years ago, October 28, 2018. I come from Dallas - Fort Worth area and moved to Florida in 2015. Donnie, Richard's oldest son, lives with us in North Port.

During the time of the hurricane, Rich and I decided we would stay in our home together with Donnie. When the hurricane hit the winds kept picking up. We thought it would never stop but about 8 to 10 hours it finally stopped blowing. During that time we watched our two sheds in the back yard blow away and all the contents were all over the yard.

But not for not one moment did I ever fear that something would happen to us because I asked Jesus to send his angels to protect our home during the hurricane and He did just that!

I am so thankful to be part of this church and the family members. I love each and every one. Rich and I are so thankful for all the prayers that have come from our church family. And we want to thank Pastor Ben. Oh, how thankful I am that we have Pastor Ben! He has called and prayed with me on the phone, he came to hospital, had prayer, and read the Word with me. Pastor Ben went across the street to Shorepoint Hospital and visited Rich and prayed with him. Oh, how our church has been blessed! We all should thank Jesus.



*Mark Miller shared his testimony and his family's experience of sheltering in the church during Hurricane Ian.*

We are home from the hospital. I had arm surgery and had to go back to the hospital again with Covid and had blood clots in my leg and both lungs, and pneumonia. I was very ill and didn't even realize it, that's how much Jesus loves me! Richard had a heart catheter procedure done.

Thank you church family members I love each and everyone of you and if I have nothing else to say in this life but this is the most important thing to say if you have Jesus that's all you need!!!



Psalm 56: 3, 4

When I'm afraid,  
I put my trust in you.  
I trust in God. I praise his word.  
I trust in God. I am not afraid.

## Marianne Mc Carter

We are ok, Thank God! I was going into my bedroom, and had two steps more to go when the ceiling caved in, in front of me. Just two steps and it would have landed on my head: asbestos, shingles, brown dirty water, a real mess. My ANGELS were with me.



*Pastor Ben arrived on the scene right after the hurricane to begin leading and making decisions, as well as delivering supplies to those in need.*

## *Joan and Tom Flynn*

We were fortunate. We had just recently had the trees in the lot thinned out that is just north of us. The hurricane came from the north and we had tree limbs and branches so thick that we could barely get down that side of the house. We experienced no real damage to our house or lanai. Lost some shingles and soffit. God is good all the time!

Joan, Tom and Maxwell—the cat —spent most of our time in the family room. We were watching and listening to what was going on.

Our generator had three leads coming to the house. One went to the refrigerator, another to our third bedroom where we had a window air conditioner. The last lead was for our microwave and cell phones. We actually slept in our own beds.

Psalm 91:11

The Lord will command his  
angels to take good care of you.



*Office manager and head elder, Diane Sedgwick, coordinated the efforts to get help to our members, as well as recovery of the church campus.*

## Susan and Art Brooks

While the storm was raging our son in law, daughter and friend from Punta Gorda evacuated were in our house. We were on a cruise. Pictures were sent and the cleanup began once home. But the same day and Sunday both Art and I were very sick with covid, which lasted about 2 weeks.

## David and Aixa Molina

We live in North Port with our sons, Brandon and Noah. We stayed together at our house during the storm. It felt vulnerable and scary.

We had some roof damage with leaks, the lanai screen was broken, soffit, gutters, a wall with a window and some damaged trees.

God never leaves us, and helps us to go through the storm, no matter how strong, with hope and faith. Some of our neighbors and close living friends helped each other and brought us close to one another.



## Lynne Schmitz

My husband, my mother-in-law and I stayed in our home off of Midway Blvd. during the hurricane.

We have a closet with no outside walls, where we could hibernate. But we also, were taking pictures as the storm progressed. We have double pane windows, therefore, did not put up storm shutters. We listened to a battery operated radio, but it was broadcasting from Clearwater-St.Petersburg area, as we endured the well-over 100-mile an hour winds for hours. They said they were getting 30-mile an hour winds, with gusts up to 60. I'm like "boohoo, come here." They also broadcasted that all calls were similar – "just, make it stop!"

We lost some of the roof. The gables blew out, blowing down a ceiling in the spare bedroom and the garage, and we had water under three doors. We lost the roof to our shed. We cannot complain, and are just grateful the house held up, and we survived.

We had a generator, and were able to save most of our food. We had electricity in six days (only took 3 cold showers) and did not have to wait in line for gas. We siphoned 20 gallons out of our boat. We called insurance on the first thing Thursday morning and the adjuster came on Oct. 13th. We received our claim payment on Oct. 28th. GOD Is so good!



Church volunteers helped unload a delivery of supplies sent by the Florida conference. Photo submitted by Wave Williams.

After the storm, my husband came up with the idea that we could empty out the garage onto our trailer out back. We figured we would need a 15x30 tarp. The next day at the grocery store, there was a clearance rack, with a tarp 16x30 for only \$15. Is GOD good or what?

## *Eunice Hernandez*



*Eunice and her daughter, Eliany.*

My daughter, Eliany, and I live in Deep Creek. During the hurricane we were at my father's house in Port Charlotte, with my father, his wife, my brother, brother's wife's brothers and kids.

I have never seen that kind of hurricane before -- so strong and powerful! I started to pray before and everyone slept well all during the night, thank God. And also thanks to God for the protection and all the blessings.

The place that we rent has roof damage and there's water leaking inside the house in parts of it. Feels like so much humidity that we have a lot of fruit flies inside. We have to move. I'm praying for a place and if is God willing that He'll provide a place that we can afford.

My daughter and I were very blessed asking God to be with us during the storm and after. He helped provide the peace we need during the storm and afterwards. I didn't work in the school for three weeks and He has provided. I didn't have to worry about anything. We're truly blessed -- thank God.





*Harry Selent shared his testimony of praise at our first indoor worship service since the hurricane. NaRissa was on a previously planned vacation in Michigan while the storm sent logs right through her bedroom window and over her bed.*

More miracles keep falling on us! Our barn roof middle aisle was destroyed and we had a lot of stuff under there, and lost a lot due to the water damage. The Army Corp of Engineers came to look at it to tarp it but said they don't do barns. But the engineer just happened to add that the only way they would do it if someone was sleeping in it, and I told them Mark Hanson had slept in it and Rissa was in my home office because her bedroom was destroyed. He said, "Ok then, we will do it." The roofing company that the Army contracts with came to look at it and the first thing he said was "we've been tarping roofs for seven storms/hurricanes and never have we seen them approve a said they would find a way around the rule and help her out. God Provides!!

## Harry and Rachel Selent

barn to be tarped." They are going to put down 70 plywood panels to cover the roof and then tarp it.

Samaritan's Purse came to help with tree removal and was authorized for one tree-but when they saw all the damage, they ended up removing six or seven trees.

You know I was asking God, "Why didn't you impress Mark and Elvin to stay an extra day to help me?" But all things work together for good as Samaritan's Purse had the tractors and big chains saws to do it all "right." So God answered and gave us the best solution for our needs. Praise God!

Then while Samaritan's Purse was working here I was out talking to them and became friends with them. They left me a Billy Graham Study Bible and each one signed the Bible that helped here.

After they left, I saw a post on Facebook from Melissa Walker. She does a lot of work for the homeless in the county and Rachel and I have helped cooked meals for them when she had a big event once or twice a year. She mentioned that she had contacted Samaritan's Purse to help with tree removal, but they refused because the house is in probate from her mother's death and she can't give the authorization to get on the property. I contacted the team leaders from my project to see if they could do something since she helps the homeless so much and they said they would find a way around the rule and help her out. God Provides!!