

SERMON TITLE: "The Tale of Two Roofs: An UMVIM Trip to Puerto Rico"  
SERMON TEXT: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16 (For the kids' sermon, MT 9:1-8; someone also needs to fix roof)  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: November 25, 2018, at First UMC (Reporting about my UMVIM trip)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today, I'm going to show and tell you about my November 2-10<sup>th</sup> mission trip to Puerto Rico. But before I get into the details of that, I want to begin by reflecting on the scripture reading from Ephesians 4. I chose these verses because of some key words that relate well to our experience in Puerto Rico.

Ephesians 4:1 urges us to lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called. As we had our team devotions and reflection times each day, many spoke of how we did, indeed, feel called—for various reasons—to participate in the work there in Puerto Rico.

Ephesians 4:2-3 speaks of humility, patience, love, and unity. Those were all essential traits as the twelve of us on our team worked together with each other, our translator, our foremen, the residents of the houses, and the staff at the church.

Verses four through six indicate that, among Christians, there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, Lord, one faith, and one baptism. That truth was apparent to us as we worshiped with our Puerto Rican Methodist hosts. Even though the service was mostly in Spanish, the unity of our faith came through.

Ephesians 4:11 speaks of different gifts that God gives to us, and those many different gifts were evident and so helpful in our teamwork. Between all of us, we had a great mix of skills: organization, construction, driving, resilience, and Spanish; muscular and helpful; technological, devotional, analytical, and relational.

Ephesians 4:12 speaks of "building up the body of Christ." While our mission team wasn't supposed to be doing any proselytizing, we certainly were doing the work of building. And there was no

doubt that we did this work because we were believers in Jesus Christ working through the Methodist Church.

Several times during our mission week, we heard someone say how amazed they were that we came to Puerto Rico to help them. They knew that we had to buy plane tickets and pay for our room and board—not for a vacation on the beach, but to come and work. They knew that we took time off from our jobs and left behind families and responsibilities to be there. They were so appreciative that we would come to offer them encouragement and assistance, so that—in the words of Ephesians 4:16—the body of Christ could “build itself up in love.”

### **PowerPoint Slides Script**

1—I’ve titled this presentation “A Tale of Two Roofs” because that’s what our project was supposed to be. “UMVIM” stands for “United Methodist Volunteers in Mission.” That’s the standard name for any group of United Methodists that works on an approved UMCOR project. “UMCOR” stands for “United Methodist Committee on Relief.” Our team was the 96<sup>th</sup> UMVIM team to go to Puerto Rico since Hurricane Irma and Maria hit Puerto Rico in September 2017. More teams are scheduled every week through March 2019.

2—If you’re like me, a little geography lesson never hurts. From this slide, you can see where Puerto Rico is. It’s three time zones east of us. Puerto Rico is east of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, and just a little west of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The latitude of Puerto Rico is about the same as Mexico City.

3—We flew in to the capital city of San Juan. While other groups before us had gone out to other parts of the territory, we were the first team to actually do our work in the San Juan metropolitan area.

4—Here’s a picture of our 12-member UMVIM team. We had 5 men and 7 women. We 12 people were from 8 different churches in five different states: Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

5—We stayed at the Methodist Church in the suburb of Los Angeles. The symbol is cut off a little bit, but you can see that it is the same cross and flame that we have. But, in Puerto Rico, the Methodist Church is independent of the *United* Methodist Church. So you can see that the bottom of their symbol has a Puerto Rican flag imposed on a shape of their island.

6—This was our women’s sleeping quarters in an upstairs room of the church. The men’s was smaller, but similar. There were restrooms with showers that were equipped with cold water only.

7—We ate our meals and had group meetings and devotional times in the church’s fellowship hall. Ladies from the church prepared our breakfasts and suppers, and also sent coolers of lunch, snacks, water, and Gatorade for us to take to the worksites.

8—On Sunday morning, we attended adult Sunday school and worship with the congregation. The total time lasted about 3 ½ hours. Our team was warmly welcomed,

9--and the pastor invited me to help serve communion.

**10—Since work didn’t begin until Monday, we had some free time to be tourists.**

11-- The main attraction in San Juan is “Old San Juan” with its U.S. National Park Service historic sites.

12--Here you can see the stone wall that was built by the Spaniards to protect this wonderful port that was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493. “Puerto Rico” means “rich port,” and was so named because the port was excellent for harboring ships, and the large island provided fresh water and a central location for further exploration, extraction of natural resources, and colonization.

13—This is the fortress known as El Morro, from which the Spaniards defended Puerto Rico from the Dutch, the English, and even the Americans--until 1898, when the U.S. won the Spanish-American War and took over Puerto Rico as a territory.

14—Here you can see inside El Morro. The fortress has 6 different levels built at different times and different centuries.

15—Around the outside of El Morro, there’s a walkway along the ocean.

16—We were amazed at the thousands of feral cats we saw along the path. Animal lovers put out big containers of cat food and kitty litter to provide a sanctuary for the cats, which help keep down the rat population in San Juan.

17—The Spanish who populated Puerto Rico were Catholics. So, along with Christopher Columbus, they honored St. John the Baptist. The city of San Juan is named after him.

18—Inside the Cathedral of San Juan we found another bit of history.

19--Do you remember the name Ponce de Leon, the guy who explored Florida, looking for the fountain of youth? Well, the King of Spain appointed him as the first governor of Puerto Rico. His remains are buried under this part of the Cathedral.

20—The current political leaders of Puerto Rico meet in this territorial capitol building. I say “territorial” because, as you may know, Puerto Rico, so far, is only a territory of the U.S. Statehood has often been discussed, and some progress is being made in that direction. If the U.S. Congress would agree, then Puerto Rico would be able to elect and send representatives and senators to Washington, DC., where they could advocate for their people.

**21—We saw these colorful umbrellas hanging over a street in San Juan.**

22—There was a lot of color in the city. You could see brightly painted buildings everywhere.

23—You could also see a lot of blue roofs. The blue tarps you see here were installed by the first waves of emergency relief workers. These blue roofs are why we went to Puerto Rico.

**24—On Monday morning, we received an orientation from Carmen and her staff.**

25—They told us about their Rehace organization, which is “rebuilding communities with hope.”

26—Carmen told us that Rehace has received three grants: 1 from FEMA for \$5 million, and 2 from UMCOR totaling \$20 million. Rehace is currently serving 25 communities on the main island of Puerto Rico and the small island of Vieques. There are about 20,000 houses in Puerto Rico that still need roofs. Carmen and her staff told us about the two houses where we would be working. One was in San Juan. The other was in a community to the west called Toa Baja. Both houses and their families had many needs, but the primary need was a new roof, made out of strong materials that could withstand another hurricane, up to 180 mph. We were told that both houses were made of concrete blocks and were 20’ wide by 30’ deep. Both were two-story houses. Because the roofs were blown off, the families were crowded into the first floor.

**27—Our group was divided into two teams. I was in the team that worked on Isabel’s house. Our Foreman, Josef, is in the middle in the red shirt. On the other side of me is Jose, our translator. I’ll tell you about our project first.**

28—Here’s Isabel’s house, and you can see Isabel in the lower left.

29—When we arrived, this is how the roof looked. The first wave of emergency workers used whatever wood they could nail and screw together to hold up the plastic tarps. It was helpful, but it also leaked. In the mornings, before we could do much else, we had to sweep the rain water out of the upstairs. Downstairs, where Isabel, her son, her pregnant daughter and her daughter’s boyfriend lived, there was also water standing on the floor. Isabel’s family definitely needed a good roof.

30—So, we began the roofing project by tearing off the blue sheeting.

31—There were also some remnants of corrugated metal that had to be removed.

32—Then the old boards had to come out of the house and down the stairs.

33—Here I am with Isabel at the landing

34—where we took the boards and removed the rusty nails or bent them flat so there would be less risk of someone getting hurt.

35—Then we stacked them along the side of Isabel’s house, where there was about three feet from the house to the fence.

36—Over the next days, the pile of debris grew

37—and grew. Isabel said she called the municipal trash department and that they would hopefully come in a couple weeks to take the debris away. But Isabel and her family or other Volunteers in Mission would have to load the scraps onto the trash truck. In the meantime, we were sad to learn that this tall pile was causing even more rainfall to flood into Isabel's ground floor living space.

38—To build a new roof, you need supplies. First came the 20'-30' steel beams, which we had to get off the delivery truck and manually lift up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> story.

39—Isabel's son Steven helped us lift the beams.

40—Here's Foreman Josef guiding the beams into the upstairs.

41—Here are we women, laying the beams in a pile on the floor.

42—Next came the delivery of strong steel roofing sheets.

43—After all that hard work, we needed a rest.

44—With supplies on hand, it was time to begin engineering and building the steel trusses, or at least that's what our foreman thought at first.

45—But then other problems became apparent. Once the final old rotten wood was taken off the tops of the walls,

46—we realized that there wasn't any good surface to set the trusses on. Notice that there's nothing above the windows to hold up the beams.

47—Architectural engineers were consulted, and we came up with a series of ever-evolving new plans, which included taking out the windows.

48—The revised plans required more supplies. A load of 50-pound bags of cement arrived,

49—and we lifted them up the stairs in a chain.

50—There were 33 bags in all.

51—Next came a delivery of sand, dumped into the street. We had to move it up onto the little porch by Isabel's front door.

52—While a few of us were cleaning up the last of the sand, others took a very necessary water break. We drank a lot of water. With 85 degree temperatures and 90 percent humidity, we needed large quantities of liquid to keep us going.

53—Next came a load of gravel. Again we had to shovel it from the street to the front porch. The guy in the green shirt was a big help to us. His name was Larry. He was a part-time Methodist pastor, and worked part-time delivering supplies for Rehace.

54—And then came a load of plywood,

55--which had to be carried up the stairs.

56—To get the tops of the walls ready for the roof, some blocks had to be evened up. Rather than throwing the scrap concrete block pieces into the trash pile, these volunteers broke the cinder blocks into small pieces and dropped the pieces down the holes of the cinderblock walls.

57—We began sawing plywood

58—and rebar--to make forms for concrete pillars. These pillars were placed in the window openings, so there would be strong places to hold up the roof.

59—In the back corner bedroom, some of us worked to mix the concrete. You can see Isabel was helping us stir the sand, gravel, and cement with shovels.

60—We shaped the mixture into a volcano, and then added water.

61—Then the rapid mixing began. (Click again) I called this the “concrete dance.”

62—Buckets of concrete were then poured into the plywood forms.

63—When it was dry enough, we removed the forms from the pillars.

64—Over the next few days, we cut more plywood

65--and began building forms along the top of the front wall

66—and a little bit of the side walls.

67—We also had to build some braces to hold up the concrete at the top of the window openings.

68—That’s what I was working on when we finally had to call it quits on Friday afternoon. We didn’t get anywhere close to putting a roof on Isabel’s house. And we worried throughout the week that we had actually opened up Isabel’s house to the rain even more than it was before. But the work we did was necessary preparation, and we felt good that we made significant progress for the next UMMIM team that would begin working on Monday.

69—Isabel and her family were so thankful for all that we accomplished. Just before we left, Isabel gave us a thank you card, and she brought us some homemade Mangu, which is a food from the Dominican Republic where she was born. Served with salami and onions, the Mangu was made from boiled plantains mashed with butter. It was a gracious and delicious gesture from a very poor, but grateful woman.

70—Then it was time to say “good-bye.”

**71—While my team had been working at Isabel’s house, the other team was working at the home of Manuel, his mother, and their little dog.**

72—Here’s a picture of that team. Their foreman was Gerard.

73—Here’s a picture of Manuel’s house. Again, you can see the blue emergency tarp roof on the second story.

74—This group also had a narrow stairway for carrying up their supplies.

75—Manuel’s house was different from Isabel’s in that his temporary roof was so much better that it was possible to shore it up and work under it for several days. This team had the advantage of blue shade, and the interior didn’t get wet when it rained. The down side was, however, that the blue tarp acted like a sauna in the humidity.

76—Because Manuel’s house was in so much better shape, this team was able to get to the roof quickly. Foreman Gerard and professional engineer-builder Rex were a great team.

77—They figured out how to fabricate a center load beam,

78—which the team later muscled into place.

79—Then they bolted the purlins from the wall to the center beam.

80—Here’s a picture of how they fit the beam at the corner of the house.

81—Here’s a picture of Cathy at work with a Sawzall.

82—Claudine was prying the wood loose,

83—so the guys could then prep

84—and attach a channel to the tops of the walls.

85—After installing the beams, the team was able to begin putting up the galvanized steel roofing.

86—Here’s Cathy working outside.

87—Here someone was installing Ridgeline Cap.

88—When the team had to quit their work, they made sure to make it watertight until the next UMVIM team could arrive to continue the job.

89—Here are some fun pictures the team had eating Dragon Fruit.

90—(Dragon Fruit cut in wedge)

91—(Eating dragon fruit)

92—Here, they're enjoying coconut milk from Manuel's tree.

93—Then it was time to say "good-bye" to Manuel's mother and dog

94—and to celebrate with Manuel how much the team had accomplished.

**95—After our work was finished on Friday afternoon, we were all very tired.**

96—We felt like this.

97—But we also wanted to celebrate. So we went out to a nice restaurant.

98--Foreman Gerard and his wife and Translator Jose and his wife joined us.

99—Some of us ate Mofongo, which is the specialty food of Puerto Rico. Mofongo is made from fried plantain. This one was mine, with chicken on top. Others ate their Mofongo with seafood, beef, or vegetables.

100—On Saturday morning, we cleaned up our bedrooms, packed our bags, and remade the beds for the next team that would be arriving that day.

101—Then we headed to the airport, which was just across the freeway from the church. We all agreed it was a wonderful adventure, and a great opportunity to serve God and the people of Puerto Rico. Many of us would love to go again. **We definitely encourage others to participate in a UMVIM trip if you ever have a chance.**