



In the Eye of the Hurricane

***Living the Rhythm of Natural Disasters in the
Caribbean with Faith, Solidarity, and Hope***

*A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Antilles
Episcopal Conference.*



2025



1. To our beloved sisters and brothers in Christ across the Caribbean, may the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

2. Each year, as the skies darken and the winds rise, our region is reminded of the realities of volcanic eruptions and how global warming has contributed to more powerful hurricanes, larger floods, and wildfires, especially in the Amazonian countries of French Guiana, Suriname, and Guyana.



La Soufriere

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

We prepare for natural disasters, not as distant threats but as familiar, and sometimes devastating, realities. Yet, even as we face these storms, we proclaim with the psalmist: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear...” (Ps 46:1-2).

3. We, the Bishops of the Antilles, write to offer you a message of faith, courage, and hope. As pastors journeying alongside you in this Jubilee Year and growing in the spirit of synodality, we wish to reflect on what these natural rhythms signify for our life as a Church and how we can respond as a people rooted in hope.



Natural disasters and the cry of the poor

4. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, are not just disruptions to Caribbean life, they form a part of our annual cycle of weather events. However, this cycle brings significant challenges, particularly for those in poverty. Families residing in unstable housing or coastal regions endure substantial threats. Following each hurricane, the most vulnerable individuals experience prolonged suffering. Poverty worsens when crops are ruined and food security is threatened, when homes are destroyed, when children cannot return to school, and when the ill have limited access to healthcare. As Pope Francis stated, “The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (Laudato Si’, §48)[1].



5. Creation itself echoes our distress: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now...” (Rom 8:22). In each flooded village, every damaged roof, and every unvoiced grief, God knows the cry of the impoverished: “I have seen the misery of my people ... I have heard them crying ... I know their suffering” (Ex 3:7).

As highlighted in the 2015 AEC Declaration on Climate Change[2]: “Everyone is affected, but it is the poor who feel it the most. This is because the poor have the fewest resources with which to absorb these events and adjust” (§5).

[1]Francis. Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home). 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html#_ftnref14

[2]Antilles Episcopal Conference. AEC Declaration on Climate Change. 2015. <https://aecbishops.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/AEC-Statement-Declaration-on-Climate-Change.pdf>

God with us in the storm

6. Some people view these disasters as divine punishment. We reject this notion. When questioned about a tragic occurrence (Luke 13:1-5), Jesus clarified that suffering does not equate to God's punishment. Instead, suffering invites us to engage in conversion, compassion, and communion. We proclaim a God who journeys alongside us rather than above us: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Christ is present in the shelter during hurricanes, in the neighbour who offers food, and in the hands that assist in rebuilding.

During every disaster, we are encouraged to find a God who does not forsake us but encounters us in the tumult, calling, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39).

7. Our theology should resonate with our experiences. During every disaster, we are encouraged to turn to God who does not forsake us but encounters us in the tumult, calling, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). The Bishops of the Antilles reminded us in 2005: "To thankfully take responsibility for the integrity of creation is an important part of what it means to be made in God's image... We are all in the world not as owners but as tenants and stewards" (*Caring for the Earth – Our Responsibility*, §2)[3].

8. In light of a theology that speaks of God's presence in the turbulence of this annual cycle of weather events, we need to develop a culture of preparedness that counteracts the cultural tendency to make last-minute preparations.

A certain level of readiness should always exist, so there is no last-minute rush to prepare when the hurricane is already bearing down on us. The quality of preparation will influence our recovery following a hurricane.



Floods

Olive Creek, Kurupung bottom, Jawalla, Kamarang, Guyana

A culture of preparation rooted in faith

9. We must develop a Caribbean theology of disaster rooted in our faith, culture, and experience. The storm is not only a crisis; it is also a classroom. It teaches us resilience, compassion, interdependence, and resourcefulness. Like cassava planted after a flood, or nets repaired after a storm, our spirituality must be strong and rooted. But we must go further.

10. We must develop and live an attitude and culture of preparation. This means cultivating habits of readiness and responsibility at every level—home, faith community, school, community, diocese, and region. Preparation is not just about emergency kits. It is about a long-term commitment to spiritual, relational, logistical, and infrastructural readiness to face disasters and minimise the risk together: “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2); “I was hungry and you gave me food.... I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt 25:35).



Hurricane Maria
Dominica

11. Our response must be proactive, not reactive. The quality of our preparation will determine the speed and strength of our recovery. Waiting until the hurricane is already bearing down on us is too late. We need clear protocols, training, supplies, and networks already in place, well before the winds begin to howl. As the COP21 Declaration^[4] urges, we can reduce fossil fuel use, manage natural resources wisely, plant trees, protect forests, and always help before, during, and after disasters.

12. Building this culture of preparation is more important than relying on any relief organisation. It is the work of the community. It is the work of the Church. It must be woven into the fabric of our Caribbean culture and spirituality.

[4] United Nations. The Paris Agreement. 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>

Preparing for Hurricane Season with IsraAID Dominica



The Church as a field hospital of hope

13. Caritas Antilles, Catholic Relief Agencies, civil societies, and other organisations in various dioceses exemplify the Church's mission to serve as Christ's hands and feet. Caritas exemplifies the essence of loving action by utilising trained youth and parish volunteers, implementing safeguarding practices and establishing rapid response systems. We should take inspiration from their example. As Pope Francis stated, "Everything is connected" (*Laudato Si'*, §91). Dioceses are encouraged to:

01

Establish a strong relationship with Caritas Antilles.

02

Train parish-level disaster teams.

03

Educate young people in disaster readiness and leadership.

04

Ensure dignity and safety in all we do.

05

Collaborate with national disaster agencies.



14. The AEC Disaster Fund allows bishops to respond swiftly. It demonstrates our commitment to solidarity, not merely in words but in action. We must strengthen our awareness of solidarity between all the Catholic communities across the region with the view to coming to the assistance of those impacted by a natural disaster. This is spiritual maturity. When the Jerusalem Church faced disaster, St. Paul reminded the Corinthians: "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God can bless you abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Cor 9:6-8).

Hope: The Spirit poured out in us

15. Even in times of brokenness, we hold on to hope: “And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Hope is not wishful thinking. It is grounded in God’s love which fills our hearts. It embodies the strength to support a neighbour, the courage to rebuild, and the faith that God has not forgotten us. As the Bishops stated in 2015, “We are convinced that everyone has a capacity to contribute to overcome climate change and to choose sustainable lifestyles” (*Declaration*, §11). As a Church, we are called to embody a mission of hope.

And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).



What every person can do

16. At least five methods exist for spiritual and practical preparation:



Gather for prayer with your family, parish, religious groups, school communities, and colleagues in the workplace before and throughout hurricane season (Psalm 46; Romans 5).



Create or become a member of your parish's disaster response team.



Prepare an emergency kit containing food, water, medicine, and battery-operated torches and radios.



Look in on elderly or isolated neighbours before, during, and after the disasters.



Support Caritas and aid the Church's relief initiatives.



Contribute to the Bishops' Disaster Fund.

Final blessing: One people, one faith, one hope

17. We do not face these disasters alone but together. We are united as one Body in Christ in our multi-ethnic Caribbean background. Even amid the hurricane's eye, God remains with us. In every effort to rebuild, Christ emerges anew. Let us be a Church that watches, prays, prepares, and serves for: "The Creator does not abandon us... Humanity still possesses the capacity to collaborate in building our common home" (*Laudato Si'*, §13). As the Bishops reminded us in the 2015 Declaration: "Climate change ... represents primarily a spiritual crisis with profound moral consequences. Its repercussions will impact future generations. We owe it to ourselves and those who follow to ACT NOW" (§9).

18. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace (Num 6:24-26).

May Mary, Our Lady, Star of the Caribbean Sea, intercede for us as we embrace the rhythm of a new hurricane season.

***With pastoral love and solidarity,
The Bishops of the
Antilles Episcopal
Conference
July 14, 2025***



Appendix

Practical Guidelines Before and After a Disaster

In times of storm, we seek spiritual readiness but must also act with wisdom and foresight. As Jesus said, “The wise man built his house upon the rock” (Matt 7:24). Preparation is a form of wisdom rooted in love for our families and our communities. Here are practical instructions to help every household in the Caribbean live out a Culture of Preparation.

Before a disaster: Be prepared



1. Prepare your household:
 - Emergency Supplies: Keep a 3-5-day food and water supply (minimum one gallon per person per day).
 - First Aid Kit: Include basic medications, bandages, disinfectants, and any required prescriptions.
 - Secure Documents: Store copies of important documents (IDs, titles, health cards) in waterproof containers or digitally.
 - Flashlights & Batteries: Avoid candles. Use battery-operated torches and radios.



2. Know your safe places:
 - Identify the safest room in your home (e.g. an interior room without windows).
 - Know where your nearest community shelter is and how to get there.
 - Agree on a family meeting point and emergency contact plan in case of separation.



3. Protect your home:
 - Clear gutters and drains before the season begins.
 - Trim trees and secure loose items outside.
 - Install storm shutters or board up windows if a hurricane warning is issued.



4. Prepare your parish:
 - Ensure your parish has a disaster plan and team.
 - Make your church a centre of communication and care.
 - Organise local check-in systems for the elderly and vulnerable.



5. Government Preparation
 - Build more resilient economies
 - Design and execute a common agricultural policy to ensure food availability after disasters.

Appendix

After a disaster: Recover with care



1. Stay safe:

- Do not return to damaged buildings unless declared safe by authorities.
- Be cautious of downed power lines, contaminated water, and floodwaters.
- Listen to official announcements before moving around.



2. Care for one another:

- Check on neighbours, especially the elderly, single parents, or disabled persons.
- Share what you have—water, food, shelter—with those in need.
- Support your parish relief efforts and assist Caritas or local aid groups.



3. Tend to your spiritual health:

- Offer prayers of thanksgiving and lament.
- Gather for Eucharist when safe to do so; it strengthens our hope.
- Keep a journal or prayer reflection to help process grief, loss, or miracles experienced.



4. Rebuild as a community:

- Document damages for insurance or government support.
- Join or form parish-based response teams to assist in cleanup and rebuilding.
- Advocate for better preparedness policies in your local community and diocese.

Remember:

“The wise store up choice food and olive oil, but fools gulp theirs down” (Prov 21:20).

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40).

Preparation is not fear but faith in action. Recovery is not solitary; it is the work of the community. Let us live wisely, act together, and rise again in hope.

*Thank you for
journeying with us.*



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