

AFTER HURRICANE MARIA

My family and I moved to the island of Dominica in the Caribbean in August 2016. We immediately fell in love with the island's beauty, culture, and people. We attended the local branch and learned much from the members there.

On Monday, September 18, 2017, a Category 5 hurricane, Maria, hit our small island. My husband and I watched as homes and vehicles were thrown down the street by the powerful storm. The fury of Hurricane Maria passed directly over the island, and the destruction was devastating. The day after the storm, we walked through the streets and found that the lush and vibrant rainforest of Dominica now looked like a wasteland.

That same morning, we walked to our fellow branch members' homes. Only two homes were unscathed and

livable. Six of the eight member families who lived on the northern side of the island lost everything. Eighty percent of the homes and buildings on Dominica were declared uninhabitable. Despite this tragedy, many families still smiled. When we asked how they were doing, they responded, "We are blessed to be alive."

Because our family heeded the prophet's counsel to be self-reliant, we had food storage. We were able to feed many neighbors, missionaries, and members of our branch. At each meal, we fed an average of 20 people. As we used our food storage to serve and care for those around us, our own burdens felt lighter.

This experience reminded me of Alma and his people, whose "burdens . . . were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that

they could bear up their burdens with ease" (Mosiah 24:15).

Even though we still lived without running water, electricity, and day-to-day comforts, we were strengthened to overcome and to lift others. In the months since Hurricane Maria, I have realized that while it is important to be temporally prepared, we need to be spiritually prepared as well. As we obey and build our testimonies on faith in Jesus Christ, we will have a solid foundation that will not fail when the winds and tempests of life blow around us. ■

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