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4-2018

# Remember . . . and Connect!

Melissa Ponce-Rodas  
*Andrews University*, [ponce@andrews.edu](mailto:ponce@andrews.edu)

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### Recommended Citation

Ponce-Rodas, Melissa, "Remember . . . and Connect!" (2018). *Lake Union Herald*. 785.  
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# Remember . . . and Connect!

After a disaster, many people focus on what they have lost. However, during a recent mental health mission trip to Puerto Rico, we asked people what hurricanes Irma or Maria had given them.



▲ *Melissa Ponce-Rodas*

Their answers varied, but had one common theme — connection! One woman shared how her neighbors used the last of their gasoline to remove the trees blocking the entrance to *her* house. Gas was being rationed, and no one knew when they would get more. Still, they used it for her, not themselves. She says that she will never forget those neighbors and will do anything she can for them. They connected!

Another gentleman spoke of his town of about 2,000 families. Before the hurricanes, most of them did not know each other. After Maria, their town was blocked off from everyone else, and they had to band together to clear a road for FEMA and other help to reach them. After these experiences, they consider each other family. They connected!

When we asked kids what happened after Maria, they spoke about losing stuff, but then added what they gained. “Mom and dad stayed home with us for days.” “Mom played games with us.” “Dad told us stories.” Simple, but profound. The disasters of hurricane Maria and Irma took a lot from the people of Puerto Rico, but the survivors focused on the positive things they gained: time with family, neighbors they met and worked with, a sense of community and belonging. They connected!

As I heard these stories, it was not lost on me that these are all things we often should treasure about the Sabbath — time to reconnect with our heavenly Father, time to spend with our own families, and time to go out into our communities and share with them the Light of

the World. It forced me to think about how my family would remember our Sabbaths together. Would my kids talk about time spent with mom and dad? Would my neighbors talk about my family sharing the Good News with them? Would our extended family and friends say we care and call to see how they are doing?

Honestly, I cannot answer yes to all of these questions. Sometimes I get overwhelmed with my church responsibilities. Sometimes I have worked so hard during the week that I am physically ill by the time the day of rest comes. Some weeks, my husband and I are so busy that we are not even in the same church on Sabbath. While it is important to help others, we need to remember that we must take care of our own homes and families first. It took a hurricane for some of our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico to relearn these lessons. I pray we can learn from them, and connect with others now. I pray we can strengthen our commitments to each other during better times, so that when the harder times come, we have enough connection to withstand the temptations.

May we remember the Sabbath day to set it apart as holy (see Exodus 20:8) as we also remember the importance of our connection to God and to our families first. ■

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*Melissa Ponce-Rodas is an assistant professor of Psychology at Andrews University. She and her husband, Segundo, have twin boys, Samuel and Jonathan. Her research and advocacy revolves around the intersections of religion and domestic violence.*