

Report on disaster relief trip to Dominica – September 2015

On August 27, 2015, Tropical Storm Erika struck Dominica with around 15 inches of rain in just a few hours. According to ABC News, 20 were confirmed dead with 50 still missing as a result of the flooding and landslides. We know two missionaries on the island, one of them sent out of our home church.

We are praising the Lord for a good trip to Dominica then Barbados and back this week (Sep. 9-10). When Pastor Daniels and I were buying the emergency supplies on our list, I thought for sure they wouldn't all be able to go, regardless of whether the consideration was volume or weight. We took around 1,000 pounds of supplies, plus full fuel, the missionary pilot (Dave Spangler), an insurance adjuster, and myself. The insurance adjuster needed to be present to verify the loss and proper disposal of the aircraft.



We also brought some tracts and Christian literature to be included with food donations.



The supplies were entrusted to the Coupes and Challengers, both missionaries in Dominica. We left early Wednesday and arrived 2.5 hours later without incident. During part of the flight near Guadalupe, we had to deal with airspace controlled by French-speaking controllers. We were assigned a controller who spoke English with a very thick accent. We had to ask him to repeat constantly, and all three of us would try to listen intently with our headsets trying to decipher his instructions.

When we landed in Dominica we could see buildings and vehicles in bad shape and fences down all over. Missionary pilot Mike Coupe's plane could be seen in a sorry shape hundreds of feet from where he had tied it down before the storm. There's a river

that runs next to the airport, but it overflowed and instead of making a turn before the runway, the river changed course to flow over the runway and spilled over into the parking ramp and flooded all the airport buildings with several feet of water and debris (see photo of river running alongside runway).

After arrival, we dealt with a custom's official who was rude and unreasonable. He was insisting on a Customs clearance from our point of departure, something we have never heard of when leaving US territory. He was threatening a huge fine for that. It was obvious from the contents of our supplies that it was intended for relief efforts, but he still proceeded to charge \$380 for duty. After the supplies were dealt with, we





proceeded to immigration. All this was taken care of outside, because the buildings were undergoing repairs. Since Dave Spangler was able to list me as crew (I've had a pilot's license since 1994, which I have been able to keep current in recent years), I did not have to fill out immigration paperwork nor pay any tourist visa fees (same for Barbados).

Once we cleared Customs and Immigration, we headed for Mike Coupe's aircraft damaged beyond repair. (I flew in it with Brother Coupe to Haiti last year.) Arrangements had been made to have a dump truck with crane and a backhoe on hand. When we came on the scene, I helped with extracting remaining fuel from the tanks and removing the radios, which the insurance adjuster needed to take with him. Since the fuel tanks were not level, some of the remaining fuel could not be extracted. At one point a small fire started when the wing spar was being cut, but it was quickly put out. Over an inch of mud was found inside each wing. It took a total about three hours before the aircraft was cut up enough to fit on the dump truck in such a way that nothing was sticking out.



After that project was done, we drove about 1.5 hours to where the Coupes live. The roads were drivable in this area, but there were places where landslides left only one lane open. Some places showed little signs of damage, whereas other areas were more affected. It all had to do with where the flood waters formed a path as it headed downhill. Wherever the flood waters made a path (becoming like a raging river), it left a trail of destruction.

When we got to the Coupe's home they had no water service (only a trickle). They took us to a river for a bath where other Dominicans were bathing as well. I had to find some bushes to change into a pair of shorts before getting in the river, and then again to get dressed after getting out.

That evening we went to the service at the church which Mike Coupe pastors. The insurance adjuster—a Catholic—agreed to go with us (please pray for his salvation—his name is Ted). The people at church were very kind. The testimony of a young man that had a leg



amputated after being shot by the police (before he knew the Lord) was a blessing. Dave Spangler preached. There was an impromptu business meeting of sorts after the Bible study to discuss how to best distribute supplies entrusted to the church.

We were not able to see the worst of the disaster because of only being there for just under 24 hours and not having traveled to the areas most affected. Also two weeks had already passed, and the Dominican government seems to be working hard in coordinating cleanup efforts. We heard and saw pictures of a village nearby that was cut off



because of ruined bridges on the only road to and from the village that were impassable. Supplies were being delivered across the river to the villagers through a rope and pulley system.

That night I slept soundly on a mattress on the living room floor. We got up early to load and have breakfast before the 1.5 hour drive back to the airport. The first flight of the day (1.5 hours) was to take Mrs. Coupe to Barbados, where her daughter is expecting twins (the Coupe's first grandchildren). She had many suitcases, some of which were her daughter's belongings. It looked like it would not fit in the plane, but somehow it did.

Mike Coupe flew both legs on the return trip. At the Barbados airport I tried baked marlin for the first time, which they call "steak fish." We flew nonstop from Barbados to Puerto Rico, a little over 3 hours. Missionary Mike Coupe is staying in our home for a few days while he takes care of some business in Puerto Rico and prepares to fly some supplies back to Dominica in the aircraft which Missionary Dave Spangler is leaving in his care.

Please continue to pray for the people of Dominica both for their physical well-being as they recover from the flooding from Tropical Storm Erika and for their spiritual condition as well.

Missionary Calvin George

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