

A man wearing a blue tank top with "SEND Relief" printed on it, safety glasses, and work boots is carrying a large stack of lumber on his shoulders. He is walking outdoors, and another person in a similar blue shirt is visible in the background. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

On the Front Lines in Puerto Rico

Local Churches Partner to Serve Those in Need

God is at work through Southern Baptists on the Island of Enchantment, Puerto Rico. But there is much Gospel work to be done. Puerto Rico is a United States territory in the Caribbean Sea with a population of 3.4 million people. There are currently 51 SBC churches listed as affiliated with the Convención de Iglesias Bautistas del Sur de Puerto Rico, with 20 of the churches and pastors currently planting or replanting, and revitalizing churches.

SBC of Virginia churches have been actively involved in Gospel work through Send Relief and have been partnering with local churches since Hurricane Maria devastated the island in September 2017. Maria changed the landscape of Puerto Rico physically and spiritually. And the door for new Gospel work was opened as well.

In the aftermath of Maria, God called out Felix Cabrera to lead Send Puerto Rico and Jonathan Santiago to lead Send Relief in Puerto Rico. Their leadership and God's power have sustained



church planting efforts and expanded relief efforts. Cabrera also serves as the executive director of Convención de Iglesias Bautistas del Sur de Puerto Rico and pastors Iglesia Bautista Ciudad de Dios in San Juan. Cabrera says that while God is doing great things in Puerto Rico, “There is a great need for more partners to continue growing the work of Christ.”

SBCV of Virginia churches have responded! In May 2021, 11 pastors and leaders from SBCV churches attended a NAMB Catch the Vision Tour in Puerto Rico. This was the latest group in a growing line of SBCV churches finding ways to serve in Puerto Rico.

From the first callout for disaster response after Hurricane Maria, to the continuing Disaster Relief efforts through Send Relief, SBCV churches have been on the front lines in Puerto Rico. This partnership of SBCV churches and local Puerto Rican churches readily respond to earthquakes and even political unrest, and they stand

ready to care for and share the Gospel with those in need.

Some churches like **Sky View Missionary Baptist Church** (Fancy Gap) have sent team after team to serve the people of Puerto Rico. Several churches are partnering directly with church planters for long-term partnerships that include prayer, financial support, and sending teams. **London Bridge Baptist Church** (Virginia Beach), **New Bridge Baptist Church** (Sandston), **Cave Spring Baptist Church** (Roanoke), and **Bethel Baptist Church** (Yorktown) are just a few of the SBCV churches committing to partner with local churches in Puerto Rico.

On this recent trip, Pastor Nathan Cecil of **Fox Hill Baptist Church** (Hampton) was impacted by hearing from each of the church planters who presented. “This is a beautiful place with faithful brothers and sisters serving faithfully all over the island.”

Pastor James Hobson of **Hill City Community Church** (Lynchburg) plans to explore internship opportunities in Puerto Rico in the future. David Patsel of **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church** in Colonial Heights is excited to explore partnerships and meet even more church planters to see where the Lord will lead his church to partner.

SBCV church planter Josh Weatherspoon of **The Way Church** (Glen Allen) feels like partnering in Puerto Rico will not only serve Puerto Rican churches but can strengthen his own. “Sending teams to Puerto Rico can give our church members experience in missions that will also prepare us to go to reach unreached people groups around the world.”

Brad Russell, SBCV’s mobilization strategist, explained, “The goal is to see every one of the 20 current church planters in Puerto Rico have one or more SBCV churches partnering to pray, give,



and send mission teams.” Cabrera is grateful: “We are thankful for Virginia Baptists who are so faithful to encourage pastors, support financially, bring teams, and continually pray for us.”

The work is fruitful, the need is great, and the opportunity is now! Your church can get involved in this Gospel Partnership. Please contact your SBCV Mobilization Team to find out more. ■

RESOURCES:

Your church can get involved in this Gospel Partnership today. For more information contact:



mobilizing@sbcv.org

Explore opportunities in Puerto Rico with Send Relief and begin praying for churches and church planters in Puerto Rico:



tinyurl.com/namb-send-pr



tinyurl.com/sendrelief-puerto-rico

En Español:



cibspuertorico.org

Puerto Rico Southern Baptist Convention Executive Director, Felix Cabrera, and SBCV Mobilization Strategist, Brad Russell, sign new commitment



A Five-Year Partnership Commitment

On May 19, 2021, SBC of Virginia and the **Convención de Iglesias Bautistas del Sur de Puerto Rico** signed a five-year partnership commitment that opens the doors to future exciting opportunities for churches in Virginia and Puerto Rico. The partnership focuses on three areas:

First, meeting needs — SBCV churches will continue to partner through Send Relief to meet immediate Disaster Relief needs and community needs like feeding, construction, and adoption ministries.

Second, strengthening churches — SBCV churches will partner directly with church plants and churches in Puerto Rico to strengthen churches and push forward the mission of Christ in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican churches will also partner with SBC of Virginia churches to support and advance Gospel ministries in Hispanic work around the Commonwealth.

Third, sharing the Gospel — SBCV churches plan to take the Gospel to new places and peoples through missions opportunities.

SBCV and Puerto Rican Baptists are partnering to reach the nations through a partnership with the IMB among North African and Middle Eastern Peoples in Europe and South America and to reach peoples throughout Central and South America together. Utilizing SBCV’s connections and partnerships in Europe and Puerto Rican Baptists’ connections and partnerships in the Americas, churches can mobilize together to strengthen and advance the work of the Gospel among those who have never heard.

SBCV’s mobilization strategist, Brad Russell, believes this partnership will produce great fruit as the Lord leads and provides. Felix Cabrera, executive director of the Puerto Rican convention and leader of Send Puerto Rico, agrees. “A strong Puerto Rican church and a strong Virginia church can serve as a hub to reach places we could never reach alone. We are always stronger together.”