

'Welcome to Carriacou'



On Tuesday 22nd July 2024, Clifton Nedd, the Anglican Alliance's Caribbean facilitator, and Elizabeth Perry, the Anglican Alliance's Programmes Director, visited Carriacou, one of the three islands that make up the state of Grenada, which had been devastated by Hurricane Beryl three weeks previously on July 1st. Clifton lives in Grenada and Elizabeth was in the region for an Agents of Change training. They accompanied the Venerable Michael Marshall, Archdeacon of Grenada, on one of his pastoral visits to Carriacou. Here, Elizabeth gives a personal reflection on their day.

The first thing you notice is the number of people wearing high-visibility vests emblazoned with the logos of relief agencies. Next, it's all the boxes of basic supplies on the jetty. Then, that there are several brand-new generators amongst the items waiting to be ferried over to Carriacou. It is already abundantly clear that this is not an old-normal crossing of locals, tourists and goods but a new-normal crossing of relief supplies and personnel - another day of responding to the disaster wreaked by Hurricane Beryl.

Whatever the weather, the two-hour crossing from the mainland is always rough. An underground volcano, Kick 'em Jenny, churns the water, creating stomach-heaving currents on the outward journey. I spend half of the journey becoming intimately acquainted with the inside of several seasickness bags; I am not alone. Meanwhile, the large TV screens play a continuous loop of adverts for Carriacou's small businesses - cafés, bakeries, an optician - each one looking sunny and happy and thriving. But you already know it won't look like this now.

"Welcome to Carriacou"

The warehouse jauntily welcoming us to Carriacou is badly damaged, its roof splintered. The dock has been transformed into a disaster relief hub. In the adjacent marina, yachts sit awkwardly on top of each other, like toys tossed into an untidy pile by a fractious child.

As you drive away, the scale of the disaster unfolds. Every house, every shop, every street, every school, every business and every space in between is damaged or destroyed. A few have escaped lightly but most are not so fortunate. Many lie in ruins. It's relentless. It's not only the scale that is shocking but also the details: the corrugated iron roofing wrapped around concrete pillars or tangled in the branches of trees; a pair of slippers left neatly in an office which is now without roof or walls.



A closer look

My colleague Clifton and I are visiting Carriacou with the Venerable Michael Marshall, the Archdeacon of Grenada, who has visited regularly in the three weeks since Hurricane Beryl. The principal of Bishop's College, the Anglican secondary school, Mrs Rholda Quamina, is hosting us, generously sharing her time and experiences with us.

Our first stop is **St Francis Anglican Church**. Its doors are blown out, its windows are mostly now jagged shards of glass and its bell lies on the far side of the churchyard, but, overall, the building is relatively intact. The plan is to turn the church into a space offering psychosocial support – providing much-needed help to people traumatised by the disaster impacting everybody here.



Our next stop is at the other, much larger Anglican church on Carriacou, **Christ the King**. It is utterly ruined. The roof lies on the grassy hill beyond the church in improbably large pieces. The enormous forces capable of such a feat also brought down the south wall of the church and took out its other windows. Chunks of concrete and shattered wooden beams are strewn over pews now exposed to the elements; plaster stations of the cross lie broken on the ground (floor no longer feels the right word): Christ falls for the second time.



Between stops, Rholda describes living through the ferocious storm, which arrived as a category 4 hurricane and left as a 5. It had tornado-like qualities, twisting trees up by their roots and sucking the contents out of some people's homes after the 240 km/h winds had taken the roofs. Rholda described the burst of bright sunshine and calm at the eye of the storm, tempting people outside before the deadly far side of the eyewall suddenly hammered the island.

At first sight, **Bishop's College** – our next stop - doesn't look too badly damaged. And there are a few people around, which gives it an air of life. The school has been requisitioned by the government as a secondary shelter for displaced people (especially young people) and as a base for the military. A closer look reveals that there is, in fact, significant damage to this brand-new building. The school only recently reopened after a major refurbishment, making the damage all the more heart breaking.



Our final stop is at the **Anglican rectory**. Despite the extensive damage, the plan is to repair the roof of the extension to make it habitable, so it can be used to provide overnight accommodation to relief workers. This will spare them the daily strain of travel from the mainland, which as well as being an exhausting, seasickness-inducing journey means relief workers can only spend a few short hours on the island before it's time for the return journey. Having accommodation on Carriacou would make a huge difference to their capacity to provide disaster relief. I am in awe of the imagination of the archdeacon to see possibilities and solutions in the midst of so much loss and damage.



As we travel, we make frequent stops as Archdeacon Michael greets people. They are surprisingly upbeat.

"How are you?" he asks one woman.

"Good" she replies.

"Really?!" I think.

Behind her, her house is badly damaged. As she talks with the archdeacon, we learn about some of what she has lived through. She lost her roof to the hurricane; she lost her business to the rain which followed. Exposed to the elements, her stove filled with water, destroying the gas rings on which her livelihood – as a café owner – depended. Had tarpaulins been readily available after the hurricane, her business might have been saved. Her situation exemplifies the importance of community preparedness for disasters, including pre-positioning emergency supplies. "But we are alive" she finishes – a refrain and resilience we have now heard several times.

The distinctive role of the Church

Churches rarely, if ever, get a mention in the news coverage of disasters, but they play a role few others can in times of disaster (or can do, if prepared). Integral parts of their communities, they are there before, during and after the event – present long after the aid agencies and news reporters have left.

Churches frequently respond from their own resources before external help arrives. They know their communities, including where the most vulnerable people are – meaning they can be key connectors between relief efforts and those most in need.

Church – and other faith – leaders tend to command trust; people listen to them, and they can influence people's behaviours. They, and their parishioners, provide spiritual support and psycho-social care, helping people cope with the trauma of a disaster. They offer rituals of lament and comfort. They are a reassuring presence, able to connect people to a bigger story of survival, recovery and hope.

Churches have other assets. Churches are useful buildings providing spaces for shelter or counselling – as is the plan for St Francis Church. Grenada's prime minister has called for churches to be repaired rapidly for this reason. Often, churches have land where containers for pre-positioned supplies, such as tarpaulins and water, can be situated.

Churches across the Anglican Communion are increasingly helping to build the resilience of their communities to disasters and their ability to respond to them, using tools such as the Resilience Course and the Pastors and Disasters toolkit.

The problem of relativity

Carriacou was not the only victim of Hurricane Beryl. Union, in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (visible from Carriacou), suffered similar catastrophic levels of destruction. The mainland of Grenada also suffered significant damage. Roofs were damaged or destroyed, buildings wrecked and livelihoods severely affected. Nutmeg, cocoa and other crops essential to Grenada's economy were devastated (and, ironically, non-commercial trees were less affected). Carriacou is economically dependent on the mainland, so damage to commercial crops there impacts the country's resources to support and rebuild Carriacou.

Compared with Carriacou, the damage was relatively light, in that it was less universal. But that's the problem with comparisons. For the people affected, who have seen their homes damaged or source of income taken by the hurricane, who have seen years of investment, work and care ripped up in a few short hours, it is no less of a catastrophe. A disaster is a disaster; loss is loss; damage is damage. Even if it is not as great as someone else's; even if the focus of attention is elsewhere or has moved on to the next newsworthy event.

At the cocoa processing station in Grenville (on the mainland) I get talking with Nolan, who works there. The farmers who supply their cocoa beans have been affected to varying degrees. Cocoa trees are fairly flexible, he tells me. Once the broken branches are removed the trees will likely recover quite quickly – after a couple of months or so. However, nutmeg trees are more brittle, and many have been destroyed. It takes four years for a new nutmeg tree to start yielding fruit – and you can only replant when all the damaged trees have been removed. He tells me how some farmers have been unable to go back to their fields – partly through the trauma of how much damage has been caused, partly because of their inaccessibility, especially in hilly areas, as there is so much debris blocking the way.



What now? What does the future look like?

We visited Carriacou on 22nd July, three weeks after the hurricane - in that transition period between 'before' and 'after', when the all-encompassing shock and immediate response to the pressing emergency is beginning to give way to the 'what next?' ... to the unknowable future now opening up in all its inescapable difficulty.

One of the striking things about visiting Grenada is the way the spectre of Hurricane Ivan still haunts the island – whether physically, in the buildings that still stand abandoned 20 years later, or in the collective trauma which reveals itself in conversation and public commemoration.

In the centre of St George's, Grenada's capital, information boards about the country's history put it bluntly. One is titled '1994 - 2003: The Calm Before the Storm'; the next, '2004 - 2013: Recovering from the Storm'. As I am reading them, Jimmy strikes up a conversation. We talk about the late queen and Hurricane Beryl. He soon starts telling me about his experience of Hurricane Ivan, staring into the middle distance as he recalls its horrors. I suspect this is how the residents of Carriacou will be in twenty years' time. But then he pulls himself to and says, "But we recovered". Pray God this too will be the experience of all who have lost so much to Hurricane Beryl.



How you can respond

Pray: for all affected; for all helping in the recovery; for the local church.

Give: donate to one of the Anglican agencies who are partnering in a co-ordinated Anglican response.

Act: Grenada is already a highly indebted country and will need to take on additional loans to build back. As the Prime Minister of Grenada, Dickon Mitchell, has said: *"We are no longer prepared to accept that it is ok for us to constantly suffer significant loss and damage arising from climatic events and be expected to borrow and rebuild year after year while the countries that are responsible for creating the situation sit idly by with platitudes and tokenism."* Write to your member of parliament about this injustice, a horribly perfect example of the deep injustices at the heart of the climate emergency and call on them to push for debt cancellation for all indebted small island states on the front-line of the climate emergency.

Prepare: Think about what you can do to help your community prepare for a disaster and build its resilience - its capacity to live through and recover from an emergency. No community is immune to the many manifestations of climate change – including flooding, drought and wildfire. And other emergencies, such as pandemics or civil unrest can arise with little warning. Does your church and community have an emergency response plan? Do you know where the most vulnerable people are? Have key people been checked from a safeguarding point of view so they can be deployed readily in an emergency? Do you know the other faith and community leaders, with whom you will need to interact in an emergency? Are you building relationships and trust with them, so you can work together effectively should a disaster arise? Look at the Resilience Course and Pastors and Disasters toolkit.