News
EarthBeat
Lizvelle Rivera sits in a pickup truck and thanks a Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice volunte

Lizvelle Rivera of Florida thanks a Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice volunteer for the supplies she received Oct. 10, 2022. (CNS photo/Katie Camario, Gulf Coast Catholic)

Katie Camario

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

October 27, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Lizvelle Rivera recalls vividly how Hurricane Ian passed over her home in Fort Myers.

"It was really scary," she said. "I heard crazy sounds. You hear every single shingle come off; every single tree come down. Sounds like a bunch of people running on your roof. But no, it's because everything is being blown off."

The storm passed right over Rivera's home, located a few miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. Once the storm passed, she emerged from her shelter-in-place location and saw the storm's impact.

"Our neighborhood is completely destroyed," she said. "I lost my roof."

Rivera said she also lost her job, which was located on Fort Myers Beach, where many structures were destroyed, and almost all are unsafe to enter.

She is one of the thousands of people being helped by Catholic Charities Diocese of Venice, which has set up several drive-thru emergency supply distribution sites throughout the affected areas.

Michael Vega, the agency's program manager, said the need is so great that there is a line of cars waiting to come through the distribution site before they open each day.

"We took a really bad hit, there's a lot of homes that were lost, some lives were lost, and quite a few people lost their livelihoods," he said. "This is nonstop. The moment the supplies get here they go right out the door, there is someone waiting for it," he told the Gulf Coast Catholic, a news outlet of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

Advertisement

Vega said Catholic Charities started meeting the needs of those affected immediately, causing their stocked food pantry to become bare.

The agency made an urgent request for supplies and assistance to several organizations including Catholic Charities Diocese of St. Petersburg. They began an emergency drive and within a week had enough items to fill a box truck, pickup truck and a van.

"We had no idea how great the response of the supply drive would be and, supplies are still coming in. We are so grateful for such an abundance amount of generosity from those in our community," said Maggie Rogers, executive director of Catholic Charities Diocese of St. Petersburg.

The supplies were transported October 11th, to Vega and his team for immediate distribution.

Rogers said at the time that the area was still without electricity and that staff teams from Catholic Charities were planning to deliver a truck full of supplies each week for as long as necessary.

"People here are very grateful for the fact that the Diocese of St. Petersburg has stepped up and helped us immensely," Vega said, adding that the agency not only brought supplies but volunteers to help out.

Rivera, who was still without power and clean running water in her home, was particularly grateful.

"I came here and now I have supplies for cleaning. I received tarps. I received ice. I received a hot meal and a cold meal. I really appreciate that," she said. "Thank you, Catholic Charities."