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Cyclone Harold destroys school in Vanuatu after our workcamp

In April this year tropical cyclone Harold hit Vanuatu destroying a huge portion of the town of Luganville on the island of Espiritu Santo. This town has played host to multiple workcamps run by study centres based in Australia and New Zealand.

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One of the sites the workcamps focused on was San Michel Technical College. Both the high school and primary school of San Michel were severely damaged during the cyclone. Many roofs were ripped off the classrooms and the dormitories. A large amount of rain and strong winds damaged everything inside. The 400 high school students and the 200 primary school students have been sent home indefinitely until at least some of the school is rebuilt.

A few weeks after the cyclone ripped through one the organisers of the most recent workcamps to Vanuatu spoke with the principal of San Michel, Augustin, and told him we were praying and that we would try to help raise some money to help with the rebuilding process.

In January, before the cyclone hit, a group of 27 volunteers mainly from study centres in Australia repainted

the outside of the local church along with refurbishing classrooms in San Michel Technical College. Some of the classrooms the volunteers worked on were damaged but thankfully only a small portion of the church was affected.

The trip earlier this year didn't get off to a great start as it poured rain for the first few days. It looked like the group would have to give up on the repainting of the outside of the church. The local priest even commented to one of the group leaders that 'this is the type of weather you would expect when a cyclone is about to make landfall'. Little did he or the leader know that cyclone Harold was only a few weeks away.

However after much prayer and a few creative ideas on how to paint in wet weather, the group was able to get the project going again. The sun

then smiled upon the group for the remainder of the trip.

The church being painted by the group was the site for Mass each morning and a time of guided prayer in the evening. It was almost impossible to hear the priest or the person leading the prayer in the first few days because the rain on the corrugated iron roof was extremely loud.

Along with the work the volunteers also had the opportunity to visit some of the most beautiful beaches any of them had ever seen including the world famous Champagne Beach and Million Dollar Point which is a prized venue for snorkelling and scuba diving. Million Dollar Point is the place where the US military famously sunk millions of dollars worth of equipment at the close of the Second World War.

The group managed to successfully paint the entire outside of San Michel church but didn't get to see the classrooms fully refurbished. Some local builders continued to work on the classrooms after the group left.

At the beginning of the trip many of the volunteers didn't know each other but by the end some had become very good friends and have continued to stay in touch especially throughout the coronavirus lockdown and isolation period.

Recently the principal, Augustin, mentioned the good news that none of the students got injured and that despite social distancing and isolation rules due to the coronavirus a few of the locals have started with some of the smaller repairs. Much of the infrastructure on the island of Espiritu Santo was damaged. We are praying now that San Michel Technical School and the island of

Espiritu Santo can receive the emergency relief that they sorely need.

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