

After the superstorm

“We’re there for each other”

By Marilyn Boesch

Those of us in the path of hurricane Sandy stored supplies, water, batteries, and made all possible precautions, not knowing exactly what we might encounter with Monday morning light. Some had to evacuate, many lost power and phone service if not houses and cars. Since Living City offices in Hyde Park, NY were spared, we have tried to contact our friends.

With the presidential election close, it was notable to see politics at least briefly put aside in order to focus on rescue and repair efforts centered on those affected by the hurricane. Also notable was the concrete support that arrived to the Northeastern states from across the U.S.

In lower Manhattan, J.P. reported that they were without power or water. Their car, parked underground in a nearby lot, was completely under water. Manhattan, usually bustling, reminded him of a ghost town. Without cell phones, internet service or heat, J.P. described the situation as being brought back to the essentials of life. All the local stores were closed for days. J.P.’s only link with the outside world was through an old, simple corded phone. He was able to share a few similar phones he found in the attic with neighbors who otherwise would have been completely cut off.

Rose Marie DeMaille reported from Long Island: “Neighbors shared the power from their generator with other neighbors. People say many things about New Yorkers, but when it comes to caring, we’re there for each other.”

This sentiment was repeated by many officials, including New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg: “We will get through the days ahead by doing what we always do in tough times — by standing together, shoulder to shoulder, ready to help a neighbor, comfort a stranger and get the city we love back on its feet.”

Certainly ordinary life has been disrupted and, as we go to press, an amount of uncertainty remains — when, or if, things will return to “normal.” In the meantime, many are reaching out to their neighbors or taking advantage of the forced return to simpler times.

Newscasts have served the public interests, both before the storm, during, and afterwards. The emphasis has been on being prepared, following public officials’ precautions, and on helping one’s neighbor, perhaps an elderly person living on the block. This happened many times. Neighbors visited a 91-year-old man. “I’m O.K.,” he said, “I have a candle.” They brought him food, flashlights and other necessities.

In Manhattan, someone placed their battery-operated radio in their window, facing the street. A small crowd gathered to hear the emergency messages from government officials. Someone noted that it was like the days before TV, with the family gathered around the radio.

In Ocean City, Maryland, widespread damage resulted in mandatory evacuation for much of the city. Before the hurricane hit, Father Stanislaw Esposito reminded his parishioners to love the city officials by following orders so that they would not have to be rescued later. “I also asked each to check on one another.” He wrote, “Many have checked on me as well. A parishioner prepared a ‘storm’ basket with the bare necessities: all food and

things I might need if power went out (as it did). All the goods were useable without a stove. I was particularly touched by this action and felt loved in a very concrete way.”

Many businesses are reaching out to customers and all affected by the storm. Free pizzas were handed out to residents in an area of Manhattan. At least one major bank has set up a dedicated phone line for patrons to get expedited help in the areas of obtaining new loans, restructuring old loans, and any other related services for those affected by Hurricane Sandy.

The superstorm has ripped millions of people away from their usual comfortable existence. More than 100 people have died, yet the total would have been much higher without the massive preparations for the “worst,” which was as serious as officials had predicted. Our hearts and prayers go out to all who are still suffering from this immense natural disaster.

Captions:

Gray skyline. The dark outline of Manhattan in the days following Hurricane Sandy

Just the beginning. Young people of the Focolare went to help empty a family’s house of everything damaged by the storm