

“If a sibling is naked and lacks daily food, and you say to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, eat well,' and do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ... Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.” - James 2:15-16; 4:17

Four thousand six hundred forty-five. They didn't die in Maria's wind. They weren't swept away by waves. Lightning didn't shock them dead. They weren't ripped from life by falling trees and flying debris. Their souls left the island unnoticed, they died behind the scenes, as cameras and promises were leaving, too. In the aftermath. An afterthought. No thought at all.

There are natural disasters: tectonics, eruptions, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, disease, fire. And then there are unnatural disasters: racism, neglect, corruption, victim-blaming, egomaniacal self-congratulation. We were told that sixty-four were killed by nature's violence. Not a whisper about those killed by human indifference.

Those who died after the winds and cameras left—from medical inattention, no power, no food—they didn't count them. They didn't count. Them. Four thousand six hundred forty-five.

A recent study finds that roughly half of us in this country don't know that Puerto Ricans are fellow citizens. It also finds that among those who don't know, support for greater aid for the island registers at 41%. But that number rises to 81% when people learn of our civic kinship.

That's a strong argument for better education. But it begs the question at the heart of the letter of James: Why isn't human kinship enough? Four thousand six hundred forty-five. Count them.

Then, as James would say, do something. Make the uncounted count.

Prayer: Deliver us from the unnatural disaster of indifferent hearts, O God—our leaders', our own. Teach us to count. That everybody counts. *Written by: Mary Luti*

Take Action: To participate in efforts toward Puerto Rico's disaster recovery, consider joining a [volunteer work team](#) or [donating financial support](#). Staff members of the United Church of Christ's Disaster Ministries [visited Puerto Rico this spring](#) to support partner churches and organizations there.