



God's love made known in ongoing struggle to rebuild after Katrina

Help still needed; full recovery may take decades

'Our greatest fear right now is that we will be forgotten. There is still much to be done in helping people rebuild not only their homes but their lives.'

—Leon Philpot, lay minister, Grace Lutheran

Hurricane Katrina unleashed unimaginable damage and suffering in August 2005, but also unleashed something even more awesome—God's healing and restoring power.

The damage suffered directly by ELCA congregations and members in the Gulf Coast region ranged from minimal to complete loss of their facilities, homes, and communities. Some congregations had one or two members lose homes, while others had 40 to 50.

They responded by opening shelters, distributing supplies, operating food and clothing pantries, offering free medical clinics, cleaning and repairing neighborhoods, and hosting thousands of case-workers and volunteers from around the U.S. All this despite lingering utility outages, 18-month waits to return home, housing shortages, rising housing and insurance prices, and lack of medical care.

Bethel Lutheran, Biloxi, Mississippi, for example, has housed and fed approximately 7,000 volunteers from around the U.S. so far. Christus Victor Lutheran, Ocean Springs, Mississippi, at one point, was serving more than 600 volunteer meals daily.

"Now is the time to be the church," said the Rev. Patrick Keen, pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran, New Orleans.

The Rev. Dr. Karnig Kazanjian, pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran, Mobile, Alabama, repeats the encouraging words of a

Buddhist monk who said to a hurricane relief leader, "I am thinking of becoming a Christian, because you are the only people doing anything."

Financial and physical help is still needed. Full recovery is expected to



Toys, buried in debris, are poignant monuments to the joy that once was—and that can be again—by God's help and human hands.

take decades and homeless families increase in number as government support is cut.

"Don't forget us," said the Rev. Terri Stagner Collier, pastor at Christus Victor Lutheran, Ocean Springs, Mississippi. "That is what those who are still displaced tell us."

"Some 19,000 families still live in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers in Mississippi. Coastal cities are removing those living



From acts of nature to acts of God

“Hurricane Katrina was an act of nature. What goes on here is an act of God.” So reads a sign at Bethel Lutheran Church in Biloxi, Mississippi, as the congregation strives to bring healing to its community.

Over the last several years, this country has been hit by acts of nature—floods and drought, winds and fire, tornadoes, and hurricanes. Lutheran Disaster Relief and countless Lutheran volunteers have donated thousands of dollars and thousands of service hours to individuals affected by disasters.

Helping people rebuild their communities and lives transforms cruel acts of nature into loving acts of God.

Congregations in those areas were affected, too. And Mission Partners congregations and individuals have responded providing Prayer, Presence, and Presents to transform acts of nature into acts of God.

Some Mission Partners responded immediately after the disasters, and we thank them. Others continue to provide support for the long-haul, which is also greatly needed, and we thank them. Thank you to all who accompany others during their struggles and don't forget them.

—Marlys Waldo, Director for Mission Resources

Katrina resources for help and hope. . .

- Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has preparedness materials available at www.elca.org/disaster
- St. Paul Lutheran Church (Mobile, Alabama) hosts volunteers for free and offers local relief e-mail updates and disaster preparedness materials developed with Lutheran Disaster Response. *Contact:* KKazan8676@aol
- Sustain your spirit by obtaining the inspirational compact disc, “**Delivered Out of the Storm,**” ISBN 978-6-0002-5183-3, available through Augsburg Fortress at 800.328.4648. The Rev. Patrick Keen (Bethlehem Lutheran, New Orleans) produced the disc with traditional Gospel and reggae styles. “Each song tells of God reaching out with hope, help, and healing for any form of recovery,” said Pr. Keen.

Our Mission The ELCA Mission Partners program establishes reciprocal relationships between congregations of the ELCA so that all partners might become strong centers for mission. These connections include various types of support and may occur within the same synod or across synod boundaries.

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ELCA congregations may reprint this newsletter in part or in its entirety.



Lutheran agencies, congregations rush to the aid of California wildfire victims

Planning underway for long-term spiritual support

Twenty wildfires swept through seven of Southern California's ten counties in October 2007. Some 300,000 people were evacuated—many with 10 minutes notice. More than 2,000 homes and 800 other structures were destroyed—25% of San Diego County burned. Another fire weeks later destroyed 53 more homes and was followed by heavy rains, causing more evacuations. Those in the ELCA Pacifica Synod suffered most directly.

"People felt chaos and helplessness. Their routines were upset and their communities disrupted," said Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) Coordinator Tempie Beaman with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) of the Southwest. "Then people, denominations, and agencies, stepped forward, pulling together to help."

Congregations have sheltered and fed hundreds of people. Clothing and household items are being collected. Congregations in the Southwest California Synod, relatively unaffected directly by the fires, provided Christmas stockings for children made homeless by the fires.

LDR and LSS-Southwest are helping people process Federal Emergency Management Agency and insurance claims. The ELCA also is working with the people of the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches.

The Pacifica Synod, under the leadership of Bishop Murray Finck, has worked through the ELCA and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) to create the Inter-Lutheran Emergency Response Team (I-LERT) to provide post-emergency relief.

"All the money sent to either denomination for fire relief through I-LERT goes to the victims through LDR with full accountability to the

donors," said the Rev. James Jerpseth, pastor at King of Kings Lutheran Church, Oceanside, California. Pr. Jerpseth is dean of the Harvest Conference, hardest hit by the wildfires.

"I-LERT cuts through the red tape and lets people help one another directly and quickly."

Pr. Jerpseth added that coordinating assistance is necessary: "While appreciated, people have dropped off washers and dryers at relief centers for people that won't need them for another year or two because they do not have houses and only one change of clothes."

Planning is underway for congregations to provide long-term spiritual and emotional care. Under consideration is an activity-based support camp—Camp Noah—for kindergarten through sixth graders affected by disasters. The camp would offer a safe environment for young people to express their fears and anxieties while giving them a sense of normalcy.

The Southwest California Synod also will provide supply pastors to the Pacifica Synod in January and February 2008 to enable pastors who have provided crisis ministry for months to take a well-deserved break.

Said Jerpseth, "Plan for the disaster before it happens. Even with a disaster preparedness team and plan, we were amazed at how many things needed to happen at a moment's notice." Beaman adds, "On a personal level, we can plan ahead what we would take with us in an evacuation.

"People want to help right now," added Beaman. "But we really need you for the long-term. I pray that the sense of wanting to help continues." ●

What can YOU do?

Pray

for those still displaced,
for those rebuilding their homes,
for those traumatized,
for those without hope,
for congregations rebuilding their ministries, and
for the caregivers.

Send tangible items only after asking what is really needed. Send new items like those you would want to receive yourself.

Make a financial donation to LDR for individuals/families.

See the "giving" button on www.elca.org/disaster

Contact Tempie Beaman for more information: 520.748.2300

Make a financial donation in the attached envelope for congregations.

Contact the Pacifica Synod for current needs: 714.692.2791

Prepare for the unexpected.

See www.elca.org/disaster



Katrina-response Web sites

myweb.cableone.net/LESM-BETH/index.htm

bethelkat.blogspot.com/

www.campvictor.org/

www.stpaulsmobile.org/Web-Pages/disaster_response.htm

www.peacelutheranslidell.org/

www.elca.org/disaster/

www.ldr.org

Katrina recovery efforts ongoing from page 1

in FEMA trailers or closing down FEMA trailer parks," Pr. Stagner Collier added. "These homeless families are looking to faith-based organizations for help."

Christus Victor operated a Red Cross shelter until October 2005 and housed volunteers until June 2006. Relief efforts then moved offsite to Camp Victor Ministries—a joint ministry of Lutheran Episcopal Services in Mississippi, Lutheran Disaster Response, and Christus Victor that partners with St. John's Episcopal Church (Ocean Springs), Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response, and the Southeastern Synod. So far, 1,500 families have been helped to return home.

Maintaining this level of help exhausts volunteers. Pr. Stagner Collier suggests that congregations "balance congregational and community needs. Move your response offsite if possible and offer consistent congregational programming. The flock needs to be fed to give to others another day."

Volunteers from St. Paul's Lutheran, Mobile, Alabama, meanwhile, transported necessities daily to Grace Lutheran, Long Beach, Mississippi, until relief trucks arrived. St. Paul's also cashed relief checks from around the U.S. and delivered thousands in funds to Grace because banks were closed.

St. Paul's hosted 94 volunteer teams from 24 states, including college students and Presbyterian, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Nazarene, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod groups. ELCA volunteers continue arriving from the Southern New Jersey Mercer Cluster, Western Maryland, North Carolina Men in Mission, and Trinity, Midland, Michigan.

Grace, meanwhile, shared its worship space with displaced Episcopalians and Roman Catholics. Grace also provides space for a caseworker supported in turn by Lutheran Social Services, Episco-

palian, and other Lutheran sponsors. Grace's pastor, the Rev. Barbara Hunter, was homeless herself: "It was a terrible shock, losing our home. There were just a few dishes and a slab left."

ELCA funds have helped congregations like Grace pay their pastors as well as insurance bills that have tripled. Thirty-five congregations nationwide contributed financial gifts and volunteers. Congregations sharing the "Grace" name also were organized to help. So far, Grace has received \$350,000 to help congregation members and the community.

Bethel Lutheran received financial contributions from approximately ten congregations, and from individuals and agencies, including Lutheran Disaster Response, to help the congregation and community. ELCA Mission Builders and volunteers from Wisconsin reshingled the church's roof. Now, Bethel plans to continue helping others through a homeless family network; new classroom, storage, and meeting spaces; and a disaster response team.

"What happens after the volunteers leave?" asks the Rev. Barbara Gibson, Bethel's transitional pastor since the initial disaster response. "We must be in 'Kingdom Mode,' not survival mode."

Bethlehem and community leaders are in "Kingdom Mode," working to eliminate violent crime in New Orleans.

Bethlehem also runs an appliance ministry to provide police officers, firefighters, nurses, and schoolteachers with \$450 toward basic appliances. So far, Bethlehem has provided 200 appliances in a city where 300,000 people lost stoves, refrigerators, washers and dryers.

Pr. Hunter, too, is seeing "Kingdom Mode" in action: "Volunteers return saying, 'We don't care what color the carpeting in our sanctuary is or about the coffee. We need to help people who are suffering.'" ●



Mission Builders



Eagle Pass, Texas

Mission Builders takes on its first ministry center-parsonage project

When it comes to serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mission Builders have built, remodeled, and expanded everything from sanctuaries and church camp cabins to education, fellowship, and multipurpose spaces.

Now, in what is believed to be a first, Mission Builders are building a combined ministry center and parsonage with congregational volunteers at Iglesia Luterana San Lucas (St. Lukes Lutheran Church), Eagle Pass, Texas.

San Lucas members operate a food bank, help educate migrant farm workers, and are supporting a mission congregation in Eagle Pass. The congregation also helped start the Cristo Rey congregation in Piedras Negras, Mexico, through which free medical clinics are provided. All of these congregations serve in very low-income communities.

The Rev. Hector Vasquez serves the San Lucas and Cristo Rey communities, as well as the new mission start. While preparing for his future retirement in 2009 after 40 years of ministry, Pr. Vasquez contemplated the calling of a future pastor—possibly with a family—and realized that “something would have to be done” about the parsonage occupied by he and his wife, Mirtha, for approximately 18 years.

The previous parsonage—while well-maintained and clean—faced a variety of structural issues, including termite damage, water damage, and mold.



The Rev. Dr. Ray Tiemann, bishop of the Southwest Texas Synod (on the ladder), joins Patty Weber and Roy Doell, construction manager, at the Eagle Pass construction site.

Repairing wasn't an option; the house needed to be replaced.

Enter the Southwestern Texas Synod and the ELCA's Mission Investment Fund, which provided \$50,000 each. Add to that the ELCA Mission Builders, who contributed project planning, as well as \$17,000 for labor and incidental costs. The “turn-key” project is scheduled for completion in April 2008, with everything provided except the furniture.

“This project is a perfect example of partnership between the people of San



Mirtha and Pastor Hector Vasquez have served in the Eagle Pass area for approximately 18 years.

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Our Mission

The ELCA Mission Builders are dedicated Christians who work for their Lord, helping congregations, schools, camps, and social ministry organizations of the ELCA build their facilities.

A typical project includes Mission Builders, members of the congregation, and various professionals working side-by-side.

While building structures, Mission Builders also build up the kingdom.

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Eagle Pass volunteers were all smiles, once the structure was all framed out.

First ministry center-parsonage from page 5

Lucas, the synod, ELCA Mission Investment Fund, and Mission Builders," said the Rev. Dr. Ray Tiemann, Southwestern Texas Synod bishop. "We are able to do together what would have been difficult for any one group to do alone."

Mission Builders volunteers from ELCA congregations in Texas, Wisconsin, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Iowa, alongside San Lucas members, are doing everything from adapting construction plans to framing, painting, trimming, and cabinetry. Contractors will do the electrical, plumbing, air conditioning, and metal roofing installation.

"I have been blessed to hammer a few nails myself on the project and would encourage others to do the same," said Bishop Tiemann.

"Yes, Bishop Tiemann worked with us and turned out to be a pretty good carpenter!" said Roy Doell, Mission Builders construction manager.

Doell explained that the new building will have three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths as well as a good-sized fellowship area. A two-car garage with study and outdoor storage building will also be included. Doell and his wife of 47 years, Elaine, have served with Mission Builders since 1999.

The house is being built with cement panel siding, metal roof, tile floors, heat pump, double-paned windows, quality insulation, and wide doors to be low maintenance, energy efficient,

and handicapped-accessible. Additionally, some of the concrete piers supporting the foundation have been sunk ten feet into the ground to prevent foundation damage from shifting soil seen in other buildings on the property.

"I have been a Lutheran for the last 51 years," said Gary McVey, Mission Builders pre-construction manager for this project, "and Lutherans for the most part have taken care of their pastors. I feel good about that." McVey has worked on seven Mission Builders projects and provided pre-construction planning for a number of others since joining Mission Builders in 1998.

Another thing to feel good about is the building of relationships between people.

"We get to see how the local people live and get to know them because we live here, too," said Doell. In this case, the congregation's young people translate for the older congregation members who do not speak English and for the Mission Builders who do not speak Spanish. All share fellowship during a Saturday meal after working together.

"Our congregation is grateful to all of those involved in building the new ministry center-parsonage," said Pr. Vasquez. This project shows that the synod and others have a real commitment to do what they can to make Hispanic ministry work. How can God's mission continue otherwise? ●



Rushford, reeling from blow of August flooding, finds God present

Planning underway for long-term spiritual support

Two months after the narthex addition to Rushford Lutheran Church, Rushford, Minnesota, was dedicated in June 2007, it was flooded, along with the rest of the church property and much of the community.

A story on the addition, constructed by ELCA Mission Builders, was featured in the Spring, 2007 issue of *Mission Partners Focus*.

The original church basement was flooded with 14 inches of sewage, which caused over \$22,000 in damage to the



Members hope to have the church kitchen, shown above in the wake of the flooding, rebuilt by Easter.

new elevator. Much of the building was flooded; the kitchen was a complete loss. The parsonage basement was also flooded with sewage and had to be gutted and rebuilt.

"The flood waters came right through the front doors of the new addition. However," says the Rev. Roger Michaelson, pastor at Rushford Lutheran, "God has been present from the beginning. No lives were lost in the

flood. God has been present in the people who have come from near and far to help us in our recovery."

Some of the ELCA Mission Builders involved in originally constructing the narthex addition returned to help with the recovery work. Outside contractors did much of the rest of the church repairs, while volunteers and contractors shared in completing the parsonage repairs.

The flood also damaged the homes and businesses of approximately 115 Rushford Lutheran families. Many of these families are busy with their own repairs or helping their neighbors. "The people of Rushford have worked hard to get their homes and the community cleaned up," says Pr. Michaelson. "The outside volunteers have been fantastic with their physical labor and contributions of food, household goods, clothing, and building supplies."

Assistance is still needed with building supplies, as well as skilled laborers, such as electricians and plumbers. To offer help, please contact Pastor Roger Michaelson at the church office number 507.864.7152.

Pr. Michaelson remains thankful for God's presence during the recovery: "Wherever the church is present in its various forms through Word and Sacrament; through service organizations such as Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Social Services, and other church organizations; through prayer groups, women's organizations, and Sunday schools; God is present." ●



Narthex addition on far left, after its completion by Mission Builders earlier last year,



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Katrina victims resilient, though suffering...

Prayer Pilgrimage turns congregation 'upside down'

Faith Lutheran Church, Bellaire, Texas, had its priorities turned "upside down" when ten members visited Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans and southern Louisiana during a prayer pilgrimage in March 2007.

The prayer pilgrims prayed, ate, and worshiped with people who continue to suffer but also show resilience after Katrina. The pilgrims went to several churches and neighborhoods—some abandoned. They prayed and reflected on their experiences, journaled, and discussed their observations. Each pilgrim was given a "clinging cross"—carved to be held easily in one's hand—for walking and praying.

"One participant expressed that it humbled her to see the devastation that still remains and to be reminded of what we take for granted," said the Rev. Herb Palmer, pilgrimage leader. "New Orleans' people inspired us. They had so much taken from them, and they could let it go and rebuild."

Faith has been financially supportive to one of the congregations and is planning to share ministry ideas, leadership training, and council retreats with the Lutheran Church of the Galilean in La Place, one of



The pilgrims from Faith Lutheran each received a "Clinging Cross" made from wood that looks as though it was twisted by the wind. The card reads in part, "This cross...is a reminder of the hope you have in Christ Jesus."

the congregations on their pilgrimage.

Meanwhile, Pr. Palmer keeps his clinging cross visible to remind him daily of the people in New Orleans and southern Louisiana. "We began the pilgrimage with prayer and we continue to pray for the people of New Orleans and southern Louisiana." ●