

KATRINA: **FRIENDS,** *Stories of heroism and faith in the midst of a natural disaster* **FAMILY, AND** **FAITH**

Edited by
Fletcher L. Tink
Oliver R. Phillips

Mission Strategy USA/Canada
International Church of the Nazarene
Kansas City, Missouri

Copyright 2005
By Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

ISBN 083-412-2669

Printed in the
United States of America

Cover Design: Nazarene Publishing House

Cover photo credits: © Rick Wilking/Reuters/Corbis;
© Robert McRill/U.S.Navy/Handout/Reuters/Corbis;
© Irvin Thompson/Dallas Morning News/Corbis

All Scripture quotations are from *Holy Bible, Today's New International Version*® (TNIV®). Copyright 2005 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

About the Editors:

Oliver R. Phillips trained and pastored in the Caribbean and in the inner cities of Baltimore and Washington, and has directed Nazarene Compassionate Ministries US/Canada. He now serves as the director of Mission Strategy USA/Canada for the Church of the Nazarene.

Fletcher L. Tink has served as missionary, pastor and educator both in North and South America, and currently teaches urban and compassionate ministries at Nazarene Theological Seminary. He heads up the Bresee Institute for Metro-Ministries.

Additional copies of
Katrina: Friends, Family, and Faith
(ISBN 083-412-2669) may be ordered from
Nazarene Publishing House by calling toll-free
1-800-877-0700. Limited quantities necessitate restricting
orders to 10 complimentary copies per church. However,
electronic copies are available for download free of charge at
<www.missionstrategy.org>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface: Friends, Family, and Faith by Oliver R. Phillips	7
General Superintendents' Statement on Katrina	9
A "Thank You" from Nazarene Compassionate Ministries: Dan Soliday.	11
Introduction: Fletcher L. Tink.	13
A Word from the Chaplain Dwight Jennings	15
Friends:	
Reflections	20
What My Eyes Have Seen Gwen Lambert	21
A Saint in New Orleans Aleta Quinones	23
Day Five at the Hattiesburg Shelter Cheri Herrbolt.	24
The Therapy of Giving John Fischer	26
Extravagant Love Michael J. Christensen.	28
Quick Takes Various Reports	33
Family:	
Reflections	46
Found! Juli Metzger.	48
Both Eyes Open Cheryl.	50

One Happy Ending in a Sea of Loss CNN	53
Family Links Up After Katrina Anita Foster.	54
Katrina Victims' Prayers Answered Paul Huggins.	56
Families and the Storms of Life Joey A. Condon.	60

Faith:

Reflections	66
Nazarene Church Leader Visits Service Elizabeth Holmes	67
Hurricane Katrina Aftermath Creates Huge Demand for Bibles Rhoda Tse/Joe Alvarez	69
Church Gives Record Donation Nazarene News	72
A Concert for God Scott Rainey	73
The Storm of God's Love Gladys Grimaud	75
The End and the Beginning of Something Dean Nelson	86
One Ship of Faith in the Midst of a Storm Joey A. Condon.	91
Return to Ground Zero Jesse Middendorf.	99
Epilogue: Oliver R. Phillips.	103

PREFACE

Katrina: Friends, Family, and Faith

OLIVER R. PHILLIPS

Howard Thurman wisely observed that God never leaves us without a witness in our lives. Much of life seems so haphazard, until our explanations for unfortunate events often ends up as noncommittal or coincidence.

Yet, in the midst of business as usual, things happen that change the entire direction of our lives. Perhaps a chance word heard at a critical moment, an unexpected encounter along the way, an obscure paragraph tucked away in a book, a stray thought out of nowhere that finds a cuddling in the mind and there begins to live and breathe a new fresh way of thinking.

The Katrina disaster brought to the surface repeated evidences of the inescapable presence of an all-caring God, despite the immediate pain, despite the ways by which some affected residents may have previously tried to carve God out of their lives, and despite personal shortcomings. God has found a way to deliver, nurture and rescue us through three indispensable venues: friends, family, and faith.

The word, “coincidence” robs God of sovereign nature. We live in community and the recent hurricane relief efforts demonstrate to us that, in some strange way, there is a divine operation at work that sustains individuals and communities restoring them to health and wholeness in the midst of the chaos of life.

The old gospel song phrased it aptly, "There must be a God, somewhere!" It is this faith that emerges in the lives of the distressed and in the culture of the church. Faith is an indispensable ingredient that fills the vacuum in difficult times.

Family too is indispensable! The following stories show repeatedly how families were reunited. The saying "Blood is thicker than water" became more than a mere homespun colloquialism. In the torrid waters, family members, some of them far away, came to the rescue. Furthermore, in the world that merges desperation and grace, those who were once strangers found new friendships.

Within this little booklet are to be found just a few of the stories of human heroism emboldened by extraordinary evidences of God's grace.

"To those that wait, all things reveal themselves, provided that they have the courage not to deny in the darkness what they have seen in the light!"

GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS' STATEMENT ON KATRINA

The Board of General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene joins in prayer with Nazarenes around the world for the victims of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast of the United States.

Our hearts are broken by the devastation of catastrophic proportions across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Images of cities flattened in rubble or drowning in polluted water, the stranded seeking rescue, the helpless without water, food, and medical attention, and the grieving who lost loved ones to the storm surge are imprinted on our minds forever.

In the midst of widespread need, we are thankful for the response Nazarenes have made. Numerous local congregations and districts sent volunteers and trucks of supplies while Nazarenes in other states welcomed and cared for refugees. Financial contributions continue to come in as well.

Nazarene Disaster Response (NDR) is representing the hearts of Nazarenes everywhere in mobilizing volunteers, collecting donations, and joining with the American Red Cross and other government and nonprofit disaster agencies in providing relief in the most heavily affected areas. Our NDR representatives were early on the scene.

All our district superintendents express their gratitude for the Nazarenes' response to their need: "Thank God we're part of a church family responding so generously."



JERRY D. PORTER, CHAIR
BOARD OF GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS

A “Thank You” from Nazarene Compassionate Ministries

DAN SOLIDAY

I am overwhelmed by the response of the Church of the Nazarene in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The stories contained in this book reveal but a small piece of the loving response in which you all participated. From the small child sacrificing her birthday money, to the selfless volunteer giving months of his time, each contribution has been essential. Together we have invested millions of dollars in the stomachs, roofs, and futures of so many who have lost so much. Your generosity has allowed us to break out from the walls of our churches to reach thousands of God’s children with a tangible expression of Christ’s love.

You have already sent hundreds of teams who joyfully spent weeks shoveling mud from flooded buildings, washing the sheets and towels of rescue workers, and offering a listening ear to whoever needed it. But this is only the beginning. We are committed to strengthening local churches and ensuring that our response to future tragedies will be broader and more effective. Together we will repair homes, rebuild lives and restore communities for years to come.

This loving expression of faith is possible only by

your sacrifice and your obedience to the call of God.
Thank you for caring so much about those who are hurt-
ing and broken.

Grace & Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. J. Smith', written in a cursive style.

INTRODUCTION

FLETCHER L. TINK

Thanksgiving, 2005

It seems as though it has been a year of unmitigated disasters as far flung as the tsunami in Asia, the horrors of famine in Southern Africa, the earthquakes of Pakistan and India and the hurricanes of the Caribbean, Mexico and North America. Is this just a quirk of nature or a demographic reality that more people are located in more vulnerable locations than ever before? Or are these warning shots across the bow of history, reminding us that the prophecies of the Bible describe an increasingly cantankerous natural order that forebodes the end times? We don't know. What we do know is that dangerous times fashion extraordinary "Faith, Hope and Love" mediated by friends, family, and the community of believers.

We have compiled here a small portion of the amazing stories that have been pouring into our offices out of the Katrina/Rita devastation. Some are thoughtful reflections, others are spot narratives, and others are news clippings or e-mails voluntarily submitted. Some represent Nazarene sources, or highlight activities where our denomination is involved. Others grab our attention because they cut into the marrow of life as it is being experienced. We have done minimal editing, to convey the passion and spontaneity of the reports.

What we have done in this publication is to comprise a sacrament of thanksgiving, offered in behalf of our denomination to the thousands of concerned Nazarenes who have risen to the occasion with the largest and most

effective response seen heretofore for a natural disaster. You have offered your intense prayers, your open churches, your material possessions, your financial contributions (at the time of printing over three million dollars have been donated for hurricane relief efforts), along with many tons of donated resources, thousands of hours of volunteer labor, and many homes, apartments and personal space for displaced persons. For that and more, we are eternally grateful.

Much of the story is still to be written. It is being carved out not only in the way in which we “do” church, or prioritize programs; it is also being fashioned in an examination of our “real” values, expressed in new ways of seeing our “Friends, Family and Faith.” Along the way, there are many who, seeing the practical love and commitment of our people, have discovered all three of these “F’s” converging in the life of the Church and, as a result, they have been changed and redeemed.

A WORD FROM THE CHAPLAIN

CHAPLAIN DWIGHT JENNINGS

Many of us who live in the United States and Canada act and behave as if we have no need of anything. We acknowledge faith in God and enjoy our family and friends, but that is about as far as it goes. Often, in all of these relationships, there is little true intimacy or dependence.

We act as if we can manage life by ourselves. And to a large degree we can. The conveniences of the modern world have given us unparalleled self-sufficiency. If we need information, we go to the web. If we need money, we go to the ATM. If we need exercise, we go to the fitness center. If we need food, we either microwave it or drive to a restaurant. If we need entertainment, we watch television, play a computer game, or attend a sporting event.

We are in control of our lives. Life may not always be easy, but it is certainly manageable. Seldom do we have to bother God, family or friends with the day-to-day affairs of our lives. And then, tragedy strikes! Our teenage daughter gets pregnant. Our son becomes addicted to drugs or alcohol. A wage earner loses his or her job. A husband or wife experiences deep and debilitating depression. No problem! There are many solutions. We are in control. Send the pregnant daughter to birth and parenting classes. Send the addicted son to a rehab center for counseling. Secure the services of a “headhunter” who will find a better job than the one that was lost. Take

psychological drugs and make an appointment with a psychologist to treat the depression. Even though life has taken a slight detour, it is still manageable. We don't really need to practice intimacy and dependence with God, family, and friends. We become little potentates who govern fairly well our little kingdoms.

There are, however, a few things over which human beings have no control. Natural disasters are first on that list. Hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes and other calamities leave us totally helpless. The loss of life and the destruction of our material possessions are beyond imagination.

Amid all the destruction and suffering associated with every natural disaster, there often seems to be one positive effect. Namely, people rediscover their need for faith in God, family, and friends. It often comes in the most unlikely ways. Chaplain Jeff Spangler, a Nazarene chaplain stationed with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, relates the following story.

On the night of May 26, 2005, Chief Warrant Officer Matt Lourey was flying his helicopter on a combat mission in Iraq. Ground fire hit his helicopter and brought it down, killing both pilot and copilot instantly. Everyone at Fort Bragg, and especially his wife, Lisa, who was living in Washington, DC, was devastated by the news. Although the news hit Lisa hard, her Army family, in Washington, DC, rallied behind her and gave her support during this time of grief.

Hundreds of miles away, First Lieutenant Alex Loya was scheduled to graduate from the Chaplain Officer's Basic Course at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, on September 2, 2005. In anticipation of this graduation, his family, living in Venice, Louisiana, left their home on

August 27, 2005, to attend the graduation ceremonies. As they pulled out of the driveway, they had no idea that this would be the last time they would ever see their home.

Hurricane Katrina actually touched land in Venice as a Category Five hurricane and swallowed up the entire city, including the Loya home. They lost everything and would have to start the process of rebuilding their lives and accumulating necessary items for day-to-day existence.

When the Loya family arrived at their first duty station, Fort Bragg, after graduation from the Basic Chaplain's Course, word spread quickly of their need. The Army family pitched in to help. Lisa Lourey heard about the plight of the Loya family and offered to donate her husband's household items.

On a rainy afternoon of September 14, 2005, two tragedies came together in an act of compassion and good will. One had lost a loved one and was left with possessions that needed somewhere to go. The other, spared the loss of loved ones, was left with no earthly possessions. Lisa Lourey generously gave her husband's possessions to help another soldier in need, and Chaplain Loya and his family learned firsthand, in their first tour, of the generosity and selflessness of a new friend and the Army family.

In the strangest ways imaginable, tragedy moves us back to the values most important in life. It is friends, family, and faith. Very little else really matters.

FRIENDS



Reflections

It was a meal unlike any other. It was intended to remember the Passover, and anticipate the coming kingdom, but seemed burdened by the ominous reminder by Christ that bad days were ahead. For the disciples this meant impending disaster.

You can read the details in John 14-17. In the midst of the table discussion, Jesus redefines his relationship with his following. “I no longer call you servants . . . Instead I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, two nasty women, lumbered through the Caribbean and Florida doing devastation before again reeling Stateside, smashing down the door of the Gulf Coast. What was upset, was not only people’s lives and residences, but also their way of defining friendship. In some instances, supposed friends copped out, in the interest of personal survival. For others, the habits of comfortable friendships, dictated by place, position or heritage, were radically rearranged. For all of us, a history of benign neglect was revealed, in the realization that, as a culture, we had done a poor job of both being servants and friends.

Issues of poverty can lie languid for generations. But desperation in the midst of disaster forges new permutations of relationships. When someone grabs the last boat or the last car out of town, to safety, no one demands a pedigree of race or social status as the ticket to refuge. And when everybody has nothing, it is so much easier to share indiscriminately. Stereotypes are challenged, new unsuspecting friendships forged.

And into the thick of it come waves of relief workers, offering their services. In their frustration at the magnitude of the problems and the relative pittance of their help, they begin to realize that, more than what they give materially, is a listening ear, an embrace, shared tears of pain, common risks, and . . . costly friendship. Many of them came to serve, many left, as friends.

St. Augustine is reputed to have said, "Every meeting is a divine encounter." The divine appointments of the last month in the Gulf region will never be forgotten, etched into landscapes of disaster, but fronted by faces of care. And again, Augustine added this thought: "Every meeting is an exchange of gifts." Friendship is not a one-way street, but is a transaction of kindness. Perhaps some gave materially, but what they received from desperate people is shown in attitudes of courage, resiliency, improvisation, patience, thankfulness and hope despite long odds. Friendship, on these terms, may just be an open gate to heaven itself.

FLT

What My Eyes Have Seen

GWEN LAMBERT*

So much devastation, destruction, loss.

I look into the eyes of victims and see through to their souls, raw and tired.

I've seen tears of extreme sadness, loss and grief.

The look of fear on their faces is so intense.
I'm here to help but I don't know what to say.
I wish I could give them the comfort they're seeking.
All I can offer is a sincere hug and shared tears.
I see miles of splintered wood that used to be people's homes, neighborhoods and businesses.
Children's toys covered in mud and debris.
People's belongings scattered or piled in their yard, driveway and street.
Before we came, people said "you just can't imagine . . ."

Well, they were right.
I never could have imagined this.
I stare in disbelief.
Pictures and videos are such a futile attempt at showing the destruction.
There is no way to show or explain to those at home what we're seeing.
I feel guilt. I get to leave all this behind and return home.
I don't want to abandon them
I see a glimmer of hope in some.
In others, it is still buried deep.
So many are here to help, from such different walks of life, all working together.
Others will come and continue where we have left off.
It's beautiful . . . what my eyes have seen!
How can I say that?
I've seen God working through the hands and feet of the workers.
I see Him taking care of His children.
I see His light shine in the faces of these brave survivors.

Yes, it's amazingly beautiful . . . what my eyes have seen!

*permission given by the author

A Saint in New Orleans

ALETA QUINONES*

There was a saint in New Orleans during the wrath of Hurricane Katrina and his name is Joe Horn, pro-football player for the New Orleans Saints. As I sat in my room at the Hilton Riverside, New Orleans, on Saturday two days before Katrina was scheduled to directly hit New Orleans, I weeped [sic] while I phoned home to North Carolina, to speak with my mother and my children.

It had been confirmed that my flight was canceled along with that of my husband and 50 others. We all were frantically trying to evacuate. I sobbed as I was told by each rental car company that there were no cars available. I thought I was trapped.

But unbeknownst to me, my mother had placed a call to Joe Horn to see if he could help. I hadn't spoken to him in over 20 years. Joe was a friend of my sister in high school and had always kept in touch with my mother. This wonderful man personally came to pick up my husband and me and arranged for his driver to drive us from New Orleans to Atlanta, Georgia, at his expense, at which point we could fly on to Fayetteville, North Carolina. I'm still amazed at his generosity and I will always be grateful to him. There is truly a saint in New Orleans!! Thank you, Joe Horn. You're my hero.

*an e-mail correspondence to CNN

Day Five at the Hattiesburg Shelter

CHERI HERRBOLDT*

In the 95-degree heat more than 1,000 people stood in line for hours to receive Red Cross assistance for hurricane damage done to their homes. Today some waited as long as 10 hours.

The elderly, the disabled, pregnant women, and mothers and fathers of small children who lost everything—or nearly everything—came to receive assistance of \$365 per person in the household. This assistance is considered immediate care, like a Band-Aid, until FEMA assistance is received. Still, the Red Cross has distributed nearly \$7 million so far.

Today as I worked at a service center 25 miles outside of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Red Cross volunteers served an endless supply of cold juice, water and snacks, and provided children's activities and medical attention to those in need, as well as a listening ear to anyone who wanted to share his or her story.

I sat down next to a young woman with a 2-year-old boy lying in her arms. They had been standing in the hot sun for five hours. After talking awhile, I asked the little boy if he was feeling well. He shook his head no and stuck a finger in his ear. I felt his head and it was quite hot. Thinking he might have an ear infection, I called the doctor over. The doctor checked him out and said to the boy, "Would you like to come inside and get some medicine for your ear?" With the blink of an eye, the lethargic little boy leapt into the doctor's arms. It made my heart melt to see his eagerness to feel better.

While handing out cold water, I spotted a thin eld-

erly woman looking very worn out, sitting on a chair. I asked her how she was feeling and she said, "I'm 92 years old and never stood in line for any handout in my life. I wish I didn't have to do this." I immediately escorted her into the air-conditioned building to get her through the monetary assistance process quickly. While we were inside, she gave me the honor of telling me about herself and her family.

Yesterday I met a man who had one leg due to amputation. He had to stand in line for eight hours to receive his monetary assistance. He was so grateful for the help he received that he came back today to help others who needed assistance, handing out cold water and snacks to adults and children. When I saw him, I yelled out, "Hey, what are you doing here today?" He joyously replied, "I felt so blessed by the assistance I received, I came back to help others today."

After putting in two 12-hour days at this local service center, I'm exhausted and barely have a voice left to talk, but I am working with the most incredible and dedicated volunteers and also meeting people who in the midst of their suffering and loss show great perseverance and strength. I feel very blessed to be here.

Later, four of my team members and I drove from Biloxi to Gulfport to Pass Christian all the way to the Bay of St. Louis bridge. I cannot begin to describe how disturbing and shocking the destruction is. We must have seen at least six or seven large churches that were completely gutted. Houses were crumpled or blown on top of other houses, cars were smashed and blown apart, yards were actually picked up and moved, and thousands of trees were picked up from the roots and thrown into buildings and houses. We saw lawn mowers that were blown onto the beach,

refrigerators in trees, and complete neighborhoods wiped out. The Bay of St. Louis Bridge was actually broken and moved. The roads still had flooding. And the smell of sewage is horrid. Military checkpoints have been established along the road due to dangerous conditions.

The people who survived this storm have incredible stories to tell. I have talked with hundreds of people now, and the fortitude and faith in knowing that God is with them, and the support they've received from family, friends, and other wonderful people, has filled them with hope. Something that I have heard over and over is that the people here are overwhelmed by how much people care. While it has been really difficult for many to receive handouts and aid, they are so grateful for the many kinds of support coming from around the world. It's been amazing to see how generously churches, schools, corporations, and individuals have responded.

Cheri Herrboldt is a Red Cross volunteer chaplain from Hyattsville, Maryland, working in a shelter in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

*Copyright permission granted by Sojourners, Sojo e-mail publication

The Therapy of Giving

JOHN FISCHER*

Who would have thought that our connection through this devotional web page and a hair salon on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi would result in the emotional turnaround of a traumatized sixth grade hurricane victim

in California? But such are the intricate, far-reaching fingers of God.

She teaches sixth grade in southern California and has been reading this devotional blog for the past 9 months, and two weeks ago, when I wrote about a hair salon in Mississippi that was helping return some simple dignity to the women of the Gulf Coast who have lost everything to two hurricanes, she nearly cried.

A new student in her class is a hurricane victim from Mississippi, temporarily relocated in California with relatives while her family tries to figure out what to do without a home or a job. With all that she has endured, this child has become what the teacher called, “selectively mute.” Not only would she not speak, she was completely unresponsive to any form of communication.

“But when I told her the name of the salon, she broke down. She knew the salon, recognized the address, and bit her lip when I said that name of the town. It was her hometown! Then, for the first time, she talked to me at length. She talked about how she missed her home, how her father lost his job painting boats, and how different it is in California. She had a breakthrough in that moment. In a quiet voice, with a sheepish smile, she told me it would be nice to send things to the people she knew there.”

So the class is getting things together to send and, according to her teacher, this young girl has been transformed. “She needed to reach out to others in her time of need, and when she was finally strong enough, she wanted to turn around and give back to those who needed her support.”

It’s amazing how much healing is in the act of giving. It is therapy in itself. Yes, the devastation in these areas is huge and inhumane, but the resulting opportunity to

serve is forcing the church to recover its purpose in serving “outside the walls.” That makes sense. All the walls have been blown down anyway.

*copied with permission from
<http://sharingspirit.aspenbloompets.com>
a publication of the *Purpose Driven Life* Devotional

Extravagant Love: How Jerry Came Home after Hurricane Katrina

BY MICHAEL J. CHRISTENSEN*

On a recent Angel Flight relief mission in Baton Rouge, after delivering 1000 lbs. of requested medicine to the public hospital treating hurricane victims, I was approached by an aviation coordinator on the tarmac with a critical request from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: Since we were flying back home going north on a jet, could we first fly to Houston to pick up a displaced minor found in the Astrodome, whose parent had drowned, and take him to a family member on Rhode Island? We calculated the cost: Houston was about 250 miles from Baton Rouge and would require another hour's time (at the cost of \$2,000/hr. for fuel, maintenance and the two pilots). I asked a few more pertinent questions about the boy's age, role of child protective services, location of family members, and the pilots asked the owners of the plane for permission. Given the opportunity to help a displaced minor get to a new guardian following a disaster, we decided to do it.

After landing in a small private airport in Houston, we entered the lobby and found waiting, a sheriff, a representative of Child Protective Services, a Team Adam consultant of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and two young 13-year-old boys—Cecil and Jerry¹—who were found and identified at the Houston Astrodome shelter. I introduced myself to the boys who were watching television. Cecil was waiting for a volunteer pilot and plane to take him to Baton Rouge to be reunited with his mother. Jerry was waiting for us to take him to his relative's house in RI. They both wanted to see inside the jet. "You mean I get to fly in this?" Jerry asked with excitement. The pilots told him "You bet!" delighted to be of service.

"This is not just a plane," I explained to Jerry. "It's a 9-passenger corporate jet that can fly over 550 MPH! And you and I are the only passengers." Jerry was grinning ear to ear.

The plan was to take him with us to Reading, PA, where another volunteer pilot would meet us and take Jerry to Providence, RI, where his relative would be waiting to take him to his new home with her family.

After signing the necessary paperwork for Child Services, I heard myself say to Jerry: "Listen, we flew all the way here to pick you up and take you all the way to Providence, RI, for one reason: Because you are special!"

On board the plane, buckled in, Jerry asked: "Is it scary when it takes off?" He had never flown before.

"Yes, it's a little scary, but so much fun. See that video screen? It shows a map of where we are and where we're going." Jerry had never been outside of Louisiana and Mississippi, but knew his geography, and was fascinated by the video map and atlas booklets in the rack.

During the 3-hour flight north, complete with snacks and sodas, Jerry's story started to come out in bits and pieces expressed with unspoken emotion:

He had a 15-year-old brother. They found each other at the Astrodome. His brother was invited but decided not to join him at their relative's home. He's going off with a 19-year-old (male) friend to make some money and buy a house. He also had 2 younger sisters who live with "Auntie." Their grandmother died a couple of years ago. "My father and grandmother raised us, and I never knew my mother."

"We made it through the hurricane okay, but when the levees broke, our apartment was flooded. My cousin and I crossed the street in water up to our necks. I stepped in a hole and he had to pull me up. I don't know how to swim."

The reason they waded across the street was to gather whatever food they could find at the closest grocery store. They found some hot dogs and canned goods. Unable to return to their lower level apartment, they climbed up to the roof of the complex. There they were together with about 35 neighbors awaiting rescue. Someone found a barbecue pit and got it up to the roof, and used it to cook the hot dogs. That night, Jerry slept on the roof.

Finally, a helicopter found them and flew them all outside the city. It was the third day after the storm. They waited another day for a bus to come. His father was nowhere to be found, but his brother was with him and his cousin. When the buses came, they all tried to stay together. The buses took everyone to Lafayette, but the transfer buses went on to different shelters and the boys were separated. Jerry ended up alone at the Astrodome. He recognized some kids from

the neighborhood but had no guardian. For nearly two weeks he stayed in the Astrodome among 25,000 evacuees.

“How was it?”

“I couldn’t sleep at night . . . Gotta guard your stuff.”

“What stuff?”

“Red Cross gave me new clothes, a big bag, and \$40 cash!” Delighted, he showed off his trendy urban gear, and two twenty-dollar bills tucked into the socks he was wearing.

“Where did you get your cross?”

“From a lady clown.” Jerry was wearing a white plastic cross around his neck with the words: “Jesus loves me.”

“What did you do all night when you couldn’t sleep?”

“Watch TV.”

“How about during the day?”

“I slept. Sometimes I went to school.” (Buses picked up the kids who wanted to attend school during their stay at the Astrodome.)

“What’s the best part about living in the Astrodome?”

“Got to meet Bill Cosby. Chris Rock. Oprah . . .” (There were other celebs he named that I forgot or didn’t know.)

“Well, you’re going to a new home now. Are you anxious?”

“I’m tired. Going to sleep all day tomorrow.”

“You can sleep on the plane now if you want.”

“I can’t.”

We walked up the aisle toward the cockpit, and the pilots explained all the gadgets, offered us sodas and chocolates, and made us coffee.

“You drink coffee, Jerry?”

“Yeah.”

“Really? At 13?”

“Yeah.”

“How many creams and sugars you want?” I watched him pour into his coffee cup, 2 creamers and 7 bags of sugar!

Soon, we landed in Reading, PA. The transfer plane and pilot were there waiting. I called Jerry’s relative and gave her the ETA. She was already at the New Providence airport waiting. “Another hour,” I said.

We took pictures and said good-bye. Jerry was off on the last leg of his hurricane adventure, soon to begin a new life in a new home.

I arrived back home in New Jersey at 12:30 a.m., exhausted from my 18-hour day in LA. Yet it was a sweet exhaustion of mission accomplished: *a million dollars of medicine delivered in four flights in a single day!* A thirteen-year-old missing boy located, transported, and placed with a new guardian. Was it worth the extra \$2,000 to pick him up in a private jet rather than simply purchase a coach ticket on Continental? I have a 13-year-old daughter and if Megan were missing, I would have picked her up in a corporate jet if I had the means. Through the generosity of the owners of the Saber 65 and the mission of Angel Flight, I had the means this day to pick up Jerry, and the privilege to look him straight in the eyes and say: “Listen, we flew all the way here to pick you up and take you all the way to Providence, RI, for one reason: *Because you are special!*”

I can still see Jerry’s winning smile, and his wide eyes that lit up with excitement when he got on the plane. This poor kid from New Orleans flying home in a first class corporate jet was worth every dollar spent.

Sometimes it takes extravagant efforts to show someone they are special and loved.

I followed up a few days later by calling Jerry and his family on RI to see how they were doing.

“It’s quite an adjustment. Jerry eats more than my daughter and me. But he’s so happy, so grateful to be here. He hugged me at the airport. What made me melt was when we first made eye contact and he smiled. It was worth the two-hour wait.”

Jerry slept all day on Wednesday. On Thursday, he was enrolled in school. “He wants to be in school. He’s making friends. I’m willing to give him every chance to succeed.”

“Thank you so much for getting him here, his sister told me. “Jerry is so grateful and I am so very grateful. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

1. I’ve used different names and eliminated some details of his story so as to protect their future privacy.

*copied with permission from the author

QUICK TAKES

Ledgerland Hurricane Relief Supplies Arrive in Louisiana

More than 20,000 pounds of relief supplies donated in eastern Missouri arrived Wednesday afternoon in Slidell, LA, according to Duane Brush, pastor of the Mexico First Church of the Nazarene.

“Originally we had planned to send the load to Baton Rouge, but just before the truck was due to leave we were contacted by Nazarene Disaster Response Director Al Surgess and asked to redirect the load to the

First Church of the Nazarene in Slidell. They were getting a great response to Baton Rouge, but they felt there was a greater need in Slidell,” said Brush.

The load included tons of disaster relief supplies donated by or purchased with cash donations from Mexico area residents and churches. Included were diapers, infant formula, water, food, hundreds of “crisis care kits” including personal care items, bedding, children’s socks and underwear, other clothing and household items.

In charge of the distribution in Slidell is Charles Lambert Jr., pastor, and his wife, Bonnie. Bonnie Lambert in a telephone conversation Thursday with Brush said, “This was a lifesaver for the people down here. The situation of many of the people here locally just breaks your heart. Our church and parsonage only received slight damage, but many people lost everything. The items that were sent were just what is needed.” She went on to explain a newly built, but not finished, church gymnasium was being used to store the supplies.

Signs were erected announcing the availability of relief and people were coming from throughout the Slidell area to receive the supplies.

“We are also housing a team of workers from Jacksonville, FL, who are here to help with the cleanup and initial rebuilding. Yesterday they built several temporary showers near the gymnasium for the use of the relief workers and area residents who do not yet have water. You would be surprised how good it feels to get clean after days in these conditions,” Bonnie Lambert added.

Slidell is located northeast of New Orleans on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain. Slidell was located near the path of the eye wall of Hurricane Katrina where the

greatest winds were located. The city and the surrounding Saint Tammany Parish were also inundated by the strong storm surge caused by the hurricane.

The load originating from Mexico was delivered without charge by Witte Brothers Trucking of Troy. The driver chosen to deliver the supplies was Chad Walker of O'Fallon. In a conversation with Brush on Wednesday, Walker said he "just felt extremely blessed to be involved in this effort."

"I would like to extend our deep gratitude to everyone who made this possible," said Brush. "From the hundreds who made donations, to the scores who helped sort, pack, and load the truck, and to the dozens of churches and area businesses who helped, I would like to assure you that your efforts will alleviate suffering and help provide hope to those in this storm-ravaged area," he concluded.

*copied with permission, as news clip from
The Mexico, MO, Ledger, Sept. 17, 2005

Texas Pastor Opens Church Door Just in Time

After sleeping on the grass next to the Interstate 45 freeway for several hours, Hurricane Rita evacuee Frank Montes was desperate to find someplace with a roof.

Driving around in this small town most famous for being the headquarters of the Texas prison system, Montes wasn't having any luck.

The Walker County Fairgrounds were full, as were Huntsville High School, the basketball stadium at Sam Houston State University, and the lobbies of a few hotels that had opened up to more people because thousands streamed in after running out of gas sitting in traffic jams for hours.

While Montes was looking, Ron Nelsen, pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in Huntsville, was praying.

“I wasn’t planning on bringing anybody in, but I asked God if he wanted me to help, to send people here,” Nelsen, 77, said.

A few moments later, Montes stopped his car at the church and asked for help in broken English.

A sign on Nelsen’s church promised bilingual meetings, and Hispanics fleeing from Houston began flocking to the small church as soon as he opened its doors. On Friday night, about 160 people were sleeping in a 3,000-square-foot chapel.

Across East Texas, improvised relief efforts like Nelsen’s saved thousands from panic and exposure to harm in the fury of Hurricane Rita’s winds and rain as the violent storm swept across the Gulf Coast.

*copied with permission as news clip
from the *Baltimore Sun*, September 30, 2005

Katrina Relief Efforts in Various Churches

E-mail from New Life Community Church of the Nazarene, Pinehurst, Texas:

New Life Community in the Tomball/Magnolia is very much involved in the relief efforts of our city. The pastors of our city called a meeting last Friday, September 2, to organize our collective response. Those present included our Mayor, City Manager, Fire Chief, Tomball Independent School District Administrators, Executive Directors of two assistance ministries, Director of a Christian Counseling Ministry, and Pastors and Staff from about a dozen churches in the city. I have been involved in that planning effort.

As of a few days ago, over 1,700 individuals had reg-

istered with the Tomball Fire Department as evacuees from the area affected by Hurricane Katrina. I am certain that number is growing as more learn of the need to register.

As for our congregation, we have been partnering with New Hope Baptist Church to serve hot meals and provide Crisis Care Kits to those in hotels and shelters. Initially we spent about \$1,500 on supplies for the kits, which we distributed to an area shelter and to those coming to New Hope Baptist to eat dinner. The first night we served about 125 people. Since the shelters opened, our crowd has diminished to about 50-75 each night. This past Wednesday night our congregation served Gumbo with red beans and rice to between 50-75 people. We had approximately 50 volunteers who worked hard to provide: Set Up; Tear Down; Dinner; Clown Ministry; Serving Food; Clean Up; Visiting with people.

Our congregation will be responsible for serving the Wednesday evening meal for the next 6 weeks.

Our church took up a special offering this past Sunday and will do that for another couple of weeks. Praise God—we had over \$7,100 given in that first love offering for the relief efforts. Our people are very generous when they know of a need. We have adopted the small congregation from New Way of Life Church, in New Orleans, led by Pastor Herman Evans. There are 22 of them all together. We have given them gas cards, clothing cards, and paid their hotel bill for a night. We have also pledged \$3,000 to go toward their first months rent in more permanent housing. We are working with them now to find a home or apartment to rent. We helped Pastor Evans get a job working for the school district as a bus driver, and are working with the others to find jobs as well. We have also invited them to worship in our facility. They are a wonderful congregation

and we are growing relationally with them in so many positive ways.

I am so proud of the response of our people. We have organized ourselves in such a way to be able to respond to the need over the long haul. We are having fun serving together to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Denny Dillon

E-mail report from Lake Houston Church of the Nazarene, Lake Houston, Texas:

Lake Houston Church of the Nazarene is the drop-off location for supplies from the Humble/Atascocita area churches. Saturday LHCN volunteers gathered approximately \$3,000 worth of donated hygiene supplies from shoppers at the Atascocita Kroger's Store. On Sunday, lists of products needed for hygiene kits were distributed after the services. On Monday 30 LHCN volunteers manned the church atrium gathering, sorting, boxing and loading on a truck 6,000-7,000 personal hygiene kits bound for the George R. Brown Convention Center, in addition to delivering boxes of other items such as water, diapers, etc. to an area shelter. Boxes of coloring books and crayons were also donated.

This week our focus is food. We are gathering dry goods and sending volunteers to the Humble Area Assistance Ministry food pantry. This evening the LHCN staff and lay volunteers are attending food service training in order to be qualified to serve meals at the Convention Center.

The focus next week will be school supplies for the children now being enrolled in area schools but lacking the basic necessities. A Nazarene Church in California has asked to partner with us in this effort.

Pastor Doug Runyan

E-mail message from Spring Branch Church of the Nazarene, Houston, Texas:

We are receiving offers of help from Nazarenes all over the country. I have printed one below that is particularly touching, as they are making handmade quilts for babies. Another contact is sending handmade dolls . . . Hope Dolls that have been prayed over.

People's hearts are breaking as they watch the events unfold on TV and they want to help . . . through us. What an awesome responsibility!

Blessings, Carmen & Sam Harrison

E-mail from the makers of the Hope Dolls:

My name is Angela Leathers and I am from Tecumseh, Michigan. Myself as well as many people in my community are making handmade quilts for babies and young children that suffered in the hurricane. The Astrodome is not accepting donations directly and being so far away, we aren't sure how to get them to them. Would it be possible to send them to you and be assured they will get to the right place? All of these quilts will be prayed over and sent with love and hope for the children that receive them. You can give me a call or e-mail me back at this address. Thank you and God Bless.

Angela

E-mail message from Harbor Church of the Nazarene, Sugarland, Texas:

Our need is great as we seek to be a blessing to 15 displaced families living with families of Harbor Community Church. Thank God we have found jobs and apartments for many of them but the need to accomplish what God has called us to do is great.

Pastor Cliff Lewis

E-mail message from Victoria Church of the Nazarene, Victoria, Texas:

We are assisting 250 people in Victoria at Faith Family Church. May God bless you and yours.

In Christ,
Pastor Bob

E-mail from The Crossing Church of the Nazarene, Houston, Texas:

Just now have time to write to give an update for The Crossing's involvement in Katrina relief. We have chosen to focus on local needs as we estimate between 500 and 1,000 refugees are living within 10 minutes of our church with about 300 of those within a 5-minute walk from our church.

After church we transformed our sanctuary into a clothing, hygiene products, and housewares closet. We have had around 100 family units come through our doors receiving food and any of the above items along with internet access to get a FEMA number. Our people have given clothing and money (\$1,840) in one Sunday. I am currently receiving donations from personal friends and family members.

We have ministered to a variety of people. One lady told me that she had to get back soon to claim the bodies of her mother and father, who could not get out. Another couple, when pointed to the children's clothing area, told us that they were separated from their children during the evacuation.

The Crossing is endeavoring to be Jesus in our corner of this crisis. I have been encouraged to hear of our other churches' involvement, which prompted me to write this.

Pastor Steve Coutouzis

E-mail update from Pasadena First Church of the Nazarene, Pasadena, Texas:

We have partnered with the Church of Christ next door to us and the Salvation Army. About 60 people are staying in a metal building on the Church of Christ Property. They are using our gym for recreation and showers. The Salvation Army is feeding them. We are collecting Wal-Mart gift cards so the evacuees can purchase needed items, medicines, gas, etc. We may take on about 20 more people to help this next week.

Our gym is on a list to use as sleeping quarters if called upon. Right now we are pretty much involved in helping this present group. God is giving us courage, strength and resources to help. The hearts of our church people go out to so many in need and right now stand ready to continue helping as many as we can.

Pastor Ron Whitlock

E-mail update from Vidor Church of the Nazarene, Vidor, Texas:

We have approximately 1500 refugees/evacuees at the Ford Center in Beaumont. I have spent last night and all day today out there counseling, and setting up a chapel area. We do not really need any more items as the community has been good to donate. There may be a need in the very near future if folks can open their homes. I do not know yet on that.

We have a group of chaplains who are working to provide crisis counseling and services. A lot of prayer is needed, not only for the victims, but also for the workers; as trying times make for short tempers and frustration.

We know that the church is praying!

Pastor Dennis Knight

E-mail message from the Orange Church of the Nazarene that is serving as a Red Cross Shelter, Orange, Texas:

God is Good! We are currently housing refugees from the hurricane. We have a Spanish congregation that fled the storm together as a church. Imagine the site as we worshipped together with a State Guardsman translating into Spanish. I can only say it was the BEST service we have ever had! Sunday night the Spanish pastor and congregation provided the service with translation into ENGLISH! WOW! He is Good. We may have a ready-made Spanish church of the Nazarene soon, relocated on the South Texas District or a new one in New Orleans from this very special group of people God has brought us!

The stories have been awesome! The response from Nazarene churches around the country has made me proud to be a Nazarene. From New York, to California, from Montana, Kansas City and beyond the calls have come!

Continue to pray for us as we help them relocate and begin again or wait it out till something happens. We have been able to send a family of 10 to Georgia, and get people on their way to other parts of the country to family.

Pray for our Orange First Church family as they are tired and spent but running on the energy of the Lord. No pastor is prouder than I of them in this moment.

Two Sundays ago I preached on Mark 13:1-2, where Jesus taught that the church is more than a building. It is God and his people. I shared that we needed to take a risk as a church. We need to trust God to use us. We needed to be more than we have been in the past. Little did I know that God had a plan to do just that?

We have several families that we have been able to get jobs here and that want to stay and be part of our

church family. “Awesome” cannot describe what God is doing to us, in us and around us!

Pastor Steve Vaughn

E-mail message from the Orange First Church of the Nazarene, Orange, Texas:

It is Saturday at 3 pm and I am tired beyond belief. We have closed all the shelters in Orange County into one Old School building that has housing for 1000.

God has been so good and the people who have entered into our lives these past two weeks will no doubt change me as a pastor, as a leader and as a child of God forever! I cannot tell you the numbers of hours of prayer where we have sought God’s help in order to lead people to the throne of God in this terrible storm. We all face moments in our lives in which we hope God will use us. I hope He has, in me. But more than this, I wanted God to be seen in what we were doing!

I have seen the church mobile and in action. I have seen also people who, while proclaiming Him as Lord, do nothing. But I know that God sees more than I do and will bless those people who have risked all for him. I cannot express my gratitude to those who have been a blessing with funds and with words of encouragement. You have not gone unnoticed. God sees and hears.

I finished my sermon just 20 minutes ago entitled, “Why do innocent people suffer?” Frankly, I don’t know but I know that God is here! Right now, is the first time in 10 days I have had peace and quiet. Now will be my time to crash and think about the hardships of the people we have helped and the victories won. I am always good in the battle but tired after the war. I guess I concur with Paul, “I have fought a good fight.” But not without the wonderful GRACE of God and his wonderful presence!

I now am heading home for a home-cooked meal that I have not had in 10 days. But I am thankful beyond words for a home to go to!

Pastor Steve L. Vaughn

Tooth Donation Nets \$500 for Katrina Aid*

Brandon, SD—An 8-year-old girl with a big heart and loose tooth found a creative way to help people displaced by the hurricanes.

Briton Nordmeyer sent her tooth to the Red Cross chapter in Sioux Falls, hoping the tooth fairy would leave money there instead of under her pillow.

The tooth poked a hole through the envelope and fell out, but her letter made it. And after word spread of her generosity, a \$500 check came in from an anonymous donor, said Jeff Stingley, director of the Sioux Empire Red Cross chapter.

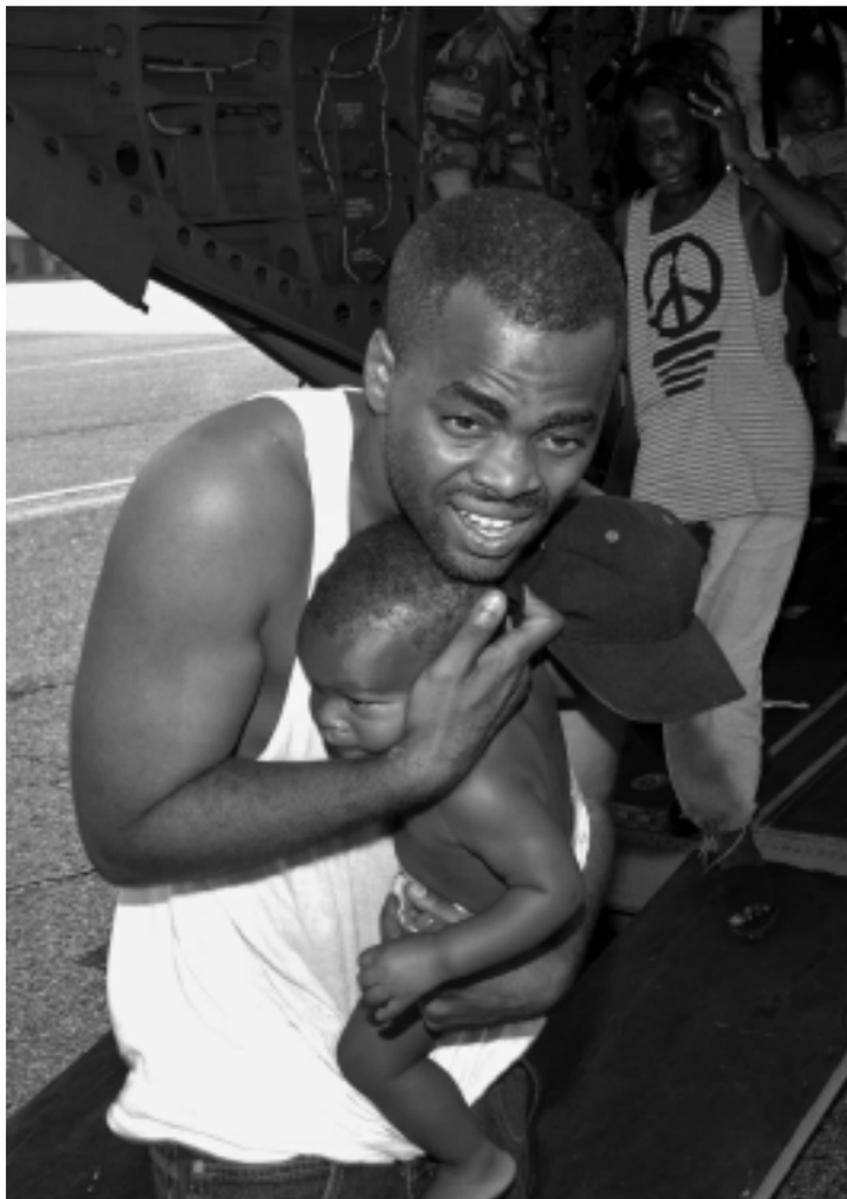
Briton had told her mother she wanted to do something for the children who lost everything.

“It’s really nice to help them get new food, homes, schools, toys, lots of stuff to help them,” Briton told KELO-TV of Sioux Falls.

Stingley said Wednesday the \$500 anonymous check was the only one that mentioned the tooth, but he believes Briton’s story prompted other donations to the chapter.

*Copied with permission as news clip from yahoo.com

FAMILY



Reflections

Some of the most beautiful, tender words in all of Scripture are found in the passage that describes Jesus' miracle that restored a dead son to his mother. "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said 'Don't cry!' Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up! The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother'" (Luke 7:13-15). Perhaps only those families splintered and reunited after Katrina can fully feel those emotions.

Jane Jacobs, in a disturbing book called, *Dark Age Ahead*, describes the demise of five central institutions in North American society, a reality that portends the pessimism of her title.

One of these is the slow, insidious destruction of the family, now down to 18% of household units that are defined as male-female, biological parents and children. Jacobs is quite willing to accept almost any liberal definition of family as better than nothing—a coherent group of adults that accepts primary responsibility to care for its young—and still finds the trends headed towards social disaster.

The primary failure of course, is our current casual attitude towards our young, too often relegated to educational institutions, media entertainment, and peers, to pick up our God-derived responsibilities that we, as parents, fail to accept.

One of our international missionaries commented, that the greatest example of child abandonment is seen in households in North America, where parents come home late from work to homes populated by children who

have, in the absence of direction, contoured their own, often destructive lifestyles. Teen pregnancies, for example, are most likely to be initiated in the hours before mom and dad get home.

Jacobs notes that there is one “family” unit that is growing by leaps and bounds in our culture as an alternative to traditional families—“coercive communities.” By this, she means prisons and mental health facilities, communities more prominent and extensive in the United States than in any other country. We are appalled at her predictions but believe that she sees it right.

Katrina represents a major “wake-up” call to us as a culture. The hurricanes sliced through families, separating them by death and displacement. In the vignettes that follow, both the agony of family separation and the joy of reunion are expressed. We are reminded that, despite our open-handed generosity to people half a globe away, our primary responsibility is to nurture those weaker persons under our guidance, children and family members, that God has entrusted us to protect, cherish and instruct in the paths of right living (“righteousness”). Furthermore, in our mobile society where family members so easily drop off of the edge of our awareness, Katrina abruptly reminds us to check in on our family members, reaffirm our commitments and our love and, in many instances, make the necessary gestures to track down and find, like the lost sheep pursued by Jesus, those who are missing, both from the active family roster, and from the household of God.

There is the further danger of sentimentalizing our “church family” on the basis of clubby, cultural relationships within the church. Katrina has blown open new possibilities, allowing us to merge into our culture, people—evacuees—who are coming to us from very different

histories and experiences. If we are to be the family of God, it becomes important that our expanded family be treated with the same respect and kindness that we offer to those who have been Christian kin for a long time. We not only graft them into our family but are willing to be grafted into theirs.

Katrina will long haunt us with its images of fractured families. But its legacy ought to remind us of the ecstasy of family members given back to each other by the miraculous power of God. FLT

Found!

JULI METZGER*

Amid the horrific images and deep despair, there are stories of joy coming out of Louisiana this week.

Until two months ago, my family and I lived in southeastern Louisiana in a city called Lafayette, just about two hours west of New Orleans off of I-10. The city is about 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. In Louisiana, we became avid fans of Mardi Gras beads, gumbo, and fried crawfish.

This week, Lafayette was spared the wrath of Katrina but has been besieged by her fallout—the refugees of New Orleans. Some estimate this city of 116,000 has inherited another 25,000, including 7,000 taking refuge in the Cajun Dome, home of the Cajuns of the University of Louisiana.

Lafayette is about twice the size of Muncie. It has a state-supported university of about 20,000 students, much like Ball State University. On Friday, I talked to a

reporter from its newsroom, where journalists have worked around the clock since Katrina slammed into the coast. "How has it been?" I asked. "As heart-wrenching as any experience can be," she answered

But then she told me a story of joy.

"I spent the morning with a woman who could not find her 10-day-old baby," she said. The mother saw a reporter and photographer and approached them asking for help. The reporter made a call to the newsroom. She asked another reporter to call a local hospital and ask if they could help the woman find her baby. Hours later, the woman had the information she had so desperately sought. Turns out the woman's child, who was to be released from the hospital last Monday, had actually been evacuated from a New Orleans hospital that day and transferred to a hospital in Baton Rouge. Problem was, no one told the mother. Then all hell broke loose.

The mother was forced to leave New Orleans on Tuesday. She ended up in Lafayette's Cajun Dome. From there she met a journalist, who told her story. And the family is soon to be reunited.

The reporter returned to the Cajun Dome Friday afternoon to try to spot, amid 7,000 people, the woman whom she had tried to help. Another miracle. She found her.

"She saw me at the same time I saw her and she jumped up and bear-hugged me, screaming, 'I found him. I found him.'"

Homes in Lafayette tonight are bursting at the seams with families from New Orleans but also with strangers, nomads now who are looking for shelter, food and work.

I still own a house in Lafayette and it is filled with all my family's precious belongings. They were to be moved to Indiana in two weeks. My home is now being used to

house journalists from other cities on loan to the newspaper.

*copied with permission from the
Marion, IN, *Chronicle-Tribune*

Both Eyes Open

“CHERYL”*

I had to go to Lafayette La. the Thursday before the storm hit, I have a brother who is in ICU ON LIFE SUPPORT, WE HAD LOST TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER AND I HAD NOT SEEN HIM AND MY OTHER TWO BROTHERS AND SISTER FOR 25 years, I had remarried and had a different last name, they were looking for me by my old name, I had been looking for them by sending letters everywhere, they did not live where they used to live and I finally found them after I finally got a used computer for mothers day.

Our mother died in 1968 at age 42 in New Orleans at Charity Hospital, which is a very nice and decent hospital, the children were my half brothers and sister, she had married a man from Erath, La. and she put the kids in a Catholic Children's Home that always took very good care of them while she was sick and in the hospital and then she would get them out when she was well enough to take care of them.

When they had transferred her from Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette, the same hospital where my brother is now, to Charity Hospital in New Orleans, she never pulled through, she was in a coma and never came out of it and died, I was 20 with two small babies and I went out

to New Orleans and had her body shipped back to Georgia to be buried. Her husband came to visit her one time, he was drunk, he never came back, he left those children in the Home and they didn't get to come to mother's funeral or anything. He just left them there, the baby boy who was about 4 was adopted out, I have not seen him in 38 years, did not get to see him when I was recently out there.

However, I found them on my very first search, and the very first phone call was them. God and our mother were leading me to them. It was a wonderful reunion, except for the fact about my brother Mark being on life support. We didn't know if he could hear or not, I kept talking to him when I first got there, I kept reminding him of our mother and Georgia, and then a tear rolled down his left cheek. On Sat. morning he was trying so hard to open his right eye, which had been shut all the time, his left eye was open, I kept talking to him and told him there were no losers on our mothers side of the family, no quitters and he had to fight, fight hard within himself, that God and mother was helping him and watching over him, and I wanted him to have that right eye open all the way when I came back to the hospital.

When we went back that evening to see him, HE HAD BOTH EYES OPEN, I sang Georgia on My mind to him, kept on talking about our mother and then I kissed him and looked into his eyes and said Mark, if you know me, if you know who I am and can hear me, blink your eyes twice for me, AND HE BLINKED HIS EYES TWO TIMES!! Miracles were happening the whole time I was out there. I told him I had to leave the next morning, Sunday, early to get back to Georgia before the hurricane hit, we had no trouble getting through until we reached Pensacola and then we got off I-10 and got on Hwy 90 and headed home, turned on Hwy 97 and then went to

84 and CAME HOME TO TIFTON, GEORGIA. We had stopped at a place outside New Orleans and the lady was closing up, said it was mandatory for everyone to leave, I would have gladly brought someone to Georgia with me had I seen anyone trying to get on I-10, walking or whatever, but the roads were not that busy until we got to Pensacola and then all we seen were the people from New Orleans in vehicles that lived east of New Orleans and not west, they heeded the warning, those that did not, look what happened.

We made it through on I-12 right before they were turning all lanes on I-10 to going just one way, west, I-12 was suppose to do the same, but we got through before that happened. I did not hear from any of my family for over 5 days after I got home, I found out one of my nieces and her husband and baby and his family lost everything, which they lived in another parish, so my help will go straight to them. They were not fussing, blaming Bush about anything, they were thankful they were all alive, they were sick, but alive. Then I heard from my sister in law who lives in Erath and she told me there was a lot of stealing and things like that going on where they lived, that it was very dangerous there, they even have to send their youngest son to live with her mother in Vinton, close to the access border. I heard my brother Mark, has been doing a lot more movement since I left. They had to take part of his frontal and posterior lobe of his brain out and how much damage he has we do not know yet. But I ask everyone who reads this to not only pray for the people of New Orleans but to please pray for my brother Mark, who has never hurt anyone or done any bad things, he was such a good person. PLEASE PRAY FOR HIM. I THANK YOU. I don't know when I will get back to see him, for I cannot fly, I

have platinum coils in my brain, titanium discs and nuts bolts in my neck, a compressed lumbar fracture, total right knee replacement and I have not been out of my house since I got home one week ago, I have been so tired and all from the trip, but every mile we went was worth it, I knew that when I seen that first tear roll down his cheek. God bless all the people out there.

*An unidentified e-mail sent to www.websitetoolbox.com

One Happy Ending in a Sea of Loss

Amid unfathomable loss and deplorable conditions, there was at least one bright moment in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Consider the story of the Marcussen family.

On Wednesday, a tearful Ashley Marcussen clutched a framed photo and described her desperate search for her husband, Jason.

He was found later after wandering in the woods, lost and confused, sometimes in water up to his neck.

Jason Marcussen stayed behind at the couple's mobile home to search for a lost cat as his family evacuated. He got caught by the storm.

He rode out the storm in the bathtub, then left as the water rose.

"As soon as day broke, I was on a bicycle until night time trying to find my family," he said.

The storm had so changed the landscape he got lost.

"I was just doing the best I could and I couldn't find it," he said.

Although the family is homeless and 10 trees sit on top of their mobile home, they are grateful.

“That’s great, daddy’s home,” Ashley Marcussen said.

Printed with permission from cnn.com on Sept. 1, 2005

Family Links Up After Katrina

ANITA FOSTER*

Wednesday, September 21, 2005—DALLAS—Reunion Arena in Dallas, former home to the NBA’s Dallas Mavericks and the NHL’s Dallas Stars, has seen its share of celebrations, but none more special than one that occurred last week after a family separated after Katrina was joyfully reunited.

New Orleans residents Ferdinand and Charlotte Toney and their three sons, ages 5-10, hunkered down to ride out Hurricane Katrina in their home. They made it through the storm itself, but then all hell broke loose. According to Ferdinand, the levees near their home broke and water rushed in. They had no choice but to escape and make their way to the Super Dome.

“We were on the I-10 with so many people,” said Ferdinand. “We were trying to get to the Super Dome, but Charlotte was having a really hard time. She went through major surgery the week before the storm and she’s diabetic.”

He desperately flagged down a bus that was only picking up the sick and injured. He put Charlotte on the bus, headed for an unknown destination, and prayed that they would all reunite soon.

Ferdinand and his sons spent several days at the Super Dome.

“We stayed outside,” he said. “It simply wasn’t safe for the boys to be inside the building.”

With dwindling food resources and extreme heat, Ferdinand did everything he could to keep his boys in good health, while his thoughts were constantly on Charlotte.

“I didn’t know where my wife was and I had to tell the boys that Mommy was safe. I just hoped that she was okay and getting medical help.”

Ferdinand and his sons were finally bussed out of New Orleans four days after Katrina made landfall, headed for Dallas. As they were signing in at the American Red Cross shelter in Reunion Arena, he asked how he could find out where his wife had been sent. Karen Jarvis, a Red Cross volunteer, immediately went to work to locate Charlotte.

Jarvis started with the American Red Cross Family Links Registry to begin the search for Charlotte.

“I typed in her name and there she was,” said Jarvis. “She was registered at Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston. I wanted to scream with joy, but I decided to let Ferdinand do that.”

Jarvis called the hospital to ensure that she had found the right person.

“The hospital staff was thrilled. They put Charlotte on the phone and I got to tell her that her husband and boys were safe and sound in Dallas. She started wailing tears of joy and relief. It was an incredible experience to be able to deliver this news.”

After several days in the hospital, Charlotte was released. Red Cross volunteers from Houston picked her up and brought her to Dallas. While she was on the way,

Ferdinand passed the time by pacing back and forth across the front landing at Reunion Arena, and the boys played games and visited with other shelter residents. The story of the upcoming reunion spread throughout the shelter, and a crowd assembled outside, everyone wanting to share in this moment of happiness. No one was disappointed as Charlotte arrived at Reunion Arena.

The boys were speechless as they laid eyes on their mother for the first time in nearly two weeks. But their silence quickly turned to squeals of delight, and all three landed in Charlotte's arms with tears of happiness. Ferdinand stood back and wept silently, the relief of seeing Charlotte more than evident.

"We are so happy to be back together. I have my wife and the boys have their mother," said Ferdinand. We have survived."

A generous donation from the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dallas rounded out the reunion with a donated room for the family. With all of the pain and agony, the joy of this reunion, at Reunion Arena no less, gave other families hope that they too would someday be reunited with their loved ones who were torn from them by Hurricane Katrina.

*Permission granted by the American Red Cross

Katrina Victims' Prayers Answered

PAUL HUGGINS*

Jackie Washington Skidmore and her nine family members who evacuated from New Orleans on Sunday

had no place to go but down on their knees Wednesday morning.

From their room at the Courtyard by Marriott, they watched television reports showing two of their homes completely underwater and a third unapproachable. They wore the only possessions they had left.

Among six adults are six lost incomes and a hesitation to continue using credit cards. With their banks destroyed, they can't use ATM cards or write checks. They must make what little cash that's left stretch for at least two months.

Those are some of the concerns that weighed heavily on their hearts and minds when they knelt together and prayed for God to bring relief.

After praying, they decided they would drive to Raleigh, N.C., and pile in on a family member. But when they got to the hotel front desk to ask for an extension on their checkout time, they found their prayers already answered.

Somewhere between Moulton and Birmingham, the Rev. Tony Collins, pastor of Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, felt his heart prodding him to do something immediately to help evacuees of Hurricane Katrina.

He had decided earlier that his church of about 250 adult members would take a collection Wednesday night and give it to the Red Cross. But then his heart told him not to wait.

He called his secretary, Lisa Jones, and asked her to find victims who needed urgent help. She contacted the hotel and learned of Mrs. Skidmore's plight.

"We were going to take up a collection tonight, but we decided to donate today because we know our members love God and love people and will definitely want to get involved in helping," Jones said.

The church paid to provide the Skidmore clan three rooms for five nights, a \$700 value, plus \$200 cash. Shortly after Cornerstone called, Central United Methodist Church called and invited all the evacuees to dine at the church that night and also gave them a \$100 gift card to Wal-Mart.

“We feel absolutely blessed,” Mrs. Skidmore said as her husband, children and grandchildren gathered around her in the same hotel they escaped to during Hurricane Ivan.

Cornerstone and Central United Methodist’s generosity was contagious as word spread of refugees stranded in Decatur.

Area hotels report 159 families displaced by Katrina, and more are expected.

Julie Hill, manager of Microtel, which has four displaced families, made phone calls and several local stores and restaurants quickly responded with donations.

They include Publix, Wal-Mart, Kmart, McCollum’s Catfish and Seafood, Vintage Salon, Big Bob Gibson’s Bar-B-Que and City Café. Some families got free meals while others had access to free groceries such as bread, soft drinks, snacks, orange juice, milk, bakery items and fruit.

“This is people doing God’s work,” said Trina Girard, who escaped from Ocean Springs, Miss., with her mother and pets. “Every little bit helps.”

Considering they have nothing, even a little bit seems huge, said Mrs. Skidmore’s family, which includes her husband, Anthony, and two of her daughter’s families: Michael and Millicent Martin and their two daughters, Melenie, 13, and Mallory, 17; and Calvin and Joy Slocum, and their two daughters, Amira, 6, and Eliana, 3 months.

“We thought we would be gone for three or four days, like Ivan,” Slocum said. “Now we don’t know when we’ll be able to get back . . . if ever.”

The extra days in the hotel give them more time to decide which direction to take and how to best handle urgent needs.

They’re considering enrolling Amira in a local school. But they must settle on permanent housing before they can do that. They want to stay together and seek a large apartment or a house to rent.

“Someplace where we can cook and cut down on food expenses,” Mrs. Skidmore said. “Eating out every meal gets expensive.”

Another urgent need: the youngest of the group, Eliana, has Down’s syndrome, and now the family must replace her developmental specialists.

By late afternoon, the Skidmores had another prayer answered: They finally got word on two family members left behind, Mrs. Skidmore’s 98-year-old mother, who was too frail to make a road trip or shelter move, and her niece, who volunteered to stay with her.

The niece, Renee Mulin, had managed to get use of an emergency phone from a National Guardsman. She mistakenly dialed the wrong area code and got a woman in Pennsylvania instead of her cousin in Georgia. The Pennsylvania woman, however, called the cousin for her.

Despite losing their homes and not knowing what the future holds, Mrs. Skidmore’s family beamed with thankfulness.

“The fortunate thing,” Skidmore concluded, “is we’re standing here in this hotel today.”

*Copyright permission granted by the Decatur, AL, *DAILY* newspaper

Families and the Storms of Life

JOEY A. CONDON*

Storms come and go; but families are forever. Driving along the “debris” line in the red zone, one sees mile after mile of devastation and destruction. The “debris line” was a designation given to an area that was completely destroyed with debris bulldozed in piles. Sometimes the debris line was three to four blocks north of the beach; elsewhere it jutted many miles north.

The “red zone” is that area north of the debris line, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by National Guard personnel with M-16s. Only those who could prove residency inside the red zone or were a part of a contractor’s crew were allowed past the checkpoint. Though the devastation was extensive, not all homes were a total loss. If you intended to work extensively in the red zone, it was required that you have tetanus and hepatitis shots.

Beyond the red zone, Katrina wreaked havoc halfway up the state of Mississippi. As she reached Jackson, the capital, she was still a “category one” hurricane. The five Nazarene churches along the coast were not the only churches damaged. Churches a hundred miles inland and beyond, suffered considerable damage to roofs and structure. Several churches were transformed into shelters, radically altering their priorities of ministry in order to reach the needs of untold hundreds of evacuees and displaced persons.

People who came to observe the effects of the hurricane, invariably were drawn to the most devastated regions, often bypassing these above, heading for the “red zone.”

As I would give visitors special access to the red zone, I observed carefully their reaction. Initially, upon seeing the destruction, they exhibited sheer horror and disbelief. Some broke into tears. As the images multiplied, their reaction became motivated more by curiosity, to spy unique configurations of twisted metal or to discover some hidden remnant of some familiar, common possession. Finally, there came a time of de-sensitivity, where one needed to remind the onlookers that each slab of concrete, each stack of rubble, every item littered in the trees once belonged to a family. Every family, changed forever, represented a story.

Some families fled from the storm. Others were drawn to it out of loyalty to family. Frank Wills had been a Nazarene elder for more than thirty-five years. He was a church builder, building both the invisible church that lasted for eternity and the visible, physical church building that would last for generations. He had left his mark of craftsman on churches in Denmark, Brazil, Mexico and throughout the Mississippi district. He had also served as a pastor, giving new life and vigor to dying churches. But now, he, himself was near death.

Despite the approaching hurricane, Frank's family gathered in Mississippi to say their farewells to their beloved patriarch at his mobile home in Vancleave, MS, about twenty miles north of the Gulf. His pastor, Ernie Gray determined that, as the storm grew nearer, Brother Frank needed to be moved to safety. A Sunday school room in the church was designated for Brother Frank and his family to ride out the storm, complete with hospital bed and Emergency Medical Transportation arrangements to await the hurricane early the next day.

But Jesus calmed the storm in Brother Frank's life before Katrina arrived. As the paramedics brought

Brother Frank to the Family Church of the Nazarene and laid him in the hospital bed in that Sunday school room, Brother Frank took his final three breaths and went to be with His Lord in the presence of family and church members, within hours of Katrina's visit.

Roger, Frank's son, was living on the Gulf Coast, not professing Christ or attending Church. After Katrina passed, he and the rest of the family went to survey the damage to his home. The house was gone, everything was lost. Within twenty-four hours, Roger had lost his father, his home, and all of his possessions. Some people would have sunk into despair but, due to his father's life and witness through his own storms, Roger returned to church and ever since, he and his wife, Liz, and their children have been faithfully attending. Storms may take everything away from us, but families are forever.

There were others who suffered tragic loss. Walt Thompson, the pastor of the Gulfport First Church saw his wife slip through the gates of heaven two days before the storm after battling cancer for several years. Courageously, he continues to pastor his people, leading his church despite damage to the parsonage, without a church building and losing several members of his congregation, all while carrying this heavy burden of personal pain. Embracing him is the family of God mediating grace.

Then there is the worship pastor of the Crossroads Church of the Nazarene who lost everything in his apartment just blocks from the beach. Brian and Heather Schubert were caught in the traffic trying to flee the coast then ended up trying to ride out the storm with a church family member in their two-story house some seven miles off the coast. The whole house flooded and they ended up in the attic. With fading cell phone power, they called

Heather's father in Kentucky who, in turn, radio-ed, using the ham radio, local authorities to make sure that they would be rescued from their rooftop. Families are there to rescue us even though they are miles away.

The storm confronted many families with critical decisions. One of the initial Work and Witness teams from Troy, Ohio, included a skilled laborer named Bob Johnson. He was so moved by what he experienced that, when he returned home, in prayer he determined that it was God's will to return to the Gulf Coast to assist in whatever way he could. Bob didn't lose anything in the hurricane, but is choosing to sacrifice family time in obedience and ministry for Christ and His church. Families sacrifice in times of need.

There is not a family in this country unaffected by this storm. Some have family members or friends living along the Gulf Coast. Some, like Bob Johnson, personally chose to have his family more involved by driving his pop-up camper to Mississippi to take an active part in the recovery efforts. Most know someone among the hundreds of thousands of volunteers of relief workers. But all the damage is not just within the red zone—there are families hurting and in need everywhere, and, if we reach out with the compassion of Christ, the family of God will be changed forever.

*copied with permission from the author

FAITH



Reflections

Extraordinary times beget extraordinary faith. In every instance where Jesus comments on people's extraordinary faith, it is set in the backdrop of crisis and desperation, disease, death, and events outside of one's control.

When we live in comfortable times, our faith tends to become a dry habit, or some kind of generalized optimism about the world, or even faith in the principle of faith itself. That is not our fault. It is situational.

But that fact does remind us that engaging the distress of others and "owning" it as our own, is often a crash course in faith, challenging and enlivening it in ways we can neither predict nor control.

Nor do we enter into the world of human need in a spiritual vacuum. How easy it is to believe that we offer faith to others, only to discover that there is both residual and active faith on the part of the desperate at a level we don't even comprehend. Their prayers are so simple and naïve, yet so effective. Their theology so mundane and irreligious, yet it cuts to the quick; their cries, so honest; their hope, so tenacious; their thankfulness, so transparent. Like the criminal on the cross, acknowledging Jesus as God and identifying his own sinfulness, many of the victims of Katrina, too cry out, and receive from God the promise of immediate and long-term salvation.

Faith under these circumstances merges prayer into action and action into deeds, and deeds into ventures that consume one's life in godly service. When we pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we look for God's will where it is being

done on earth, and there go to identify with it. While Katrina did its devastation, Jesus was to be found in the foul waters, in the chaotic, drenched ruins, in the crowded Astrodome, on the blocked bridges. And it is there that the will of God can be found. And for those unable to go, they, too, made tangible their faith in a thousand creative ways.

Faith of course is concretized in what we call the Church. Long before the government responded in its inept and convoluted way, local churches and national networks of churches, were already “on the ground” and in the “hood” of human need. The response was so overwhelming that the government, perhaps out of shame, has suggested compensation for the costs and efforts involved. Yet the Church never lives off of such compensation, because its identification with human pain is first and foremost an intuitive response born in the heart of God himself that doesn’t quantify love or relief in dollar amounts. The joy is not in the payoffs or the salary at the end of the day but found in the presence of the vinedresser, Jesus himself, working where the harvest is most imminent and the pressure of time most acute. It is there where faith unfolds its greatest redemptive character. FLT

Nazarene Church Leader Visits Service

ELIZABETH HOLMES*

Bayou La Batre, AL—Worn out and a bit smelly from

a long day of working with hurricane victims, volunteers from the Valparaiso Nazarene Church received some motivation Wednesday from a special guest at their nightly worship service.

J.K. Warrick, one of six general superintendents of the worldwide Nazarene Church, was traveling the Gulf Coast surveying the damage done by Hurricane Katrina and heard of Valparaiso Nazarene Church's efforts in this southern Alabama town.

During his visit to the Bayview Church of the Nazarene's distribution center, Warrick asked to join the evening service at the Mobile First Church of the Nazarene, where the group is staying.

Warrick, who spoke to the volunteers before they had a chance to shower, praised their work with the poverty-stricken community.

"They will never forget what you are doing for them," he said. "We're here because God is loving a broken world through us."

Warrick shared the efforts of other Nazarene churches along the coast, remarking on how they had transformed to help the community.

"We've turned our churches into hotels and motels and rightfully so," he said. Mobile First Church of the Nazarene has air mattresses, supplies and boxes laying everywhere, with volunteers sleeping seven or eight to a room.

As inspiration for the remaining three days of their work, Warrick offered his thanks.

"I'm just here to tell you we are so thankful," he said. "You are the best that we have."

**copyright permission granted by the NWI Times, (North West Indiana), for news clip, printed Sept. 15, 2005*

Hurricane Katrina Aftermath Creates Huge Demand for Bibles

RHODA TSE AND JOE ALVAREZ*

While most relief efforts are tending to the physical devastation left by Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. Gulf Coast, Christian groups are also doing what they can to fill in the spiritual vacuum that was left.

Pledging to provide spiritual support, leaders from Christian ministries such as the Bible Society agree that “the most important thing to provide is a sense of hope, something that is an absolute essential for life to be remade.”

“Individuals and organisations are looking for ways to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of Hurricane Katrina survivors,” the International Bible Society (IBS) noted in a statement released yesterday.

In overwhelmed shelters last week, people were sprawled out on every corner, hallway, or cot without hope. At least 17 people committed suicide on Aug. 31, said Campus Crusade for Christ relief worker Mike Downhauer. The Associated Press also reported that at least two New Orleans police officers had shot themselves in the head.

“The main things these folks need are hope,” Downhauer said on The Lighthouse Report radio program.

“Throughout the centuries the Bible has been recognised to provide this dimension of hope. This holds true today.”

An official in Baton Rouge said on Fox News that Bibles were the second most asked-for item after food/water.

“We need water, food and Bibles,” the official said.

According to IBS Outreach Director Sue Hyde, IBS has received numerous reports that Bibles are high on the list of items requested by evacuees. The Bible society also reported that relief workers were “flocking” to its door, phone, e-mail, and website.

“One woman called begging for Scriptures for pastors and relief workers,” Hyde said, in a statement released by IBS on Friday. “She was handwriting Bible passages to give to pastors and those she was counseling who had lost their Bibles in the flooding. They were also downloading Building the Mosaic from the IBS website and printing off copies.”

In response, IBS sent out thousands of its special crisis and disaster Scripture resources while another approximately half million pieces have been committed. The society anticipate requests will far exceed the US\$250,000 Emergency Scripture Fund it set up to provide resources in Katrina’s aftermath.

“This is the nation’s worst disaster and we are praying that God’s word can bring these children peace, comfort and strength,” said Judy Billings, a spokesperson for IBS.

Zondervan, one of the largest publishers of Christian books, is also working with the International Bible Society to provide ministry-edition Bibles to hurricane victims. In addition, Zondervan’s parent company, News Corporation, is pledging US\$1 million to the Salvation Army. News Corporation will also match—dollar-for-dollar—contributions made by the company’s employees to accredited charities to a total of US\$1 million.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been affected by the hurricane, and Zondervan is committed to providing and supporting relief efforts,” said Zondervan President-CEO Doug Lockhart.

Thomas Nelson, the world’s largest publisher of Bibles in English, is also taking part in the efforts.

“This morning, I started getting e-mails from our employees with ideas for how our Company could help,” Thomas Nelson President-CEO Mike Hyatt wrote in his company’s web log on Sept. 1. “Everyone feels the need to do something. I know I do.”

When, Hyatt heard Bibles were in high demand he said, “This is something I knew we could help with.”

Thomas Nelson pledged to donate 100,000 Bibles that will be distributed through Samaritan’s Purse—which was already mobilising its Disaster Relief Units and alerting hundreds of volunteers before Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast.

After pledging 100,000 Bibles and US\$50,000 in employee matching funds, Thomas Nelson has been looking for a third channel for those who want to give material aid to Katrina victims, according to an e-mail message sent out from the company’s director of human resources, Jim Thomason.

“To date, the company has sent US\$55,762 (half employee money and half company match) to Samaritan’s Purse, who is using that money to purchase and distribute personal hygiene items to flood victims,” he wrote.

According to Thomason a truck will be leaving the company this weekend with its first shipment of 23,040 Bibles bound for three distribution points in Texas.

*Permission granted from the web page publication of
Christian Today, Sept. 12, 2005

Church Gives Record Donation for Hurricane Relief

Pismo Beach, California—Just days following Hurricane Katrina’s catastrophic hit on the Gulf Coast, Senior Pastor Ron Salsbury and the New Life Community Church of the Nazarene in Pismo Beach, California, planned to take a “special offering” for hurricane relief. The collection was set for September 4, the first Sunday after the disaster.

“On Thursday morning [September 1],” Salsbury said, “I had a strong sense that God was calling us to do more . . . to give it ALL.”

Salsbury then had a phone vote taken of the Church Board of Directors to determine if the church could give the entire offering to hurricane relief and trust God to help them catch up in the weeks ahead.

The vote was unanimous.

“In the Saturday night and both Sunday morning services, I challenged our people to give generously and that 100 percent of the offering was going to go to hurricane relief,” Salsbury stated. “They broke out in thunderous applause in each of the three services.”

The church collected more than \$120,000 that weekend.

The second weekend following Katrina, there was more than \$20,000 marked for hurricane relief. According to Salsbury, included in this amount was \$130 in cash from a nine year-old girl who made and sold Bible bookmarks, \$300 from a group of young boys who sold cookies, \$1,000 from young people who held a car wash, and \$23 from a five-year-old girl who emptied her piggy bank—all with the intent of helping victims of Katrina.

The \$140,000 donation to Nazarene Compassionate Ministries is the largest single donation ever received by the organization from one church. As it is with every donation, 100 percent went directly to aid Katrina survivors.

In addition to monetary giving, Salsbury said the church passed out Crisis Care Kit bags those first two weeks and has since sent more than 1,000 Crisis Care Kits for hurricane relief.

Also, the church's high school ministries decided to forgo their Winter Retreat this year in favor of a Work and Witness trip to the Gulf Coast instead.

And what of the church's budgetary concerns after giving up an entire week's offering?

"Our regular giving has not suffered," Salsbury reports. "In fact, it is ahead of budget!"

"We are blessed to be able to help," Salsbury said of his church, one of the largest Nazarene churches in the U.S. "And as pastor, I could not be more proud of my people!

"It's all about Jesus."

Copied with permission from ncnnews.com

A Concert for God

SCOTT RAINEY*

Last night Sheila Davis, Thelma Martin, and I met with Helen Ryan with a prayerful hope to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Helen was a self-proclaimed atheist working as a bartender in the French Quarter of New Orleans two weeks ago. She is single and around 50 years of age.

She came to Houston with a group of four men she did not know in order to escape the storm that destroyed her city. When they arrived, they stayed in the first hotel they could find with a vacancy. It was the Days Inn just across the highway from our church.

On Saturday morning of last week, I was at that Days Inn with two teenagers standing outside their lobby inviting anyone who walked by to our BBQ lunch that we were providing for Katrina victims at our church. She cried and told us a horrific story of survival. Three hours later, she came to the lunch and began to meet people from the church. Carmen Harrison became “her first friend” (those are her words). I witnessed Carmen crying and hugging Helen as she shared her story. Helen went through our supply center and was overcome by all that we were giving away. She said, “I have been an atheist for 30 years, but after all the love I have seen from these people, I need to rethink that position.” I invited her to come back to church the next day.

She absolutely loved church. Her exact words were, “I feel like I was at a concert for God.” About 10 of our people took her to lunch last Sunday afternoon. On Monday I called Helen and asked her if we could talk with her more about spiritual things since she is rethinking her beliefs about God. She said, “I trust you people. I am open to talking.” Last night at 9:45 in Pappy’s Restaurant, Helen Ryan was converted from being a child of Satan to a child of God by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!

She agonized over the decision saying, “I don’t want to make this decision because of how nice you have been, but because of how good God has been.” With tears, she prayed through. This Sunday morning, Helen will light our grace candle during our Sunday morning service.

God has given us a wonderful opportunity to see compassion evangelism reach lost people. I know we will see more come to Christ in the days ahead. Please continue to pray.

Helen is moving into an apartment about two miles from our church. She said, "I am not going home. I have a new family." She has already invited three people who have committed to her that they will be with her at church on Sunday!

*copied with permission of author; at
Spring Branch Church of the Nazarene, Houston, Texas

The Storm of God's Love

GLADYS GRIMAUD*

Rev. Redfern II was telling a story about a group of children who came to Compassion Central** in Biloxi, MS, to attend the Kids Kamp that had been set up for the children of Katrina. His voice low and brow wrinkled, Redfern said, "They watched their grandmother float away. The night of Hurricane Katrina, they were huddled together in their living room to ride out the storm when the rain came and the floodwaters began to rise. The house began to fill up with water and the children climbed on top of the furniture. They could see the fish swimming around in the living room."

Redfern struggled to tell the rest of the story about the children. He continued, "Bobbing in the water, they realized they had to get to the attic. Even there, they were not safe. They kicked out a window so they could climb

on top of the roof and clung to life in the best way that they could. It was then that they lost the grip on their grandmother's hand and watched her float away. They never saw her again."

Redfern's voice had been soft and slow, but the pitch rose with enthusiasm as he blurted out, "But, do you know what? When those very same children came to Kids Kamp and told us the story of their grandmother, they asked us if they could sing a song." Redfern's eyes widened. "You'll never guess what song they wanted to sing!" My curiosity was peaked as I began to think of how amazing it was that they could still sing a song. "What was it?" I asked.

Half laughing and half crying, Redfern sang out boisterously, "Jesus loves me this I know, For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so." Redfern belted out an infectious laugh as if he had just opened his favorite present at Christmas. And, I guess he did, because Redfern loves Jesus and identified totally with the children's song.

I came to know Redfern when he came to a City Light meeting at the invitation of a friend. Although I did not know Redfern during his younger years, I have been told that he was quite a rebel during the Civil Rights Era. During that time, African-Americans were not served at the same lunch counters with other people. Redfern joined the ranks of the "sit-in demonstrators" and even once held a bank hostage because they did not have any African-American employees. He didn't go to jail for that. As he later told me, "I didn't have a weapon of any kind. I just locked everybody inside and wouldn't let them out." It must have been effective. The bank hired their

first African-American employees right after that. The same delightful charismatic personality that charmed the NAACP during the days of Civil Rights and caused an icy shiver in the white community is now being used by God to bring hope to Katrina survivors in Biloxi.

Another story Redfern tells happened on one of the days that he and the volunteers from Compassion Central went to help clean up the churches. Many churches had been reduced to a pile of rubble, but there were a few churches that were left standing with walls even though the floodwaters had reached the roofline inside. Redfern looked at me with a twinkle in his eye. I knew that he had another good story to relate.

“Gladys,” he said, “it is awesome to be a part of Compassion Central here in Biloxi. This tent city with volunteers from all across the nation—this “City of God” with people from every walk of life and every denomination—something so wonderful that even the heathen notice what is happening.”

“What do you mean, Redfern?” I asked.

“Oh, Gladys, you should have been here the day that we went to the Vietnamese community. We found the priest at the Vietnamese Catholic church and asked him if we could help him clean up his church. When the priests from the Buddhist temple next door noticed that we had arrived in the yard of the Catholic Church, they came outside and drew a line in the dirt and asked us not to cross over. They said that they had to remain separate from us.”

My facial expression gave away the sadness I was feeling at the moment, but then, Redfern began to laugh.

“That’s all right, Gladys. We had to respect their wishes, but listen to the ending.”

The rhythm in his voice picked up as he said, “We

left rice and supplies in the yard of the Catholic Church and cleaned out about a foot of mud from inside. When the Vietnamese Buddhists saw what we had done for the Vietnamese Catholics, they sent a note to us asking if we would help them too.”

“That’s great, Redfern,” I said. “What did you do for them?”

Redfern’s eyes were twinkling even more now as he responded, “The same thing. We gave them rice and supplies and helped clean out the mud in the Buddhist temple. And at the end of the day, they wanted to know about the God that we served. They wanted to know what kind of God we worshipped that would allow us to help them after they had drawn a line and asked us not to cross over.”

“You know what, Gladys?”

“What, Redfern?” I answered eagerly. I had learned to expect the unexpected.

Redfern couldn’t wait to share the rest. “Because we ministered to them, they opened up to other relief groups who came to Biloxi to help survivors. Oh, it’s wonderful, Gladys. It’s wonderful.”

Redfern talked freely about what it meant for him to be a part of the move of God that is taking place at Compassion Central in Biloxi. He said, “It is wonderful to know that God sent me here. It’s wonderful just to know that I don’t have to have any kind of degree to be here. It’s wonderful just to see ordinary people doing extraordinary things in ordinary ways.”

I was fascinated by Redfern’s comments and wasn’t quite sure what he meant about ‘ordinary people doing extraordinary things in ordinary ways,’ so I asked him what he meant.

“Well,” he said. “One person shoveling mud out of a

house or church is ordinary, but to see 1000 people shoveling mud out of churches and houses—ah, that's extraordinary."

And just to make sure that I understood, he said it again, "Yes, it's awesome to see ordinary people doing extraordinary things in ordinary ways."

And then he added a comment that only Redfern would think of: "It's also awesome to see T-bone steaks being served in the middle of disaster and to see little ole feisty grandmothers living in the shelters unafraid." Redfern chuckled.

He said one of those feisty grandmothers at the shelter whispered in his ear. "I'm not afraid. Don't tell the white folks, but I've got my pistol right here." She opened her purse for him to see. She was living at the senior citizen shelter that had been set up in Greater St. John AME Church that was later "adopted" by Bethel AME Church in Columbia, South Carolina. I guess she was keeping it a secret from them too.

Redfern continued. He started to talk about Richard, a homeless man who had been living at the Loaves and Fishes Homeless Shelter in Biloxi—just a few blocks from the oceanfront. The night of the hurricane, Richard decided to ride out the storm at the shelter. He had done it before and it had turned out all right in the past. This shouldn't be any different, or so he thought. To his horror, he found out that this would be different.

Within five minutes after the rains started coming, he was up to his waist in water inside the shelter. He tried to open the door to get out, but the door was frozen shut by the pressure of the water on the outside. He broke the window hoping to get out, but the water was coming in so fast that he could not get out through the window. It was only until the water was higher than the window that he could

swim out. When he was able at last to get out of the shelter, the rain was driving down in torrents so that he could hardly see, the water current was so strong that he could hardly swim, and the wind was blowing so hard that he was almost blown away.

While Richard was trying to find something to cling to, he saw a man on a rooftop next to him blown away by the winds. Richard struggled to get on the roof. A five-gallon pail floated beside him and he snatched the pail to use as a flotation device until he could make his way to the rooftop. Finally, he was able to get on the roof, but had to lie down in order to keep from being blown off. Twice, the wind blew him off the roof, but he eventually was able to get to a third roof and hold on for hours until the water receded. When the waters receded, everything inside the shelter had been washed away—stoves, pots and pans, furniture, everything. It was the same story with the church across the street, and repeated again and again within a six to eight block area. But Richard was still alive. He had survived Hurricane Katrina and would live to see another storm—the storm of God’s love that was coming his way.

It’s amazing whom God chooses to get His message of hope to the world. Just a day or two after Hurricane Katrina, I received a phone call from Rev. Jimmy Jones, Founder of Christ Central Ministries, a poverty mission ministry. He called to let me know that he was going to Biloxi, Mississippi, to set up feeding stations and a Kids Kamp for the survivors of Katrina.

I heard Jimmy’s voice, “Gladys, does my partner want to go to Biloxi with me?”

He was referring to me, of course. Christ Central Ministries and City Light had been partners in compassionate care to the community for years.

I said, "I'm sorry, Jimmy. I can't go because Joe needs me at the furniture store, but what can I do to help you?" I think he already knew that I would have to help my husband in the furniture store, but he continued with confidence that I would aid him in his mission to help the survivors of Katrina. He continued with his request, "If City Light can coordinate church volunteer teams to come down every week that would be a big help."

I found myself saying, "That's an easy request, Jimmy. I'll get on it right away."

Joe and I were part of a group of people that founded City Light in 1996 to bring Dr. Tony Evans, an African-American preacher, to Columbia for a three-day crusade at Williams-Brice Stadium, University of South Carolina's football stadium. The purpose was to bring people of God together in unity to lift up Christ in the city for evangelism and discipleship. At a time when racial tension was high because of church burnings, Ku Klux Klan activity, and the Confederate flag flying over the State Capitol Building, a group of people got together and began to pray that God would heal our land as promised in II Chronicles 7:14.

This was an historical event: for the first time in the South an African-American preached to 80,000 people with the racial ratio of the attendees 60% white and 40% black. Also, for the first time, many denominations worked side by side for this cause. God began the reconciliation process that has been on going to this day. City Light has continued to exist to act as a catalyst to bring the people of God together to empower the local churches for service to community. Christ Central Ministries began at this time too and has been a partner with City Light ever since.

I hung up the telephone and called Redfern and told

him about my conversation with Jimmy. He agreed to lead the church volunteer teams every week. I called Rev. Craig Winesett, Compassionate Ministries Director in my church, First Church of the Nazarene, Columbia, South Carolina. With Craig's gift of administration and organization, it was a blessing to hear Craig say he would help organize the church teams. I called my pastor, Rev. Geoffrey Kunselman, and asked for his support in this endeavor. Just like always, he showed his support for this move of God and encouraged us in it. Thus began the storm of God's love that headed toward Biloxi, Mississippi.

Only a couple of days after Katrina hit the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast, Compassion Central was set up in Yankee Stadium on Division Street. The devastation was unbelievable, but the love of God that showed up in the people of God was unbelievable too. The people of God began to respond in the same measure that Katrina had arrived.

In the first week, Compassion Central had:

- established a visible community presence by setting up the Big Red and White Tent
- cleared Lee Street Stadium of debris
- removed debris, wrecked cars, and trees from the parking lot
- surveyed the community and discovered immediate needs
- organized and hosted a planning meeting for 80 local pastors and community leaders
- set up a supply depot with food, water, clothing, diapers, cleaning liquids, toiletries, school supplies, tents, and cots
- volunteers cleared Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church, Main Street Baptist Church

- established a supply depot at Vietnamese Martyrs Church
- began daily 'Kids Kamp' offering inflatable games, rides, sno-cones, popcorn, lunches, songs, crafts, and Bible lessons
- hosted five services under the Big Red and White Tent for local churches
- visited families and children on the streets, handing out toys, food/drinks, and offering words of hope and encouragement
- cleaned Light House Apostolic Church on Mission Street, removing sheet rock and debris
- took doctors and nurses to make house calls
- cleaned out Selenac Houses for elderly and shut-ins

More of God's love would arrive the next week, including the supply of 135 brand new mattress sets, special requests from the residents of the community. The church volunteer teams continued to respond to City Light—teams from all denominations meeting on the parking lot of First Church of the Nazarene to head out to Biloxi. In the fourth week alone, over 1,000 people were helped through warehouse services providing cleaning and hygiene supplies, over 100 people were counseled for spiritual needs, and over 450 boxes of food were distributed.

A surprise arrived from God in the form of Olivia Octopus, a hand puppet and creation of Auntie Karen. Olivia is a jazz-singing octopus who has overcome a great tragedy in her life and has been transformed by the caring of her fish friends who give her wonderful hugs. Because she has been transformed by their love and care, she begins to give to others what she herself has received, love and compassion communicated through a hug.

Redfern introduced me to Karen Alexander, who is a jazz singer with her own band, over a year ago, but it was not until Katrina that I realized that Karen's hand puppet, Olivia, could be used to comfort the children of Katrina. I called Karen.

"Karen, how about having lunch with me? I want to talk to you about Olivia."

Karen was delighted to join me for lunch and the two of us talked about the possibilities of using Olivia the Octopus to help the children in Biloxi.

"Karen," I said. "Olivia is wonderful. Let's develop her message for the children based upon the transforming power of her hugs and connect that to the healing power of the human touch. Olivia can be on a mission in Biloxi for Jesus." I went on to explain that I had a daughter-in-law who was once an orphan in Korea. Her life had been saved because a Christian lady in Minnesota adopted her and hugged, cuddled, and loved her for two solid weeks until she began to improve. You see, she had been told that her newly adopted baby girl was going to die but prayer and the power of those hugs kept her alive.

Karen liked the idea. She had already developed the Hugs from Carolina Campaign inspired by Hurricane Katrina and now we would add an "adoption kit." We were able to convince the City of Columbia to adopt the City of Biloxi using Olivia the Octopus and the Hugs from Carolina Campaign.

Phase I was the adoption ceremony on October 14, 2005, which included Dr. Tony Evans preaching an encouraging message to the people of Biloxi and his promise that he would help with the church adoption process. The revival was in full swing as the people sang, shouted, and praised God for His goodness. It certainly did not feel like the people under the tent considered

themselves “victims,” but rather, they acted more like “overcomers.” City Light and Christ Central had been with them for 49 days, and their enthusiasm for God soared as they realized that we were there for the long haul.

Olivia the Octopus kicked off the Hugs from Carolina Campaign by “adopting” twenty children. They were so happy to take Olivia home as their “best friend,” and there was something magical about the small arms reaching up to receive their hugs. The parents were encouraged to hear that City Light is committed to finding churches in Columbia to adopt churches in Biloxi, and families to adopt families, businesses to adopt businesses, and everyone to adopt children and seniors through Olivia the Octopus Adoption Kits.

Phase II of the Hugs Campaign will come when the Governor of South Carolina gives a proclamation, like Mayor Bob Coble did for Columbia, that the State of South Carolina will adopt the State of Mississippi.

Phase III will happen when other states, cities, towns and counties start their own Hugs Campaign until all of the people in the affected hurricane areas are covered by the compassionate care from God’s people.

The last prayer of Jesus for His disciples before His crucifixion was that they should be one as He was one with the Father. Then, He said that His prayer was not only for them but for all those who will believe in Him. (John 17:20-23) He also said that others would know we are Christians by our love. The storm of God’s love that has already hit Biloxi can hit all over the world—when God’s people come together as one to lift up Christ and show compassion to others.

Recently, I asked Redfern how this experience had affected him. He thought for a few minutes and then

responded, “It has made me appreciate my wife, children, and family a lot more. It has made me more keenly aware that everything I have is nothing and that I should not allow anything to separate me from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

*This tent city is a partnership between Christ Central Ministries and City Light Coalition, Inc.—two separate entities with two separate charters sharing equal responsibility to community need. The Founder of Christ Central Ministries is Rev. Jimmy Jones, ordained minister in the Church of God. The Founders of City Light Coalition, Inc. are Joe and Gladys Grimaud, Church of the Nazarene. Christ Central and City Light have been partners in compassionate community care for nine years. City Light takes the leadership role in defining the area of need through community leadership with clergy, business, government, and education. Christ Central takes the leadership role in responding to the community. City Light and Christ Central assume equal responsibility in making sure that we have a response to the area of need identified by community leaders.

**Copied with permission of author

The End and the Beginning of Something

DEAN NELSON*

It looked like the end of the world.

Flying over the Superdome in a private plane a few days after Hurricane Katrina, I saw the gash in the roof, debris flapping in the opening like a giant flag of surrender. The dry part of the city looked like the top of everything—trees and buildings—had been shorn off. The submerged part looked as if the missing tops from dry land were scattered and floating in the brown water.

After I landed and started driving through the evacuated New Orleans, the only real traffic was overhead, from thundering helicopters. Occasionally, heavily armed military vehicles drove by. No people on the streets, no electricity—steel beams from buildings bent over, as if they were still resisting the wind.

Whatever picture I came in with after seeing the images on television got replaced immediately. This was worse, so much worse than was possible to portray through camera, keyboard, or pen. It was epic in its awfulness.

I went there with Gary Morsch, head of the Olathe, Kansas-based Heart To Heart International, a humanitarian relief agency, to get medicine, food, and water to some of the worst-hit areas, and to determine where the big shipments of medicine should go. Heart to Heart was coordinating tractor-trailer and air shipments of insulin, antibiotics, tetanus vaccinations, saline solution, pain relief medicine, and critical care kits into the area. The president of Jefferson Parish, one of the devastated regions, gave Heart to Heart permission to pass through all check points and restricted areas to get supplies in.

We headed for one of the few open hospitals. Hospital staff had been “looting,” the head of that hospital told me, from local pharmacies to try to get enough drugs for the thousands of people in his facility. We passed over the freeway that had served as the city’s evacuation area. Empty wheelchairs and cots, shoes, clothes, and garbage were scattered for miles—a rapture scene from your worst childhood fears.

Then we got lost. Our maps were useless because roads were gone. Whole sections of the city were gone. As we came over a hill on Veterans Boulevard, we encoun-

tered police officers with automatic weapons waving us down. We got out of our vehicle, not believing what we saw through the windshield. There was no road ahead—the entire community before us was underwater. Rescue boats ferried people from their homes to dry land. The rescuers knew there were still survivors in that water. They would worry about the bodies later, they said.

An elderly woman approached the uniformed men.

“Are you taking people from this neighborhood to see their homes?” she asked.

“No. Maybe in a few weeks. Right now we’re trying to get them out, not in.”

She turned to us.

“Can you take me to see my house? I want to see what’s still there before I leave forever.”

Waist deep in the water was what looked like a resident: a wiry, unbathed, unshaven man who resembled actor Al Pacino, a cigarette in his mouth and behind each ear, dislodging his fishing boat from a tree branch.

“Can you take this lady to see her house?” we shouted to him.

He squinted at her.

“What’s your address?”

She told him.

“We’re neighbors. Get in the boat.”

She looked at the water—a color not found in nature—fouled with floating animals, waste, debris. Putrid. Toxic. Diseased.

“Wait there,” he told her. He slogged out of the water like a John the Baptist stunt double, picked her up and carried her to the boat, gently setting her in. He came back for her 60-year-old niece and set her next to her aunt. He looked us over.

“I’m not carrying you. If you want to go, get in.”

We stepped into the water and waded to the boat.

We motored past, and above, Frances Smith's church, the school her children attended, the neighborhood convenience store, which our driver circled for a few minutes, using his landing net to scoop up cartons of cigarettes floating at the rooftop.

"I guess now I'm a looter," he said.

He cut the engine a few houses from our destination, and quiet momentum carried us the rest of the way. The bow of the boat gently bumped against her useless gutters. She had lived in this house for 79 years.

"The oak tree looks good," she said, looking at the top third—all that was visible. Who knows what childhood memories that tree held? She gazed at the house for several minutes, the way we visit headstones at cemeteries. No one made a sound.

"The roof's gone," she said, finally.

"Is there something you wish you could still get?" I asked her.

"I've got my life," she said. "There's nothing in there that I can't replace."

"We don't want to get stranded here after dark," the driver announced, starting up the motor.

On the return trip the propeller stalled briefly after hitting a submerged vehicle.

Walking back up the street, with Frances bone dry and me soaking wet, I asked her if she had cried yet.

"None of that has come out," she said. Then she whirled to look me right in the eye. "I feel like I died and woke up. That's my old life, out in that water. It's over. Now I have to move on."

When I first got to New Orleans, I thought I was witnessing the end of something. But in that moment it dawned on me that I was seeing the beginning of some-

thing, too. I saw suffering and hope as two sides of the same coin, exposed by the kindness of a neighbor who had a boat. I saw the failure of our government—are we really surprised by that anymore?—and the goodness of people.

I heard the same stories you heard about the terrible actions of some—people whose hearts seem set on harming others. But I also encountered people whose inner compasses point to helping others. Many came from all over the country or provided services at their own expense, because the images they saw evoked questions out of their own hearts: “What can I do? How can I help?”

I saw resilience, compassion, courage, hope, the desire to help: new beginnings.

Two scripture passages came to mind during my time there. One was Psalm 121: “I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?” This was the lament of the poor in the Gulf Coast. In some cases, no one came to rescue them.

The other was the exchange between Moses and God in Exodus 3 and 4. “I have indeed seen the misery of my people,” God says. And after a discussion/argument, God asks Moses a question that I believe he asks all of us: “What do you have in your hand?” Moses had a staff for leading sheep. God told him that whatever he had in his hand at that moment would be usable enough for Moses to lead people out of their suffering.

This is what I saw in New Orleans: People used whatever they had in their hands at the moment they heard about the suffering, and let God use it to ease the misery of others.

*copied with permission of author

One Ship of Faith in the Midst of a Storm

JOEY A. CONDON*

(AS TOLD BY CHRISTOPHER COLEMAN AND TRINA WELLS)

Camille was the standard. Veterans of hurricanes on the Mississippi Gulf Coast had always had that benchmark, had always looked back with a sense of confidence that they had stood firm as the forces of nature dished out the worst beating people in these parts had seen for generation after generation. Some made the conscious decision to ride out every storm after that and in tempting fate, stared down Katrina's eye losing their lives due to pride and not necessarily the wrath of her wake.

Then there were others. They had no choice. No gas money, no motel money, nowhere nor no one to flee to for safety. Theirs was a decision made not out of pride but out of poverty, which left them with very few options other than to ride out the storm and pray. They were spared in the past by God's mercy and relied and hoped on the same to be protected from this storm.

Trina lived in a one-story brick house along with her mother and two daughters, Elizabeth and Kimberly in Pascagoula along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Other houses in the neighborhood lacked the stability that this structure provided. Naturally, as storms drew near, coworkers from the shipyard where Trina worked, and friends from down the block gathered at Trina's home for shelter and safety from the storms. They had gathered there before. But this time Katrina was calling. All they could do was to watch, and wait, and pray.

Until recently, Trina had been searching for a church home and just two Sundays prior to that memorable

weekend had decided to start faithfully attending Victory Praise and Worship Center Church of the Nazarene just one block away from her home. Earlier that summer Trina became a member of the church but had been sending her children to the activities of the church since the beginning of the year, along with her tithe and offering. Pastor Myron Hairston had been preaching a sermon series for several weeks prior to Katrina's arrival on how Jesus calms the storms of life, not realizing that God was preparing His flock for the storm that would shake the very foundations of this tiny congregation.

Victory Praise and Worship Center is a recent church plant, a struggling congregation in a diverse, depressed, multicultural community just blocks away from the Gulf of Mexico in the heart of Pascagoula. Pastor Myron, an experienced evangelist and church planter had worked hard over the course of many months to build a church. The week prior to the storm, he had more than 60 in attendance at morning worship. He had a sense that the church was on an upswing, was growing and beginning to impact the community.

But all that seemed secondary as the storm approached. Those who could sought higher ground inland. Of those that remained, some were with Trina, others scattered across the neighborhood. In the past, most storms came ashore at night. Trina and her family went to sleep that night expecting the storm to pass in the quiet hours of the nighttime. While the community slept, Katrina was building up strength offshore.

They awoke to the news that Katrina was still approaching. The lights flickered and then the electricity was lost in the early morning hours. As Trina gazed out of an opening in the window, the eastern skies darkened even though the sun should be rising, lightning embla-

zoning the sky giving brief flashes to the potential terror of destruction. Then the storm surge came with a vengeance.

As the storm grew in intensity, so did the concern of all in that one-story brick house. Sandbags were already set in place in front of all the doors, boards barricaded windows. They were as prepared as could be. Then the waters quickly started to rise inside that little dwelling until it became a whirlpool of floating chairs, tables and debris, two feet, then three feet as the adults quickly picked up the children and held them up as the waters continued to rise more rapidly than anyone ever imagined that they could.

Prayers became more intense; anxiety rose higher than the storm surge. No storm had ever ventured this far inland with flood waters from tidal surges. And the eye hadn't even come ashore yet. The waters continued to rush into the house. Perhaps this was the end. Prayers for safety and protection from the storm changed radically to pleas of salvation, of rescue, of lifesaving hope from above.

Options were limited, they opened a window in the front of the house, and as they looked across the street they saw that the floodwaters hadn't risen fully into those houses yet. Chris, a former marine and coworker of Trina's at the shipyard, and the tallest of everyone there, crawled through the window and, one by one, carried all eight who were at Trina's house to her neighbor's house across the street, wading through wind, rain and mucking waters filled with clutter, dangerous black moccasin snakes and other creatures, while dodging live power lines dangling dangerously near the waterline in his direct pathway.

The waters continued to rise in Trina's neighbor's

house; his name was also Chris. His wife and her mother, their two children, and family pets had also decided to ride out the storm. Suddenly they remembered that there were a couple of boats on trailers down at the end of the block, if they could get to them, but it meant that they had to swim several hundred feet in rough waters. Trina and her neighbor Chris were the only strong swimmers and decided to go and get a boat because the floodwaters were still rising and time was short. The shipyard worker Chris had already made several trips across the street and knew the block and the distance that the two of them needed to swim.

Above the prayers, above the panicked conversation and instructions, and just as they got out the door preparing to swim down the block, Trina declared, “The Lord brought us a boat!” Everyone turned and looked out the window and saw an unpiloted boat being tossed and thrown up against the side of the house by the floodwaters. Chris could only exclaim, “That boat was not there!”



Photo by Joey A. Condon

Trina's neighbor Chris instinctively swam around to the side of the house knowing how imperative it was that they grab this opportunity and, with assistance from Trina and her coworker Chris, secured the boat by lassoing the bowline and dragging the boat back in front of the house against the swirling waters caused by the surge. "Hurry, everyone into the boat!" instructions were given as each person clambered into the boat. If they waited any longer, there was genuine fear that they would not make it out, that they would die. Everyone helped the others get into the boat, the young, the elderly. The boat was rocking and thrashing about so much that one little neighbor boy, Bo, received a nasty gash across his leg, and his sister Amber also sustained some minor cuts and bruises. But all managed to crawl into the fourteen foot row boat, all soaked by the torrential downpour of Katrina's wrath, but all secured including the family pets.

Trina's coworker Chris, blinded by the intense rain and wind of the hurricane forces he faced, could faintly hear the cries of the neighborhood as he began to traverse what he thought was the street where Trina lived, to rescue others. Trina suggested he go down her street to the main road but that avenue was blocked by debris. At first both men called Chris were in the water towing and pushing, working in tandem and maneuvering the boat through treacherous waters. But Trina's neighbor Chris was recovering from the flu and, upon the insistence of his wife, crawled into the boat to prevent further illness. Chris, the ex-marine now alone in the water was uncertain as to where he was heading, no street signs to guide him, no clearly marked avenues, clutter in back yards and fences blocking his way, darkened, windblown, horizontal rain belting him in his face till he was blinded. He knew that he needed to wrap and hold secure the bow-

line across his chest and drag and pull until he got his precious cargo to safety or until he collapsed and drowned, trying.

As he instinctively headed north, away from the beach, he felt the bottom of the boat bouncing and occasionally getting temporarily hung up on the rooftops of cars and other obstacles—but he kept going. Dragging, pulling, and riding the boat adrift upon wave after wave of storm surges, sometimes the water breaching the sides of the little row boat, sometimes the boat acting more like a bucking bronco, trying to tame, trying to gain control. Those passengers in the boat were pushing objects out of the way, and, as fear was reaching its pinnacle, Trina encouraged everyone, “Is everybody praying? Keep praying everyone!”

What seemed like an eternity was really less than an hour of maneuvering through floating obstacles and dodging flying pieces of rooftops and metal sidings. At the point of sheer exhaustion where Chris wondered if he could fight for even one more inch, suddenly, they were facing a shadowed structure just ahead. Although darkened, the massive structure rose out of the shadows of the storm. Trina shouted, “It’s the church!” Just then, a storm surge rammed the bow of the boat into the front door of the Victory Praise and Worship Center Church of the Nazarene, shattering the already broken glass. Chris and the others fought with the door, finally breaking the frame in order to gain entry into the church. One by one, they left the boat and scurried up the stairs to the second floor of the educational wing of the church where they administered first-aid to the injured boy who would later require several stitches on his leg, and there, in the darkness, rode out the rest of the storm in the safety, in the solitude, and in the sanctuary of God’s mercy.

There were fourteen people in that boat—six children, six adults, two senior citizens, as well as two dogs and a cat, and of course Chris, a man of tall stature, over six feet tall, with water up to his chest, guiding that craft. All were saved that fateful day aboard a boat adrift in a storm. Coincidence? Or a God thing in the midst of a storm? To Trina, it has brought her back to a deeper understanding of faith. To Chris, an agnostic with no church affiliation, it has brought back the issues of faith in a whole new light. To others in the community it has been a physical witness of the meaning and reality of what the church really is, a shelter in the midst of the storm.

An afterthought. There is much more to tell of this story, much more beyond the boat. Trina and her family are back and more active than ever in the church. A Work and Witness team from Florida have gutted her house, removing sheetrock, bathroom fixtures and kitchen cabinets, all destroyed by the flood waters that rose to more than six feet inside her home. Another team sprayed for black mold and prepped her house while a team from Nebraska put up new drywall. And a lady from Chicago taped the walls. Still other groups will follow to paint and help restore Trina's home.

Chris like many others became an evacuee. Before he left, he insisted on paying for the damages to the front door that he caused as he broke in. Pastor Myron, instead, asked him to stay upstairs in the church as a security presence until he had to leave. Chris, again like many, initially left, but was able to secure a means to return to the community he loves. Pastor Myron, in fact, spent the first two weeks after the storm tracking down members and friends of his congregation. The good news, no lives were lost; the bad news, many lost everything and have had to move to other parts of the country to start a new life. As

the final tally was taken, almost fifty attendees at Victory Praise and Worship Center Church of the Nazarene were displaced and removed from the fellowship.

What an interesting term in light of this story, “fellow–ship.” Not many fellows left on board this ship of faith in Pascagoula! However, this author was privileged to attend the first worship service after the storm and after the sludge was removed from the sanctuary when the floodwaters subsided, repairs done by a Work and Witness group from Missouri. There were about a dozen of us. No microphone, no piano, no organ, no frills, just a gutted out shell of a sanctuary, and a mud-stained Christian flag. We had a generator supplying power for a couple of fans and a used, borrowed, barely playable electric piano.

As the “fellows” of this ship of faith gathered and, as the believers began to worship God in the spirit of authentic gratitude and thanksgiving for lives spared, there was no thought of possession, or material things, gone forever, but rather the thought of the eternal presence of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the Peace in the midst of the storm.

This author has worshiped our Lord and Savior in several unique settings and at outstanding memorable events. All those special days of worship combined, whether it be among thousands in auditoriums and stadiums around the world, could not compare to the humbling presence of worshiping alongside my brothers and sisters in Pascagoula, offering to God their contrite hearts and broken spirits. God’s presence was there, amid the fellowship.

Katrina will now become the standard. Yes, it will be the benchmark of the most powerful storm in recorded history. But it will also be the standard by which the Church of Jesus Christ will measure her response to future tragedies. The church has come to the aid of a lit-

tle church plant in Pascagoula and with the help of a little rowboat, is changing the community for Christ and His Kingdom.

Whenever you are able to travel to Pascagoula, Mississippi, I am confident of two things. You will see the boat that brought Trina and her friends to safety. It rested right in front of the church doors as the waters subsided. No matter how many times the dump trucks tried to haul it off, the community heard the story, and has vowed that it shall not be removed. Someday, there will be some fitting memorial so that you will be able to see the actual boat that God brought to those in need of rescue during Hurricane Katrina.

I am also equally confident that Pastor Myron, and that little band of fellows aboard the ship of faith at Victory Praise and Worship Center Church of the Nazarene will once again rise up and be a thriving congregation because of the witness and assistance from Nazarene churches and colleges around the country that helped them rebuild their homes and their neighborhood, reaching out to a lost community with hope and relief supplies. But most of all, they will remember a story of God's mercy and protection that has inspired many to re-examine their own place in the ship of faith.

*copied with permission of author

Return to Ground Zero

JESSE MIDDENDORF*

In September 2001, I stood at "Ground Zero" in New York City, stunned and shaken by the sight and smell of the still-burning rubble, and the frantic efforts at

rescue being carried out by the New York Fire Department and other personnel. Over the next two years I returned several times to New York. In each trip I was deeply moved by the response of the rescue and recovery personnel, the resolute determination of the people of New York to overcome, and the incredible outpouring of love from Nazarenes from around the globe. Local churches and districts had sent generous offerings, teams of support personnel, and thousands of expressions of love and concern.

Four years later, to the very week, I stood in Slidell, Louisiana, stunned and shaken by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and amazed by the magnitude of the loss that stretched over an entire community of about 200 homes. Not one was left standing.

Once again, I was moved by the immediate sacrificial effort made by Nazarenes who were already present, only days following the storm, and from across the nation. They were there, distributing relief supplies, helping families rebuild homes, and working in our local churches with the clean up and relief work so vital to the people of the Gulf Coast region.

I had grown up in the Gulf Coast area, spending some of my most enjoyable years as a young teen in Biloxi, Mississippi. I have returned to the coast on several occasions, always finding it a place of great beauty and restoration.

This time was different. I went with Dr. J.K. Warrick, one of my colleagues on the Board of General Superintendents, to review the damage brought about by the storm. The experience was heartbreaking. Once beautiful communities, with large century-old oak trees and beautiful magnolias, were utterly destroyed. Homes that had been built in the mid to late 1800's and had survived all previous storms, were now masses of wreckage.

We drove to the Pearl River Church in Slidell, to find a massive and well-organized relief effort underway. There were dozens of Nazarenes, and people from other churches as well, handing out water, Crisis Care Kits, food, and preparing meals for relief workers and National Guard personnel. The pastor and associate pastor, having suffered damage to their own homes, were on-site, leading the effort, pouring out their hearts in compassion and love to their neighbors. Desperate people were flooding into the church for daily rations while they tried to bring some kind of order into their homes and businesses.

We made our way to the Gulf Coast Family Church of the Nazarene (Formerly Biloxi First), where we found a building that had survived remarkably well. There was damage to the ceiling in several rooms, and some damage to the sanctuary and the roof, but the structure was not compromised, and the repairs could be accomplished. This church was also being used as a relief center. There was a large supply of food, water, and clothing available to people, and it was being organized by the people of the church in preparation for distribution to folks in Biloxi who had lost everything.

The first man we met was a member of the church who had suffered extensive damage to his own home. But here he was, deeply involved in organizing the material for giving aid to others in spite of his own loss. "I just felt like this is what I should do," he said. Joining him was a young man of about 10 years old, busily helping, pouring himself into carrying material, opening doors, helping those who were so desperate for help and emergency supplies. The pastor, who had endured the storm in the church building along with a few others from the church and community, shared that they were in such danger during the storm that they began to seek shelter

in the framework under the platform of the sanctuary. The roof and walls seemed in danger of collapse at the height of the storm, and the only place that seemed to offer promise of enough structural integrity to survive the collapse of the walls was under the platform. Fortunately, the storm began to subside, and the people were grateful that the building, for the most part, survived the storm intact.

From Biloxi we went to Pascagoula where we found the beautiful new Cornerstone Church a beehive of activity. Though the church's steeple lay on the ground, there was little other damage. But the building had been virtually taken over by the Red Cross, the National Guard, and many other relief agencies. The parking lot and the gymnasium were piled with supplies that were being distributed to other relief agencies and centers. Trucks and trailers were coming and going as Nazarene volunteers from the local church and from across the country worked to organize and distribute the materials so needed by people in the devastated areas.

It was also in Pascagoula that we found the Victory Praise and Worship Center, a Church of the Nazarene located in the older part of town. This was the former sight of Pascagoula First, now the Cornerstone Church. The water had risen to about four feet inside the church building. The homes surrounding the church had suffered water damage to as much as six feet. The ruined homes, the piles of rubble, the boats scattered along and on the roads, testified to the ferocious storm that battered the Gulf Coast.

Once again, there were Nazarenes hard at work in the midst of a devastated community. Some had already removed sheetrock and paneling from about five feet and down throughout the building. Inside the gymnasium

they were already organizing relief supplies for distribution to the families surrounding them. The church had become a center of caring concern, of tangible assistance, and of much needed encouragement to people who had lost everything.

It was there that, to my surprise and delight, I turned to see a familiar face. There stood a member of my wife's extended family, a Nazarene from northern Alabama, who had made his way to Pascagoula to help in any way he could.

Those loving, caring, generous and sacrificial Nazarenes were there again, right in the middle of the action, giving of themselves for the sheer love of Christ. That is the incredible strength of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

*copied with permission of author

EPILOGUE

OLIVER R. PHILLIPS

The stories in this book would never answer the question why bad things happen to good people, or conversely. This was never intended. What we hope the book accomplished was to reassert the belief that we can survive life's tragedies and its unfairness by an unyielding belief in the interdependency of all of creation. We desperately need each other.

Victims of the unwelcome Gulf Coast tragedies were tested to their capacity by recurring news of impending hurricanes in the Atlantic. It is only fair to ask, under such circumstances whether God has a plan in all of this.

It is understood that we could endure any misfortune if we knew there was meaning in it. The stories captured in this book have not concluded any closer about the purpose and plan of God.

However, the lesson learned is that the unpleasant facts and suffering are neutral. We, by our responses, give circumstances either a positive or a negative meaning. Each story, in its own unique way, demonstrates how people can become strong in the midst of adversity when total strangers respond in an unselfish or heroic manner.

God transposed the circumstances of the Gulf Coast tragedy to become a giant stadium of people helping people through their innate desire to be good to their neighbor. Harold Kirshner said it so well “God, who neither causes nor prevents tragedies, helps by inspiring people to help.”



Photo by Gwen Lambert