



CHURCHWORK

OUR VISION: The Diocese of Louisiana is one church, faithful to Jesus Christ, united in mission, reaching out to seekers. We live in joyous witness to the power of grace and divine compassion in our lives.

Presiding Bishop visits stricken churches in New Orleans

Margaret Shott Lawhon
St. Luke's, Baton Rouge

Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold and his wife Phoebe, visited Bishop Charles Jenkins and the Diocese of Louisiana on Tuesday, Sept. 20, for a tour of damaged Episcopal churches in New Orleans. Special guests included: the Rt. Rev. George Packard, bishop suffragan for chaplaincies and his associate, the Rev. Jerry Blackburn; media specialist Sarah Bartenstein from the Diocese of Virginia; and Matt Davies of Episcopal News Service in New York. Local clergy, some staff members and secular press people accompanied the group. As a volunteer media liaison for St. Luke's, Baton Rouge, I was invited to join the entourage as well.

After successfully passing through a security checkpoint on Jefferson Highway a mile or two past the Ochsner Hospital campus in Jefferson Parish, our caravan made its first stop at Church of the Annunciation on South Claiborne Avenue in New Orleans.

The Rev. Jerry Kramer, who now shares office space at St. Luke's, Baton Rouge, was there to show the group the devastation done by Katrina to his church: pews lifted from the floor by rising water, mildewed kneelers, a ruined baptismal font and a damaged organ. Outside, broken branches and debris littered the church grounds and neighboring yards, while abandoned cars that had been completely submerged in the flood, were scattered along the street's median.

At St. Paul's on Canal Boulevard near the Lakefront, it was another heart-wrenching sight. Although the building was locked and there was no way to enter it, the church's exterior indicated serious damage throughout the structure. Several huge trees were uprooted near the building, there were broken windows and water lines on the building from the flood that looked to be eight to ten feet from the ground. Every plant that had been under water was now dead and brown and caked in gray mud. The stench of the contaminated water was everywhere.

Miraculously, only a short drive away from St. Paul's near the edge of Lake Pontchartrain, the Chapel of the Holy Comforter sustained only minimal roof damage and is surrounded by green grass and only a few broken trees and bushes. The Rev. Roger Allen, chaplain of Holy Comforter and one of the driver's for the Tuesday caravan, rejoiced over his chapel's lack of damage while mourning for so many other losses in the city, including that of his own house. Allen said he sheds tears each time he returns to New Orleans on a



Mold-ridden pews and cushions lie strewn about the nave of Church of the Annunciation, New Orleans.



Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, Bishop Charles Jenkins and Phoebe Griswold walk to the steps of St. Paul's, New Orleans, knowing that the telltale eight-foot high mud line means the contents of the first floor inside have been under water for three weeks.

salvage mission.

Many members of the groups shed tears as they looked at the devastation in the city.

On St. Charles Avenue at Christ Church Cathedral, we found clean-up crews on the job, and thankfully a structure that appears to be dry and in tact.

Some members of the diocesan staff made a quick trip to the Noland Diocesan Center to retrieve personal items from their desks. I walked around the downstairs reception area and again the smell of mildew and rot were made worse by the stifling heat.

On a day filled with such shocking images, no longer separated by a TV screen or radio announcer, one experience stood out for me and will do so for a long time. At St. Luke's, New Orleans, on North Dorgenois in Mid-City, where a predominantly black congregation worships, the water seemed to have risen only about a foot, trees had fallen away from the building and the church's piano was not damaged. Here was a lot to be thankful for. As we en-



Bishop Charles Jenkins removes the reserved sacrament from the tabernacle at St. Luke's, New Orleans, and those present consumed the elements which had been blessed before Hurricane Katrina.

tered the church, the odor hit us like a wall, and with the windows closed, it felt like a sauna.

The senior warden, Elvia James, led us in, and as we were wandering around and realizing the church was basically okay, all of a sudden we heard Bishop Jenkins' voice above the conversations saying, "The Lord be with you." He was at the altar, calling us to prayer in the midst of a moment of overwhelming emotion. The bishop prayed a prayer of thanksgiving, then asked the senior warden to help him look in the tabernacle for any consecrated hosts left there before the storm. Led by Bishop Jenkins and his wife Louise, many in the group received the host from the presiding bishop, and along with an incredible understanding of the Lord being with us in the midst of every storm.



Bishop Griswold talks with Chaplain Roger Allen at the Chapel of the Holy Comforter, New Orleans, which was spared major damage. [SARAH BARTENSTEIN PHOTOS]

The Diocese of Louisiana stands ready to serve

Ann M. Ball, editor

Since the earliest days following Hurricane Katrina – and before, during and after Hurricane Rita – the Diocese of Louisiana has been working tirelessly to “provide and promote on-the-ground relief ministries” relevant to the needs of residents in each civil parish of our diocese impacted by these incredible back-to-back forces of nature.

Under the most difficult of circumstances, Bishop Jenkins, his staff, and the many support people who came from Episcopal Relief and Development with their financial assistance and expertise in disaster response, worked tirelessly to give immediate help to stricken areas which were seemingly neglected by national agencies.

The Episcopal Church Center offered immediate pastoral help to clergy families. Church Pension Group offered assistance for clergy who needed it. Church Insurance, Church Mutual and Church Restoration began the process of inspecting and protecting churches and church property.

The bishop and diocesan leaders developed a vision for the diocese in the wake of the hurricanes. Two key elements express the spirit of the short term objectives: that there is “flexibility to adjust the program as needs shift” and that there is “no fear of initial error – the worst error is doing nothing.”

In addition to assessing the needs of New Orleans churches for the future, there will also be an assessment of the needs of all rural churches.

Planning for the City of New Orleans

Bishop Jenkins and church leaders stress the importance of Episcopalians being “present at the table” as a vision is set for the development of the City of New Orleans. The church should be a “prophetic voice in the planning” and

St. James ministers to shelter workers, evacuees

Sarah Bartenstein, Diocese of Virginia
Serving Louisiana via grant from ERD

In September 2004, when Hurricane Ivan threatened the Gulf Coast, residents of New Orleans evacuated. Although Alabama took the brunt of that monster storm, the evacuation revealed a host of problems that would have been catastrophic had Ivan taken aim at Louisiana.

The evacuation, says the Rev. Robert Odom of St. James Church, Baton Rouge, “was a mess.”

But it was also a blessing, he believes, because “it showed us what went wrong” and presented an opportunity to make sure that if the need arose, the area could be better prepared. At St. James, where Odom directs the church’s Center for Spiritual Formation, people began asking one another, “What can we do here?” A year after Ivan, the fruits of that discussion were evident in the ministry that St. James provided before, during and after Hurricane Katrina.

A group of parishioners received training from the Red Cross as shelter volunteers. As local residents, they would be in a position to respond immediately in a crisis. They were soon pressed into service as New Orleans evacuees flowed north to Baton Rouge. A middle school served as a support shelter for families who had loved ones receiving medical attention at a special needs shelter at Louisiana State University. According to Father Odom, the congregation’s volunteers were told to expect 150 to 180 evacuees; that projection was raised to 250, and eventually the group was told not to turn anyone away until they reached capacity. Nearly 400 people were housed at the shelter. Because it was the first shelter to open in Baton Rouge, Kenilworth Middle School had the highest census in the area in the days immediately after the hurricane – despite being the location with the least capacity.

Coordinating the St. James volunteers was parishioner Holly Heine, who has since joined the staff of the Diocese of Louisiana’s newly-formed Office of Disaster Response.

St. James volunteers worked 12-hour shifts each night, from 7 p.m. until 7 a.m., until the Red Cross arrived with its own personnel. Conditions were grim: the shelter had

“be present at the table in every conversation.”

Establish a new mission plan

The bishop has charged diocesan leaders to begin the process of discerning where new churches might be planted in the rebuilding that lies ahead. The Rev. Ken Ritter of Trinity, Baton Rouge, will head a committee to assess congregations in the diocese.

The Diocese of Louisiana is exploring ways to form linkages with its sister dioceses, Western Louisiana and Mississippi, for collaborative mission work. Such innovative approaches may enable new funding streams from the development arm of Episcopal Relief and Development.

Strengthening the foundation of Louisiana’s Bishop’s Mission Fund through philanthropic agencies and other granting bodies is another priority. This would require securing a diocesan staff person skilled in grant writing.

Promoting clergy health

As caregivers for congregational needs, it is important that clergy remain in good physical, spiritual and mental health during these stressful months.

Bishop George Packard, suffragan bishop for chaplaincies for the Episcopal Church, arranged a Day of Reflection and Healing and Preparation for diocesan clergy on Sept. 16. Over 100 clergy participated in the day-long event featuring time for prayer, Holy Eucharist with Healing, and long-needed conversations. Follow-up events will be held. Regular “check-ins” with the bishop and the Canon for Program will be implemented. Retreats and other clergy community days will be emphasized.

Bishop Jenkins told his clergy at the event, “We have a great deal of resources coming our way. I am confident about our future. We will continue, as always, to walk in God’s grace.”



The Rev. Robert Odom

no windows and, on the night the storm came through, no ventilation or light. There were six toilets and two showers for the hundreds of evacuees. As residents of Plaquemines Parish, which Odom calls Hurricane Katrina’s Ground Zero, “They didn’t have anything to go back to, and they knew it.” Odom admits that he “wanted to be a Red Cross guy and not foist religion on them,” but when he began saying a prayer before meals, there was “a loud amen and applause,” and he realized that the spiritual element that had been missing was something shelter residents wanted.

The St. James shelter team received word that the Red Cross was closing the shelter and moving its evacuees to larger shelters such as the River Center – Baton Rouge’s convention center. But as they soon learned, there was still work for them to do.

“When you walk into the River Center,” says Odom, his eyes brimming, “your heart breaks.”

“There are children, old people, the blind, people in wheelchairs. They’re displaced and have nothing to go back to.” For volunteers, “Just being present is hard work – but on top of that, they have to function.”

St. James’ associate rectors the Rev. Stephen Hood and the Rev. A. J. Heine also visit the center, as have three Episcopal monks from the Society of St. John the Evangelist and local Stephen Ministers.

Odom is aware that people across the country are looking for a way to respond to the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. He thinks that what many feel as they see photographs and television footage of the devastation, and hear stories about the toll that it has taken on the poor in particular, is “survivor guilt.” He says that the “middle miles” in the crisis are very difficult, and continued prayers and financial support are critical as the affected communities deal with life after Katrina.

Communities should be prepared to help the disadvantaged in time of disaster. Every metropolitan area in this country that is susceptible to disaster – terrorism, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes – needs to work on a plan to evacuate the poor in their communities first.



RITA RELIEF – Bishop Jenkins delivers a truckload of cleaning supplies, bottled water, diapers and other items to St. Matthew’s, Houma on Sunday, Sept. 25, in the wake of Hurricane Rita. The bishop was accompanied by his wife Louise, Canon Chad Jones, Eric Murrell, and Sarah Bartenstein from the Diocese of Virginia. Bishop Jenkins hoped to visit St. Andrew’s, Bayou du Large, but flooding made the road impassable. The supplies will be delivered to St. Andrew’s by St. Matthew’s parishioners by boat.
[SARAH BARTENSTEIN PHOTO]

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CHURCHWORK supports the vision of the diocese to be one church, faithful to Jesus Christ, united in mission reaching out to seekers.

The newspaper 1) provides news and information about the diocese; 2) keeps deaneries and congregations in touch with each other through news stories; 3) informs people about significant events in the wider church; and 4) provides theological reflection on the relationship of faith and current issues through editorials, columns, and features.

Pertinent articles and photographs are welcome. Send your stories to the editor at the address given above. Deadline for submitting material is the 15th of the month for consideration in the next month’s issue. Articles and photos can be e-mailed to the editor at the address below.

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Young professionals organize Office of Disaster Response

Ann M. Ball, editor

The long hallway on the third floor of the Manship Ministries Center at St. James, Baton Rouge – which currently houses the Diocese of Louisiana's Office of Disaster Response – is covered with color-coded charts listing each of the 54 congregations in the diocese.

The charts show churches by deanery, with locations on a push pin map, clergy names, telephone numbers, street addresses, supplies that have been delivered, supplies that are needed, the dates of pending visits, new information as it arrives in the ODR and other pertinent data.

This amazing ongoing Marks-a-Lot database was created by the young professionals who are supervising the Office of Disaster Response. Holly Heine of St. James, Baton Rouge, who is Volunteer Coordinator, and Eric Murrell of Trinity, New Orleans, who is Distribution Manager of ODR goods and services, worked with outside consultant Anson Burtch of North Carolina in organizing the office into a smoothly functioning system.

At the time of this article, the office also had as volunteers, the Rt. Rev. John Lipscomb of Southwest Florida, and his wife Marcie Lipscomb who came as pastoral and office assistants. Bishop Lipscomb was

a curate at St. James years ago. The office has hired other staff people to assist with ongoing needs as it searches for a permanent director.

Burtch began a weekly ODR newsletter which is circulated to the diocesan churches and is posted on the diocese's web site.

The ODR is actively contacting all congregations in the diocese to assess their short- and long-term needs. The office also is organizing long-term church partnership programs with congregations from across the country.

Clean-up crews and work crews are being organized for local churches in need of them. There are church groups from out-of-state who will come for extended stays to work on building projects which can be set up through the ODR.

The office continues to receive telephone and email offers of goods and services from around the country.

Bishop encourages gifts to ODR

Individuals in the diocese, church groups planning fund raisers, and congregations that want to support disaster relief should consider directing their resources to the diocesan Office of Disaster Response says Bishop Charles Jenkins. The ODR short-term recovery needs are being administered now and will continue over the coming months. The rebuilding needs for southeast



Holly Heine writes a new entry for All Saints, Ponchatoula, while Eric Murrell notes the church's location on the Northshore. Anson Burtch fields a phone call inquiry. [EDITOR PHOTO]

Louisiana will be a long-term project which Bishop Jenkins already has on the drawing board. For information about making contributions, contact the diocesan Office

of Disaster Response at St. James Church, Baton Rouge, 1.225.387.5141, ext. 224. Call that number also if your church has recovery needs in the immediate future.

St. Luke's, Baton Rouge, on duty "24-7," buys mobile unit for diocese

Baton Rouge area churches have responded with remarkable hospitality, goods, services, and ministry to the many evacuees of Hurricane Katrina who are staying in the diocese and to those who are passing through to other parts of the country. St. Luke's, Baton Rouge, is no exception.

As early as Sept. 7, St. Luke's, served as a residential host for families with infants in intensive care at Woman's Hospital next door to St. Luke's, reports the Rev. Brien Koehler, rector of the parish.

"Our nightly census has ranged from 15 to 30 persons," he said. "New arrivals come to us daily. We also provided shelter for pregnant women close to their delivery date who had not yet entered the hospital. Our location next to Woman's Hospital makes our partnership with the hospital ideal."

Additionally, the church provided space for the employee care center of Woman's Hospital so that the usual space on the hospital campus could be used for treatment purposes.

"We are also providing temporary housing space for 25 federal law enforcement officers on our campus," Koehler said. A good deed that brings with it "good security."

Help extends far and wide

After a long day of work, 75 emergency telephone answering personnel at the state's "9-1-1" center near St. Luke's partake of an evening meal provided by the church. Church members have prepared and served hundreds of other meals to people all over town. The church also distributed tons of clothing throughout East Baton Rouge, Livingston and Washington parishes.

St. Luke's was able to deliver needed water to the distressed people of Bogalusa even before FEMA or the Red Cross were able to reach them.

The financial resources in two small area churches were strained during the hurricane

crisis, hampering their ability to provide ministry needs. The generous support of St. Luke's – and people and churches across the country – enabled ecumenical outreach to these congregations. St. Luke's has received and distributed to other institutions and individuals several truckloads of relief supplies from all parts of the country.

"We have been around the clock hosts for our on-campus guests, as well as drivers, laundry assistants, offered bathing facilities, and in several cases, assisted in employment and other first steps toward permanent re-settlement for some of the displaced,"

Koehler said. "We have added, or will add, about 130 additional students to our day school. We have recognized that Jesus is in our midst as we minister to those whom he loves the most," Koehler said.

Four-wheel drive ministry begins

St. Luke's recently purchased a 30-foot self-contained mobile unit for use by the diocese in its hurricane relief efforts.

Members of the parish made the down payment on the vehicle from a local camper dealership and will make the monthly payments while it is in service.

The dealer agreed to buy the camper back

whenever the diocese has finished using it for its ministry needs. The mobile unit is fitted with wireless internet for communication.

Professional drivers who were displaced from work were hired to drive the mobile unit. Their salaries are funded through generous donations.

St. Luke's clergy, the Rev. Flip Bushey, Deacon Jim Tomkins, Administrative Coordinator Shirley Duncan – and the Rev. Walter Baer of New Orleans – blessed the mobile unit "and moved out" according to Bushey.

"We have begun to let people out in the field know we are here," Bushey said.



The Rev. Brien Koehler, rector of St. Luke's, Baton Rouge, is dwarfed beside the new diocesan Hurricane Katrina Relief mobile unit.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONGREGATIONS

Christ Church helps Slidell

John Massarini
Northshore Correspondent

On Sunday, Sept. 18, the service schedule returned to Christ Church, Slidell. The previous week had been anything but normal.

My son Michael and I returned to Slidell from Alabama after the storm to find deacon-candidate Milt Gibson in our driveway saying he needed us to come to the church to unload two 18-wheel trucks filled with relief supplies. I thought Milt had lost his mind. He hadn't. He had organized churches to bring relief supplies to Christ Church to donate to people who needed them.

I arrived at church to find the Rev. Joe Rhodes from Baton Rouge singing while unloading a truck and sorting shoes into organized piles. In other parts of Comfort Hall, Beth Gibson, Josh and Mary English and Cathy Simpson were organizing toys on one table, a mountain of diapers on another, food, clothes and toiletries and bedding in the far corners. A displaced family was sent to us by the Rev. Ernie Saik.

That was Tuesday. Since then, Lutheran seminarians, nine of them, arrived from Bethany Lutheran to help. They had done what they could at Bethany and came to help us.

Jodie Solito brought jambalaya to us from Bethany cooked by our own Jambalaya King, Burt Kemp. Wasn't Sept. 18 the date of our Parish Picnic? Well, we had the picnic early, sitting among Red Cross workers and volunteers arriving from Christ Church, Covington.

Our church relief volunteers included Milt Gibson, Beth Gibson, Caroline Capps, Winston Capps, Jodie Solito, Mary Slazer, Melinda Epperson, Tod Lussen, Jim Pichon, Shiela MacArthur, Laurel and Bruce McCartney, John Pfeifer, and others.

Truckloads of supplies came from churches in Kansas, New York, Pennsylvania, Missouri and most notably from St James and St Luke's churches in Baton Rouge.

It was difficult to know if we were doing the right thing until people in the area learned that Comfort Hall was open and we saw what the effort had accomplished. Comfort Hall lived up to its name. Diapers and formula were the most needed items, and newborns and infants were

brought in, along with little kids who were thrilled by the toy table.

One Gulfport woman who lost her home left \$20 as a donation. She didn't have to and was told that everything was free. She was just so happy to see clothes and books for her four-year-old son that she insisted.

The Christ Church congregation is scattered. Some may not return. Their houses are gone or severely damaged. In the midst of all the relief activity, fresh flowers were sought for the altar for the Sunday services. There are few if any fresh flowers in Slidell. But somehow Peace lillies were on the altar this morning.

Churches in brief

- Senior Warden Carl Gaines reports that St. Mary's, Chalmette, sustained major damage. Most of the roof was gone from the church and the parish hall will probably need to be torn down. Water damage and sludge covered the interior of the church. The Risen Christ sculpture and two paintings over the altar were miraculously unharmed.

- St. Andrew's, Bayou du Large, had flood water in their parish hall from Hurricane Rita but only minor water damage to the rectory and church. Supplies were sent immediately from St. Matthew's, Houma, from the diocesan Office of Disaster Response including cleaning supplies.

ECS grants due

The Episcopal Community Services board desires to fund not-for-profit agencies who create, manage and expand educational opportunities for young African Americans in the Diocese of Louisiana. Grant applications for program year 2006 are due on Nov. 1, 2005. Funding is for Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2006 and can be applied for annually. For information or to receive an application call Betty Evans, 225.387.5141.

Winterlight funding

Winterlight Conference for youth at Kanuga, North Carolina, is offering full scholarships for all young people in areas affected by the storms. Call 334.549.1725.



Army Spc. Brandon Taylor loads baby supplies onto a helicopter bound for Bogalusa where the infant formula and diapers are needed. St. Margaret's, Baton Rouge, collected the supplies and Navy Reserve Chaplain Victor Sheldon, rector of St. Margaret's, talked the Army into transporting them. (GREG PEARSON PHOTO-THE TIMES(SHREVEPORT, LA))

St. Margaret's priest arranges for airlift of baby supplies

Dan Turner
The Times, (Shreveport, La)

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina produced acts of heroism and acts of basic humanity. Victor Sheldon pulled off a feat that qualifies on both counts.

Sheldon, who leads a double life as a chaplain in the Navy Reserve and as an Episcopal priest, overheard a Washington Parish official on a local radio station describing a severe shortage of infant formula and diapers in Bogalusa, a small town north of New Orleans.

Sheldon responded to the call, challenging St. James Church in Baton Rouge to come up with the baby supplies.

"I had an idea, since they needed the formula so badly, of a way to get it there quicker," Sheldon said. "Driving was going to take too long."

On a day when President Bush came to

town to make sure various agencies were cooperating in the relief effort, Sheldon managed to get an Army search-and-rescue crew to haul the goods. It wasn't a tough sales job.

"We've flown all over New Orleans picking people off of rooftops with the boom lift, but I'm just as excited about this," said Spc. Brandon Taylor, crew chief for the group making the first of two flights.

A trip to Sam's Warehouse produced a full pallet of formula, while a church volunteer rounded up bottles and pacifiers. "We bought all the formula they had," Sheldon said, just as another church volunteer rounded the corner with a trailer loaded with more. In short order, the flight crew packed the helicopter to the brim with the supplies.

The image of an olive-drab Army helicopter crammed with brightly packaged diapers and formula impressed Taylor.

"This," he said, "is so cool."