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"Be dressed ready for service
 and keep your lamps burning."
 -Luke 12:35



A Newsletter of the US Disaster Program

Issue #5 - February 2011

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NEWS

Join Ready to Serve!

Offer your services to your vulnerable neighbors after a disaster. Sign up [online](#) to be called upon to volunteer if a disaster affects your area.

We are building up our resource library!

Now you can go [online](#) to find tools and stories about preparedness planning and response

A Note from Katie

I just got back from visiting our program partners in the Diocese of Tennessee, and I'm reminded once again of the amazing work done day in and day out by the Church around the country. I was able to spend a few hours visiting homes that are being rebuilt by St. Luke's Community House in Nashville with support from Episcopal Relief & Development. I got to meet a few relatives of one elderly homeowner who were there on a Saturday morning hanging blinds for their aunt's return the next day. The power of this work lies in mornings like these, long after the country's attention has moved on. The Episcopal Church remains for the long term serving those who need it most. I hope the following stories and those in the [resource library](#) help you see the inspirational ministry already going on around the country.

-Katie

Flood Recovery in Nashville Begins

As Denice O'Neil and others from St. Luke's Community House walked around the neighborhood of West Nashville after the May 2010 flood, they came across a

programming. Do you have a document that might help another community? Do you have a story to share? Please send them so that knowledge can be shared around the country! Email Alison at ahare@er-d.org.

Trainings

February 3 & 4 -
Conference for
Diocesan Disaster
Coordinators in
Provinces I, II & III

March 12 & 19 -
Disaster training with
the Episcopal Charities
of New York

Current Emergency Relief Projects:

Pass Christian, MS
Oil spill recovery, Trinity
Church

Portage, WI
Flood recovery, St.
John the Baptist

Current Disaster Recovery Programs:

**The Episcopal
Community Services
of Louisiana (ECSLA):**
supports oil spill-
affected communities
adapt to the financial,
emotional and social
changes cause by the
oil spill through case
management and
supporting community
resilience.

Jericho Road:a
neighborhood-based
home-building
organization, working to
revitalize Central City, a
New Orleans
neighborhood

gentleman just beginning to rebuild his home. The rebuilding process had been difficult and full of obstacles - navigating the paperwork and processes of FEMA, insurance companies, etc. had been overwhelming. This Vietnam veteran told O'Neil that the flood and rebuild had been harder than any war he'd fought.



A volunteer crew cleaning a house in West Nashville

For residents like this gentleman, overwhelmed by that fight, St. Luke's Restore the Dream Center provides support in the form of case management and construction assistance. This Center is one of five supported by United Way and is housed at St. Luke's Community House, a social service agency established by the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee in 1913. St. Luke's Community House has a Restore the Dream site supported by funds from Episcopal Relief & Development for construction materials and a care for the care-giver program, and support from United Way for case management.

According to O'Neil, St. Luke's Restore the Dream Site Manager, case managers "walk with people hand in hand through the process." This includes filing the necessary paperwork with agencies and insurance companies, as well as researching and applying for resources from other agencies and organizations, and negotiating with mortgage companies on behalf of families who are paying both a mortgage and a rent so that these families don't lose their homes. However, the care is not just financial; case managers also provide emotional support and can connect residents with mental and medical health services if needed.

St. Luke's Community House has been assisting neighborhood residents since the first moments after the flood. Residents, volunteers and organizations used it as an information hub and distribution center because it has historically been a meeting place for the community.

This has meant that the Restore the Dream Center is well-placed to help residents with rebuilding and mitigation efforts. In this vein, another service the Center provides is construction estimates. This has a twofold purpose: first, it helps to avoid unethical contractors overcharging homeowners; and second, with this estimate case managers can rightly assess how much of the rebuild process the homeowner will be able to pay for with the resources they have, and what gaps there are that need to be covered.

According to O'Neil, most homeowners will receive about

recovering from Hurricane Katrina and decades of disinvestment. Jericho Road planted an [urban fruit orchard](#) in late November as part of its continuing Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts.

The Episcopal Diocese of Texas: rebuilds homes for elderly and disabled residents affected by Hurricane Ike in Galveston and the surrounding communities. Read an [article](#) from the Galveston Daily News about Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori's visit to the island for a house blessing.

The Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi: expands home-ownership opportunities on the Gulf Coast through the diocese's Hallelujah Housing program, and provides financial education and assistance through a parish-based ministry.

Contact Us:

To add your name to the "Ready to Serve" volunteer and skills roster:

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\$29,000 to rebuild from various sources, which may almost be enough to cover the cost of materials. With Episcopal Relief & Development's support, the Center can cover the remaining gap. In addition, the Center works with contractors that use only volunteer labor, which cuts the highest costs of rebuilding.

St. Luke's Restore the Dream Center has stepped in to help the Vietnam veteran: walking him through the process of filing all his paperwork. They also provided support as his wife went in for knee surgery by bringing the family Thanksgiving dinner. He and his family are now back in their home, but there is one last thing he needs help with: he lost all his medals in the flood. His case manager and the staff at St. Luke's Restore the Dream Center are now helping him through the processes with military and government agencies to get them replaced. "It would be a pleasure for us to help him get those," O'Neil said

If you are interested in helping with reconstruction efforts in Nashville, please contact Denice O'Neil at denice.oneil@stlukescommunityhouse.org, or call 615-324-8368. If you are interested in volunteering, you can become part of a construction crew. Housing is being organized for out-of-town volunteers. If your church or organization is based in Nashville and would like to provide meals or other support for volunteers, that would also be welcome.

Pastoral Care From the Back of Pick-up - La Porte, Texas

When Hurricane Ike was threatening the coast of Texas in September 2008, the City of Shoreacres in La Porte was warned that the storm surge was predicted to exceed roof height and that everyone needed to evacuate. The Rev. Michael Besson, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church "The Beloved by the Bay," and his staff urged parishioners to leave. Rev. Besson believes that if a church is along a coast line one of its responsibilities is to do everything possible to get people to evacuate. "We went door to door to convince everyone to leave," he said, "you've just got to get people out, I don't care how you do it."



Sherry Burns, Sandi Harris, the Rev. Mike Besson and Virginia Pierson-Turner check names from their parish list. Photo courtesy of Carol E. Barnwell - Texas Episcopalian 3/09

This same commitment to his community and parishioners led to a powerful response after Hurricane Ike swept past and left an estimated 575 of the town's 650 homes flooded and

uninhabitable. Once residents began to return, Rev. Besson wanted to do something to help his community, though at first in the face of such devastation, it was hard to see what he could do. Rev. Besson said, "I could just be with them, so that's what I did."

The Rev. Besson and his wife, Ellen, began by visiting each one of their parishioners whose home had sustained flood damage. They wondered what to bring with them, and in that hot and humid Texas summer without air conditioning, they were told everyone just needed a cold drink. So he and Ellen loaded his pickup truck with a couple of coolers of cold drinks, and set out to make their rounds. It took them three days to visit all of their affected parishioners, and as they met more people on their rounds, the list of people to visit grew. In the end, they visited people all day, every day for several weeks.

During these visits they also came to realize that people were either too busy cleaning or too far away from official feeding stations to access the many meal programs, so they started bringing lunches on their rounds. Volunteers from surrounding Houston churches as well as members of St. John's provided groceries, and congregational volunteers - both affected and non-affected - came together daily to make sandwiches to pass out at lunch time. They also began a clothes cleaning service as damp clothes became moldy. People could stop by the church and drop off their bags of clothes; a volunteer would take those clothes and wash them at home, then bring them back to the church for pick up.

Four months after the storm, the congregation at St. John's went on to further help their community and started a program to rebuild homes. They have rebuilt around 75 homes with help from the Diocese of Texas and Episcopal Relief & Development. However, the immediate and successful response of St. John's during the first weeks after the disaster demonstrates how important strong relationships can be in responding to disaster. The ability of the Rev. Besson to reach the people that really needed him and understand what they most needed are the cornerstone to that success. "I just cared. I had been in their homes for holidays and house blessings - I was very connected to the people there, and we really are a family at St. John's."

To learn more about the Hurricane Ike response activities at St. John's in La Porte, read "[Assisting Neighbors Through Cold Drinks and Laundry](#)" in our [Resource Library](#).

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