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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 #4 - January 2010

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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 programming. Do you have a document that might help another



A Note from Katie

Happy New Year!

After a calm (and snowy!) Advent and Christmas, the busyness of the new year is upon us. Alison and I just returned from Seattle where we presented at a Disaster 101 training held by the Diocese of Olympia. They did a great job organizing it, and we were happy to get to introduce a new parish preparedness guide we've been working on. Using their feedback, we'll now make a few changes and then make it available on the [Resource Library](#) for you to use in your local training and planning efforts.

-Katie

Wisconsin Floods - Serving Those Falling Through the Cracks

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

Upcoming Trainings

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

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

Current Emergency Relief Projects:

Diamondhead, MS
Oil spill recovery, St.
Thomas Church

Portage, WI
Flood recovery, St.
John the Baptist

Current Disaster Recovery Programs:

The Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee:
in partnership with St. Luke's Community House, rebuilds homes and provides support for caregivers in the neighborhood of West Nashville affected by the floods in the Spring of 2010.

The Episcopal Community Services of Louisiana (ECSLA): Jericho Road:
a neighborhood-based home-building

Last September, after heavy rains, the Wisconsin River flooded hundreds of homes along its riverbanks. The congregation of St. John the Baptist, a small church in Portage, WI wanted



to help. They immediately opened up their church hall to be used as an emergency shelter, and because they didn't have a priest they were able to use the empty rectory as a shelter as well. However, they also wanted to do more for their neighbors; they just didn't know who to help or what to do.

They first reached out to their diocese for assistance. The Rt. Rev. Steven Miller asked the Rev. Joan Smoke, from neighboring Holy Cross Church in Wisconsin Dells, to help guide the congregation in this ministry. Rev. Smoke spoke with Kate at Episcopal Relief & Development about groups she should connect with within the Portage community. This led her to contact the local branch of Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), the Salvation Army and local interfaith groups, as well as the local Columbia County Emergency Management Office. From the county she received a list of names and addresses of people who needed extra help, and who the county either couldn't help or couldn't reach.

Along with reaching out to the people on that list, the Rev. Smoke and groups of parishioners walked through affected communities, going up to front doors and talking to residents. Often what they found was that many people had substantial unmet needs but couldn't get help from the authorities. These were people like a newlywed family expecting their first child. Their income was too high for them to qualify for help from the county, but the mom-to-be would soon have to leave her job. They needed extra help to rebuild their contaminated well, the only source of fresh water for the family.

There were also people who had declined help. Many of them were afraid that if they let government officials in their homes, the homes would be condemned and residents forced to leave. Others refused aid because they thought it would be of better use to others. However, these people also needed assistance - someone just had to get in and find out what that need actually was and convince them to accept it. One gentleman whose home was on stilts could only reach the front door in a canoe because the waters were so high, but he refused help because he believed others to be worse off than he. According to Rev.

organization, working to revitalize Central City, a New Orleans neighborhood 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.

This program was featured in the Texas Tribune online in [pictures](#) and in an [article!](#)

Contact Us:

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

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Smoke, "We were able to get in to places that the county couldn't get in to, and people were open to talk to us. We were able to extend some comfort and compassion to them too."

Since their program began, the congregation of St. John the Baptist has used locally-raised funds as well as funds from Episcopal Relief & Development to provide a washing machine to one family and a stove to another. They also replenished food that was destroyed when another family's freezer flooded. In addition, they have helped to begin construction on the new well for the family expecting the baby. They are helping people with things that aren't covered by any other kind of program - things not covered by insurance or for people without insurance.

For the Rev. Smoke, one of the most important lessons she has learned from this work is the value of cooperating and working together with various agencies and other churches. Through these networks they have reached the individuals and communities who were falling through the cracks, and were able to serve their needs. The Rev. Smoke said, "This is what Christ told us to do: go out, feed, clothe and help those in need. We were able to make Christ's presence known in the middle of disaster."



Preparedness and Relationship-Building in Louisiana

Recently, Episcopal Community Services of Louisiana (ECSLA) has been tasked with bringing together and working with congregation-based community ministries throughout the Diocese of Louisiana. ECSLA is also the branch of the diocese at the helm of disaster preparedness and response. These two missions go hand in hand. For the organization's Executive Director, Nell Bolton, the best way to begin to work with congregations and help them prepare is to get to know them better. To this end, she and a handful of volunteers have been visiting Louisiana churches for the last six months, and will continue to do so for the next year.

After four hurricanes and an oil spill in the last five years, congregations around the diocese have provided individual disaster response ministries. Until now however, many of these efforts have been isolated and have gone unnoticed by the

broader diocese. In addition, many of these congregations have very successful year-round outreach programs that are also largely isolated and unheralded. Therefore, the main goal of ECSLA's first visits is to get to know congregations, their vision and their work. It will also allow congregations to get to know them, creating a foundation for future cooperation and partnership.

These visits have also been a golden opportunity to ask congregations whether they are prepared for disaster and what support they need from the diocese in order to be better prepared. They have asked what disaster response has been done in the past, if there is interest in creating a disaster response ministry in a future emergency and what support is needed for this endeavor. Finally, it is also a good opportunity for understanding what assets are in the Episcopal Diocese in Louisiana. These are both physical assets, like buildings and beds, as well as current outreach programs that can be used in future disaster response.

Through her experience with hurricane and oil spill response, Bolton has come across one big finding: the more involved a church is in its community before a disaster, the better equipped it is to respond after a disaster. ECSLA is helping churches build on community relationships and their own outreach programs so that they will be better prepared to respond in future disasters. Bolton said, "These relationships and communications channels will prove invaluable the next time a crisis arises."

For more information on this program, please visit the article: [How To - Building Relationships for Response](#) in our online [resource library](#).

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