

Disaster Relief

On November 12, 2006, the Illinois-Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren sponsored a disaster relief trip to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina. Five people traveled to Pearl River, St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana, from Dixon and the surrounding area to join eight other volunteers from Illinois, and provide assistance to victims of Hurricane Katrina in Slidell for one week.

When disaster strikes the Church of The Brethren Disaster Response provides volunteers to assist with clean-up and to repair or rebuild homes for survivors who are uninsured or lack the necessary resources to hire a contractor. The presence of these volunteers helps to ease the trauma felt in the aftermath of a disaster. In 2005, the Church of The Brethren nationally provided 8,519 days of volunteer assistance to disaster victims.

The Bible tells us "Carry each others burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

Some areas had their water service restored just one week prior to our arrival. The volunteers were housed at the United Methodist Church complex in Pearl River.

The group was divided into three teams to work on different homes that had suffered damage. Our group of two was charged with remodeling a bathroom, another group was dispatched to paint a house requiring both interior and exterior painting. The third group was responsible for installing drywall, mudding, sanding, installing base board and several interior doors.

On Thursday, November 16, in cooperation with the St. Bernard Parish Project, we traveled to Chalmette, St. Bernard Parish to provide the same kinds of assistance.

Chalmette is closer to the gulf and has Lake Ponchartrain to the north and Lake Borgne to the north and east. The area suffered severe damage from wind and flooding. This was followed by a 20 foot storm surge.

As we drove down the main street the commercial district is still out of business fifteen months later. Banks, super markets, restaurants, entire strip malls and offices were either boarded up or the glass was blown out. One bank had pulled a trailer up along the side of their building and was conducting business. There are numerous FEMA trailer parks in the area.

We proceeded to a middle class neighborhood consisting of approximately 2500 homes. All brick, one story homes, mostly standing vacant. The homes that were in the process of rebuilding had FEMA trailers parked alongside that were hooked into the home's sewer system and temporary electric service connected. We were given to understand that the municipality is in the process of condemning homes that were not under repair and if condemned they face destruction.

We again were divided into two teams. Four of us were assigned to pull electrical wiring into a home. The other group was assigned to drywall.

The home that we were assigned to had a large "X" painted on the front. In the upper portion was the date 9/14. In the lower section were some initials and in the lower right section was a zero, indicating no dead bodies. The searchers had broken the glass in the front door to gain entry.

When we entered the home it was clear the water had risen to the ceiling. There were water marks and all of the ceiling fans had blades that drooped forming half moons. We removed the fans and any remaining electric boxes. Most of the boxes had been removed along with all of the wiring and drywall. We spent the day installing new boxes and pulling wire to the new

boxes.

At the end of the day while we were waiting for our transportation we had an opportunity to talk to the homeowner. They are all so thankful and continually express their appreciation for the assistance. On the day that we cleaned up the job site in Slidell, the homeowner, a single woman who had an adopted young daughter, age 8-10 years, who had lost her mother, insisted that my partner and I hold hands with her while she prayed giving thanks and blessed us and our families.

The St. Bernard Parish Project is begging for help. They are doing the best they can with limited resources, financial and human. They are working to provide additional housing for volunteers to permit them to bring in more volunteers. They appreciated our assistance and the quality of our work.

Marlin E. Misner
Dixon Church of The Brethren