

DISASTER RECOVERY WORK GROUPS IN NEW ORLEANS
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE



**So, You've Signed Up
Now What? Logistics
Preparation is More Than Packing Your Suitcase...
Now You've Been On-Site -- Reflect/Reflect/Reflect on That Experience
Return Home – Live the Hope**

I. So, You've Signed Up....

Thank you for your participation in a disaster recovery work group. Your willingness to engage in this experience allows you to walk with others as they rebuild their lives and in doing that, share gifts, talents and resources you bring. Disaster Recovery is a particular type of mission trip. Mission trips of any kind have three primary components:

- (1) Preparation
- (2) On-Site Experience
- (3) Returning Home

Attention to each component will allow you the opportunity to play a significant part in the lives of people you will meet and those you may never meet in person.

You may travel to a different part of the country, experience different cultures than you might have known previously, and are exposed to different economic or social settings than at home. Disaster recovery, in particular, puts you deliberately into the midst of disruption of various intensities. These experiences move you out of a comfort zone and can prompt you to ask new questions and seek deeper faith responses. Such an experience participates in God's transformation in yourself and in the community where you serve.

We hope that this resource will help you prepare for your experience and will empower you for continued commitment and involvement in disaster response and recovery when you return home.

PURPOSE OF A DISASTER RECOVERY WORK GROUP

UCC Disaster Response Work Groups are participating in the South Central Conference Program in partnership with UCC National Disaster Ministries and Volunteer Ministries. Coordination for this program is through the Minister for Disaster Response and Recovery with housing with a local UCC congregation. As a participant in this group, you are an integral part of a larger effort by the local community and by the United Church of Christ working with community-based and ecumenical partners. With home repair and rebuilding, the United Church of Christ works in cooperation with interfaith long-term recovery committees in the local communities. The United Church of Christ is actively engaged in justice initiatives related to intertwined issues such as the environment, health, education and the racism that runs through all these areas. New church starts and renewing churches are in process. For a snapshot of the broad-based recovery efforts in which you are involved as a member of the United Church of Christ, see the October/November, 2006 *United Church News* insert “Hope Shall Bloom: Walking the Line Between Devastation and Hope.” Copies can be ordered from United Church of Christ Resources 1-800-537-3394.



In the midst of this wide-ranging work of accompanying people and communities in the wake of disaster, work groups serve an integral and particular role...***Rebuilding Homes – Rebuilding Lives....*** Work groups help provide safe and affordable housing for people who have been affected by the disaster. Volunteers assist people as they begin to reclaim their lives and communities and to recover their identities. As outside groups, we do not determine how a community recovers, but assist people and communities in recovering themselves. Volunteers do not go to “fix things,” but to accompany people in their recovery.

Following a disaster, those affected are often left feeling disempowered. Destruction and loss surround them. Systems of obtaining assistance often offer the affected person few choices. Government at various levels requires specific paperwork. Insurance companies require certain documentation. Emergency food and clothing and shelter meet the needs of the moment, but are not in a position to empower people to meet their own needs. Someone who has been affected by disaster often feels out of control.

Disaster recovery work groups assist people and communities in reclaiming whatever part of their lives is possible. Some groups may meet the family or person in the home where they are working and hear their stories. Other groups may not meet the homeowner in person for a variety of reasons related to that person’s life-situation following the disaster. Often the trauma of disaster makes it psychologically difficult for a person/family to participate in the physical clean up or rehabilitation of the home. In either situation, groups have the opportunity to be a presence that demonstrates God’s companionship as people and communities are empowered to rebuild their lives.

South Central Conference Disaster Ministry – New Orleans

March 2007

I PULLED A NAIL TODAY

Many months ago there was a very large wind named Katrina. It was so large that it ruined many, many homes in this very large city. And with this very large wind came very much rain. So much rain that the levees broke and there was a very great flood. The flood was so great that it ruined many more homes, many, many thousands of homes, too many to count.

Many families lived here. Some have left. Some have returned. Where is my home? Who will help me? I need help because there are so many nails that need to be pulled to fix my house. My neighbors need help too, and their neighbors and so many more neighbors.

Maybe the government should help pull these nails. Maybe the state should help. Maybe the church. Maybe. Maybe.....

I can pull nails. I can do lots of things, but maybe I need to start by pulling some nails.

I pulled a nail today. Maybe I'll pull another tomorrow. Maybe someone else will see and pull another nail as well. And maybe, just maybe, someone will see and want to help with more than nails. Maybe with these nails pulled, someone else will be able to rebuild. Maybe with these nails pulled another family will be closer to being able to return.

I pulled a nail today.

I pulled a nail for a house.

I pulled a nail for a family.

I pulled a nail for a city.

I pulled a nail for God today.

Longer term of service

People with home repair and/or home rehabilitation experience are needed on a long term basis to help in the coordination and planning of work. If you or someone you know has the desired skills, talents and is in a position to serve for an extended period of time, please contact Mary Schaller Blaufuss at >blaufusm@ucc.org<

Partners in Service



Marcy Magness has been serving as a 'Partners in Service' Volunteer since early November. She is serving for a term of six months in New Orleans with this office. Marcy would call Philadelphia home, but for the last two and a half years has been volunteering in different capacities. She answered a call in her heart, sold her home and began working with Heifer Project in California for one year. Marcy worked with the UCC Disaster Ministry in New Orleans for six weeks in the springtime. She returned to Philly to visit with her family for a brief period then went to Africa as a Habitat for Humanity volunteer. Marcy then volunteered for a short time in the White Mountains of New Hampshire in the summer of 2006 working with young girls in a camping and backpacking environment. Before returning to work with this ministry for six months, Marcy took a month and hiked the John Muir trail in California with two other women.

One in Eight

Groups coming to New Orleans to work are asked to have at least one person in eight be knowledgeable enough in home repair/rehabilitation to be able to lead a crew at a worksite. One of the most important facets of this rebuilding ministry is having knowledgeable crew leaders or site supervisors. This allows the disaster ministry staff to better coordinate, plan and keep groups supplied with material.

New Staff



Sarah McAllister has been added as our first staff person. She serves in the capacity of volunteer coordinator. She began in mid January. Sarah is a recent graduate of Lees McRae College in North Carolina. Sarah was attending High Country UCC in Boone, North Carolina while in college. High Country has sent three groups to New Orleans to work. Sarah sat in church, saw the pictures heard the stories and felt a need to be in New Orleans. Sarah contacted Mary Schaller-Blaufuss in Cleveland and was able to work with us as a 'Partners in Service' volunteer in the summer of 2006. At the end of her stay, she wanted to come back. As this office looked at hiring staff, Sarah was an obvious choice. Sarah is looking into graduate work at Tulane University in addition to her responsibilities with the disaster ministry office.

Blessings



Tom and Charlotte Gorham have been a gift from God and a blessing to the disaster ministry. They have been visiting their daughter and son-in-law who live in Metairie, LA a suburb of New Orleans. Their daughter recently gave birth to her first child and Tom and Charlotte's first grandchild.

Tom and Charlotte are here to be grandparents and enjoy this special time in their family's life. Tom contacted this office offering his help. Tom and Charlotte sold their home five years ago traveling around the country in a fifth wheel travel trailer visiting family and friends and volunteering with the NOMADS, a United Methodist group that travels and serves throughout the country. Tom worked with us from mid December through the end of February when they left for California and another NOMAD experience.

Donations

There are different ways of donating to the work and mission in New Orleans.

*Gift cards to Home Depot and Lowe's are welcome as a donation to the ministry in New Orleans. This allows the purchase of needed equipment and supplies to rebuild homes.

*Monetary donations may be sent to the South Central Conference office with the words 'New Orleans Disaster Ministry' on the memo line.

*Donations to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) and One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) allow ministries such as these to exist, please give generously.

Long Term Recovery

The United Church of Christ along with other denominations and non-profit agencies work together in any federally declared disaster. New Orleans after Katrina is no different. Long Term Recovery Organizations (LTRO) are setup in each affected parish. Their mission/goal is to meet the unmet needs of the affected population. By working together, more people, families will be helped and able to move back into their homes.

Take the case of an 83 year old woman who lives in the upper ninth ward. This woman did not evacuate immediately. She and a nephew went to a nearby church with a second story. After five days she was rescued by boat, brought to the New Orleans airport, put on a military transport to Atlanta. She commented to this writer that during her flight because she has mobility issues she was strapped into a bunk with a few inches of room between her and the bunk above. In time she made her way back to New Orleans to begin the process of rebuilding her home. She rented an apartment while she waited for her home to be repaired. Recently she has been living in her home because people have

been breaking in and stealing her things while she is not there.

This woman has found the Long Term Recovery Process. She is unable to rebuild her home by herself, having paid contractors who then never returned to finish the work and not having the ability herself to rebuild. The process of going through a Long Term Recovery Committee itself takes time. So far she has been visited at her home to determine the extent of damage and develop an estimate of what it will take to repair her home. The case worker who made the initial visit and compiled the necessary information was from Catholic Charities. The UCC is providing the estimate of damage to her home. All this information will be presented at a meeting in the near future. Agencies at this meeting will assist this woman with money, muscle and material to repair her home and provide any additional assistance needed.

Over the next several years this scenario will be repeated thousands of times as people rebuild and recover from Katrina. The difficult thing to remember is that this is "Long Term Recovery." Someone will be the last case seen and completed, a long way down the road.

Overheard

From a UCC member in New Orleans who is waiting for their home to be repaired: "God may not show up when you want Him to but He is always on time."

Are we there yet?

That question asked by children and some adults all over the country for many years speaks of impatience in waiting to arrive at a destination. It is most heard on the way to a summer vacation destination. The question heard from this office in communications with groups and individuals is similar, "Isn't it all done yet?" Enough time has gone by to take New Orleans and the affects of

Hurricane Katrina out of the daily news. So for a good percentage of the population, New Orleans is all fixed. That is what is portrayed on national media. The Superdome is fixed, the French Quarter is all set, Mardi Gras '07 was a success, the publicity for Jazzfest is in full swing, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie have a home in the French Quarter. Surely by now everything is fixed! Truth is, not everyone has a FEMA trailer, nor settled with their insurance company, decided whether or not to come back, or cleaned out or rebuilt their home. A lot of people have made those necessary decisions, but FEMA has said repeatedly they will be here for ten years. The recently appointed New Orleans recovery chief Dr. Blakely has said twenty years of recovery.

The work and ministry of the United Church of Christ disaster office is transitioning to mostly home rebuilding at this stage of recovery and will be here as long as we are able.

Whose needs are being met?

This question is put to all the people who come to work with the UCC Disaster Office in New Orleans. One of the most difficult things to do in any mission endeavor and certainly in this disaster response ministry is, to put one's own needs aside and focus on the needs of the people being served. The culture and people of New Orleans are often times very different from the people and groups that come to help. It stirs up a lot of emotion within individuals. The people of New Orleans have suffered through one of the worst disasters in our nation's history. Ours is a simple task of service showing forth Christian love and compassion using the gifts and talents each of us have been blessed with. Fortunately we have Jesus Christ as our example of how to serve.

*Rev. Alan Coe
Minister for Disaster Recovery
revacoe@yahoo.com*

II. Now What? Logistics

In this section you will find:

- Responses to Frequently Asked Questions
- Liability Release Forms for Adults 19 years and older
- Liability Release Forms for Youth ages 16-18 years
- Medical Forms
- Tips on Organizing Your Group during the Trip
- Tips on How to Work with Your Hosts
- Safety Awareness
- Awareness of Secondary Trauma

Flexibility Flexibility Flexibility

This is the key to a good experience. So, make plans...Do your homework, bring tools...and be prepared to have everything change before your very eyes! It's OK! You are there because you were sent there. And you will do God's work even if it's not exactly as you planned. Your spirit of flexibility and joy as you do it will bring hope and refreshment to those who toil there every day. And **THAT** is more important than all else...that you and your group become "Bearers of Hope."

Responses to Frequently Asked Questions

You will be staying at one of four UCC host churches in New Orleans area; each church is air conditioned. There are showers available. You have full kitchen privileges and there are sufficient dishes, flatware and pots/pans. Cots and airbeds are supplied and there is a washer/dryer. You should bring a sleeping bag or twin size sheets/blanket and a pillow. You will receive directions to the church. It is important to let us know your expected time of arrival so someone may greet you at the church.

At this stage of recovery, the work is primarily rebuilding private homes. You are asked to have one person in eight be knowledgeable in home repair and rehabilitation techniques and have people identified as crew leaders for the trip.

We do not work on Saturday or Sunday. If you are arriving early on the weekend, you may wish to take a tour of the city, visit the French Quarter, or check out www.nola.com to see what is happening in the city. We will orient you to the work projects for the week Monday morning before you work. It will be helpful for you to send us a roster of the people coming, addresses, and their particular skills. We will try to match skill level with our project list at that time. Currently, we are still gutting people's homes on our list and we will be doing this for quite a while yet. However, we do match skills with rebuilding projects when these are available. We cannot say right now exactly where you will be working.

Please make arrangements to rent vehicles if you are flying. Please consider one rental vehicle being an extended cab pickup truck. This will help with our work and coordination efforts. Most of the projects are located in the northern and eastern parts of New Orleans, about a half hours drive from any of the host churches. You are strongly encouraged to purchase insurance for the vehicle through the rental company.

On each work day, the group is usually ready to leave the church by 8:00 am. Most days the group is ready to leave the worksite by 3:00 or 4:00 pm. This can be adjusted with the Project Coordinator if needed.

We suggest volunteers be prepared with packed lunches and plenty of beverage for the day. In hot weather, an electrolyte drink such as Gatorade is helpful. We supply two ice chests for the lunches and two 5 gal. coolers for water. There are grocery stores near the church as well as other stores for most of your shopping. You will also find a wide variety of restaurants in the area.

For work projects in a mold environment, everyone must be suited in a disposable coverall, wear respirator type masks with a N95 rating, goggles if appropriate, gloves, head covering, and sturdy shoes. We supply protective coverall suits, gloves, masks, safety glasses and goggles. You are welcome to bring your own. Under the suits, shorts and sleeveless shirts may be worn.

You do not need to bring any tools. If you feel comfortable using your own tools, you are welcome to bring them. You might check with us within a few weeks of your trip to see if any additional tools are needed. If you have donations from your church that were designated to help victims, you may wish to buy Lowe's or Home Depot gift cards which will be used to buy tools as needed, or materials to help rebuild homes. Cash donations should be forwarded to our conference office: SCCUCC, 9022 Long Point Road, Houston, TX 77055. Please write "hurricane relief" on the memo line.

Please download the Liability Release forms from <www.ucc.org>, one for Adults and one for parental signature for those 16-19. Please have each group member complete these and mail all of them to the address on the form at least three weeks before your arrival date.

Each person on the work team MUST have an up-to-date Tetanus shot. Each person should complete the enclosed medical form and have this in the possession of the leader of your group in case of emergency.

If there are additional questions, please contact the Disaster Recovery Office in New Orleans at 504-258-7306 or email: ucchurricanerecovery@yahoo.com.

MEDICAL FORM FOR DISASTER RECOVERY VOLUNTEERS

This is a confidential form for emergency use only. It will only be in the possession of the group leader during the trip and will be returned to you at the end of the trip. Please fill it out completely, sign it, and give it to your leader before your trip begins.

Name _____

Address _____

Date of birth _____

Emergency contact (someone NOT on the trip) _____

Emergency contact phone number(s) _____

Family Physician name and phone number _____

ALLERGIES(specify) _____

Date of last tetanus shot _____ Any other recent shots? _____

HEALTH PROBLEMS: *(check all that apply)* Heart ___ Asthma ___ Other lung problems ___ Diabetes ___ Seizures ___ Stomach problems ___ Kidney problems ___ Bleeding problems ___ High Blood Pressure ___ Any other health concerns ___

(If you checked any of the above, please attach another page describing your problem, treatments needed, and any other pertinent information about your health problem.)

MEDICATIONS YOU ARE TAKING (OR MAY NEED) *List name and dose and number of times per day that you take them.* _____

Health Insurance Information _____

In the case of extreme emergency, I give permission for treatment by a physician.

Signature _____ Date _____



**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
DISASTER RECOVERY
VOLUNTEER WORK GROUP OPPORTUNITIES**

ADULT RELEASE FORM

To be signed by each Adult (age 19 or greater)

Please return to: Disaster Response Coordinator, Little Farms UCC, 135 Sauve Road, River Ridge, LA 70123 at least three weeks before your date of arrival at work project.

(Please read before signing, as this constitutes the agreement as a volunteer and the understanding of your working relationship with United Church of Christ Disaster Recovery).

I, _____, acknowledge and state the following:
(Print Name)

I have chosen to travel to the work site to perform cleanup/construction work in disaster relief. I understand that this work entails a risk of physical injury and often involves hard physical labor, heavy lifting, and other strenuous activity; and that some activities may take place on ladders and building framing other than ground level.

I certify that I am in good health and physically able to perform this type of work.

I understand that I am engaging in this project at my own risk.

I understand that this is a "grass roots" activity to support individuals adversely affected by the disaster. I assume all risk and responsibility for any damage or injury to my property or any personal injury which I may sustain while involved in this project, and related material costs and expenses.

In the event that my supervising disaster organization arranges accommodations, I understand that they are not responsible or liable for my personal effects and property and that they will not provide lock up or security for any items. I will hold them harmless in the event of theft or for loss resulting from any source or cause. I further understand that I am to abide by whatever rules and regulations may be in effect for the accommodations at that time.

By my signature, for myself, my estate and my heirs, I release, discharge, indemnify and forever hold the United Church of Christ, together with their officers, agents, servants and employees, harmless from any and all causes of action arising from my participation in this project, and travel or lodging associated therewith, including any damages which may be caused by their own negligence.

Signature:

Date:

Witness:

Date of Planned Work Trip:

Name of Church or Organization:



**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
DISASTER RECOVERY
VOLUNTEER WORK GROUP OPPORTUNITIES**

PARENTAL RELEASE FORM *(for volunteers under age 19)*

Please return to Disaster Response Coordinator, Little Farms UCC, 135 Sauve Road, RiverRidge, LA 70123 at least three weeks before your date of arrival at work project.

(Please read before signing, as this constitutes the agreement as a volunteer and the understanding of your working relationship with the United Church of Christ Disaster Recovery)

Name of volunteer: _____
(Print Name)

I hereby give permission for my child to serve in the Disaster Recovery project coordinated by the Office of National Disaster Ministries and Office of Volunteer Ministries of the United Church of Christ. In the event of an emergency during the duration of the trip, I hereby give consent to a licensed physician to hospitalize, secure proper treatment, anesthesia and/or surgery for my child named above.

I understand that I am responsible for his/her own medical insurance and will not hold the United Church of Christ liable for any injury or damage to my child while engaged in the disaster project.

Your relationship to participant: _____

Health Insurance company: _____

Does your child have any physical limitation that might affect his/her work? _____

List any allergies/medications: _____

Date of last tetanus shot: _____

Special needs if any: _____

Volunteer Signature: Date:

Parent/Guardian Signature: Date:

Witness:

Date of Planned Work Trip:

Name of Church or Organization:

Organizing the Trip

(From *Getting Dirty for Jesus!* Office of Disciples Volunteering, 2005, pp, 14, and 7-8)

Meal Preparation and Evening Prayers:

Have participants in three different groups that will do meal preparation and evening prayers. Each day before dinner the three groups have a task:

- 1.) Fix dinner.
- 2.) Go grocery shopping for the next day.
- 3.) Plan evening prayers for that night.

Mix the groups so that old are with young. Each group needs spiritually strong leaders. Mix creative people so that **all** prayer services will be **good** experiences.

Evening prayers and reflection are an important component of your on-site experience.

Work Teams:

Design work groups to get the work done. It's good to put friends together here. They tend to work better in teams. Be aware of the skills and energy level, etc., of the participants. There are always all kinds of jobs (some labor-intensive, some not). Assign jobs accordingly. **DO NOT** assume that only guys can do hard labor. It's not true! Much of this info can be gleaned at fund raisers. You'll see who works well together and what kind of work suits whom. (The work groups are usually different from the meal preparation groups.)

Adult groups can usually choose which work they're best suited for. If you have some unskilled adults, try to partner them with some who are good teachers. It is usually best to assign youth to work groups realizing that the groups may change as you progress throughout the week. Be sure to let everyone know that they can switch jobs the next day if they just can't get the hang of it or are really unhappy where they've been placed.

Some Specific Tasks You Can Assign:

Treasurer (or banker): This person would have the travelers checks and all money. They would keep receipts and pay for everything. At the end of the trip, this person would submit a report of how all money was spent. In addition, you may want the banker to hold everyone's spending money. The advantage is that the church is bonded and if somehow the money is lost or stolen, it can be more easily replaced. You can give participants spending money when they need it and they won't find themselves without money on the way home.

Photographer: Assign someone the task of taking slides for the slide show when you get home. They would go to each work team being sure to get every aspect of the trip. The advantage of this is that you don't have 15 or 20 cameras always snapping shots of the "locals" which can be uncomfortable for them. Be sure to make significant shots available to the whole group on your return. You may want to do a video as well.

Secretary/Correspondent: This person would write thank you notes (on site) to the various people you meet, churches who host you, etc. It means a lot to them to be acknowledged and often it's hard to get around to doing that when you get back home. Having someone do it right there is a neat way to support

the ministry offered to you. This person could also record names and addresses of significant people you meet so the group will have them after the trip.

How to Work With Your Hosts:

Some Helpful Hints

Always remember that you are guests and servants. Thinking about how guests act when they visit someone's home is helpful as you enter into someone else's "home". Your attitude of servanthood is also helpful as you work together with your hosts. Try to serve "with" and not "for" your hosts.

Remember whose disaster it is. Do not expect those who have just had their lives destroyed by a disaster to be able to accommodate you immediately. They will have limitations, and governmental paperwork often works against their "speedy" recovery. Be patient. Sometimes, just your presence in those times of pain is enough.

Don't expect a "sense of completion". This can best be explained through a quote from someone charged with planning work trips for groups coming to her organization. "They want a sense of completion after their three days of work. I go home every day and never feel a sense of completion. Why do I have to orchestrate one for them? I think this is a fair question. Part of the power of the trip will be realization that there is still much to be done to right the wrongs in this world...and your work helped along the journey."

Be Sensitive to Overworked Staff. Unless there is a specific person whose job description is to host workgroups, you will likely be hosted by someone who usually does something else. Be aware of the fact that all the time with you means another job is not being done. As much as possible, be independent in your work once you get started. And be aware that the life and ministry of the organization does not stop when you arrive!

Remember there is more than "Work" to be done. Work with the host to expose your group to the particular culture and people of the community. If team members simply went to the worksite and worked without experiencing the area or its people, they would leave without a real sense of the church and community and their needs. Plans should include opportunities to be involved with the locals in activities, tour places of historical or cultural significance, etc.

Schedule the itinerary with input from the hosts, balancing that with the needs and interests of the group. The hosts may have many good ideas for ways your team can spend its time, but you need to be sure your team has time for reflection and worship, free time and time to play. You know your group best and your hosts know the area and culture. Work together to ensure the best possible experience for all concerned.

Expect to meet saints. One of the most rewarding benefits you'll discover is that you will meet saints of the church in these organizations. Watch for them, learn from them, experience the holy in them, Your life will be enriched from spending time with them.

Be creative with coming up with work that will help. If they haven't got enough for your group to do, look around and offer to do something more. Jobs that need little or no supervision by their staff are best.

Safety Awareness for Responders to Gulf Coast Hurricanes

(From *The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences*, US National Institute of Health, 2005

[http://www-apps.niehs.nih.gov/Katrina/wetp/index.cfm.](http://www-apps.niehs.nih.gov/Katrina/wetp/index.cfm))

Protecting Yourself While Helping Others

Before you leave for your trip, everyone in your group should get a Tetanus Vaccination or have had a Tetanus Vaccine within the last 10 years.

Workgroups should have a standard First Aid Kit (in water proof container) with them at the work site. Include:

- (20) adhesive bandages, various sizes.
- (1) 5" x 9" sterile dressing.
- (1) conforming roller gauze bandage.
- (2) triangular bandages.
- (2) 3 x 3 sterile gauze pads.
- (2) 4 x 4 sterile gauze pads.
- (1) roll 3" cohesive bandage.
- (2) germicidal hand wipes or waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- (6) antiseptic wipes.
- (2) pair large medical grade non-latex gloves.
- Adhesive tape, 2" width.
- Anti-bacterial ointment.
- Cold pack.
- Scissors (small, personal).
- Tweezers.
- CPR breathing barrier, such as a face shield.
- Non-Prescription Drugs: aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever, anti-diarrhea medication, antacid (for stomach upset), syrup of Ipecac (use to induce vomiting if advised by the Poison Control Center), laxative, activated charcoal (use if advised by the Poison Control Center)

Heat Stress:

- Know signs of heat related illnesses:
 - confusion, profuse sweating, excessive fatigue
- Wear lightweight, light colored clothing
- Avoid alcohol, caffeinated drinks, heavy meals
- Drink a lot of water

Sunburn:

- Use sunscreen and lip balm
- Use protective eyewear

Piles of Debris:

Don't walk on surfaces you aren't sure are stable, wear safety shoes with slip resistant soles and socks/no sandals

Dust that may contain toxins:

Chemicals released by Katrina include chlorine, diesel, gasoline, motor oil, medical waste, industrial and household products.

Minimally, wear paper masks that cover nose and mouth. Masks need to be rated n95.

Mold B can cause severe nasal, eye and skin irritation:

Avoid touching mold with your bare hands.

Wear long gloves (rubber, polyurethane) that reach the middle of forearm.

Wearing protective clothing (Tyvek Jumpsuits and Hats) is strongly recommended.

Wear goggles that do not have ventilation holes. Articles that have visible mold should be thrown away. After working with mold-contaminated materials wash everything thoroughly including your hair, scalp and nails.

Standing Water:

The EPA has found elevated levels of contamination associated with raw sewage and other hazardous substances in the flood waters of New Orleans. Wear water proof gloves if skin comes in contact with water or residue, wash thoroughly with soap and clean water. If you have open cuts that may be exposed, keep as clean as possible by washing them with soap and clean water; apply antibiotic ointment. If clothing comes into contact with water or residue, wash them in detergent and clean water separately from uncontaminated clothes.

Other protective measures:

Use Insect Repellent with Deet or Picaridin

Trauma You May Experience

(“What you Might Experience,” taken from *Seminar on Trauma Awareness and Recovery Training Manual* November 2002. Eastern Mennonite University, Conflict Transformation Program p.29).

Secondary Traumatization - known by various names – compassion fatigue, secondary or vicarious traumatization and burn-out. The symptoms here are usually less severe than post-traumatic syndrome symptoms experienced by direct victims in a disaster. But they can affect the lively hoods and careers of those with considerable training and experience working with disaster and trauma survivors. The risk also increases when traumatic exposures are unexpected or among those without adequate preparation.

Vicarious Traumatization – experiencing trauma symptoms as a result of observing (in person, via media) traumatic events or hearing disturbing stories from the people one is serving.

Resources for Preparing Yourself

Common Reactions to Trauma:

Not all people will have the same experience or reactions to trauma. Some people do well by talking to family members or friends and remembering to take care of themselves. Others may not be able to focus on what they need or may not know how to get their needs met. Following is information that may be helpful for you or that you can share with others who have experienced a trauma.

People may Experience:

Anger
Guilt

Depression
Fatigue
Hopelessness
Helplessness
Disorientation
Fear
Interruptions in sleeping patterns
Changes in eating habits

Things that help people:

Times set aside for group Reflection
Support system
(i.e., family, friends, co-workers)
Feeling safe
Routine
Encouragement
Activity
Exercise
Focus on the positive

III. Preparation is More Than Packing Your Suitcase...

You are a very important part of the recovery effort in New Orleans. You have gifts and skills to share and your physical presence on the Gulf Coast at this time is tremendously important for helping people rebuild their lives and keep hope alive. You will gain more from the experience and you will be empowered to be an even greater help to those affected by this disaster both during and after your trip, with your commitment to prepare beforehand and to spend time in reflection during and after the experience.

What follows in this section are materials to assist you in this preparation and reflection. Many of the highlighted issues of justice are interrelated. The background information here offers perspectives on various struggles confronting people of New Orleans before the Hurricanes of 2005; which were intensified by the disaster and now take on new immediacy.

a. The Storm

- (1) Visit <http://www.nola.com/katrina/graphics/flashflood.swf> for an interactive graphic of the flooding of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The Times Picayune, the major newspaper of New Orleans provides this resource.
- (2) Read “New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina, and the Aftermath” by Michael Fermanis. This paper was written in September/October of 2005 and outlines the storm and some of the historical factors that effected the breadth of damage. (Paper available at end of this section)

b. Historical Context

- (1) Read the book *Rising Tide* by John M. Barry. This gives important historical context to dynamics of the Mississippi River Valley that affect the 2005 disaster in New Orleans. (John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.)
- (2) Read the book *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security* by Christopher Cooper and Robert Block. This is a post-Katrina look at circumstances and decisions made at all levels that contributed to the disaster.

c. Levees

Read the essay on levees written by John Pecoul “Beyond Katrina: A Call for United Church of Christ Awareness and Action” at (www.ctucc.org/katrina2005/beyondkatrina.html) (up-dated copy of paper available at end of this section).

d. Race

Pastor, Manuel, Robert D. Bullard, James K. Boyce, Alice Fothergill, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Beverly Wright. “In the Wake of the Storm: Environment, Disaster, and Race After Katrina.” New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006. Order copies from the Russell Sage Foundation, 112 East 64th Street, New York, NY 10021.

e. Environment

Visit <http://www.leanweb.org> for news of the Louisiana Environmental Action Network with which the United Church of Christ is partnering on safety issues for Louisiana residents and volunteers.

Visit <http://www.healthygulf.org> for initiatives on restoring the environment of the Gulf Coast.

f. Education

Read “Public Education in New Orleans In the Aftermath of Katrina.” by Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness, UCC. *Message on Public Education 2007, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries*. Available at http://www.ucc.org/justice/pdfs/jwm_publiceducation.pdf. For printed copies, contact Jan Resseger, ressegerj@ucc.org

Read “New Orleans Pledges to Educate Children on Waiting Lists” by Jan Resseger Minister for Public Education and Witness, UCC, Witness for Justice #307, February 12, 2007. (Article available at end of this section.)

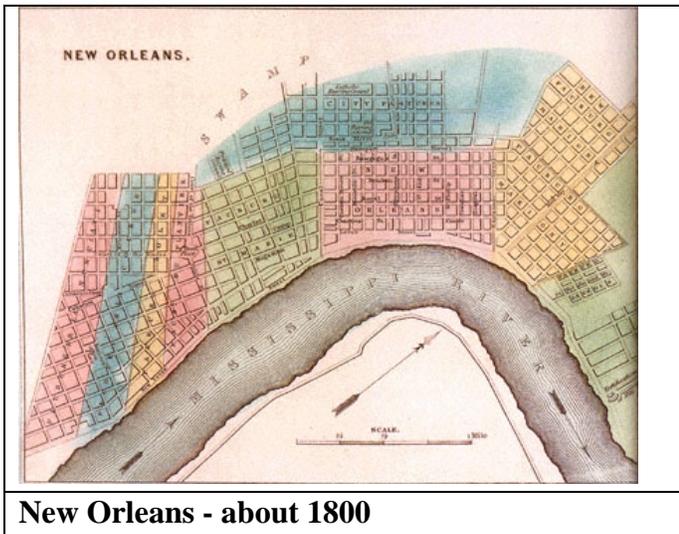
Read *Dismantling a Community* by the Center for Community Change. This article addresses the reinvention of public education in New Orleans. Several students enrolled in the Students at the Center program at New Orleans’ Frederick Douglass High School write about their experience of education, their experience of the public’s perception of their high school, their experience of being displaced, and in some cases, their experience of return to community and school. Available at: <http://communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/downloads/DismantlingFULL.pdf>

New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina, and the Aftermath

Some Historical Background

Why Here?

An historic scholar once described New Orleans as the "inevitable city on an impossible site." A glance at the map of North America reveals that the continent's interior is drained by a single river system - the Mississippi – that provides a natural waterway system for moving people and goods across the midcontinent of North America and down the Mississippi to its outlet on the Gulf. Another glance at the North American map reveals that there would naturally be a city at the mouth of that river that controls the trade between the vast interior of North America and the rest of the world.



New Orleans - about 1800

Ironically, New Orleans was chosen by its founders to be the site of that city because it was high ground. Due to the meanderings of the Mississippi, its delta has created natural levees (embankments) each year when spring brought silt with the spring floods to its mouth. These silt deposits formed higher banks along the river's course, and as the river changed its channel from time to time, the old embankments were left. These ridges were used by the native Americans to avoid the surrounding swamps and one was chosen as the site of New Orleans. The location's other advantage was its nearness to Lake Pontchartrain a few miles to the north which allowed seagoing ships to reach the city quickly and avoid coming all the way up from

the river's mouth.

What Makes New Orleans so Different?

Jean Baptiste La Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, established New Orleans as the capital of Louisiana and a fortress to control the wealth of the North American interior. His settlement was along the Mississippi in what is now the French Quarter. Unlike the east coast of the United States, New Orleans was settled by the French and Spanish from Europe, but more particularly from the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola (modern Haiti and the Dominican Republic) until the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. New Orleans has always been very different than the rest of the continent, with unique laws, customs, trade, religions, and a very liberal status for the free people of color (over half the population in 1803). Slavery was common during the 18th century and supplied the labor needed for the cotton and sugarcane plantations as well as for domestic service. Many of the historic buildings and civil engineering projects that remain today were originally constructed by imported African forced laborers. Many of the customs we have today, like Mardi Gras, are artifacts of that early "gumbo pot" of people that have always made up New Orleans.

In August of 2005 New Orleans was over two-thirds black. And half the city's 400,000 inhabitants were poor. The crumbling schools were dangerous academic failures. The city government was only slowly cleaning up its tarnished image. New Orleans had become a dowager - once beautiful but now a dingy lady creaking with age.

These characteristics were also its germ of life. Musicians and artists of all kinds found New Orleans a hotbed of creativity. Visitors came from throughout the world to share in the city's vibrancy. And the locals wouldn't live anywhere else – because there is no where else like New Orleans.

Why There?

One of the first public works after the city was founded in 1718 was the construction of a three-foot levee to keep out some of the river's annual flood waters. Until the last half of the nineteenth century, the city's growth was limited to river levees and natural ridges inland where the river had previously deposited silt. Over the centuries, many schemes were tried to drain or at least keep as much of the water out as possible. Drainage canals were dug, levees were built, and people developed a type of two-story architecture that elevated them above the periodic flood waters. Much of the area around the city remained uninhabitable because it was more water than land. And each year the river continued to flood and hurricanes brought floods and devastation as well.



New Orleans - 1890



New Orleans - 2005

With the invention of electricity that all changed. The New Orleans drainage system as we know it today dates back to the turn of the twentieth century. In 1899, the Sewerage and Water Board was authorized by the Louisiana Legislature to furnish, construct, operate, and maintain a water treatment and distribution system and a sanitary sewerage system for New Orleans. It constructed canals and dozens of pumping stations to drain the area surrounded by the levees and pump it into Lake Pontchartrain and other bodies of water around the city. Today this system's pumping capacity is over 29 billion gallons a day, enough to empty a lake 10 square miles by 13.5 feet deep every 24 hours. That flow rate (over 45,000 cubic feet per second) is more than the flow rate of the Ohio River.

Electricity allowed areas to be surrounded by levees, crisscrossed with canals, and pumped dry. This opened up the areas of Mid-City, Lakeview, New Orleans East, and the Ninth Ward to development and industry. The reason people live in these low-lying areas today (some below sea level) is entirely because they were willing to rely on technology to protect them from the natural hazards of living in a river delta prone to annual floods and hurricanes.

Modern Threats

Most residents of New Orleans will tell you that hurricanes are generally no big deal. In modern times, you know they're coming, you leave town and stay out of harm's way for a few days, and then come back and clean up the mess and repair your house. While hurricanes are dangerous, a distance of 50 miles from their central eye is sufficient to avoid their peril, unless you live in areas right on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain or the Gulf of Mexico.

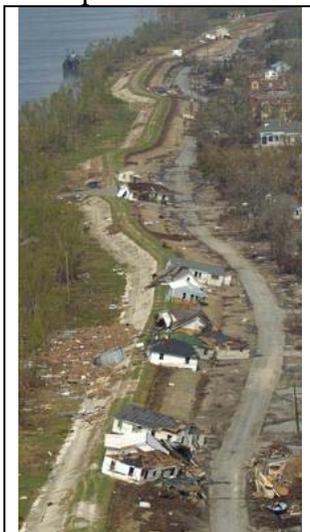
River flooding is now a less threatening hazard. Spillways and other water control structures along the river have largely eliminated its annual overflow. Of course, this also prevented the deposition of silt that

had created the natural levees and outlying islands around the delta that have eroded over time. The Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) claimed that their levees, dams, and other civil engineering feats could withstand nearly anything. The people of New Orleans believed them.

Hurricane Katrina

The Hurricane

In late August, Hurricane Katrina swept through the straight between Florida and Cuba wreaking havoc on the Florida Keys. It was predicted to continue up the west coast of Florida to the Pensacola area. On Saturday, August 27th the prediction was altered and Katrina's path was changed to hit New Orleans head-on. Most New Orleanians made plans to leave, and by the time the storm struck early Monday morning August 29th, over 85% of them had left the city. Those who remained were the aged, the infirm, the poor without transportation, and those who had ridden out many previous storms and thought they knew what to expect.



Houses swept onto the levee in Plaquemines Parish by the storm surge.

Katrina strengthened as it crossed the Gulf of Mexico and became a Category 5 hurricane, the strongest sort with winds above 150 mph. When it reached land, it passed through Plaquemines and St Bernard Parishes south of New Orleans East and continued on to the Mississippi coast. As does any hurricane, it brought with it a bulge of water (“storm surge”) beneath it over 26 feet high. This surge inundated the coastal areas, overtopped levees like a tsunami and washed away any man-made structures it encountered. The low-lying areas near the mouth of the Mississippi (Plaquemines and St Bernard Parishes) and the coastal Mississippi towns of Waveland and Pass Christian were largely wiped from the map.

New Orleans experienced wind damage and some minor flooding due to the storm's rain, but the city's drainage system could easily handle it.

The Flood

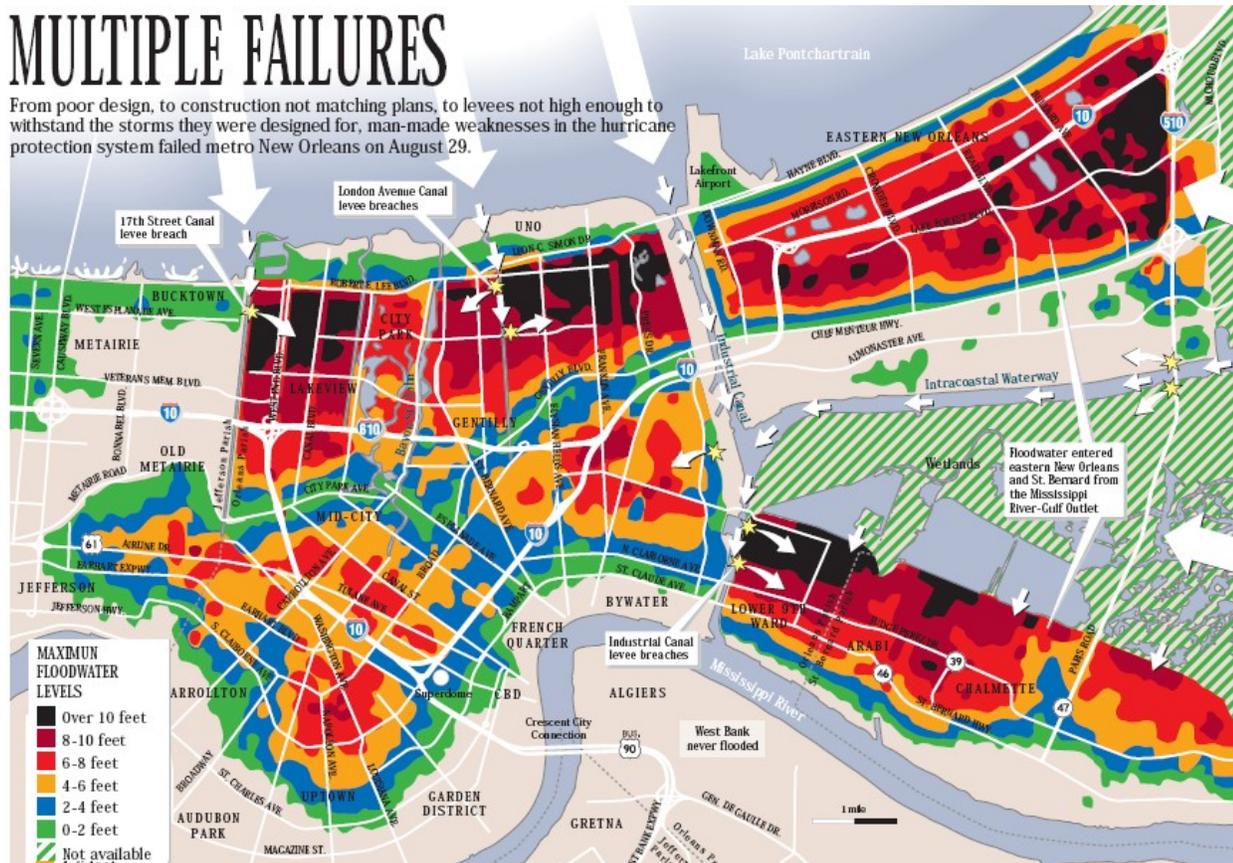
As Monday progressed, however, reports began to surface that some levees had been breached. Soon, it was reported that there were more than a dozen places where the levees had given way or been overtopped. The primary ones were along the Industrial Canal (through New Orleans East and the Ninth Ward) and on the east side of the Seventeenth St Canal (through Lakeview).

Levees are good at keeping water out. They are equally good at keeping it in. The broken levees allowed the storm surge (up to 26 feet above normal sea level) to pour in from canals connected to Lake Pontchartrain and from the bodies of water connected to the Gulf of Mexico in the eastern part of New Orleans. The water continued to flood until the storm surge passed and the surrounding water levels fell. By that time, parts of the city were under 15 feet of water. The city's entire electrical, sewage, and natural gas systems were destroyed. The pumping stations, knocked out by the flood, could not be restarted to drain the water.

While the hurricane was destructive, the flood was devastating. People had lost their homes, their jobs, and their city. They had no home to go back to and had to rely on family, friends, and government agencies elsewhere to survive. Their very ways of life had been taken from them.

MULTIPLE FAILURES

From poor design, to construction not matching plans, to levees not high enough to withstand the storms they were designed for, man-made weaknesses in the hurricane protection system failed metro New Orleans on August 29.



(From the New Orleans Times-Picayune)

A Man-Made Disaster

The hurricane was a natural calamity, but neither unexpected nor insurmountable. Had it come and gone as predicted, it would have been destructive, but only another storm like the ones New Orleanians have withstood many times before.

The flood, however, was not a natural event. It was obvious to anyone watching the television coverage that the disaster preparedness plans created before the storm could not begin to address the greatest disaster in American history. The civil engineering systems were inadequately designed, improperly built, and neither maintained nor funded sufficiently to ensure that the city was protected. The levees and pumps failed because of mistakes and negligence.

New Orleans in the Aftermath

The first step in recovery was to drain the water. It took weeks to do. The levees must be rebuilt, a job that will take years to achieve. And finally, the infrastructure of the drainage system must be redesigned and strengthened.

On a human scale, over three-quarters of the city was flooded to some extent. According to the Times-Picayune newspaper, over 128,000 homes have been inspected and 5,534 houses (about 4%) are unsafe to enter and must be razed. About 68 percent of the homes in the city are judged to be sound but with structural damage so severe that about half of them (43,000) will eventually be demolished.

The lack of housing means that people cannot return to the city even if they want to. Nearly every available hotel room is occupied by debris cleanup employees, public safety personnel, and other essential laborers. Businesses, provided with almost no assistance from the government they depended upon, cannot restart their operations here with no employees and few customers. So many New Orleansians must remain elsewhere.



Ninth Ward near the levee breach.



Mid-City homeowner salvages what he can.

Those who have returned are located in areas where there was little or no flooding. These areas are in the French Quarter and along the river – the natural high points settled *before* the electrified drainage system was created. Neighborhoods that were inundated remain uninhabited, unlit, and full of ruined cars, storm debris, and silt. Their house's walls are covered with mold and the yards are littered with the ruined keepsakes of their lives

Currently, less than a quarter of the city's pre-Katrina population of 450,000 has returned. Although utilities have been largely restored, many houses and buildings are too badly damaged to be reconnected. And the

availability of services like transportation, cell phones, mail delivery, restaurants, gas stations, and other modern conveniences is minimal.

Some persons will have insurance to cover their losses, either homeowners insurance for wind and rain damage or government (FEMA) flood insurance. Many will not have coverage and will have to rely on their own resources to rebuild. Some will give up on New Orleans and resettle elsewhere where they believe that the opportunities for employment are greater and the chances of hurricanes and floods are less.

This paper was written by Michael Fermanis [fermanis@sprynet.com] and was adapted from the following sources: The New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, [<http://www.swbnola.org/>] "A History of New Orleans" - Donald McNabb & Louis E. "Lee" Madère, Jr. [<http://www.madere.com/history.html>] The New Orleans Times-Picayune newspaper, various reports [www.nola.com].

Beyond Katrina:

A Call for United Church of Christ Awareness and Action

By John Pecoul

There are many Katrina stories.

Hearing those about people who were evacuated, flooded, or displaced by Katrina is essential, especially when told by the very persons affected. Stories of disaster response teams on site or new visions of local mission inspire us. Yet another story must also be heard. It is the complex story of public policy and private business decisions over the previous century that set the stage for the disaster that occurred. It is the story of actions now needed to remedy and substantially improve hurricane protection to guard against future disasters. UCC leaders, congregations, and all Americans need to learn more about this policy history, its context in the Gulf coastal environment, and how they can become advocates to correct the hurricane vulnerability and flawed protection exposed by Katrina---even as we minister to the human suffering caused by the storm and grapple with our nation's continuing inability to overcome poverty and racial exclusion.

KATRINA'S ENABLERS

In various ways, all Americans today and others before us were Katrina's enablers. The storm was a destructive natural phenomenon, like all strong hurricanes, but its impact in southeast Louisiana was immensely worse due to the actions of businesses, of national, state, and local governments, and of individuals here and throughout the country in the 20th century.

In less than 100 years, some of those actions disrupted the Mississippi River's 10,000 years of building new land at its mouth. Ocean erosion now washes away many more square miles of coastal wetlands in Louisiana than the river builds each year, for a net loss of 10.3 square miles per year, or one football field every hour and a half. Loss of coastal wetlands on the Gulf of Mexico is a crisis, not only for the intrinsic ecological and economic importance of these wetlands, but also because they serve as buffers to mitigate the height and power of storm surges like those caused by Katrina. (Some experts say that every mile of wetlands crossed by storm surge reduces it by about one foot.)

Factors contributing to coastal erosion and other human intensifiers of Katrina's impact include:

1. LESS SILT. Dam and lock construction along the upper Mississippi and its tributaries reduces the amount of silt and sediment carried to build the delta and new land in the Gulf of Mexico.
2. LEVEES TOO CLOSE TO RIVER'S MOUTH. Massive levees were built along the Mississippi and streams flowing into it. Precipitated by the Great Flood of 1927(See John M. Barry's book, Rising Tide), their goal was to prevent river flooding. Near the river's end, however the levees extend too close to the mouth of the river and create a "chute" effect, propelling much of the silt that still reaches the delta into deeper Gulf waters rather than allowing it to settle in shallows and build new land.
3. SALT WATER DESTROYS WETLANDS THROUGH OIL AND GAS CANAL DREDGING. Energy companies dredged hundreds of canals for their drilling barges in fragile coastal lands with no remedial or restorative action. For most of the 20th

Century, they sold and we Americans bought cheap oil and gas without covering the cost to correct the damage done. That damage takes many forms nationally but in Louisiana and parts of coastal Texas, it includes the intrusion of salt water via the oil and gas canals into healthy wetlands, killing trees, marsh grasses and other vegetation whose roots hold soil in place, resisting coastal erosion and reducing storm surges.

4. SHIP CHANNEL BRINGS MORE SALINITY, ERODING WETLANDS, AND STORM SURGE. At mid-century, port and ocean shipping interests and the Army Corps of Engineers secured congressional and state funding to dredge an enormous channel, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) to shorten the distance from the Gulf for ships heretofore using the Mississippi River. Once complete, it did not attract many ships and thus was not an economic success-- but its side effects were major. MRGO increased salt water intrusion, destroyed more wetlands, eroded its own banks, and became an ever widening funnel for more storm surges to reach levees in St. Bernard Parish and the sprawling Ninth Ward of New Orleans.

5. BOTCHED FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEVEE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION. Since Hurricane Betsy in 1965, which flooded the Lower Ninth Ward, the Bywater area in New Orleans, and parts of St. Bernard Parish, the US Army Corps of Engineers has been "upgrading" levees and floodwalls along the lakes and drainage canals of the NO region. Many of those improvements are the ones that failed catastrophically during Katrina, according to studies by a variety of groups such as the American Society of Civil Engineers, the University of California-Berkeley team funded by the National Science Foundation, and the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center. The studies document how, during the last three decades of the 20th Century and on into the 21st, the safety of human lives has had to compete with a culture of cost cutting in presidential, congressional, state, and Corps of Engineers funding decisions, and in Corps flood control and hurricane protection design and construction processes. In the New Orleans area, these dysfunctional tradeoffs of safety for savings produced poorly designed and constructed levees and floodwalls that collapsed from a storm surge most were supposedly built to withstand. (See Times-Picayune, 5/22/06 and 6/2/06 stories at www.nola.com for the latest independent reports on the failures of the Corps and its hurricane levees in southeast Louisiana.)

The federal promise of secure hurricane protection proved worthless when Katrina came to New Orleans. The result was more than 1500 deaths and a nearly lethal wound to the lives, cultures, and livelihoods of a million and a half people in or near a great and historic American city.

KNOW MORE, DO MORE: A CALL FOR UCC AWARENESS, ADVOCACY, AND ACTION

Human decisions and actions created the conditions which magnified Katrina's destruction, and human action can change and rectify those conditions. Many of us in the New Orleans Association of the UCC want to see more advocacy and support from UCC leaders and national bodies, and from conferences, congregations, and members for major federal funding and policy improvements in the wake of Katrina. We need active UCC engagement in our struggle for comprehensive and sufficient federal resources to recover from Katrina, begin coastal wetlands restoration, and build hurricane protection able to withstand not just a Katrina but the even stronger Category 4 and 5 storms predicted as oceans warm and rise, and hurricanes become more frequent and more powerful.

Short term disaster "relief" is not enough. Justice requires the long term recovery of communities by assisting people to rebuild their homes, and reclaim their lives. That is the objective of the UCC disaster response ministry through efforts such as the Hope Shall Bloom Fund and volunteer recovery teams now working on the central Gulf Coast. In support of this objective, the UCC family must learn and do more to enhance recovery and save lives.

For example, many people are not aware that it took Congress nine months since Katrina to pass funding to finance housing(including affordable purchase and rental units), to restore businesses, jobs, and utilities, to rebuild local government facilities and services, and to start large scale levee improvements beyond the quick fixes made for the 2006 hurricane season. You can follow developments in the New Orleans region through the Times-Picayune at www.nola.com . This New Orleans newspaper won two Pulitzer Prizes for coverage of Katrina and its protracted aftermath. Here are other needs about which the UCC family can study and offer advocacy.

1. UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT GULF COASTAL RESTORATION

Congress and the White House in December 2006, after nearly a decade of pleading from Louisiana, finally approved U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu's legislation to dedicate a portion of the government's revenue from oil and gas pumped from Gulf federal waters to coastal restoration and hurricane or flood protection in Louisiana, Texas, and other offshore oil producing states. Even after this action, mountain states still receive much larger proportions of federal revenues from oil or gas drilling on federal lands in the western US than coastal states receive from such revenues in federal waters off their shores. Giving coastal states a comparable share and restricting its use would be a major change to expedite a healthier coastal environment and safer communities as well. Let the White House, Congress, and federal agencies know you want full funding for coastal restoration. This website, www.americaswetland.com, is a good information source on these issues, and often provides messages that can be e-mailed to relevant public officials and media outlets. Learn more about coastal restoration and hurricane protection and how you can help by clicking on the Resources section of the America's Wetland website, and by visiting other websites such as www.healthygulf.org , www.saveourlake.org/wetlands.htm , and www.restorewetlands.com .

2. HOLD THE CORPS ACCOUNTABLE

The US Army Corps of Engineers must be held accountable, have its culture and policy revamped, and its funding sufficient to make protection of human lives a top priority. Are you aware that its spending decisions about the strength, size, and safety level of levees does not consider loss of human life but only narrowly defined economic impacts? Are you aware that dams are built with much higher margins of safety than levees, even when those levees are ostensibly protecting urban areas with thousands of people? Levee safety is an issue not only in Louisiana and along the Mississippi River and its tributaries from the Rockies to the Appalachians. Levee failures could inundate locations such as the northeast Bay Area and the Sacramento area in California, and the area around Lake Okeechobee in Florida.

In 2006, the Independent Levee Investigation Team, composed of leading engineering/flood safety experts from universities and other entities, funded by the National Science Foundation, and led by Ray Seed, geotechnical engineer at the University of California-Berkeley supported a major overhaul of the Corps of Engineers and creation of a National Flood Defense Authority independent of the Corps. This authority would oversee levee projects from design to construction to assure safety standards and watchdog the Corps. Messages to Congress from citizens need to urge such drastic changes of Corps practices and funding. See also the website of www.levees.org for more information on what you can do to hold the Corps accountable and revamp it.

3. SEAL MRGO AND REMEDIATE ITS WETLANDS DAMAGE

Support closure of the Miss. River Gulf Outlet(MRGO), the ship channel that devastated wetlands southeast of St. Bernard Parish and New Orleans for a half century before Katrina and helped funnel Katrina's surge direct to inland levees unprepared for the onslaught. For more information and action options, visit the website of the Coalition to Close the Miss. River Gulf Outlet at www.ccmrgo.org .

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The people of southeast Louisiana and the New Orleans area have been moved to tears by the outpouring of aid and sympathy from millions in the United States and around the world in the wake of Katrina. Our tears continue as we confront the enormity of the challenge to make our part of the world safer, more equitable, more just, and more able to thrive and sing songs of joy again.

We need support and advocacy from all levels of the United Church of Christ for federal and private funding to re-build lives and housing for families, and to restore businesses and institutions. We need messages to Congress and the White House to assure substantially improved safety in hurricane protection (levees, floodgates, pumping capacity, and coastal wetlands restoration). If top flight storm protection does not receive full support and prompt action, then all the people being assisted to re-build places to work, live, and celebrate life will be at the mercy of nature's vagaries every hurricane season.

Human lives have been at risk from a major storm for years along the Central Gulf Coast, but the few truth tellers sounding the warnings were largely ignored. Now, there is no longer any doubt about the great danger that lurked---and still lurks. The difference is that after Katrina, no one should be able to get by with saying they were not aware of the deadly potential.

Please hear this call to the UCC, and all citizens, to join us to assure a better and safer future for people of the New Orleans/Central Gulf region.

3/1/07

John Pecoul (japecoul@yahoo.com), St. Matthew United Church of Christ, New Orleans, LA (UCC Clergy retired, former Vice Pres. and political science faculty at Xavier Univ. of Louisiana, and former executive staff member for two Mayors of New Orleans)

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE #307

February 12, 2007

NEW ORLEANS PLEDGES TO EDUCATE CHILDREN ON WAITING LISTS

Jan Resseger

Minister for Public Education and Witness

In America public education is supposed to be provided for everybody, but during this past January in New Orleans, 300 children languished out of school on a waiting list because the Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD) had neither buildings nor teachers to serve them.

Only when the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and local attorney Tracie Washington filed separate lawsuits on February 1, under federal law and Louisiana's compulsory attendance act, did the RSD pledge to open two additional schools for the beginning of second semester, February 5.

It is now clear that a humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of a hurricane is a poor time to experiment with school governance.

Aided by a \$20.9 million federal charter school grant that came on September 30, 2005, less than one month after the storm, the Louisiana Legislature used Hurricane Katrina as an excuse for state takeover and a massive charter school experiment in New Orleans. The RSD is the body Louisiana created to manage this transformation.

Since the hurricane, parents have been required to apply to a fragmented system: a few selective admissions public schools left to be operated by the New Orleans School Board, 31 independent charter schools, and 18 schools opened by the RSD itself only when too few

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE #307

potential operators filed applications to launch charter schools. While Robin Jarvis, the RSD superintendent, blames today's dysfunction on the condition of the public schools pre-Katrina, the real problem is that Louisiana and the RSD never planned to manage school operations.

That the RSD was unprepared to run a school system was clear in July 2006, when its ten person staff included a public relations liaison but no special education coordinator. After Louisiana laid off and then fired all 4,500 of New Orleans' teachers who had been working in classrooms the day before Katrina struck, the RSD began advertising for 500 teachers only in late July 2006, after those best qualified had already taken jobs in charter schools or outside New Orleans. A shortage of teachers has plagued the RSD since last September. Today 33 percent of teachers hired by the RSD are uncertified.

Other school districts across the Gulf Coast have scrambled successfully to welcome children back to the schools they attended pre-Katrina. A better plan for New Orleans would have been to keep one coherent system, retain New Orleans' pre-Katrina teachers, open schools in all neighborhoods, and plan for slightly more schools than required for children immediately expected to return. The only side effect would have been smaller classes in under-enrolled schools until children moved back to fill the seats.

Now, after Louisiana granted charters and selective admissions schools the right to cap class sizes, the RSD is in the position of trying to pressure those "protected" schools to accept more children to reduce appalling over-crowding in RSD schools. Meanwhile the RSD has lacked the capacity to get other rotting buildings repaired.

The right for every child to a publicly funded education is something we take for granted in America. Because of an ideological experiment, parents in New Orleans cannot count on this right.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,700 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

IV. Now You've Been On-Site

Reflect–Reflect–Reflect on that Experience

Tony Saddington, a leader in experiential learning wrote, “Experience is not the best teacher. We learn nothing from experience. We only learn from reflection on our experience.” Reflecting on your experience while on-site gives perspective on your work and sets the stage for your continued involvement in the issues and lives of people when you return home.

Meeting God in the Ruins is a spiritual resource for reflection on your observations and experiences during and after the trip. It is written specifically for and with groups participating in disaster response by Disaster Response of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Copies are available for your group at your host church, or order copies before you depart. Order your own copy for on-going use at: <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/item.asp?isbn=6000167881>

An example of such reflection on experience resulted in the poem “Displaced Within by Country” by Aisha N. Howard following her participation in a group of UCC National Staff members in disaster recovery in New Orleans.

Displaced Within My Country

Written by: Aisha N. Howard
Justice & Witness Ministries, UCC

How many CAN relate?
Have gone to a place, where its people, pets, and neighbors are displaced?
Never, ever had enough space...on their track...in their race...
Within my own county I have...and I felt their faces in my face,
And what I witnessed was a disgrace.

It was as if I'd been asleep forever.
The extreme segregations and devastations I still cannot believe.
This land within my country so weathered.
2,000 lives and counting lost, all because of greed.

Entire neighborhoods abandoned, with molded memories rotting inside.
Every single possession just left, as they always were, behind.
A block just like mine, wiped totally from sight.
Realizing the only thing left WAS the truth to come to light.

In this time when our artillery is fully stocked,
Their paths to rescue and safety were security blocked.
Now their doors to opportunity are locked.
Programmed by the masses to believe the movement has stopped.

But it's only just begun, and it floods through me.
The sons and daughters of division are the roots of equality.
If none of this had happened, where would I be?
Could I ever understand this privilege of liberty; see the vast variations of free,
Had I not volunteered for Disaster Response Recovery?

For the Spirit guided me to this work along the Bayou.
Proved to me with the Lord there's NO THING I cannot do.
Learned faith is the only thing they can't take from you.
We stripped down to the rock and found these people's refuge,
And prepared a garden from which *hope shall bloom*.

V. Return Home – Live the Hope

When you return home, the real testimony of your experience is just beginning. At home, you can continue to reflect on the experience and make choices about how you live differently because of the experience. At home, you have the opportunity to share stories of your experience to help others remember the continuing disaster and long-term recovery. At home, you have the opportunity to engage in actions that aid disaster preparedness in your community and to become advocates for legislative actions that address the wide-spread recovery still necessary in New Orleans and along the United States Gulf Coast.

What follows in this resource are materials available that can assist you in this continuing faith journey and interaction with issues you may have encountered in the New Orleans area.

(1) Continue to Pray

The resource, *Letters from My Sisters: Words of Wisdom and Comfort for Women from Gulf Coast Women Survivors* is part of a series of booklets for bringing hope and strengthening faith. This particular booklet includes reflections from women of the Gulf Coast affected by Hurricane Katrina who came together a year after the storm in July, 2006 in a *HeartSongs* Retreat. Curran Reichert, coordinator of the retreat reflects, “Despite all that they have lived through in the past year, I have never met a more hope filled, generous and God centered group of people.” Order your copies from United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394.

A Healing Prayer

Leader	The God of strength moves within us;
People	The God of courage hears our distress.
Leader	The God of hope reveals wholeness to us;
People	The God of healing touches us when we are broken.
Leader	When the pain overwhelms, when the burden is too heavy,
People	We turn to our God who is comforting and strong.
Leader	When there is brokenness, when there is unending guilt,
People	We turn to our God who is sustaining and redeeming.
Leader	When there is loneliness, when there is isolation,
People	We turn to our God who is loving and ever-present.
Leader	For God creates us, redeems us, and sustains us,
People	And we are not alone. Lead us in your ways, O God, and bring us your healing touch.

(2) Act as Advocates

ADVOCACY IN THE RECOVERY

During disaster recovery, local issues often arise that call for immediate advocacy by local residents, often with the assistance of people from the wider church and community. The recovery may uncover injustices already at play, which now become more exposed to the wider world. Advocacy is also inherent in the process of recovery itself because population groups that are generally more neglected - the economically disadvantaged, the disabled, undocumented persons – are often more vulnerable to disasters and have the bulk of unmet needs. Unlike people who can recover with temporary assistance, persons on the margins of society do not recover quickly, if at all, without long-term assistance geared to their special needs. The categories of concern above take on special intensity in this context.

The first step in advocacy is discerning what local communities want those from outside the region to advocate with them. In New Orleans, as in most places, this is difficult, because the local community is composed of many communities, many with differing priorities.

The “Gulf Coast Justice Initiative” of UCC Justice and Witness Ministries in cooperation with National Disaster Ministries of Wider Church Ministries unveiled in July 2006 includes the discernment of local initiative as an emphasis. Through discussion among local residents and partners, the initiative has identified eleven areas of possible justice collaboration and local leadership empowerment.

Develop on-going contact with your House of Representatives and Senate legislators and their staff. Staff in your legislators’ offices have great influence in helping formulate priorities and in gathering information from constituents. Communicate with them that you have personally been to New Orleans with disaster recovery work and are concerned that Gulf coast issues remain part of the national legislative agenda. Indicate that you have first-hand experience in the area and would be willing to share stories with them (Legislators and their staff are always looking for stories). Even write a short summary of a particular experience related to a social justice issue and send it to your legislator.

Become part of the Justice and Peace Action Network to involve yourself in legislative initiatives as they are formulated and become part of public discourse and action. Sign up for JPANet at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/jpan.htm>

Become part of the *Covenant of Compassion* for periodic up-dates and alerts of action opportunities related to the Gulf Coast in disaster recovery and the on-going work of Refugee Ministries, National Disaster Ministries, Volunteer Ministries, and One Great Hour of Sharing.

Advocacy also includes looking at your own local community with new eyes, seeing if these concerns are present, taking action.

WHEN YOU GO HOME

The journey has not ended, but has just begun. Here are some ideas to remain involved in this experience:

- Continue to reflect on the experience and share the stories with others. Create and share a power point presentation in your local church that helps others visualize your experience and move them to action.
- Continue to help your own local community prepare for possible disaster and response. The document “Prepared to Care” gives good ideas on how to go about this. It is available from United Church Resources (1-800-537-3394) #WCM103.
- Continue to commit yourself to opportunities for hands-on engagement in diverse settings of ministry through another mission trip – either to the same location that you will no doubt see with new eyes or to another location. See the publication “Mission Trip Opportunities” for location and ministry ideas. This is available at <http://www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer>. It can also be ordered from United Church Resources (1-800-537-3394) #WCM110.
- Become part of the “Covenant of Compassion” is an on-going way to stay up-dated on opportunities for engagement through Refugee Ministries, Volunteer Ministries, National Disaster Ministries and One Great hour of Sharing <http://www.ucc.org/disaster/covenant>.
- Become part of the Justice and Peace Action Network <http://www.ucc.org/justice/jpan.htm>
- Continue to involve yourself in the broad and on-going efforts of recovery and advocacy that your faithful contributions to 5 for 5 UCC All-Church offerings make possible.