Hurricane Recovery on U.S. Gulf Coast and New Orleans, LA following Hurricane Katrina August 2005

Thousands signed onto a UCC Covenant of Compassion immediately following the storm surge and flooding disaster. Mission groups that served in disaster recovery received up-dates and tools for continued and wider engagement through the messages from UCC Volunteer Ministries through Executive, Rev. Mary Schaller Blaufuss, collected here. (These were sent through electronic mail over the past decade, so current links may or may not be live.) Rev. Alan Coe, Minister for Disaster Recovery, South Central Conference wrote monthly updates from the New Orleans Office. Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS kept constituents updated through their newsletters.

Hope Shall Bloom Covenant of Compassion United Church of Christ in Disaster Recovery following Hurricane Katrina August 2005

Because my faith and conscience call me to respond with prayer and action on behalf of hurricane survivors and others impacted by disaster, I offer my personal promise - in partnership with thousands of United Church of Christ members - to take the following five steps during the next three years to alleviate suffering.

1. I promise to pray for victims and survivors of Hurricane Katrina, for those still recovering from other disasters and for victims and survivors from natural and human-caused disasters that will occur in the future.

2. I promise to contribute to the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing special mission offering, especially its "Hope Shall Bloom" hurricane recovery initiative as well as other One Great Hour of Sharing special appeals created to respond to the needs of survivors.

3. I promise to participate in and/or support locally based efforts to temporarily house survivors of Hurricane Katrina or other disasters, support an initiative to assist in resettlement of Hurricane Katrina evacuees which is being pursued by Church World Service, and participate in the UCC's ongoing refugee resettlement program for those fleeing civil war, famine, or ethnic violence around the world.
4. I promise to participate in and/or support mission trips now available through the Florida UCC Disaster Response Ministry or available in the future for Hurricane Katrina recovery or other disasters, as well as involvement through service in my local community, UCC Mission Trip Opportunities and/or Global Ministries' People-to-People Pilgrimages.

5. I promise to support the UCC’s Neighbors in Need special mission offering and other justice initiatives that work to ensure that our government adequately serves all people, including the most vulnerable, the disabled, the poor and the elderly.

_Holy God, bless and confirm my commitment to join with others in a deepened spiritual discipline of compassion. Help me to serve my brothers and sisters affected by disasters, both nearby and far away. Fill me with the urgency to aid those devastated by Hurricane Katrina, but instill in me a commitment to serve all affected by natural/human disaster. By making this covenant, may our collective effort sustain a long-term Christian commitment to relief, recovery and rehabilitation. AMEN._

-Signature –

**Prayer After Katrina**

*_Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home._

- Be present, O God, with those who are discovering that loved ones have died, that homes and jobs are gone. Embrace them in your everlasting arms.
- Be present, O God, with those who suffer today in shelters, hot and weary from too little sleep and too much fear. Let them know they are not alone.
- Be present, O God, with those who wonder what they will find when they return to homes battered by wind and engulfed by flood. Teach them to hope.
- Be present, O God, with those who have not been able to reach loved ones, who are frantic with worry. Offer them consolation.
- Be present, O God, with those who have hardly recovered from last year’s storms, who are unsure how much they can bear, who yearn only for quiet. Grant them peace.
- Be present, O God, with all who respond - mayors, police, firefighters, FEMA employees, Red Cross workers, pastors, church disaster response coordinators. Their work is just beginning, and will not end for many months. Strengthen them for service.
- Be present, O God, with the people of the United Church of Christ in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, and especially with the staff and clients of the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi where we fear so much has been damaged. Inspire us by their determination to care for others amid their own trials.
- Be present, O God, to each of us as we pray, that distance may not deter us from generous giving and enduring companionship. Help us remember tomorrow, and next week, and next month.
- Be present, O God, with all affected by Hurricane Katrina. May Immanuel, God with us, our precious Jesus, take every hand and lead us home. Amen.

John H. Thomas
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ
August 30, 2005
September 8, 2005
Dear Friends:

What a generous outpouring of compassion and desire to offer self in service to others in response to the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina! The number of e-mails and phone messages and people keeping up-dated on the UCC response through <www.ucc.org> has been astounding. Action on the commitment to a long-term presence with people whose lives have been thrown into chaos by this disaster is well underway. This message is our attempt to provide an up-date on possible responses you might pursue.

Contribute:
One direct way you can respond is to continue your efforts in encouraging people to offer monetary donations to the “Hope Shall Bloom” Hurricane Katrina fund. Donations to this fund are used in their entirety to respond to immediate needs through our churches and partners in the region as well as making our commitment to long-term recovery possible.

100% of your gift goes to hurricane recovery programming. This is possible because your gifts to Our Church’s Wider Mission basic support provide for the infrastructure necessary to make the UCC disaster response possible.

Hospitality:
Many of you as individuals, congregations and conferences have written and phoned with offers to provide housing/hospitality for evacuees from the affected region. As many displaced Americans are now arriving in various states, we have an opportunity to respond to people in our local communities. Please be in contact with your local government officials, your local American Red Cross office, and your State Emergency Management Agency to connect with local possibilities.

We also are moving forward on a program through Church World Service to provide long-term hospitality for displaced Americans using the expertise of the Refugee Ministries offices of various denominations. We will provide you with more concrete ways to be part of this CWS program of “Katrina Hospitality Connections for the Displaced” as soon as it is in place.

Volunteer Service:
The need for volunteer service in light of this disaster is certain. Eventually there will be possibilities for groups to offer their service. Systems are not yet in place for the rebuilding effort which will follow the relief and recovery stages of disaster response. That effort will be long-term and will need many hands, hearts and resources. In the immediate response, please research what volunteer service is needed in your local community. Seek evacuees coming into your community and work with local organizations to provide the hands-on service needed. Remember, there were people in need of service in each community across our country prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Another immediate response you can make to disaster ministry is to organize your group or volunteer your service as an individual with the UCC Florida Conference Disaster Response Ministry. Disaster response is a long-term commitment to minister with people for several years following the initial trauma. Recovery efforts from the 2004 hurricane season leave 43,000 homes yet to be repaired. Systems are in place and the
Florida Conference Team is ready to receive you. You can contact Candy Shoop at the Florida Conference office. Her e-mail address is: casucc250@yahoo.com. FOR FLORIDA MISSION TRIPS ONLY

In an effort to try to connect those of you with specific skills in helping professions, the United States Department of Health and Human Services may be an avenue you can pursue. They are currently looking for multidisciplinary healthcare professionals and relief personnel with expertise in a variety of areas. You can access this resource online: https://volunteer.ccrf.hhs.gov/

Individuals seeking volunteer opportunities may contact the National Emergency Resource Registry – 1-800-440-6728; www.swern.gov

Donations of Material Goods:
A common desire for disaster response is to offer material goods. Those with experience in disaster response often caution “appropriate gifts at the appropriate time.”

Adventist Community Service – Disaster Response multi-agency warehouses have opened in the affected region. To donate goods, call the warehouse PRIOR to collecting materials, see what they need and where needed items may be sent:

Mississippi, Ray Elsberry: 334-467-5174; 
Louisiana, Stan Buckmaster: 405-612-4602 
Texas, Linda Walker: 832-928-4937

Please also respond within your local community. Arriving evacuees may have specific needs. Local homeless shelters and food pantries have on-going needs for donated items and foodstuffs.

You may also want to respond by collecting “Gift of the Heart Kits” for distribution through Church World Service. The most applicable kits in this time are School Kits, Kids’ Kits, and Health Kits. You can find information on the contents of these kits and instructions for packing and sending those kits at the Church World Service website: http://www.churchworldservice.org/kits/index.html.

Covenant of Compassion:

A UCC Covenant of Compassion was launched yesterday on the UCC web site: www.ucc.org This is an opportunity for us to commit ourselves as individuals and in partnership with thousands of UCC members to concrete steps during the next three years to help alleviate suffering. It is a way to act immediately and to commit ourselves to some of the concrete opportunities suggested above as well as others that will emerge. It will help us to act in a way that responds to the urgency of the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina and that nurtures compassion as a spiritual discipline.

Thank you for your contact and desire to keep up-dated on possible avenues of response. Keep watching the UCC website: www.ucc.org and keep praying.
January 2006
Dear Hope Shall Bloom Covenanter:

As we move further in time from the violent winds, torrents, ocean surges and breached levees of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, there is a fear that the people affected by the disasters caused by these hurricanes will be forgotten. As church, however, we practice a remembering faith. We share with you the following story written by Kelley de la Rocha from New York state who in January, 2006 joined a work group from St. Paul’s UCC in Fleetwood, PA to work with Back Bay Mission efforts in Biloxi, MS. She becomes a conduit through which people on the Gulf Coast ask us to remember, for the story of the disaster is just beginning.


Katrina was downgraded too soon by Kelly de la Rocha

The darkness is kind in Biloxi, Mississippi. As I stand on the beach in the pre-dawn blackness, I see only shells and seaweed on the circle of white sand illuminated by my headlamp. But as the pink light of the approaching sunrise begins to reflect off the Mississippi Sound, another vision comes into view: twisted aluminum siding, misplaced tree limbs and a listing lawn chair, half-submerged in the water. At my feet is a child’s booster seat, and further on, the face of a dresser drawer, a coffee cup, a high heeled shoe half buried in the sand.

Inland, the view is no less disturbing. The road that hugs the beach is flanked with houses that are teetering, tilted, collapsed. Tombstones are upended in the cemetery; the roof of a church balances on spindly steel girders; plastic bags sway like ghosts in the trees. Only the ancient live oaks, standing sentry everywhere, seem unfazed by Katrina, a storm that devastated 70 miles of Mississippi coastline five months ago.

I came to Biloxi on a mission trip, prepared to help people put their lives back together but insufficiently steeled for the blow of how much yet needs to be done. Snug in my upstate New York home, I simply assumed the cleanup and rebuilding was in full swing. It is not. It has barely begun. The only things in Biloxi that appear to be cleaned up and put back together are three shiny casinos that cling to the shore not far from the crumpled Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge. “Good Times Roll” tour busses rumble up out front, disgorging tourists eager to try their luck and quick to turn their backs to what looks like a war zone on the other side of the street.

While the casinos flourish, the town itself flounders. Most schools still aren’t operational. Many neighborhoods still have no power. People are living in tents and trailers with the possessions they’ve salvaged gathered close around them. A sign, spray-painted on one ruined home announces, “Don’t bulldoze! We’re still alive and kicking!” But there’s no sign of life there. Streets wander through lots littered with rubble and tattooed with bulldozer tracks: the only remnants of once thriving neighborhoods located blocks from the shore.

The statistics regarding the devastation are staggering: in southern Mississippi alone, over 65,000 homes were destroyed. The storm surge that decimated the coast
generated an estimated 44 million cubic yards of debris. But those numbers mean nothing until you drive for mile after mile after mind-numbing mile through nearly deserted communities that have been crushed, upended, ripped apart at the seams. And that view itself means little until you meet the people whose lives have been forever changed by Katrina.

I journeyed to Biloxi with 22 others, most of them members of St. Paul’s United Church of Christ in Fleetwood, Pennsylvania. We arrived with a pick-up full of tools and supplies, and grand visions of making a difference. Under the guidance of Biloxi’s Back Bay Mission, we tackled three homes: two in need of electrical work, insulation, windows and wallboard and a third infested with mold that needed to be removed.

I found myself installing wallboard in a modest clapboard bungalow belonging to 51-year-old Ella Glavan. Her house sits on Hoxie Street, about three blocks from the Sound, surrounded by other homes in varying states of destruction. Glavan rode out Katrina clinging to the frame of her front door, her terrier, Taylor, stowed inside her shirt, as seven feet of water invaded her home.

When the water subsided, she fashioned a tent out of tarps and camped on the front porch for over a month while she shoveled mud, ripped out wallboard, bleached joists and installed a new roof. She currently lives in her driveway, in a tiny camper-trailer on loan from FEMA, and survives on donations. A professional gardener, she has been unable to generate income since Katrina destroyed every one of her clients’ yards, but she hasn’t had a moment’s rest since the hurricane re-landscaped her life. She sanded and drilled alongside me and my group, stopping only to bring us turnovers or serve us coffee from the two mugs she managed to take back from the storm.

Right after Katrina roared through, Glavan’s survival story and many others like it made national headlines. But once the water subsided and the death toll was tallied, the spotlight shifted elsewhere. The story, however, goes on. Thousands of people still have no homes to live in, no jobs, no schools for their children, no safe place for them to play. “If you put us on a percentage scale, our life is probably 30% back. Seventy percent is still a void,” Glavan told me. “That’s five months. That’s a whole lot of life to be missing.”

Now and then, as I worked on Glavan’s home, I saw a neighbor quietly wheeling a pile of debris to the side of the road, but the air was not full of the ringing of hammers, as I had imagined it would be. Many people have not returned since the storm. Those in residence who are attempting to reclaim their homes are finding progress hindered by lack of funds, lack of tools, lack of contractors, lack of supplies, lack of building permits, lack of so many things. Insurance checks are slow to come and often inadequate. Some of those who did get checks have pushed their luck and gambled away their compensation in the casinos, in hopes of doubling their money.

My little group of Samaritans barely scratched the surface of the rebuilding of Biloxi, the reclaiming of normalcy lost, but we brought hope to a place where it’s in short supply. And now that I’ve returned to the neatly manicured Northeast, to neighborhoods full of homes with windows and roofs, to stores and restaurants with blazing “Open” signs, to friends and family, I’ve brought back a message from the South: The story of Hurricane Katrina is just beginning. The survivors are fighters, but they need our help now more than ever. They need money, they need hands to help them rebuild and they need to know we haven’t forgotten them.
April 2006
Dear Covenanter:

Responding to disasters caused and intensified by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma on the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2005 you joined many UCC members in becoming part of a “Covenant of Compassion.” Thank you. In these months after the storms as decisions are made about rebuilding, we, as Christians, are challenged to embody our Easter faith in the resurrection. We pray that “Hope Shall Bloom” on the U.S. Gulf Coast and in our own local communities through this commitment to service and justice.

In this week before Earth Day observances in the U.S., and in relation to the point of the Covenant through which we commit to justice initiatives, we share with you a resource on the environment produced by the National Council of Churches USA, “Through the Eye of a Hurricane: Rebuilding Just Communities.” You can sign onto the Eco-Justice Program of the NCC, USA and download the file from www.nccecojustice.org or call 202-544-2350 for a copy of the resource.

Through background information, avenues for action and liturgical resources, this resource addresses the intersection of destruction caused by disaster, on-going environmental degradation, and the need for a renewed covenant of community. While the hurricanes impacted all classes and races, the environmental racism involved in on-going environmental hazards and in the recovery efforts have shown that communities of color and low income populations bear a larger brunt of the storms’ impacts. These resources encourage us to take action in relation to the Gulf Coast and in our own local communities to address environmental hazards in the care of God’s creation and the continued rebuilding of just communities.

The following are a sampling of the resources included:

**An offering of Eco-Justice Principles for Rebuilding the Gulf Region**
- In clean up and rebuilding, protect public health and God’s creation.
- Restore environmental protections and address patterns of environmental racism.
- Encourage new environmentally sustainable models of economic growth and community in the Gulf Region.
- Expediency in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita cannot be an excuse to weaken or waive environmental protections in the Gulf coast region.
- Environmental cleanups must be conducted fairly and equitable in every affected community.
- Government agencies need to comply with Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, which addresses environmental justice in minority and low-income populations.
- Jurisdictions in the Gulf Coast region must focus on creating sustainable and environmentally friendly low and moderate income housing.

*(In “Through the Eye of a Hurricane,” adapted from the National Black Environmental Justice network Resolution on Environmental and Economic Justice in the Gulf Coast Region)*
Gathering Meditation
When willows bow and snap
Under the weight of the wind…

When congregations of raindrops
Become inland streams flowing where they will…

When the streets are littered with toxic waste,
Broken dishes, and shattered dreams…

When the wind blows both the
Wheat and the chaff of our lives in giant swirls.

Good Lord, anchor us in your love!

Response  
Ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est.
Where charity and love are found, God is there.

Prayers of the People
For the victims, human and non-human, of disaster,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who labor in the work of recovery and just rebuilding,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the communities and congregations impacted by the hurricanes,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For those whose lives and health are in peril from toxic hazards resulting from flooding and storms, that they may be saved from this time of peril, we add our voices to the cry, Lord, hear our prayer.

For those who have gifts to share to restore a vibrant and environmentally sustainable Gulf Region, may your spirit move them,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the devastation to God’s creation,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the discipline to use the gifts of the Earth to your glory and for the good of all, that we may not add to the harshness of nature’s power,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For justice tempered with mercy, and for peace,
Lord, hear our prayer.

That we may learn from you Holy Spirit to amend our lives according to your word and live in right relationship with the Earth.
Lord, hear our prayer.
(In “Through the Eye of a Hurricane: Rebuilding Just Communities, National Council of Churches USA Eco-Justice Program)
May 16, 2006
From: Florence Coppola, Executive for National Disaster Ministries
NATIONAL DISASTER MINISTRIES
Gulf Coast Hurricane Update

In the continued effort of the United Church of Christ to respond to the destruction and human suffering caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Wilma and the flooding that followed, a debt of gratitude is owed to UCC members and friends for your inspiring generosity. The UCC has received over $5.6 million dollars to address the needs of people impacted by these storms. The funds received will allow a UCC church presence on the Gulf Coast for the long term recovery. Partnerships continue to be formed on the Gulf Coast with recovery committees to address the physical needs of people affected; and with existing environmental groups to address the justice and health issues in communities.

The major role of the church in this disaster, continues to be the rebuilding and repairing of homes for persons identified with “un-met” needs – people who have no insurance or who are under-insured – to learn more about the possibility of taking a volunteer work group to New Orleans, check: http://www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane.htm.

Relief and Recovery Phase - August 29, 2005 to May 16, 2006
Funds Disbursed thru 5/16/06

$25,000 Church World Service, (Hurricane Katrina) to support distribution of blankets, health kits, and continued deployment of Disaster Response and Recovery Liaisons to work with establishment of Long Term Recovery Committees.

$310,600 UCC South Central Conference to meet emergency needs; provide grants to UCC clergy families who have been displaced and lost homes & income sources; long term recovery disaster response coordination [four long term volunteers]. Additionally, Rev. Alan Coe has been called by the South Central Conference to coordinate disaster recovery and work camp groups in the New Orleans Association.

$50,000 UCC South Central Conference to purchase building materials for repairing and rebuilding of homes of persons who are under-insured or not insured.

$15,000 Mix in ‘06 to assist 25 women from the South Central Conference impacted by the 2005 hurricanes to attend the women’s event in Indianapolis. The women attending will participate in planned events including leadership in worship with opportunity to tell their stories to women from across the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

$25,000 Missouri Interfaith Disaster Recovery Organization (MIDRO) to support long term recovery committees throughout Missouri who are assisting persons evacuated and still displaced by the hurricanes.
$25,000  Disaster Recovery Services of George County, Mississippi – interfaith support to buy materials to repair and rebuild homes for persons who are under insured; or, have no insurance. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor.

$25,000  Interfaith Disaster Task Force (Jackson, Hancock and Harrison Counties in Mississippi) – interfaith support to buy materials to repair and rebuild homes for persons who are under insured; or, have no insurance. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor.

$135,000  Community of Faith Church of Houston (UCC/Disciple) - Amistad Resettlement Project, to assist in paying resettlement costs (job re-training; housing; food and clothing; medical assistance) for 82 evacuated families who have been identified to participate in long-term resettlement project.

$50,000  Church World Service - Relocation Program for Displaced Americans, relocation of families in various sites across U.S.

$15,000  UCC Southeast Conference to meet emergency needs; feeding evacuees in Atlanta through the Hosea Williams Feeding Program (at the request of Ambassador Andrew Young).

$20,000  UCC Back Bay Mission, Biloxi, Mississippi to re-establish mission site for emergency relief and long-term recovery and rebuilding.

$5,000  Purchase of two Iridium satellite phones and service for use by Back Bay Mission staff as long as normal land-line and cell phone communications are disrupted.

$40,000  UCC related Dillard University, New Orleans to repair damage to campus and restore operations.

$5,000  UCC related Olivet College, Michigan, to help cover costs of feeding and sheltering 18 evacuees.

$10,000  Farm Worker Association of Florida to assist migrant farm workers unemployed when the crops were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

$113,800  Good Shepherd UCC, Metairie, Louisiana to prepare church building (repaired damages, remove mold) to serve long term as site for UCC volunteer work groups.

$10,690  St. Matthew UCC, New Orleans, Louisiana to prepare church building (install showers, kitchen facilities) to serve long term as site for UCC volunteer work groups.

$10,000  Howard University, Washington, DC to help support 205 students “alternative Spring Break” in the New Orleans area – served as volunteers to rebuild and repair homes for persons who have no insurance or are under-insured.

$14,000  Church World Service - (Hurricane Rita) to support distribution of blankets, health kits, and deployment of Disaster Response and Recovery Liaisons.
$2,400  Back Bay Mission, support for WCM Volunteer to serve as mission trip coordinator (6 months).

$4,500  Plymouth Congregational UCC, Beaumont, TX (Hurricane Rita) to assist the community with relief and recovery needs.

$20,000  Old First Church, Springfield, MA – support for books for Gulf Coast; church is working with school districts and local organizations to replace books through an ongoing book program. Shipments of 350,000 books have now been sent to schools, hospitals and libraries on the Gulf Coast (Louisiana and Mississippi).

$15,000  New York Disaster Interfaith Services – support for resettlement of evacuees in New York City.

$20,000  Louisiana Environmental Action Network to support an intern who will work in communities to address health and safety issues in the greater New Orleans area. The intern will attend meetings of recovery groups to discuss environmental aspects of this disaster; and to distribute fact sheets including environmental data.

$30,000  Louisiana Environmental Action Network to assist with direct relief efforts for residents - providing "Re-entry Protection Kits" that contain protective clothing and eyewear, gloves, biohazard bags, and particulate respirators, as well as more bleach, and hopefully, if we can find them in time, buckets and detergents.

$50,000  Into Afrika – Exodus Ministries – UCC Ministers for Racial, Social & Economic Justice – to facilitate radio town hall meetings for the Diaspora to receive critical information and have a voice in plans for how to rebuild their communities.

$20,000  UCC South Central Conference – support for new church start in Baton Rouge, Louisiana – Malcolm Richard, pastor.

Recovery and Rehabilitation Phase
June 1, 2006 to December 31, 2006 (projected funding)

$100,000  UCC National Disaster Ministries and Church World Service for work with partners in local communities on the technology-caused issues (environmental hazards) related to Hurricane Katrina.

$500,000  Partnerships with local organizations for advocacy in relation to environment, affordable housing, re-entry assistance for residents, job re-training.

$90,000  Support for recovery efforts of nine UCC congregations in New Orleans Association.

$200,000  Church World Service to develop long term recovery organizations; spiritual care for persons affected directly and indirectly; care for the care-givers; support for local community organizations related to vulnerable populations.

$2,000,000  Ecumenical home reconstruction program - Long Term Recovery and Interfaith Committees.
The projects and funding amounts listed above are projections. This is a very fluid situation and we anticipate many opportunities to serve our sisters and brothers in need.

Highlights of recovery initiatives:

++May 2006: Fact sheet on environmental hazards prepared by the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Church World Service and the United Church of Christ are being distributed to members of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). Members of NVOAD who are supporting volunteer work groups; and working with returning residents are using this fact sheet to provide information on contaminants. To download and print the pdf file, go to the LEAN web site: http://www.leanweb.org/ – fact sheet is under “Keep Safe Louisiana.”

++May 2006: Environmental justice meetings continue with UCC staff and local partners in New Orleans. Carlos Correa and Barbara Baylor of Justice and Witness Ministries (environmental justice and health portfolios, respectively); Florence Coppola of Wider Church Ministries (disaster ministries); Joann Hale, Lura Cayton, Heriberto Martinez (disaster recovery liaisons) of Church World Service are working with local communities to provide much needed information about existing contaminants. Local partners include: Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Sustainable Community Development Group and Moving Forward Gulf Coast. Among the local faith groups represented were Hispanic Apostolate and Catholic Charities Hispanic Outreach, United Methodists Committee on Relief, Louisiana Interchurch Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

++April 2006: Volunteer work groups have almost completed work on Beecher Memorial UCC to remove mold and clean out the building to ready it for renovation. Homes of UCC members and of the wider community are being cleaned out and repaired as possible. Work groups are assisting people in recovering what is salvageable from their homes. More than 100 homes have now been cleared and are ready for repairs.

++April 2006: John Thomas, UCC General Minister and President, visited with clergy and lay leaders in New Orleans; and, preached at the New Orleans Association Spring meeting. Rev. Thomas visited with the staff of Back Bay Mission in Biloxi; and with clergy living in the area. Reflections on his visit may be found at: http://www.ucc.org/disaster/u041106.htm

++April 2006: Linda Jaramillo, Executive Minister, UCC Justice and Witness Ministries, travels to New Orleans to meet with local community members to focus the nation’s attention on the rights of residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina. In addition to voting rights in the April election, there was conversation about the right to return home and to live in safe and affordable housing. Reflections on her visit may be found at: http://www.ucc.org/index.php under hurricane response.

++March 2006: National Disaster Ministries working with Justice and Witness Ministries continues working to establish partnerships in Louisiana to address the environmental justice issues in communities. Toxic materials including heavy metals residue (known carcinogens); a large oil spill; and bacterial residue in residential areas have not been removed.
++March 2006: The Interfaith Disaster Task Force (Jackson, Hancock and Harrison Counties in Mississippi) has begun the work of assisting to repair and rebuild homes through the purchase of materials. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor to repair homes of persons who are under insured, or who have no insurance. As soon as there is sufficient housing to accommodate additional volunteers, opportunities to serve will open to the UCC.

++February 2006: National Disaster Ministries working with Local Church Ministries supports the establishment of a new UCC church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Reverend Malcolm Richard (formerly a pastor in New Orleans) lives in Baton Rouge and is working to provide a worship experience for displaced persons. Rev. Richard is hoping to have a first worship service on Easter Sunday.

++February 2006: The work of repairing and rebuilding in George County, Mississippi has begun through the efforts of the Disaster Services Interfaith established to assist in recovery efforts. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor to repair homes of persons who are under insured, or who have no insurance. As soon as there is sufficient housing to accommodate additional volunteers, opportunities to serve will open to the UCC.

++January 2006: Cally Rogers-Witte, Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries, traveled to Louisiana and Mississippi with WCM staff. Rev. Rogers-Witte met with clergy and lay leaders in New Orleans to discuss recovery and toured areas of the city that had been impacted by the hurricanes. In Mississippi, Rev. Rogers-Witte met with Back Bay Mission staff in Biloxi; and visited with volunteer groups working at repairing homes.

++January 2006: National Disaster Ministries working with Church World Service begins work with the Louisiana Environmental Action Network to form a partnership that will address the toxic materials issues in the New Orleans area. Many of the homes and neighborhoods are contaminated by toxins including benzine, mercury and lead. Safety issues for volunteers and for residents wanting to return home are being addressed through this partnership.

++ December 2005: National Disaster Ministries, working with the Justice and Witness Ministries, Washington, DC office released the following statement via the Justice and Peace Action Network asking members to contact their Senators.

"As the season of light and hope progresses to the culminating birth of the baby Jesus, who, along with his parents, found shelter in a stable because there was no room at the inn, thousands of families left homeless and jobless by hurricanes Katrina and Rita are still finding no room at the federal inn. In the three months since these natural disasters hit the gulf coast, Congress has not yet passed critical aid packages for those who lost everything in the deluge. However, there is hope, because now there is a new bi-partisan relief bill that could bring desperately needed aid to these struggling families: the Gulf Coast Recovery Act of 2005 (H.R. 4438)."
"The Gulf Coast Recovery Act, which has been approved by the House committee that has jurisdiction over federal disaster programs, would extend federal disaster unemployment assistance (DUA) for families who run out of their limited 26 weeks of federal aid. The bill also requires an immediate increase in minimum DUA benefits from $98 per week to $135 per week, a modest, but significant increase. These, along with other provisions in the bill, will help ensure that those who continue to suffer will not be left out in the cold this winter. The Senate has a similar, though more limited version of this bill (S. 1777).

"If these bills do not pass before Congress recesses for the holidays, they will not be taken up again until late January. Congressman Dan Young of Alaska, the Republican chair of the House committee that just approved the bill, was quoted as saying that his aim is to have the measure enacted before the Congressional session ends. So, the immediate priority is to get the bill through the House so that the Senate can take it up before the holidays."

++ November 2005: UCC President and General Minister, The Reverend John Thomas led a spiritual retreat in Houston, TX. 45 clergy from the South Central Conference including staff from Back Bay Mission participated in this time of renewal.

++ November 2005: Volunteer work group opportunities in the New Orleans area begin. To learn more about this possibility check: http://www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane.htm. Housing for volunteer work groups is available at three New Orleans area churches.

++ October 2005: National Disaster Ministries, working with the Justice and Witness Ministries, Washington, DC office released the following statement via the Justice and Peace Action Network asking members to contact their Senators. "Keep Katrina Workers Safe: Thousands of disaster responders, workers and volunteers in the Gulf Coast areas affected by Hurricane Katrina remain inadequately protected against exposure to environmental health hazards. The flood waters were contaminated with an estimated eight million gallons of petroleum and the disaster area contains highly elevated levels of sewage, bacteria, lead, mercury, hexavalent chromium, arsenic, benzene and pesticides. Yet, Sen. James Inhofe (OK) has proposed legislation to allow the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to temporarily relax or suspend its rules in the clean-up effort for 120 days."

++ October 2005: Worship and Education Team of Local Church Ministries developed Advent worship resources related to the Hurricanes which were posted on the UCC web site for use by congregations.
May 2006
Dear Hope Shall Bloom Covenanter:

The 2006 Hurricane Season is now upon us! As we continue to accompany people in recovery from the 2005 hurricanes on the Gulf Coast, we share with you information from the Louisiana Family Assistance Center. This is the national collection point for information on separated family members or those who may have perished in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It is a joint effort between the State of Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, the Louisiana State Police, FEMA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They are asking each of us to remember and to help bring awareness that a list of missing persons remains, to help reunite families, and to remember victims of the storms.

The Center is asking anyone who lived in south Louisiana prior to the storms, especially evacuees, to check the missing persons list for your name or for the names of friends and family. The list is posted on their website at www.familyassist.us. If you are able to assist the Center in locating anyone on the missing list, please call 1-866-326-9393. They assure us that all information gathered by the Family Assistance Center is held in the strictest confidence and used only for the purpose of identifying and reuniting loved ones.

Attached you will find an information sheet compiled by the Louisiana Family Assistance Center.

Please continue in your efforts to raise awareness in your community that the disasters caused, intensified and uncovered by these storms continue. Our commitments of compassion can make a difference.

April 2007
Dear Friends:

Thank you for sending your address to be included in these periodic up-dates on the UCC Disaster Recovery program in New Orleans. There are two resources for you in this message. The first attachment is a copy of the most recent newsletter from the Disaster Ministries Office of the South Central Conference in New Orleans. Thanks to Rev. Alan Coe for these wonderful up-dates. The second attachment contains reflections written by Rev. Doug Moore on his experience as a “Partners in Service” volunteer. He and his wife, Judy, are serving in New Orleans during February, March, and April, 2007.

Thank you for your continuing involvement. Please let us know if there are others who would like to be added to this list for New Orleans up-dates.
August 2006
Dear Hope Shall Bloom Covenanter:

The response during this year of work groups participating in disaster response has been fantastic. People of the U.S. Gulf Coast are still in need of our commitment to long-term recovery. Groups from UCC congregations and church-related institutions are still signing up to offer service and accompaniment. Thank you. This service not only assists in the physical acts of helping people rebuild their homes, but is an act of presence that indicates the commitment to walk beside people as they seek to rebuild their lives. Such acts also offer work group participants the opportunities to experience new realities, to be moved out of a comfort zone and encouraged to ask new questions and seek deeper faith responses. Materials for orientation, on-site reflection, and after-the-trip engagement are available from the particular disaster ministries sites upon registration.

You can find registration information for short term group volunteer opportunities on-line: www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane.htm. You can also find this information along with descriptions and contact information for many other mission trip sites in the publication Mission Trip Opportunities. This publication guides you to sites that help your group engage with social and economic justice issues in a variety of settings. Mission trips can be inspiring, learning and potentially life-transformative opportunities. You can find the up-dated 2006 version of Mission Trip Opportunities on-line: www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer or call United Church of Christ resources for multiple copies 800-537-3394.

Keep a look out during the next couple of months for the 2007 Mission Trip Opportunities with a UCC 50th Anniversary Theme.

We can surely “Let It Shine....” through engagement in group mission trips.
May 2007
Dear Participants in New Orleans Disaster Recovery:

Hope Shall Bloom! Are you coming to General Synod 26 in Hartford, CT this summer? You’ll see some people you recognize! A video on the disaster recovery efforts enabled by the Hope Shall Bloom fund will be shown in the 2:30 p.m. plenary session on Friday afternoon. We would love to have everyone with a “Hope Shall Bloom” T-shirt to wear them on Friday, June 22 so we can get a sense of the breadth of participation from all over the church. So, pack your suitcase with your “Hope Shall Bloom” T-shirt picked out for General Synod Friday. Also, come by the Wider Church Ministries booth in the exhibit hall to pick up your “Gulf Coast Hurricane Volunteer” sticker to wear throughout the Synod. Help tell the story!

Lots of new things happening in the Disaster Recovery work in New Orleans! Tim Fonderlin, a former Global Ministries missionary who worked in southern Asia after the 2004 tsunami, will join the staff as construction coordinator. He joins Sarah McAllister and Rev. Alan Coe as disaster recovery staff. This will enable the program to move into the new phase of repair and building now called for in New Orleans. Long-term “Partners in Service” volunteers continue to add welcome leadership for the program. See the articles in the attached New Orleans up-date from Rev. Alan Coe, Minister for Disaster Response and Recovery.

In this new phase of rebuilding and as the media is no longer focused on disaster recovery in New Orleans, it is even more important to keep issues in front of people around the country and world. You have been there. You are in an important position to do this. Use the attached flyer to get the word into your congregations that volunteers are still needed.

Also, a new category of volunteer service has been added to your opportunities in New Orleans. You can apply to serve for 1-3 months as a work site coordinator. Bring your own RV or have housing provided by the program, as available. Contact Rev. Alan Coe directly to apply ucchurcanerecovery@yahoo.com.

Please continue to remember the people of the Gulf Coast and know that your participation in recovery efforts continues to make a difference. Keep those groups coming! Stay involved.
August 2007

Long-Term Disaster Recovery
Two years After the Storm

With an emphasis on justice, long term disaster recovery on the U. S. Gulf Coast continues

Dear Disaster Recovery Participant:

As our list grows of those wanting to receive these up-dates on the United Church of Christ disaster recovery efforts in New Orleans, we invite others who may not have had the chance to physically participate in rebuilding in New Orleans but who are participating through educating people and inspiring advocacy efforts to send us your name and e-mail address so we can add you to this list. Please send your contact information to Diane Dicken at dickend@ucc.org.

Because we have new people now receiving these up-dates, we point you again to a historical piece and call for advocacy written by UCC member, John Pecoul, in September of 2005, soon after the hurricanes. It is attached. Up-dates on levees, environmental issues and avenues of action are available through the “Gulf Restoration Network” http://www.healthygulf.org. The Gulf Restoration Network is a diverse network of local, regional, and national groups and individuals dedicated to protecting and restoring the valuable resources of the Gulf of Mexico. The GRN has members in the five Gulf states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

The justice issues surrounding rebuilding in New Orleans have long history and many layers. The following bibliography points to resources to better equip ourselves to participate effectively in a LONG and JUST Rebuilding. If you know of other resources that will be helpful in continuing efforts of education on issues in the region, please let me know at blaufusm@ucc.org. Thanks.

These resources are part of other materials sent to group leaders by e-mail when your group registered as a disaster recovery work grouping New Orleans. You can find that orientation booklet on-line in printable format: www.ucc.org/volunteer.

Keep those groups signing up to physically participate in the rebuilding. New groups are registering every week. You can use the attached brochures to help recruit people for Florida Conference, UCC and New Orleans, South Central Conference, UCC disaster ministries programs.
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 affected 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.” (Part of Group Leader’s Guide)

d. Race

e. Environment
Visit [http://www.leanweb.org](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](http://www.healthygulf.org) for initiatives on restoring the environment of the Gulf Coast.

f. Education


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](http://communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/downloads/DismantlingFULL.pdf)
September 2007
Dear New Orleans Disaster Recovery Participant:

We hope that you continue to be involved in the long-term disaster recovery through plans to participate in future mission trips in the U.S. Gulf Coast or in other areas. An update from Rev. Alan Coe from the South Central Conference Disaster Ministry is attached. Disaster recovery sites are listed on-line or see “UCC Mission Trip Opportunities” for broader opportunities at www.ucc.org/volunteer.

Because of your personal experience in New Orleans you also are equipped to continue your involvement in long-term disaster recovery through educating yourself and your congregation and by taking action on justice issues. Many of these issues also may have implications in your own communities.

With the beginning of a new academic year, justice issues and public education are a focus. You are invited to use the resource “Message on Public Education 2008” prepared by Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness of the United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries. In this issue, she reflects on “Public Education and the Public Good” examining New Orleans’ experiments with an increasingly market model of education in light of a Christian theology of ‘the common good.’ Other sections of the piece reflect on the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’, recent U.S. Supreme Court actions turning away from school integration, and the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) in the U.S. Congress. It is also available on-line at http://www.ucc.org/justice/issues/public-education/pdfs/message-lower-res-08.pdf. You can order printed copies by contacting Jan Resseger, Minister for Public Education and Witness at 216-736-3711 or <ressegerj@ucc.org> “Public Education and the Public Good” uses information from personal interviews as well as a study, “The State of Public Education in New Orleans,” conducted by the Boston (Massachusetts) Consulting Group and published in June, 2007. It was conducted for the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation, Scott S. Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives and the New Orleans City Council Education Committee. The full report of the study can be downloaded from http://www.stateofnolaschools.org/NO_FINAL.pdf.

Other resources related to public education and New Orleans include:


- 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 http://communitychange.org/issues/education/publications/downloads/DismantlingFULL.pdf.
November 2007

Two years after the storm and counting…. 1 million volunteers and counting….  

1.1 million volunteers on the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2 years, says the federal government Corporation for National and Community Service in their report released at the end of August, 2007. John Pope of the New house News Service quoted in the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported that “by rolling up their sleeves to perform tasks such as feeding and sheltering evacuees, tutoring youngsters, and gutting and rebuilding houses, about 1.1 million volunteers have contributed services worth nearly $263 million in the two years since Hurricane Katrina hit.” (Plain Dealer, Aug. 26, 2007) **Thank you** for being part of that number in the work of the South Central Conference, UCC program to gut and rebuild homes, helping people make decisions on how to reclaim and rebuild their lives and communities. An up-date from Minister for Disaster Recovery, Rev. Alan Coe, is attached.

The challenge **now** is to continue that level of involvement – on-site and as we are involved from our own homes in issues of justice in the recovery. In a 2006 book *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, p. 152), author Michael Eric Dyson quotes a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered at Riverside Church: “On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life’s roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”

**Now** is a good time now to introduce yourself to your political legislators and candidates. Let them know that you have personal experience and have heard first-hand stories from the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Ask them about their political positions on issues such as the rebuilding of levees, restoration of coastal wetlands, provision of healthcare and mental health services, re-creation of education systems,… Let them know that you are concerned and are willing to work with them to share these stories as they support legislation that address issues in the recovery. Help put disaster recovery in New Orleans and the Gulf coast back in the public dialogue.
December 2007
Dear New Orleans Disaster Recovery Participant:

Thank you for your continuing participation in disaster recovery efforts along the U.S. Gulf Coast – through your prayers, hands-on actions in rebuilding, and advocacy efforts with your own local legislators. The news this week regarding affordable housing in New Orleans is cause for continued concern and vigilance. What follows is a news article from the Advancement Project...just democracy!


ON DECEMBER 15TH HOUSING CRISIS IN NEW ORLEANS MAY REACH EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS

(December 5, 2007 New Orleans, Louisiana) -- On December 15th, 2007 demolition is slated to begin on the four largest public housing developments--Lafitte, St. Bernard, C.J. Peete, and B.W. Cooper--in New Orleans. Despite Hurricane Katrina causing the worst affordable housing crisis in recent times, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is spending $762 million in taxpayer funds to tear down over 4,600 public housing subsidized apartments and replace them with 744 similarly subsidized units – an 82% reduction.

"Affordable housing for working class families is vital to the recovery of the city," said Judith Browne-Dianis, co-director Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization. "HUD’s plan shuts out thousands of families and there’s no plan for building the affordable housing that is needed."One of the more sobering changes in the "Big Easy" is the number of homeless men and women living under bridges and in parks. An estimated 12,000 homeless people have taken up residence in tents across the street from City Hall and under the I-10. The sense of an impending housing crisis grew stronger last week with the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) recent announcement that it would close all the trailer camps on varying schedules by the end of May 2008--more than 50,000 families are living in FEMA trailer parks around the region.

"There is a housing crisis that needs a response," continued Browne-Dianis. "It boggles the mind that the federal government would allow more than four thousand units to be destroyed in the next two weeks given the scarcity of available apartments in the city. They need to build more not tear down what exists."

A federal court has refused to stop the demolitions. Public housing residents offered evidence showing that the buildings were structurally sound and that the local housing authority itself documented that it would cost much less to repair and retain the apartments than demolish and reconstruct a small fraction of them. The New York Times architecture critic described them as "low scale, narrow footprint and high quality construction." The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that requires one for one replacement of any public housing demolished, but Senator David Vitter (R-La) has killed the Senate version.
Reduction of crime was supposed to be a major reason for destroying thousands of public housing apartments--yet crime in New Orleans has soared since Hurricane Katrina. HUD has approved plans to turn over acres of prime public land to private developers for 99 year leases and give hundreds of millions of dollars in direct grants, tax credit subsidies and long-term contracts. This is the biggest tax-credit giveaway in years.

"The federal government might as well put an ad in the paper stating ‘Blacks not welcomed in New Orleans,’” remarked Browne-Dianis. "Those who support the demolition of public housing have come up with a myriad of reasons for their actions, but their intent is crystal clear; political and economic gain for the wealthy are the true reasons behind making tens of thousands of people homeless."

A recent series in The National Journal exposed the boondoggle of contracts stemming from the public housing demolitions and redevelopment, including alleged improprieties by HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson. For example, HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson worked with, and is owed over $250,000 from an Atlanta-based company, Columbia Residential. Columbia Residential was part of a team that was awarded a $127 million contract by HUD to develop the St. Bernard housing development. Columbia was also awarded other earlier undisclosed contracts for undisclosed amounts.

The National Journal also discovered that a social acquaintance of Secretary Jackson was given a no-bid $175 an hour "emergency" contract with HUD within months of Katrina and was subsequently paid more than $485,000 for working at HANO over an 18 month period. A review of the dozens of no-bid contracts approved by HUD in New Orleans by the National Journal shows millions going to politically connected consultants, law firms, architects, and insurance brokers.

"Disaster capitalism is alive and well in New Orleans," concluded Browne-Dianis. "It is a shame that the season of giving is upon us and the rich are taking from the poor in New Orleans. We will continue to fight with survivors of Hurricane Katrina for justice."

###

Advancement Project's core purpose is to develop, encourage, pioneer and widely disseminate innovative ideas and models that inspire and mobilize a broad national racial justice movement so that universal opportunity and a just democracy are achieved.

The organization was founded on the principle that structural racism can be eliminated and a racially just democracy may be attained through multi-racial collective action by organized communities. Advancement Project's founding team of veteran civil rights lawyers and communications experts have established an organization that informs community organizing with careful legal analysis and strategic communications campaigns. We develop community-based solutions based on the same high quality legal analysis and public education campaigns that produced the landmark civil rights victories of earlier eras.
January 2008
Dear New Orleans Disaster Recovery Participant:

Thank you again for your involvement in disaster recovery in New Orleans and along the U.S. Gulf Coast. We send you these periodic up-dates in a continuing effort to keep you informed of issues in the recovery effort, both those that developed after Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma and that existed before the 2005 hurricanes. It is also to encourage your involvement in such issues of mission in your own local community and globally. A January 2008 up-date from Rev. Alan Coe in the Disaster Recovery office of the South Central Conference is attached.

Also attached are two articles on the public housing situation in the New Orleans area from the *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans’ main newspaper. Last month’s message regarding public housing in New Orleans and the increasing homeless population generated lots of energy. This up-date carries on with that topic. The two attached articles approach the subject of public housing from different perspectives. Such multiple perspectives illustrate the complexity of issues of public housing and of affordable housing in general – highlighting again the need for local and wider concern, vigilance and involvement.

Various issues have been raised related to these topics:

- The increasing homeless population in New Orleans
- Plans to dramatically decrease the number of public housing units to be rebuilt
- The future of populations that evacuated during the hurricanes and have not yet returned to New Orleans
- The approaching end of time period allowed for FEMA trailers
- Pre-Katrina efforts to improve public housing and how those efforts are related to current developments
- The shape of public housing units for community living and safety
- The location of public housing units for proximity to employment opportunities and public transportation

Consider what other issues these articles raise for you.

**As people from outside the area, what can we do? Some ideas:**

- Continue to pray. Keep your experience with the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast part of your Bible study and reflection.
- Continue to register your group for hands-on work through the South Central Conference Disaster Recovery Program – helping rebuild so people can return to their homes. Register at [http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/hurricane/](http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/hurricane/)
- Continue to stay involved in efforts that are “part of the solution.” For example, through the *Hope Shall Bloom* special fund of One Great Hour of Sharing you are already helping support the work of St Joseph’s Rebuild Center, working
with immediate care and structural issues related to the increasing homeless population in New Orleans; along with the work of the South Central Conference, UCC Recovery program and others.

- If you’d like to become involved in legislative efforts related to public housing in New Orleans, contact Carl Wallace WallaceC@ucc.org of UCC Justice and Witness Ministries for information.
- Become involved in issues of public housing in your own community. As a federal government’s Department of Housing and Urban Development, issues of the shape and emphasis on public housing are interrelated throughout the country. Join efforts in your local community for addressing affordable housing in a variety of ways. Include these topics as part your on-going communication with your legislators and as part of your regular Bible study, reflection and prayer.

Thank you again for your continuing involvement.
May 2008
Dear Disaster Recovery Participant:

“Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint,” is a phrase that rings only too true for those in New Orleans and along the U.S. Gulf Coast, recovering and rebuilding their lives after the 2005 Hurricanes of Katrina, Rita and Wilma. **Thank you** to all who continue to be deeply involved in hands-on rebuilding and justice advocacy efforts of disaster recovery.

A variety of resources available to keep you active in the process:

- **Continue to involve yourself and volunteer groups in hands-on rebuilding efforts.**
  - An up-date is attached to this message from Alan Coe, Minister for Disaster Response and Recovery, South Central Conference, UCC. Register your group at [http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/hurricane/](http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/hurricane/) Questions? Contact the New Orleans office at 504-258-7306.

From this attached newsletter:

“The Disaster Ministry office recently designed a new t-shirt for those that come and work in with the Disaster Ministry office. In the redesign process it was decided to put the words “rebuilding homes, rebuilding hope” on the front of the shirts. That succinctly describes what this office and volunteers do each week. The rebuilding of a person’s home gives the homeowner safe, secure housing. Rebuilding hope is what happens in the process of home rebuilding. Our office and each volunteer that comes to work, brings with them love, compassion and hope. The time and effort it takes for a group to plan ahead, travel here, work for the week and return home is itself a great undertaking. To do that for someone a person doesn’t know and may never meet is one of the purest forms of Christian love there is. All the love, compassion and hope is transferred to the homeowner. What a great blessing.”

- **Full-time volunteer positions as construction site coordinators through Wider Church Ministries’ Partners in Service program are available in New Orleans beginning April, 2009 and in Biloxi, MS at Back Bay Mission in January, 2009.** For information, contact Mary Schaller Blaufuss at blaufusm@ucc.org. Apply on-line at [http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/volunteer-on-line-application.html](http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/volunteer-on-line-application.html)

- **Tell the Story.** This summer’s issue of *Common Lot* published by Local Church Ministries, UCC Women in Mission with Deborah Bailey as editor, offers stories of women intersecting in a variety of ways with the 2005 Gulf Coast storms and disaster recovery. For subscription information contact velezd@ucc.org and for editorial e-mail write baileyd@ucc.org.

- **Involve yourself in awareness and advocacy for issues of justice that live in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast and have sources and implications beyond.** For more information in particular areas of advocacy in which national staff of Justice and Witness Ministries are involved, contact:
  - Barbara Baylor, Health Care Justice baylorb@ucc.org

Barbara recommends the following articles on Mental Health issues in New Orleans:

o Sala W. J. Nolan Gonzales, Criminal Justice and Human Rights  
nolans@ucc.org

o Loey Powell, Justice and Witness Ministries Team Leader  
powelll@ucc.org

o Janice Resseger, Public Education and Witness  
ressegerj@ucc.org
Jan recommends the following article from last summer’s *Dissent Magazine* as commentary on public education in the New Orleans area  
http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=862

o Carl P. Wallace, Justice and Witness Ministries Team Leader  
wallacec@ucc.org
August 2008
United Church of Christ Volunteer Ministries

Dear New Orleans Disaster Recovery Participant:

Disaster Recovery in New Orleans after the 2005 hurricanes and flooding certainly is in its long-term stages. It gives us a powerful peak into and reliance on God’s steadfast love to continue these commitments to accompany people for the long-term. These commitments become even more clear in the face of new disasters taking place in other parts of the United States – let alone other parts of the globe – as we speak. The people of New Orleans continue to recover their lives and their communities. Your continued presence with them as volunteer groups make God’s presence visible. Register your volunteer mission trip group for New Orleans at http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/hurricane/

Flooding in the Midwest this summer has also effected many people and has prompted the need for volunteers to accompany people as they recover their homes and livelihoods. YOUR SERVICE IS NEEDED in the current clean-up stage and in the long-term repair/rebuild stage of the recovery that will begin in coming months. Please gather and mobilize your groups for this as well. Sites for flood clean up are ready to receive your group and facilitate your service. For registration information see the website http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/ or http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/disaster-recovery-volunteers/index-1.html. Registration will begin later in the summer for groups in the long-term recovery repair/rebuild efforts. Keep checking the website for up-dated information.

Floods – fires – hurricanes – toxic spills....The increased number of disasters in so many different areas call on each of us to be prepared. Helping our congregations and communities be prepared is an important ministry in which you already have been involved through your hands-on service. Some resources for your use in this preparedness:

**The Silent Disaster: 21st Century Response to Technology-Caused Disasters**
Order your copy from United Church Resources 1-800-537-3394 Code: WCM103

This booklet published by the United Church of Christ and Church World Service addresses preparedness for and response to technology-caused disasters. It highlights the impacts on a community: “Devastating hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods capture media headlines...Life for those victimized by a technology-caused disaster may be quite different because of their hidden or controversial origin....” (p. 10) More often than not, natural disasters include technology-caused causes or results that intensify the disaster.
Community Arise: A Disaster Ministry Curriculum
Available on-line for information and downloads: www.communityarise.org
This curriculum includes 8 learning and training modules highlighting the breadth of disaster response:
  ❖ Basic Disaster Ministry
  ❖ Disaster Case Management
  ❖ Disaster Long-Term Recovery
  ❖ Volunteer Management & Coordination
  ❖ Emotional & Spiritual Care in Disaster
  ❖ Children & Youth in Disaster
  ❖ Technology-Caused Disaster Response
  ❖ Vulnerability to Disaster

Thank you again for your continued commitment and faithful journeys of service.
October 2008
Dear Disaster Recovery Participant:

It’s now the end of October – over three years have passed since the disasters inflicted by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. Other storms have come. People’s lives have changed. Long-term disaster recovery continues.

Attached are two up-dates from Rev. Alan Coe from the South Central Conference disaster recovery office – one focused on New Orleans and one on Texas.

Short-term disaster recovery mission trip groups and long-term *Partners in Service* volunteers are still vital to the recovery effort. Thank you for continuing to serve and be engaged in prayer and advocacy.

Long-term recovery gets addressed in many forms. While the UCC disaster recovery is focused specifically on housing recovery, other organizations focus in different but interconnected areas of life.

Systemic justice issues present throughout the United States continue to be intensified in New Orleans because of the hurricanes. Political policies at every level of government matter. As new people are elected to office or as incumbents are re-elected, it is important to contact these officials to emphasize your concern for a just long term recovery in New Orleans and throughout the nation. Remember, elected officials and their staffs are influenced by first-hand experiences to inform them and shape their policies. They seek stories from their constituents.

Thank you for making the effort to reach out to your elected officials to keep disaster recovery in the public consciousness.
February 2009
Dear Disaster Recovery Participant:

- Once again we give thanks for your participation in disaster recovery in New Orleans. Your continued action in areas of housing recovery and justice advocacy are key to the transformative possibilities of your service.

**OGHS Live!** during Wednesdays in Lent will allow you to hear live up-dates and interact with ministries funded by One Great Hour of Sharing®. Rev. Alan Coe, Minister for Disaster Recovery in the South Central Conference, New Orleans, will be the featured speaker on March 4, 2009. For details on how to participate, visit [http://www.ucc.org/oghs/resources/oghs-lenten-programming.html](http://www.ucc.org/oghs/resources/oghs-lenten-programming.html)

- Mission trip groups continue to serve through the United Church of Christ in strong numbers. Many repeat groups build the capacity to respond. The United Church of Christ also works ecumenically with other churches in rebuilding homes.

One of the ways we are working ecumenically is Church World Service:

**Neighborhood: New Orleans**

**Rebuilding Homes, Reclaiming Hope**

**An Ecumenical Work Project of Church World Service**

April 20 – May 17, 2009, volunteer groups registered through their own denominations, will work together to rebuild twelve (12) homes in the Little Woods neighborhood of New Orleans. In partnership with Crescent Alliance Recovery Effort (CARE), the long-term recovery group in Orleans Parish, we will help twelve (12) families return home.

The goal of this volunteer “blitz” is to remind people everywhere that the long process of recovery from Hurricane Katrina continues, and in places like little Woods which have been largely forgotten, much more help is needed. We will also show the world how people of faith, working side-by-side can make great things happen for their neighbors in need.

More information is available at [www.ucc.org/volunteer/disaster-recovery-volunteers/index-1.html](http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/disaster-recovery-volunteers/index-1.html).

- Stay Involved. Get someone else involved.

**Seeking Long-Term Disaster Recovery Volunteers to serve as Work Site Coordinators**

UCC Volunteer Ministries and National Disaster Ministries are seeking full-time volunteers with skills in construction trades to serve as Work Site Coordinators in disaster recovery sites. Work alongside staff to coordinate the on-site work of disaster recovery mission trip groups. Positions are available beginning in May, 2009. Serve during the summer of 2009. Serve during September – December, 2009, or get on the schedule for 2010. Apply with introductory application on-line at [http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/volunteer-on-line-application.html](http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/volunteer-on-line-application.html). Please feel free to contact me with any questions. 866-822-8224 ext. 3214  blaufusm@ucc.org
March 2009
Dear Disaster Recovery Participant:

Attached is an up-date from the South Central Conference, UCC Disaster Ministry.

- Participate in **OGHS Live!** an audio web worship experience with Rev. Alan Coe as the speaker on this Wednesday, March 4, 2009.
- Church World Service Ecumenical Build Project April 20-May 17, 2009
- Openings are still available for full-time Partners in Service volunteers to serve as construction site coordinators.
- Mission trip groups are still needed in New Orleans.

**Also, new disaster ministries mission trip opportunities are now ready for your participation:**

**2008 Midwest Flood Recovery**
- Iowa -- Cedar Rapids, Cedar Falls and Clarksville
- Indiana – Wabash Valley (near Terre Haute)

**2008 Texas Hurricane Gustav Recovery**
- Galveston, TX during April/May, 2009 and October, 2009
Register by contacting Brenda Tyler, Office of Disciples Volunteering
  btyler@dhm.disciples.org
  Phone: (317) 713-2642 or toll free (888) 346-2631

Thank you for your commitment to serve.
April/May 2009
Dear New Orleans Disaster Recovery Participant:

Long-term disaster recovery continues in New Orleans. Green could be this month’s theme. Housing recovery through the South Central Conference, UCC, the Church World Service Ecumenical Build “Neighborhood: New Orleans” and the re-introduction in the U.S. Congress of the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act offer several arenas of action.

South Central Conference Disaster Ministry
Rebuilding Homes, Rebuilding Hope
An up-date from Rev. Alan Coe is attached.

- UCC volunteers are part of the 500+ volunteers serving in New Orleans this month through the Church World Service Ecumenical Build. (more below)
- Partners in Service long-term volunteers continue to serve and keep on serving. Today nine currently placed or alumni Partners in Service volunteers are busy in New Orleans.
- And an update on Green Rebuilding efforts. The Disaster Ministry adds ‘green’ touches when it can during the rebuilding of homes. ...Read more in the attached newsletter.

Church World Service Ecumenical Build
Neighborhood: New Orleans

This spring, April 19 – May 16, Church World Service and its members are hosting a four-week ecumenical work project in New Orleans. In partnership with the local Long-Term Recovery Committee, Crescent Alliance Recovery Effort (C.A.R.E.), we are helping 12 more families return home. Up-dates and stories are posted at
http://neighborhoodneworleans.net/
http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/resources-for-volunteers.html
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=how_vol_rebuild

Read more: “Ernie Danner hasn’t been home in three years. Instead, he sleeps in a government-issued trailer propped by cinder blocks in his front yard. “At first it’s nice, but after that you feel like the walls are closing in on you,” Danner, 79, said. “You just can’t get outside fast enough. It’s very, very tough. I’d wish this on no one.” Soon enough, Danner will be able to return home thanks in part to the efforts of a team of volunteers hammering, sawing and rebuilding as part of the Church World Service project “Neighborhood: New Orleans”. ...
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7161

Gulf Coast Civic Works Act
is slated to be re-introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives around April 30 or the first week of May. It would establish the Gulf Coast Recovery Authority to administer a Gulf Coast Civic Works Project to provide job-training opportunities and increase employment to aid in the recovery of the Gulf Coast region. Currently the Act is co-sponsored by 27 members of the House of Representatives, including representatives from both Louisiana and Mississippi. The hope is to get at least three times as many Representatives to co-sponsor this legislation in 2009.
Read the summary of the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act posted by the Gulf Coast Civic Works Campaign, a non-partisan partnership of community, environmental, labor, student, and human rights organizations advocating for the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act. 
http://www.solvingpoverty.com/printer/3_pager_GCCW.12_12_08[1].pdf

More information and action ideas are introduced by Scott Myers Lipton through a video interview posted at http://www.solvingpoverty.com/

“The Gulf Coast Civic Works Act funds “green” resident-led recovery projects, building on the success of community organizations in Gulf Coast recovery, to help meet the overwhelming unmet needs of the individuals, families, and communities devastated by hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike. The program would be a pilot project administered by the Office of Gulf Coast Recovery and Rebuilding using a hybrid model to partner directly with communities in planning, overseeing and administering recovery projects to assist the survivors of these disasters, provide communities with tools to build resilience against the impact of future disasters and revitalize the region economically. The bill would create a minimum of 100,000 prevailing wage jobs and training opportunities for local and displaced workers on projects reinvesting in infrastructure and restoring the coastal environment utilizing emerging green building techniques and technologies. This program would empower residents to realize their right to return with dignity and create stronger, safer, and more equitable communities.”

- Rebuilds Vital Public Infrastructure and Restores the Environment
- Creates Good “Green” Jobs and Provides Job Training
- Spurs Equitable and Sustainable Community Development
- Requires Accountability and Community Oversight

(http://www.solvingpoverty.com/printer/3_pager_GCCW.12_12_08[1].pdf)

Thank you for your commitment to serve.
Rebuilding Homes, Reclaiming Hope

The long process of recovery from Hurricane Katrina continues, and in places like the New Orleans neighborhood of Little Woods, much more help is needed.

This spring, April 19 – May 16, Church World Service and its members are hosting a four-week ecumenical work project in New Orleans. In partnership with the local Long-Term Recovery Committee, Crescent Alliance Recovery Effort (C.A.R.E.), we are helping 12 more families return home.

People of faith, working side-by-side, can make great things happen for our neighbors.

Up-dates and stories are posted at
http://neighborhoodneworleans.net/
www.ucc.org/volunteer/
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7161
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=how_vol_rebuild

NEW ORLEANS - Ernie Danner hasn't been home in three years. Instead, he sleeps in a government-issued trailer propped by cinder blocks in his front yard.

"At first it's nice, but after that you feel like the walls are closing in on you," Danner, 79, said. "You just can't get outside fast enough. It's very, very tough. I'd wish this on no one."

Soon enough, Danner will be able to return home thanks in part to the efforts of a team of volunteers hammering, sawing and rebuilding as part of the Church World Service project "Neighborhood: New Orleans."

In this case, the neighborhood is Little Woods on New Orleans' far east-side. A short tour of the flat cluster of blocks beside a levee holding back Lake Pontchartrain reveals an area where the horrors of Katrina continue. Only about half of homes are occupied; some still bear the spray-painted tags of search-and-rescue teams.

Katrina's telltale signs will soon begin to fade away. The four-week CWS effort brings together more than 500 volunteers from 10 CWS partner agencies to focus on rebuilding the upper 9th Ward neighborhood. In all, 12 families will be able to return home following the project.

"We picked this area because it hasn't received much attention, and flooding from Hurricane Katrina in most cases reached the rooftops," said Bonnie Vollmering, Church World Service Associate Director for Domestic Emergency Response. "The idea is by repairing homes across the neighborhood, momentum for recovery will build."
Little Woods is one of the few neighborhoods where trailers like Danner's are still common. In other parts of New Orleans, many have been removed as homeowners have returned to their residences, or due to concerns about formaldehyde poisoning from living inside the trailers. May 1 is the last day the Federal Emergency Management Agency will allow survivors to occupy trailers, adding to the urgency of volunteers like Jim McElroy.

McElroy, a machinist volunteering with Grace Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., is on his fourth trip to help rebuild homes in Katrina's path.

"There's still quite a bit of damage down here, they need quite a bit of help," McElroy said. "There's still a lot who don't have their life back together yet and they need help."

McElroy said he enjoys the aspect of working side by side with volunteers from other denominations. Volunteers from across the U.S. and Canada are intentionally mixed with others, from different denominations and areas.

"When we work together, we get more done, and there's a lot of work that still needs to be done," McElroy said, while fiddling with a tape measure hooked to his tool belt.

Along the Gulf Coast, battles with government and insurance regulations have kept scores of families from repairing and returning to their homes. It has particularly been difficult for many Louisiana families caught in the grips of the Road Home Program.

Supported by a $6.9 billion Community Development Block Grant, the Road Home Program was designed to provide as much as $150,000 to thousands of homeowners who lacked the funds to rebuild. But more than 133,000 applications for assistance came in. The swell of applicants ground government systems to a near halt. As a result, homeowners were left with gutted houses, decaying emergency trailers and a looming deadline to vacate.

Danner, who suffers from COPD, is one caught in the system.

"I have yet to receive one red cent from the federal government's Road Home money," Danner said. "We got some money from flood insurance but not enough to cover rebuilding."

When Danner's cash assistance finally comes in, it will help defray the cost of returning him to his home. For now, the team of volunteers is aimed at getting his home and 12 others back to a livable condition.

"Every day, every night, I thank God I have you here to rebuild it for me," Danner said. "I can't thank y'all and bless y'all enough. I am just so thankful."
September 2009
Dear New Orleans Disaster Recovery Participant:

It’s been four years since Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma hit the Gulf Coast and the flooding of the city of New Orleans. Thank you for your hands-on participation in the re-building. As you’ll read in the attached up-date from Rev. Alan Coe in the South Central Conference Disaster Recovery Office, quotes the Times Picayune newspaper: “We’re almost half-way there!”

The United Church of Christ continues to be present and working in significant ways in New Orleans’ disaster recovery. Your hands-on participation continues to be important. Register your mission trip group on-line at http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/hurricane/

Your continued prayer and involvement in the wider issues of justice and faith make a difference in the lives of people rebuilding in New Orleans.

Some books that can help:

The following titles were spotted on the bookshelf of the house where UCC long-term “Partners in Service” volunteers stay in New Orleans.


February 2010
Dear Disaster Recovery Participants in New Orleans:

Long-term disaster recovery – 4 ½ years and going. Thank you again for your participation in disaster recovery in New Orleans. Knowing that the greatest transformations often happen in the long-term commitments you make after participating in a mission trip and in the reflection on the experience, this note comes with some resources for that journey.

Attached is the most recent up-date from Rev. Alan Coe in the Disaster Recovery Office of the South Central Conference in New Orleans. It features:

- Carol and Diane Talton who moved back into their home on February 6, 2010;
- Betzi Yunglas who is completing her placement as a long-term “Partners in Service” volunteer;
- Elizabeth Baumann, our new Volunteer Coordinator
- And YOU – Here’s a hint “What do the numbers 847 and 57 have in common?”

ALSO - This note recently came from Ms. Jan Resseger who serves as the Minister for Public Education and Witness in Justice and Witness Ministries of the national UCC setting.

Subject: Federal Appeals Judge in AZ says charter schools are not “state actors” and civil rights protections do not apply...

Dear Gulf Coast Friends,

Check out this article in which a federal appellate judge in Arizona ruled that although charter schools are “public schools,” “That does not make the school and its owners ‘state actors,’ something required to make a civil rights challenge. Instead the court concluded, the school is a private company…” http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/149102 This issue is quite relevant in New Orleans, where charter schools serve approximately 60 percent of students.

--Jan

Ms. Jan Resseger
Minister for Public Education and Witness
Justice and Witness Ministries

“That all citizens will be given an equal start through a sound education is one of the most basic, promised rights of our democracy. Our chronic refusal as a nation to guarantee that right for all children... is rooted in a kind of moral blindness, or at least a failure of moral imagination.... It is a failure which threatens our future as a nation of citizens called to a common purpose... tied to one another by a common bond.” —Senator Paul Wellstone, March 31, 2000

Thank you for your commitment to service and justice as we continue to accompany people in long-term disaster recovery.
Hope Shall Bloom

A Service of Worship Celebrating the Ministry of Disaster Recovery in New Orleans through the United Church of Christ
St. Paul UCC, New Orleans
November 2011

Call to Worship

Leader: As we gather here together in this sacred space,
Community: We give thanks for having this place.

Leader: As we gather here it give thanks
for all that has happened here since Hurricane Katrina
Community: We give thanks for the people
who came to bring God’s love to us in so many different ways.

Leader: As we gather here to sing God’s praises,
Community: We know that our songs
come from deep places and travel to on high.

Leader: As we gather here to pray and to offer God our thanks,
Community: We remember those who are still without a home,
or a job or their health.

Leader: As we gather here to worship the still-speaking god,
Community: We give thanks that
God has been with us, is with us, and will continue to be with us.

All: Come, let us sing, let us pray and let us give thanks to our God and all of those who have lifted us up. Amen.

Scripture: Isaiah 35: 1-2; Romans 5: 1-5

Songs: Called as Partners in Christ’s Service
       Down By the Riverside
       Amazing Grace
Litany of Thanksgiving

Leader: We are thankful – for those who gave donations that enabled us to know that, even following our darkest hours:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom!

Leader: For churches that housed and supported volunteer groups and for churches that are building:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom!

Leader: For the Rebuild Center’s day shelter for homeless people; for those who supported and staff food banks; and for those who offered sound legal advice:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will bloom!

Leader: For agencies that provided funds to rebuild homes:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom!

Leader: For the Compassion of our Partners in Service volunteers:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom!

Leader: For those who did spiritual and pastoral care:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom!

Leader: For the leaders and paid costs of Spiritual retreats:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom!

Leader: We give thanks for all who remain nameless but whose donations and commitments made such a difference in our lives. They enabled us to know that:
All: Hope Shall, Has and Will Bloom! Amen.
An Open Letter from UCC Disaster Ministries  
on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of Disasters on the  
U.S. Gulf Coast and New Orleans, Louisiana - Hurricane Katrina, August 2005  
Re-Call and Re-Commit

Ten years ago this week, disasters caused and precipitated by Hurricane Katrina changed forever the lives of people on the U.S. Gulf Coast and in New Orleans, Louisiana. The storm surge that swept away swaths of the Gulf Coast and triggered the breach of levees that flooded the city of New Orleans left the landscape different and our collective psyche stunned. How could this happen and what could we do?

People of the United Church of Christ in all its settings turned to the church for connections that embodied response to those questions. The local UCC was present in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast as neighbors brought each other to safety, as families welcomed displaced loved ones, and as decisions were made about the shape of recovery. Around the country and in global partner churches, UCC people responded with connections wrapped in a love that would not let go. In the days immediately following the storm surge and flood, thousands of UCC individuals and congregations signed onto a national “Covenant of Compassion” that kept them connected until it became clear how volunteer mission groups and long-term volunteers would be utilized in the recovery.

During the following six years, almost 15,000 people volunteered in New Orleans with UCC ministries and with Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS, multiplying gifts and talents through an estimated total value of $7.9 million in volunteer hours—gutting and rebuilding hundreds of homes and restoring communities. Groups from 47 states and six countries...
joined together to accompany people in their recovery. Long term volunteers through the UCC’s *Partners in Service* program served in the leadership and facilitation of volunteer groups. Local UCC congregations in New Orleans hosted those groups with space in their buildings and a mid-week hospitality meal; while Back Bay Mission in Biloxi rebuilt to double its capacity for mission groups in disaster housing recovery. People from Missouri and Connecticut, from California and Ohio worked side by side as part of the recovery while also strengthening UCC identity by coming to know each other deeply in common commitments of mission.

The UCC lived covenant connections as over $6.1 million in donations were utilized through a special *One Great Hour of Sharing* fund, named “Hope Shall Bloom.” Donations to Mississippi’s Back Bay Mission and the South Central Conference joined the outpouring. The Council for Health and Human Service Ministries rallied around its member, Back Bay Mission, with financial and gifts of expertise in rebuilding and visioning mission for the new context. United Church Funds, the Cornerstone Fund, United Church Insurance Boards and UCC Pension Board all used their areas of ministry for significant contribution in the recovery. These generous gifts enabled the UCC to serve as a catalyst wide-ranging response that met immediate needs, stayed for the long-term and addressed systemic root causes. At the UCC’s 2006 national General Synod, then General Minister and President, Rev. John Thomas, addressed a group of Gulf Coast/New Orleans residents and volunteers committed to the recovery. “We are not just rebuilding,” he reiterated. “We are JUST rebuilding.” That commitment to systemic justice continued.

Groups not only shared time and talent, but became personally connected to the recovery and formed a constituency of informed and authentic advocates for legislative action at state and national levels. UCC’s national and ecumenical networks addressed inequities in housing, health care, public education and environmental protection. Resources leveraged other resources so that even though the UCC is not the largest national church in numbers, the UCC was among the last national church disaster...
programs to transition. The South Central Conference led the celebration closing the disaster ministries program in New Orleans in November 2011, proclaiming that “Hope Shall Bloom and Bloom It Did.” Back Bay Mission continues on the Mississippi Gulf Coast with strong presence and programming, catalyzing new partnerships in the community in the change from overt disaster recovery to continued long-term preparation and community building.

Several months after the storm and flood, residents of the Gulf Coast and New Orleans began wearing T-shirts with a slogan signaling their resiliency of spirit – “Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint.” Ten years later, the national media again is engaged in the important recalling of events caused and magnified by Hurricane Katrina. UCC Disaster Ministries urges not only this re-call but also a re-commitment to action. Both root causes and recovery continue in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast. Natural and human-caused disasters continue to wreak destruction throughout the U.S. and around the world. So the marathon continues—empowered by glimpses of Hope Blooming:

- Rev. Jim Hightower, then Pastor of Little Farms UCC, New Orleans: “Hope Shall Bloom helped us feel connected to the larger denomination, in a way that without it simply could not have happened.”
- Bessie Griffin, New Orleans homeowner: “The UCC has truly been a blessing, for a lot of reason. I’m just so grateful for the UCC’s expertise and support.”
- Rev. Shari Prestemon, then Back Bay Mission director and currently Minnesota conference minister, testifies that “when the church does mission, it is at its best.”
- National UCC Disaster Ministries continues to leverage talents and financial resources offered by each of you to make connections that facilitate abundant life in the midst of destruction—with a love that will not let us go. Donate; Volunteer in Disaster Recovery
- Your spiritual gifts now also are sought in a research project of Christian Theologies in Disaster and Recovery. Your responses to this survey on Who is God? Who are we? Theology in Disaster will add your voice. You also can expand the conversation by sending copies of any sermons, poetry, music, art, created around themes of disaster and recovery (to be utilized only with your permission and credit). They can be attached to an e-mail to Mary Schaller Blaufuss, team leader, UCC Global Sharing of Resources blaufusm@ucc.org or mailed to 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

Thank you for your commitment. Thank you for living our covenant connections in such powerful ways. Thank you for joining God’s mission in changing lives.

In Hope, Compassion and Covenant,

Mary Schaller Blaufuss, UCC Global Sharing of Resources Team Leader

Zach Wolgemuth, UCC Disaster Ministries Executive