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Southern District
LCMS
Recovery
Assistance, Inc.
(RAI)

Rev. Dave Buss
Director

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9301 Chef Menteur Hwy.
New Orleans, LA 70127

To Donate Go To:
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Finding Shelter from the Storms of Life

It had been several days and nights without substantial rest, and my wife and I found ourselves exhausted when we pulled our vehicles into a North Mississippi Red Cross shelter set up for Gustav evacuees at 7:00 a.m. The loving staff helped us get our four kids, two dogs and two birds situated and we fell almost instantly to sleep on what would otherwise have been uncomfortable cots strangely placed on the floor of a Baptist church gym.

Some time later, I awoke to my four-year old son's face next to mine. He whispered, "Daddy, does this hotel have a pool? Because we have a problem—we only have one towel."

Here was my son, "at home" with his family, expecting that like most other times our family traveled, we would stay at a hotel with a pool. He wasn't concerned that we were lying in a gym with over 100 cots, many of them now filled by Spanish speaking migrants who were caught without a place of refuge from the oncoming hurricane. He wasn't concerned because his Daddy was there and as far as he knew, I had everything (but more towels) taken care of.

Christians can be content that our Heavenly Daddy really does have everything under control. Even when we have been through the ravages of two or more hurricanes, we can rest in Him. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," Jesus says (Matt 11:28).

How does Jesus give us rest? First of all he gives us hope, hope for our future through his people, the church serving our needs, practically sharing His love in mission and mercy. Secondly, He gives us means of hope through His Word in various forms: proclamation, absolution, the sacraments.

God is with us—Emmanuel. He understands suffering, through His own Son. And we are his children. He understands our needs better than any loving father understands the needs of his child. God will protect us all and keep us eternally safe. As David says in Psalm 91, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

So Heavenly Daddy, does your shelter have a pool? We know you have all the towels we'd ever need.

- Kurtis Smith, REInstitute Director

Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst

It is the peak of hurricane season. With Hurricane Gustav hitting parts of Louisiana last week and Ike set to make landfall on the US coast sometime this week, what is it like to live on the Gulf Coast this time of year?

For Matt Steffan, a construction superintendent at Camp Biloxi, "It's like a big white elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about until it's upset and knocking on your door."

This is the first active hurricane season that Matt and his family have ever experienced. Matt is from Michigan. He responded to the need for construction workers following Hurricane Katrina by relocating his family to Biloxi and starting work for Camp Biloxi, a non-profit organization dedicated to restoring faith, home and community in the name of Jesus.

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“It’s a whole lot different hearing about hurricanes and actually living through them,” he says. “It’s like holding your breath for a long time. You can feel the tension in our volunteer camp and in the community. It’s hard not to get stressed out with all the media hype surrounding you as a hurricane approaches.”

Hurricane Gustav was the first hurricane that Matt and his family dealt with first-hand. “We evacuated with some of the camp staff to a church,” he said. “We sat in the fellowship hall during the storm, not knowing what was going on. We didn’t have a television to watch or a radio to listen to, so all we could do was to pray and hope for the best.”

Fortunately for Matt and his family, Biloxi suffered only minor damage from Hurricane Gustav, but he is ready to lend a helping hand to those in Louisiana who didn’t fare so well. He knows that with Ike coming and with hurricane season extending until the end of November, he’s not “out of the water” yet.

Living in the middle of a very uncertain hurricane season, Matt takes comfort in God’s words, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make your paths straight” from Proverbs 3:5-6.

- Corinna Hollar, Communications Manager of Camp Biloxi

Blessings from Above

My husband and I moved to New Orleans one month ago. We arrived here ready to begin the jobs that have been assigned us through LINCNewOrleans: Kyle is the vicar at Gloria Dei Lutheran church, located in the Broadmoor neighborhood; I am a deaconess intern working in the Marigny/Bywater area and with St. Paul Lutheran Church and School. Alongside our vicar and deaconess intern roles, we are to become active in the communities in which we work—getting to know the people who live in the neighborhood, understanding the concerns of its residents and seeing how the church fits into the area. In this last month, our expectations were to get started and get settled in.



Then came the hurricane, the evacuation, and all the work that comes with it. Our job descriptions, at least for a while, have changed. In this month, we have been to Baton Rouge, Biloxi and Chattanooga. We have helped prepare Camp Restore for evacuation, clean up trees in Baton Rouge and transport supplies to and from Camp Biloxi. In this month, we have seen people going out of their way to serve each other—staying up all hours and working non-stop in the heat, organizing, preparing food, visiting, calling and praying. It has been humbling and encouraging to see God’s people doing what is intended for them: loving and serving their neighbors.

So, the work in our neighborhoods and churches is just now, a month later, really beginning. We are just getting settled in. But what we have learned through all of this is invaluable, and will surely shape our work not only this year but for the rest of our lives. During this month of uncertainty and hurricane ruin, these words of Martin Luther have come to mind often: “By faith we receive blessings from above, from God; through love we give them out below, to our neighbor.”

- Ellee Mietzner

Many Thanks to Our Supporters and Volunteers



...and many other organizations, congregations, and individuals!

A Time to Tear Down and A Time to Build

Kathy Wendling and her family, all natives of New Orleans, have become all-too-familiar with tearing down and rebuilding. The Wendlings lost their family home in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Suddenly homeless, the family moved to Baton Rouge. Their hearts however, remained in New Orleans where Kathy began working with RAI Ministries as the Director of Congregational Restoration out of Camp Restore. Over the past three years, Kathy has worked tirelessly toward RAI's mission of restoring faith, home and community in the name of Jesus and has connected countless churches and families from across the country to each other through the Church to Family and the Family to Family programs she created.

Recently, Kathy and her family purchased a house in New Orleans and moved back "home". Her family was making plans to sell their house in Baton Rouge when Hurricane Gustav began approaching Louisiana.

In preparation for Gustav, Kathy and her family, along with several of her son's classmates from college and Kristin, the DCE intern working with Kathy at RAI this year, evacuated to join her daughter who is attending pharmacy school in Birmingham, AL.

Three days after Gustav made landfall, the Wendlings received a devastating phone call that a huge oak tree from the house behind their home had crashed into their Baton Rouge house, crushing the navy blue Ford Ranger truck parked in the driveway and destroying the rear of the house.

When the family was able to return to Baton Rouge, they immediately drove to see the damage to their house for themselves. "My husband was beside himself," Kathy says, "He was so angry. I had to remind him and myself that we had lost a house before. This was just a tree." For now, Kathy says she and her family are ok although she admits, "it took some of the wind out of my sail."

When Camp Restore and Camp Biloxi staff members heard what had happened to the Wendling's house, they assembled a crew of staff as well as several volunteers to begin the task of removing the enormous tree from Kathy's house and yard, so the house can be secured.

Although Kathy and her family are discouraged and disheartened as their house has once again been torn down as a result of a hurricane, she is continuing her ministry at RAI, knowing that their will be a time to build again for both her family and the for families she is ministering to every day.

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. . . a time to tear down and a time to build." Proverbs 3:1 and 3b

- Corinna Hollar

Family to Family

After Hurricane Katrina many families were connected with Lutheran families across the country who wanted to help. It is now our time to help those in Southwest Louisiana and Texas. The Family to Family program is a way to reach out in Christian love to others. Support can be shown at several levels - prayers, emails, phone calls, notes, gift cards, replacement of items, etc. If you are interested in participating please contact Kathy Wendling at 504-442-4876 or krlw33@hotmail.com.

- Kathy Wendling, Congregation Restoration Director



A twenty foot tree crashed through the roof of the home of RAI board member Woody Keim. Fortunately no one was in the room that was destroyed.



Director: Rev. Ed Brashier
P.O. Box 872668
New Orleans, LA 70187
504-242-2636
www.camprestore.org

How You Can Help

PRAY:

Please pray for the people affected by Gustav and Ike (also Katrina) and for the recovery effort.

VOLUNTEER:

Please make plans to come and volunteer at Camp Biloxi or Camp Restore.

SEND STUFF:

Gift cards to stores such as Home Depot, Lowe's and Wal-mart would be very much appreciated.

DONATE:

Your gifts are critical for this ministry to continue to offer the hope that we have in Christ to those who have been affected by Katrina and now Gustav and Ike.

VISIT:

www.RAIministries.org
or www.campbiloxi.org
regularly for updates.



Director: John Coyle
1996 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531
228-594-0008
www.campbiloxi.org

God's Business Along the Gulf Coast

Most Christians know the first few verses from chapter three in Ecclesiastes. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die..." But how often have you read past verse eight?

As I read this chapter, verse ten jumped out at me. "I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with." I can relate to this verse. In the aftermath of Gustav, I wasn't on the front lines of hurricane relief but I knew of the work that had to be done.

Due to previous plans, I was in Maryland when Hurricane Gustav hit Louisiana. I left New Orleans Saturday morning, hoping and praying that Hurricane Gustav would not hit and I could return, as scheduled, Monday evening. Saturday, my airline called to tell me my Monday flight was canceled. Sunday I became a communication hub for RAI Ministries. And by Monday I realized that I had "no clue" when I would get to return to New Orleans.

Throughout the week after Hurricane Gustav hit Louisiana, I heard from Dave Buss, our executive director, about RAI Ministries, LCMS World Relief & Human Care and Trinity Lutheran Church in Baton Rouge partnering to pass out ice to thousands of people and how they were helping others remove trees that had fallen through their homes - a great need since over 400 homes in Baton Rouge had trees fall onto them.

I became frustrated. I wanted to be down on the Gulf Coast helping, but couldn't because RAI Ministries needed a reliable communication center. I wanted to help in a physical and tangible way but I was stuck in Maryland. The author of Ecclesiastes states, "...there is a time for everything." I still wanted to cry and scream.

I'm finally back in New Orleans. I've seen first hand the work that needs to be done and I've gotten to go to Baton Rouge and help remove trees that had fallen during the hurricane. Communications were important. Today, the work continues to be overwhelming and we still need a variety of people in different roles. We need your help.

"I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with." In the aftermath of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, there is much more to be done along the Gulf Coast. We will be busy for years to come—even with only Hurricane Katrina work. God has blessed us with the ability to attend to this task and he has made it our business to love one another and to help our neighbors. Please, make it your business to come down to the Gulf Coast and be busy with the business God has given us.

- Susan Fogleman, DCE for Advancement and REinstitute



LCMS WR-HC photo

LCMS WR-HC and RAI staff meet to plan relief efforts.

Partner for HOPE

*It's been said that humans can live approximately
60 days without food...6 days without water...6 minutes without air.
It is said that humans cannot live at all without HOPE.*

Recovery Assistance ministries provides HOPE by restoring faith, home, and community to victims of disaster. Please make your commitment today to become a long-term provider of hope by partnering with us:

- Yes! I commit to providing HOPE through regular prayer for Recovery Assistance ministries.
- Yes! I commit to providing HOPE through Recovery Assistance ministries with a...
- monthly gift annual gift
- one-time gift of... \$5000 \$1000 \$500 \$100 \$100 \$50 \$10 Other _____
- Please contact me about volunteer opportunities at Camp Biloxi, MS Camp Restore – New Orleans.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Send to: Southern District LCMS Recovery Assistance; 9301 Chef Mentour Hwy., New Orleans, LA 70127 or go to www.RAministries.org.