

Update on LSS ministries in Louisiana and Lutheran Disaster Response 01.30.06

In the five months since Hurricane Katrina struck the Louisiana coast, followed a month later by Hurricane Rita along the Texas-Louisiana border, we have been overwhelmed by need and expressions of generosity. Throughout this initial period, we have worked diligently to meet the immediate needs of as many as possible and are now transitioning to address long-term needs. Still, like so many others, we wait for decisions from authorities and agencies to give us guidance on how we should proceed for the future.

Bethlehem Children's Center

As most of you know, Bethlehem Children's Center, the oldest ministry of LSS, suffered heavy damage following Hurricane Katrina. Engineering experts have recommended that we demolish most of the existing structures and start over. While we hope to rebuild in New Orleans East, uncertainty on the part of state and local officials on their commitment to rebuilding that area makes it difficult for us to move forward. Recently a four-month moratorium on construction was been imposed on that area, which further complicates our ability to plan for the future. We continue to explore the possibility of rebuilding Bethlehem in a different location. However, the state of Louisiana must approve such a plan and, to date, we have been unable to secure their consent.

In the meantime, the children have been well cared for and are attending school at our sister center, Bokenkamp Children's Center in Corpus Christi, since they were evacuated. However, Louisiana authorities are anxious to return the children to that state and closer to their biological families and courts that have jurisdiction over them. It is possible the state of Louisiana will decide to place the Bethlehem children in Louisiana foster homes and other treatment centers in the near future. Please pray for the children and staff during this difficult time.

Peace Lake Towers

Peace Lake Towers, our ministry that offered subsidized housing to about 160 low-income and disabled seniors, suffered significant damage. Only two blocks from Bethlehem, the future for that program also is in limbo as we wait for authorities to make funding and rebuilding decisions. It is our hope and prayer that we are able to redevelop both ministries and serve children, elderly and poor in New Orleans East, but much depends on factors out of our control. Please join us in prayer that authorities make wise and compassionate decisions for those wanting to return and rebuild that area.

Disaster Response

We continue to make progress in creating the infrastructure and system necessary for an effective long-term disaster response effort.

Our emergency hardship grants program for individuals and the emergency shelter grants funds for congregations has ended. We have given out 1,795 grants of \$300 each to families for a total of \$538,500. We also have awarded \$65,400 to congregations and care ministries to reimburse them for expenses incurred in caring for evacuees.

Six sites to house volunteers are operational in the New Orleans area and now have about 200 volunteers are going through them weekly. Since the disaster began, more than 1,700 volunteers have joined us and gutted and cleaned out 120 homes, rebuilt 40 homes, cleaned out two Lutheran church complexes and done tree and debris removal, fencing and other repairs for hundreds of homeowners. These incredible volunteers have provided more than \$1 million in in-kind labor.

Volunteers, coming from all over the country, are critical as we move into the recovery and rebuilding stage. If your congregation or a group in your congregation wants to participate in the rebuilding effort, please visit

www.LDR.org and fill out an online form that will be useful in matching your members' talents and interests with the areas of need. More than \$180,000 has been spent in volunteer support to help feed, house and coordinate volunteer efforts.

In southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana, much of our recovery and rebuilding effort is taking place on a local level, coordinated through local interfaith groups. While Rita's impact in that area is not as widespread as Katrina, the devastation is just as tremendous on the individuals, families and congregations who were stricken by the storm. Here too, the immediate response is giving way to long-term recovery and we will soon be seeing significant progress on rebuilding homes and lives. Those interested in volunteering to help in this area are encouraged to contact Bernard Scrogin at bscrogin@lsss.org.

Essential to the long-term response is providing spiritual and emotional care for those affected by the two storms. We are developing plans for caring for caregivers and pastors who have been called upon to address the extraordinary needs of others, in addition to dealing with their own losses. We are hosting a retreat for pastors in February that we hope will give them relief from the demands they have been under and equip them with tools to deal with stress, burnout and grief. In addition, we will be providing one-on-one counseling support to caregivers. To help children who have been affected and displaced by hurricanes, we planning to host up to 100 Camp Noah's throughout Louisiana and Texas over the next 24 months. These vacation Bible school-type camps help the children confront their fears, answer questions about why the disasters happened and where God was during these events.

Through the national Katrina Aid Today grant, administered by UMCOR and funneled through Lutheran Disaster Response, LSS will receive \$4.2 million over the next two years to provide long-term case management services to victims of Hurricane Katrina in Texas and Louisiana. LDR will match those funds with an additional \$2.6 million for case management services.

Beginning in February, LSS case managers will work directly with displaced families to assess their immediate and long-term needs, connect them to resources and construct long-term recovery action plans in an effort to restore and/or preserve each family's self-sufficiency. LSS plans to provide case management services to 6,800 families in Houston, Baton Rouge and New Orleans through October 2007.

LSS has received additional an additional \$600,000 from LDR and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod World Relief, \$820,000 from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and \$229,000 in contributions and small grants for immediate and long-term disaster response.

For information on how you can assist with disaster response, please visit the LSS Web site at www.lsss.org and click on *Disaster*.

We are humbled that God has given us this opportunity to share the good news of His grace by providing help, healing and hope to thousands in this very difficult time. Please feel free to contact me at (512) 459-1000 or email me at kurts@lsss.org.

May God continue to bless our partnership.

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