

April 29, 2009

Dear Shantia,

I feel blessed for having the opportunity to spend time with the wonderful people of New Orleans. The people from gsucc were very gracious and welcoming. I truly feel that it has been my privilege to have them share some of their lives with me.

This was a journey of faith for me. I have always believed in the saying, "there but for the grace of God go I." I have never been to nola, so I don't really know what it was. I do know now that it is filled with a spirit of hope and joy that I found very inspirational. I worked with the St. Bernard project and hopefully will be returning in the fall to continue doing what I can until it is done. God has shown me, through the people of New Orleans, that faith will sustain you and strengthen you.

Thank You and God Bless You

Laura Toland

April 29, 2009

Dear Shantia,

My deepest gratitude to you and WAMS, Carolyn Mains, Good Shepherd UCC and my fellow travelers for a life-changing experience. God is truly at work in all the people who are involved with organizing and hosting work groups.

My experience in New Orleans was deeply spiritual. The people of New Orleans treated us like the strangers that Jesus spoke about. We were welcomed, without knowing who we were, as though we were family. The deep appreciation that we had come to help was overwhelming. I came away feeling that I had not done enough...and I must return to continue the work.

Actually I have continued it in a small way since getting back to school - in sharing the stories and the work that still needs to be done, in enlightening my friends/co-workers who thought that NOLA must be pretty much back to normal, etc. I told them about the power-point presentation I will be developing and they all want to see it. Once they see it, I hope to recruit further help, either in donations for the next trip, letter-writing to our Congressmen about the situation in New Orleans and the funds that have not been released to people who are still waiting to be able to restore their homes, or perhaps even more volunteers!

When I was a child, my parents befriended an elderly woman who had come from England to the United States while in her teens. She always used to say "Many hands make light work". I hope that our hands made "light work" for some of the people of New Orleans.

Shalom....Darlene

April 29, 2009

Dear Shantia and members of Good Shepherd UCC:

Friday was our last day at Good Shepherd. All 14 of us had been invited through St. Bernard Parish Project to a "thank you" dinner put on by a resident named Paul Perez. This seemed like a good way to meet other volunteers and be thinking about future projects, so all of us attended. There were perhaps a hundred volunteers at the dinner and Paul personally greeted and spoke with each person as we arrived. After a delicious dinner prepared by his family and friends, we were invited to view a DVD which Paul created the first Christmas after Katrina struck.

We saw the whole story of his family, his home and saw his photos of the absolute wreckage. The next sequence told about all the angels who arrived in New Orleans to help. Fifteen nurses from around the country spent a week at Paul's house helping to dig out from the endless mud. All of us were very moved by the way he told his story, a story that surely could be repeated with variations many thousands of times. It helped us begin to realize the scope of the devastation.

I was able to speak with Paul after the video presentation. Quietly he told me about his eight year old son Blake. Here is what Blake told those 15 nurse angels who came and helped.

My Dad is superman! He can do anything. After Katrina came Superman died. Thank you for bringing my Dad back to me."

Today Paul Perez continues to recover and needs to find ways to bring his gratitude to life. He plans to continue to serve his "thank you dinners" for a very long time.

On Sunday our 8 member team presented the impromptu sermon for our home church, Mattapoisett Congregational Church. Fourteen year old Sam stood bravely before the Congregation and told that after this week he knows for sure that God is real. His stay with all of you made this a certainty for him.

Thank you all for your unending hospitality and support. We plan to keep on coming.

Kathleen S. Henry Pastor