

## New Orleans Reflections Journal – April 2006

April 18, 2006

Well we made it to New Orleans, or actually Metairie, and the stories are coming fast and furious. We have only been in the suburbs, but the response from people is just incredible. Every one is so thankful that we have come down to be with them. Many have told us that we have no idea how much it really means to them. They are overwhelmed by the fact that our home churches are praying for them and that they sent us down with here with special blessings to share their love with the people of New Orleans. Everyone has a story that they want to tell. It is hard for them to share their stories with people who are in the same situation as they are. We are new persons who have the capacity to share some of their burden. I was reading to several classes in a school today. The kids were great. When we had breaks in the teachers room, the teachers unloaded with their stories. They have to put on positive facades for the children, but inside these teachers are hurting too. There were lots of tears and lots of hugs, and the promises of much prayer.

The people who received books so far or who have seen the donations that we have brought with us are awestruck with the sheer volume of what we have brought. We brought 57 bags, most of which were books, bears, prayer shawls, and afghans. The baggage checkers and handlers couldn't believe the volume we had with us either. One of my bags full of bears and books got rejected by the security scanning machine and had to be hand checked. I don't know what those bears did.

The group did lots of work on the church today. Tomorrow, some of us will go into the city. From what I have heard from some of the natives, it should be an overwhelming and emotional experience. We will never be the same after visiting. Some of the folks here feel they are not emotionally ready to face the city yet. They will stay and do sheet rocking and painting at the church.

We are all grateful to be sharing the love of Christ with so many people down here in Louisiana. It is so very humbling, and it is so necessary. We have been so incredibly blessed by God to have been called on this mission.

With faith, hope, and love,  
Elaine

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4.19.06

It seems that our purpose is not so much rebuilding people's homes, but more to show the people of New Orleans that there is somebody out there who cares and is willing to help them carry the weight that has been forced upon them. This was evident to me twice so far; when we were at Acme Oyster House and the people who had asked who we were already told us thank you for helping out and when I was reading to the children at the elementary school. It almost seems like it wouldn't even matter to

them if we fixed their houses or not, just as long as we were there to share some emotion with them.  
-Gregg Majikas

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4-19-06

Still deeply touched by the meeting last night with the women from Beecher Church.

None of us was quite sure what to expect.

First of all there was food, a lot of it--too bad we had had such a big dinner.

There was quite a bit of time spent in just chit chat; getting to know one another. The women--Brenda, Deborah, Betsy and Celie, had been waiting for Lydia, the woman whose son had committed suicide the week before. Her pain was obvious as was her faith--I felt such "presence" with her.

When the spark of hope began, it was something! Ideas flying, laughter ringing.

Prayers said, hymns sung and a smoothy for the road.

Amen! Thank you Lord, for this joyous time.

Linda Michel

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4-22-06

Today as we shared prayer concerns I was struck by how much of a community of disciples we have become. We have witnessed so much--devastation and rebuilding, despair and hope all mingled together. Each of us has expressed the concern that we will not be able to convey our experience in ways that will enable others to join in the work that has been set before us. "Lord, with your eyes you have searched me, and while smiling, have called out my name...." May we have the wisdom and courage to be your disciples in the world.

Linda Michel

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4-22-06

This week has opened up my heart and spirit. I have never done a mission trip before and this week has been so amazing and such a learning. I've experienced so much emotional sights and stories and learned how "alone" this area has felt. I also have experienced so much fellowship, love, and hope. I will bring home this area in my heart and spread the information of all that is going on down here in this beautiful area and hopefully have others assist in helping in all ways. Good Shepherd and the people involved, have been so gracious and kind it makes me want to stay. Thanks for teaching me how to eat crawfish!!

It will also be hard to say good-bye to this great group Sunday. I hope to keep in touch with everyone and do more work at home to continue the support and assistance. After this week, I feel closer to God and the human spirit. Thank you for all your guidance and presence.

Cheryl Brasier

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04-22-06

I was told when I was a young girl that I wanted to be a Missionary. Of course they were just words to me because I was too small to understand.

God has, I believe, always been speaking to me, watching over me guiding me through the darkest of storms...I never in my wildest dreams ever thought the storm would lead me to a city so entrenched in the most horrible disaster this country has ever known. Through the wonderful people at Good

Shepherd I have been ministered to. Carolyn, Pastor Gary and members of the congregation have welcomed me with open arms, taken time out their busy schedules to talk with me and give me hope and strength to bring the story back...to advocate and to never let them feel that they are alone. I am honored to be in their presence. I am privileged to have come into their lives...Thank you  
Nancy Pettus

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04-22-06 I do not easily express my faith verbally nor by the written word - but I am here because God has spoken to me and asked me to reach out to these people who have been so devastated. I came here not knowing what to expect - how would I be able to live with 20 other people I do not know - in a church building???? What could I offer? BUT here I am at the end of the week - overwhelmed with the love with which we have been accepted - by the church and by the city of New Orleans. Good Shepherd has been an incredible place to stay - sharing their resources with us and making us feel so welcome. My heartfelt thanks also to all who have shared my personal concern and offered prayers for my son. And to my 20 fellow travelers - Godspeed and thanks for sharing this incredible experience with me!  
Sue Withers

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04-22-2006

Hot and sweaty; tired and sore. Yet, I would not have traded this past week for anything. Did we accomplish anything? Yup. Work-wise, we put out a lot of effort, and visually you could see results. Did we accomplish enough?

I think so. We all would have liked to have done more. But I felt that more important than anything, was the fact that we were there. People knew we came because we cared... and they realized that they not been forgotten.

Jill E. Lewis

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April 22, 2006

We had a tour today of the worst of the areas hit. The devastation down here is worse than I could possibly ever explain..... City Park has been set up as a Point of Distribution for food and clothing..... Totally unpaid staff..... Running totally off donations.... Feeding 400-800 twice a day.... Sleeping facilities for 2500 at the moment.... They're there for the long haul....  
<http://www.thesaintscomemarchingin.org/>

The afternoon was spent continuing to work on gutting two houses.... We're hoping to finish cleaning them out before we're ready to leave.... It was tough.... Throwing away photo albums.... Slides..... diaries.... All too covered with black mold to be salvaged....

Estimates are that there are over 150,000 homes that need to be gutted before any rebuilding can commence.... And the damage to them ranges from those like the attached photos to those that have damage to the lower few feet of their houses.... But the bottom line is that all were at least partially underwater and any where from a few days to weeks..... But in all cases the mold grew and needs to be

removed....

On a lighter note... the parishioners of Good Shepherd threw a clam and crayfish boil for us tonight. Was a nice way to end the day!

Rick

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I still don't know how I would react if this were my house that had been destroyed by a hurricane. Would I be steadfast and do what ever I could to rebuild or would I walk away? At points on this trip it seems all too overwhelming... to many images of destruction and a sense of abandonment. As we drove to the job site today I remember feeling glad that we were going to a house to clean out and do demolition because I was getting madder and madder as we drove past all the destroyed homes and FEMA trailers. Through swinging a hammer I hoped somehow to be able to release all that anger and sadness. It was a satisfying day through all the sweat and dust; and even though there was not a lot of conversation among us as we worked – I felt like we were speaking loudly and in unison, and hoping the owners of the house could hear us and take some comfort in us being there. My image of hope at the end of the day as we drove to the other house was seeing the snowy egrets nesting in the trees on one side of the street and on the other, a FEMA trailer decorated with two pink flamingos in the front... a sense of normalcy... a sense of hope.

-Kelly Fellner

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As we entered an abandoned, destroyed, semi-affluent home, it was clear that anything anyone ever has on this earth is only temporary. Every piece of the beautiful clothing from the closets is now in pile at the curb. Beautiful furnishings are all ruined. Now, everything is zero-based and its time to reconsider what is important. It makes us appreciate everything we have, every day we have it, and realize that tomorrow it could be gone. Although we never met the homeowner and they never met us, there was a sense that we were connected and appreciated.

-Dennis Majikas

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We have been gutting two homes in the Gentilly section of New Orleans. It is hot and dirty work. We need to wear Tyvek suits, goggles, and face masks to protect us from the toxic molds and any other hazardous materials that may become airborne. With temperatures being an unseasonably hot 90 degrees during the day, the work is very difficult. We also do not know anything about the owners of these homes, and unfortunately both families are out of town so we will not be able to meet them. But Jesus has called us to do this work for our brothers and sisters, and so we do so knowing that we will be making a positive difference in their lives. It does not matter who they are except that they are fellow human beings in need.

We toured many areas of the metropolitan New Orleans area on Thursday. The damage is

unbelievable! Words just are not sufficient to describe the destruction. The pictures on TV made the affected area seem fairly small and contained, but in fact, the damage has covered areas for miles and miles and miles. There has been wind damage, flood damage, and storm surge damage, and all of it has been devastating. We found out that 80% of the damage had been created from the comedy of errors committed by human beings. In some areas, the damage is spotty with some houses looking like they made it through the storm unscathed and the houses next door being totally uninhabitable. In other areas, total neighborhoods have been completely destroyed. The damage and destruction was indiscriminate, occurring in neighborhoods and business districts regardless of any perceived level of income of the residents.

Probably the worst realization to seeing the extensive damage, is that the storm happened almost 8 months ago and in many places it looks like it happened only last week. There are large sections of the city with no electricity, no telephone service, no water, and no sewer services. There are porta-potties on every block. Cars need to stop at each intersection because the traffic lights do not work. Abandoned cars fill the spaces under the interstate highways. An occasional clothesline between the cars indicates that there may be people living in some of those cars. FEMA trailers can be seen in the parking lot of the local K-Mart. This is the United States of America, and after eight months, one would have expected that at least the basic services would have been restored.

The levee system is being worked on, but it will not be completed before the upcoming hurricane season which begins in June. The area will be very vulnerable during any upcoming storms. People are growing edgier and more apprehensive as the hurricane season gets closer. An unused shipping channel that was responsible for a great deal of damage is another controversial subject. Apparently the Corps of Engineers has been talking about installing floodgates to protect the levees that they control, but use of those gates will not protect the city nor prevent flooding in the city. Alternate gate placement and designs, with the eventual future filling of that man-made waterway could prevent some of the storm surge problems, but these ideas are not being considered. There are also no known discussions about trying to restore the marshes and coastal wetlands to naturally reduce storm surges. After 9/11 anything was possible in New York, but here in Louisiana, there is nothing but red tape.

Elaine Cavanaugh

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4/24/06

I feel as if our work is now just beginning. We have a huge responsibility to the people in the New Orleans area to not let the world forget about them. We are ambassadors for Christ and we cannot allow the injustices to continue. Whether we continue our outreach locally or in Washington, or in Louisiana, there is much work to do. We also need to continue praying for the healing of all of our brothers and sisters who have been affected by last year's hurricanes. Pray too for the people rebuilding the infrastructures of the region, the people rebuilding the emotional, physical, and spiritual health of the victims, the lawmakers whose decisions will make a world of difference (good or bad) for

the future of the people of the gulf coast, and the thousands of volunteers who are witness to the glory and hope of God.

Elaine