

HOPE

It is still overwhelming as I sit here and try to collect my thoughts about what we saw; heard and did. There are some people that wonder why we went why can't they help them selves, Well close your eyes for a minute and picture being stranded in your home and then rescue comes and puts you on top of a over-pass and you're there for days with many others when you finally are allowed back home you find it has water damage and the mold is so bad. You then head to where you used to work and that is closed and they decided to never open again; so now your house is unlivable and you are out of a job; you get on the phone and try getting help but you just get the run around; press this number; press that; you get frustrated and finally give up now you are depressed – picture someone who had depression problems before Katrina; or is bipolar; or other mental problems; you find you can't function as a human being; you get overwhelmed and don't know where to start so you don't.

We only touched a small few but those we touched we brought a smile of HOPE and prayers that they are not forgotten. Handing a prayer shawl and listening to their story of how they survived. Seeing trailers after trailers still in front yards or parking lots with people still living in them; seeing boarded up houses with no one in them. Talking to Sean and his family as they worked on his wife's grandmothers home so they can live in it till they buy their own (their apartment was destroyed) their trailer parked beside the house with 6 of them living in it; it should only hold 4.

Gary and the Congregation at Good Shepherd welcomed us with open arms excited that their floor in the fellowship hall was in and that we were the first to use it. Hearing their stories of leaving for what they thought would be 3 days and turned into weeks before they could return and finding their sanctuary and houses with water and mold. Looking up at their fellowship hall looked like a bow of a ship – all I could think of was Norah's arc and it welcomed us 2 by 2. Helping them finish some painting of their rooms; one used for meals on wheels; another their ladies craft room; working on bunk beds for the modular buildings that did house cots for mission groups now can hold 10 to 12 people.

Our team worked on buildings that the Central Congregational UCC own and they lost part of their roofs so they had water damage and mold; one building had been their church office; finding the minister's robes; old bulletins history of the church. Books from their Sunday school; their HOPE is to rebuild their congregation and use the buildings for senior center and offices. They had been in the process of redoing their sanctuary and now that will have to wait. We had a tour of their Nursery School Day Care the HUME center – they HOPE to hear that they are approved by the state; they had 3 children right now but HOPE to have many more; the staff have been working without getting paid and just received a grant to use. A team from Lexington, MA worked on their center painting and cleaning. When they left they asked what else could they do and they happen to be redoing their own Day Care Center in Lexington and a few days later after they left a Truck pulled up in front of the HUME Center filled with items they could use cabinets; computers; HOPE. Their church had been filled with families that had lived in the neighborhood and now are scattered. The school that the children went to is closed; they are on 3 sessions at other schools.

It was so hard for some on our team to go back and see a house that they had gutted a year ago had no work done on it since. For the workers and others that might be thinking of going to help we also need to see what has been done, we need to see the finished projects that we started on. For those that had worked for a week on a project and were determined to finish what they started but months later to go back and to see nothing had been done since they left. It's hard to understand the priorities that others have and to have one more area of life down there that is WAITING. We will also start to get depressed we too need to know that the work we do will get finished. I know myself that I wanted to finish what our team had started on Monday but because of an accident when I was hit on the head and got a concussion, I was not able to go back on Friday to see the finished project it bothered me; I wanted to be there with the team to know what we were assigned to do we finished. So even for those of us who go to help it is sometimes hard to hold onto the HOPE.

I hope Central Congregational Church's vision to be a place of service for the neighborhood comes true and HOPE if I return in a year their project is done.

There are many many more stories that I know the other team members will touch on it isn't just our team members stories it is the people of New Orleans stories of survival and HOPE THAT THEY ARE NOT FORGOTTEN – my cup is over flowing, with sadness, joy and wondering-if-their-lives-will-ever-be-the-same. Our group came from different areas but we were one team and one family; we laughed; cried; said prayers of HOPE; sang; and hugged a lot. I will never forget the week; our team; the people of New Orleans and their stories.

