

DISASTER RESPONSE TRIP TO PEARL RIVER, LOUISIANA

On October 21st, 2006 twelve volunteers left the Church of the Brethren district office in Weyers Cave, Virginia, to go to Pearl River, Louisiana, for a week of work to help rebuild the area after Hurricane Katrina.

This trip, like all the other trips we have been on, was a blessing to us. We arrived in Pearl River around 6:30pm on Sunday at the Pearl River United Methodist Church, where we would be staying for the week in the Agape building, which is beside the church. The Agape building has some of the Sunday school rooms, a library, and the kitchen. We were met by Ken Kline and Lynn Kreider, the project directors for the Church of the Brethren, and Frances Neff from Bridgewater, Virginia, who would be our cook for the week. After orientation, they gave us a report on what was being done in that area and what we would be doing during the week.

On Monday morning we were divided into two groups and went to work on two different houses in Slidell, Louisiana, which is about 30 minutes away from where we were staying. A storm surge of 20-30 feet from Lake Pontchartrain flooded this area with 8-10 feet of water. The lake is ten miles away. The houses we worked on had to have the bottom four feet of drywall, all interior doors, and some flooring replaced.

One day while we were on our lunch break (of red beans and rice from the daughter of the lady's house we were working on) an electrician came around. He was replacing the circuit breaker panel outside the house and he asked where we were from. After telling him that we were from Virginia and West Virginia, he asked if we know where Luray, Virginia is. He had driven a truck many times from Louisiana to the Wrangler plant in Luray. He knew the area we were from exactly. Seems like no matter where you go you always find someone you know or they know something about you.

The electrician told us that the house he rented was completely destroyed in the hurricane. All but 20 homes out of 320 in Pearlington, the town he lives in, were damaged or destroyed. The electrician said he was really blessed because a neighbor deeded him three acres of land, and a church from South Carolina came and built him a 900-square-foot house on the three acres.

We took a tour of New Orleans on Thursday afternoon. The main part of town looks to be almost normal, but the some sections are still terrible. A lot of them still look like they did a week after the hurricane. Small businesses are closed because there are no customers to support them, shopping centers are vacant, and some of the streets are still blocked. They say that 50,000 homes will have to be destroyed. It will be years before New Orleans will be rebuilt and be like it was before. We need to still be in prayer and supportive for our brothers and sisters in New Orleans and along the Gulf coast. Even though we might not want to live in that area, it is home to them just like the mountains are to us.

Before we left on Friday afternoon we went to see the house that the other group was working on. The couple that owned the house was there, checking on what was being done. During the walk through the house the husband stopped at one point and smiled. He said, "It's starting to look like a home again." We left for home in the late afternoon, knowing that with God's help

we accomplished a good bit of work and had given hope to at least two families there. We got back to district office in Weyers Cave around 6:00pm on Saturday evening.

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