

United Church of Christ Gulf Coast Hurricane Recovery
[Update] January 2007



The New Year often turns our thoughts to resolutions and choices about how we will live our lives and realize our hopes and dreams. For thousands of people on the Gulf Coast, the New Year also brings resolutions and choices about hopes and dreams. Hope in the form of assistance from people who continue to bring volunteer work groups to repair and rebuild homes. Hope comes in the renewal of a medical system to aid those in need. Hope comes in the restoration of a broken school system for the children whose education has been disrupted. Hope comes in the faith that lives will be restored. The United Church of Christ continues to bring hope...

As of this date, the United Church of Christ has received \$6,034,697.27 to address the needs of people impacted by the 2005 hurricanes. The funds received will allow a UCC presence on the Gulf Coast for the long term recovery. These generous gifts of UCC members and friends represent hope for thousands of people affected by the 2005 hurricanes.

The major role of the church in this disaster, continues to be the rebuilding and repairing of homes for persons identified with “un-met” needs – people who have no insurance or who are under-insured – to learn more about the possibility of taking a volunteer work group to Louisiana, Mississippi or Florida, please visit our web site:
<http://www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane.htm>

Relief and Recovery Phase - August 29, 2005 to January 5, 2007
Funds Disbursed thru 1/5/07

\$592,153 UCC South Central Conference to meet emergency needs; provide grants to UCC clergy families who have been displaced and lost homes & income sources; continuing pastoral support; renovation and repair of UCC churches; long term recovery disaster response coordination [long term volunteers]; housing for long term volunteers; tool shed for equipment used to repair homes. Additionally, Rev. Alan Coe has been called by the South Central Conference to coordinate disaster recovery and work camp groups in the New Orleans Association.

\$50,000 Jefferson Davis – Marion Counties Long Term Recovery Committee (Mississippi) to assist with casework; and construction/repairs on homes for people who are under-insured or not insured.

\$50,000 The Rebuild Center Project, New Orleans, LA; working with the Catholic Church a Rebuild Center is opening to assist day laborers who have come to New Orleans to work on clean up and repairs. The majority of these persons do not have a place to live (people have been living in abandoned cars and houses). The Center will include: medical and legal services; shower, restroom and laundry services; meals; immigration related services; respite services.

\$46,500 Dillard University to support two interns. One intern is working with the Lower 9th Ward Association on home ownership issues; and rebuilding. The second intern is working on the same issues for other areas on New Orleans.

\$2,400 UCC Florida Conference to support a long term volunteer working with the conference disaster ministries staff on Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma recovery.

\$500 UCC Storrs Congregational church as a grant to assist with supporting a volunteer work group to travel to New Orleans to repair homes.

\$23,867 UCCNews insert on participation of UCC in hurricane recovery: "Walking the line between devastation and hope" (note: UCNews circulation is 185,000).

\$6,000 Back Bay Mission, support for long term volunteers to serve as mission trip coordinators and site managers for repairs and rebuilding.

\$50,000 UCC South Central Conference to purchase building materials for repairing and rebuilding of homes of persons who are under-insured or not insured.

\$50,000 Committee for Plaquemines Recovery (long term recovery committee) for building materials for people with unmet needs in Plaquemines Parish, LA.

\$50,000 Jefferson Disaster Recovery Committee (long term recovery committee) for building materials for people with unmet needs in Jefferson Parish, LA.

\$35,000 Southwest Mississippi Recovery Network (long term recovery committee) for caseworker to assist persons with unmet needs.

\$50,000 Church World Service Advocacy Fund (note: support for two years of Ag-Missions work with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund) support for home and land owners to retain ownership where developers are pressuring for unfair buyouts in Biloxi, Gulfport and Pass Christian, MS; and New Orleans, La.

\$25,000 Terrebonne Readiness and Assistance Coalition (long term recovery committee) to repair and rebuild homes in 21 south Louisiana parishes.

\$20,000 Stone County Long Term Recovery Committee to assist with administrative costs for staff, and caseworkers to repair and rebuild homes for persons with unmet needs.

\$25,000 Church World Service, (Hurricane Katrina) to support distribution of blankets, health kits, and continued deployment of Disaster Response and Recovery Liaisons to work with establishment of Long Term Recovery Committees.

\$25,000 Church World Service, (Hurricanes Katrina and Rita) to support advocacy issues as they arise on the Gulf Coast; i.e. land ownership rights for people returning to communities, jobs. Through CWS, funding was provided to Interfaith Worker Justice.

\$50,000 Boat People SOS, Inc. to assist the Vietnamese American community (approximately 36,000 live in the Gulf State region) impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Unmet needs include transportation money to search for employment, preparation of resumes, clothing for job interviews, supplies for repair of lightly damaged fishing boats, replacement of household furnishings, legal assistance for recovery and filing of lost and destroyed documentation.

\$5,000 City of Refuge UCC to assist members of Freedom Fellowship Church in New Orleans to attend the national gathering of fellowship churches sponsored by City of Refuge. This annual gathering is an opportunity for fellowship members to gather for worship, support and continuing education.

\$12,199 to assist with a weekend retreat for 57 women from UCC churches in Louisiana; an opportunity for women to begin a healing process.

\$15,000 Mix in '06 to assist 25 women from the South Central Conference impacted by the 2005 hurricanes to attend the women's event in Indianapolis. The women attending will participate in planned events including leadership in worship with opportunity to tell their stories to women from across the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

\$25,000 Missouri Interfaith Disaster Recovery Organization (MIDRO) to support long term recovery committees throughout Missouri who are assisting persons evacuated and still displaced by the hurricanes.

\$25,000 Disaster Recovery Services of George County, Mississippi – interfaith support to buy materials to repair and rebuild homes for persons who are under insured; or, have no insurance. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor.

\$25,000 Interfaith Disaster Task Force (Jackson, Hancock and Harrison Counties in Mississippi) – interfaith support to buy materials to repair and rebuild homes for persons who are under insured; or, have no insurance. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor.

\$170,000 Community of Faith Church of Houston (UCC/Disciples of Christ) - Amistad Resettlement Project, to assist in paying resettlement costs (job re-training; housing; food and clothing; medical assistance) for 82 evacuated families who have been identified to participate in long-term resettlement project.

\$15,000 Community of Faith Church Of Houston (UCC/Disciples of Christ) – to assist with costs to bring 27 people from the Amistad Resettlement Project to Cleveland for the United Black Christians meeting.

\$50,000 Church World Service - Relocation Program for Displaced Americans, relocation of families in various sites across U.S.

\$15,000 UCC Southeast Conference to meet emergency needs; feeding evacuees in Atlanta through the Hosea Williams Feeding Program (at the request of Ambassador Andrew Young).

\$20,000 UCC Back Bay Mission, Biloxi, Mississippi to re-establish mission site for emergency relief and long-term recovery and rebuilding.

\$5,000 Purchase of two Iridium satellite phones and service for use by Back Bay Mission staff as long as normal land-line and cell phone communications are disrupted.

\$40,000 UCC related Dillard University, New Orleans to assist with repairs on damage to campus and restore operations.

\$5,000 UCC related Olivet College, Michigan, to help cover costs of feeding and sheltering 18 evacuees.

\$10,000 Farm Worker Association of Florida to assist migrant farm workers unemployed when the crops were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

\$113,800 Good Shepherd UCC, Metairie, Louisiana to prepare church building (repaired damages, remove mold) to serve long term as site for UCC volunteer work groups.

\$10,690 St. Matthew UCC, New Orleans, Louisiana to prepare church building (install showers, kitchen facilities) to serve long term as site for UCC volunteer work groups.

\$10,000 Howard University, Washington, DC to help support 205 students "alternative Spring Break" in the New Orleans area – served as volunteers to rebuild and repair homes for persons who are have no insurance or are under-insured.

\$14,000 Church World Service - (Hurricane Rita) to support distribution of blankets, health kits, and deployment of Disaster Response and Recovery Liaisons.

\$4,500 Plymouth Congregational UCC, Beaumont, TX (Hurricane Rita) to assist the community with relief and recovery needs.

\$20,000 Old First Church, Springfield, MA – support for books for Gulf Coast; church is working with school districts and local organizations to replace books through an ongoing book program. Shipments of 350,000 books have now been sent to schools, hospitals and libraries on the Gulf Coast (Louisiana and Mississippi).

\$15,000 New York Disaster Interfaith Services – support for resettlement of evacuees in New York City.

\$20,000 Louisiana Environmental Action Network to support an intern who will work in communities to address health and safety issues in the greater New Orleans area. The intern will attend meetings of recovery groups to discuss environmental aspects of this disaster; and to distribute fact sheets including environmental data.

\$30,000 Louisiana Environmental Action Network to assist with direct relief efforts for residents - providing "Re-entry Protection Kits" that contain protective clothing and eyewear, gloves, biohazard bags, and particulate respirators, as well as more bleach, and hopefully, if we

can find them in time, buckets and detergents.

\$50,000 Into Afrika – Exodus Ministries to facilitate radio town hall meetings for the Diaspora to receive critical information and have a voice in plans for how to rebuild their communities.

\$20,000 UCC South Central Conference – support for new church start in Baton Rouge, Louisiana – Malcolm Richard, pastor.

Highlights of recovery initiatives:

++November 2006: Two interns (one from Dillard; one at Loyola Law School - recent Dillard graduate) are called to: (1) work with All Congregations Together (ACT) to work with leaders of the Holy Cross neighborhood (Lower 9th Ward) on reclaiming the area for displaced residents; (2) to work with the Advancement Project and/or Lawyers for Civil Rights in setting up legal clinics in churches to assist home owners to reclaim properties where documents have been destroyed by floods.

++November 2006: Work with the Catholic Diocese begins on The Rebuild Center Project in New Orleans to assist day laborers who often have no place to live. The Center will include the following services: medical and legal; shower, laundry and meals; immigration issues and respite location.

++October 2006: Journey UCC in Baton Rouge, LA (new church start) has its first worship service with approximately 40 people in attendance. The Rev. Malcolm Richard seeing a need for outreach ministry in this community of displaced persons is building this new church in partnership with the South Central Conference, Local Church Ministries and Wider Church Ministries.

++October 2006: Plaquemines Parish and Jefferson Parish (Louisiana) long term recovery committees begin work on repairing and rebuilding homes in areas devastated by the 2005 hurricane season. The UCC participates on these committees and receives repair work requests for the wider community.

++October 2006: Beecher Memorial UCC with repairs still underway with assistance from Hope Shall Bloom has its first worship service since the hurricane in its own building. Bernice Powell Jackson is called as part time pastor to assist Beecher members with implement their visions for the future. Don Morgan, Back Bay Mission staff, continues to also serve part time.

++August 2006: WCM National Disaster Ministries in partnership with JWM Gulf Coast Justice Initiative develop a plan of action to include: hiring three interns who are students at Dillard University. The main focus is (1) responsibility of campus organizing in the New Orleans area colleges to run educational and justice-oriented programs to educate students and create Gulf Coast justice groups on campuses; (2) work with All Congregations Together (ACT) to work with leaders of the Holy Cross neighborhood (Lower 9th Ward) on reclaiming the area for displaced residents; (3) to work with the Advancement Project and/or Lawyers for Civil Rights in setting up legal clinics in churches to assist home owners to reclaim properties where documents have been destroyed by floods.

++July 2006: Community of Faith Church of Houston (UCC/Disciples of Christ) Amistad Resettlement Program to assist with costs for 27 members of the program to visit with UCC churches in Illinois and Michigan; and attend the United Black Christians meeting in Cleveland. Participants shared their stories of pain, hope and renewal; and provided a worship experience at the UCC church house.

++July 2006: Heart Songs: A Retreat for restoration and renewal. 57 women from UCC churches in Louisiana gathered for a weekend to share stories, to grieve for all that has been lost, and for a time of renewal. From this time together, those gathered have decided to meet quarterly to continue a healing process.

++June 2006: A new coalition of local organizations (New Orleans Area Health Disparities Initiative) is formed and the UCC invited to be a partner. The coalition met in June to develop proactive strategies aimed at centering health in the reconstruction debates on housing, economic development, employment, education, environmental cleanup, restoration of natural resources, transportation and mobility. A task force was formed to receive all the suggestions from the meeting and propose a plan of action. More information will be posted on the UCC web site as it becomes available.

++June 2006: Carl Wallace, UCC Justice and Witness Ministries, with Dillard University explores the possibility of students serving as interns to assist with researching and addressing the many justice issues facing residents of New Orleans.

++May 2006: Fact sheet on environmental hazards prepared by the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Church World Service and the United Church of Christ are being distributed to members of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). Members of NVOAD who are supporting volunteer work groups; and working with returning residents are using this fact sheet to provide information on contaminants. To download and print the pdf file, go to the LEAN web site: <http://www.leanweb.org/> – fact sheet is under “Keep Safe Louisiana.”

++May 2006: Environmental justice meetings continue with UCC staff and local partners in New Orleans. Carlos Correa and Barbara Baylor of Justice and Witness Ministries (environmental justice and health portfolios, respectively); Florence Coppola of Wider Church Ministries (disaster ministries); Joann Hale, Lura Cayton, Heriberto Martinez (disaster recovery liaisons) of Church World Service are working with local communities to provide much needed information about existing contaminants. Local partners include: Louisiana Environmental Action Network, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Sustainable Community Development Group and Moving Forward Gulf Coast. Among the local faith groups represented were Hispanic Apostolate and Catholic Charities Hispanic Outreach, United Methodists Committee on Relief, Louisiana Interchurch Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

++April 2006: Volunteer work groups have almost completed work on Beecher Memorial UCC to remove mold and clean out the building to ready it for renovation. Homes of UCC members and of the wider community are being cleaned out and repaired as possible. Work groups are assisting people in recovering what is salvageable from their homes. More than 100 homes have now been cleared and are ready for repairs.

++April 2006: John Thomas, UCC General Minister and President, visited with clergy and lay leaders in New Orleans; and, preached at the New Orleans Association Spring meeting. Rev. Thomas visited with the staff of Back Bay Mission in Biloxi; and with clergy living in the area. Reflections on his visit may be found at: <http://www.ucc.org/disaster/u041106.htm>

++April 2006: Linda Jaramillo, Executive Minister, UCC Justice and Witness Ministries, travels to New Orleans to meet with local community members to focus the nation's attention on the rights of residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina. In addition to voting rights in the April election, there was conversation about the right to return home and to live in safe and affordable housing. Reflections on her visit may be found at: <http://www.ucc.org/index.php> under hurricane response.

++March 2006: National Disaster Ministries working with Justice and Witness Ministries continues working to establish partnerships in Louisiana to address the environmental justice issues in communities. Toxic materials including heavy metals residue (known carcinogens); a large oil spill; and bacterial residue in residential areas have not been removed.

++March 2006: The Interfaith Disaster Task Force (Jackson, Hancock and Harrison Counties in Mississippi) has begun the work of assisting to repair and rebuild homes through the purchase of materials. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor to repair homes of persons who are under insured, or who have no insurance. As soon as there is sufficient housing to accommodate additional volunteers, opportunities to serve will open to the UCC.

++February 2006: National Disaster Ministries working with Local Church Ministries supports the establishment of a new UCC church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The Reverend Malcolm Richard (formerly a pastor in New Orleans) lives in Baton Rouge and is working to provide a worship experience for displaced persons. Rev. Richard is hoping to have a first worship service on Easter Sunday.

++February 2006: The work of repairing and rebuilding in George County, Mississippi has begun through the efforts of the Disaster Services Interfaith established to assist in recovery efforts. Volunteer work groups will provide the labor to repair homes of persons who are under insured, or who have no insurance. As soon as there is sufficient housing to accommodate additional volunteers, opportunities to serve will open to the UCC.

++January 2006: Cally Rogers-Witte, Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries, traveled to Louisiana and Mississippi with WCM staff. Rev. Rogers-Witte met with clergy and lay leaders in New Orleans to discuss recovery and toured areas of the city that had been impacted by the hurricanes. In Mississippi, Rev. Rogers-Witte met with Back Bay Mission staff in Biloxi; and visited with volunteer groups working at repairing homes.

++January 2006: National Disaster Ministries working with Church World Service begins work with the Louisiana Environmental Action Network to form a partnership that will address the toxic materials issues in the New Orleans area. Many of the homes and neighborhoods are contaminated by toxins including benzene, mercury and lead. Safety issues for volunteers and for residents wanting to return home are being addressed through this partnership.

++ December 2005: National Disaster Ministries, working with the Justice and Witness Ministries, Washington, DC office released the following statement via the Justice and Peace Action Network asking members to contact their Senators.

"As the season of light and hope progresses to the culminating birth of the baby Jesus, who, along with his parents, found shelter in a stable because there was no room at the inn, thousands of families left homeless and jobless by hurricanes Katrina and Rita are still finding no room at the federal inn. In the three months since these natural disasters hit the gulf coast, Congress has not yet passed critical aid packages for those who lost everything in the deluge. However, there is hope, because now there is a new bi-partisan relief bill that could bring desperately needed aid to these struggling families: the Gulf Coast Recovery Act of 2005 (H.R. 4438).

"The Gulf Coast Recovery Act, which has been approved by the House committee that has jurisdiction over federal disaster programs, would extend federal disaster unemployment assistance (DUA) for families who run out of their limited 26 weeks of federal aid. The bill also requires an immediate increase in minimum DUA benefits from \$98 per week to \$135 per week, a modest, but significant increase. These, along with other provisions in the bill, will help ensure that those who continue to suffer will not be left out in the cold this winter. The Senate has a similar, though more limited version of this bill (S. 1777).

"If these bills do not pass before Congress recesses for the holidays, they will not be taken up again until late January. Congressman Dan Young of Alaska, the Republican chair of the House committee that just approved the bill, was quoted as saying that his aim is to have the measure enacted before the Congressional session ends. So, the immediate priority is to get the bill through the House so that the Senate can take it up before the holidays."

++ November 2005: UCC President and General Minister, The Reverend John Thomas led a spiritual retreat in Houston, TX. 45 clergy from the South Central Conference including staff from Back Bay Mission participated in this time of renewal.

++ November 2005: Volunteer work group opportunities in the New Orleans area begin. To learn more about this possibility check: <http://www.ucc.org/ministries/volunteer/hurricane.htm>. Housing for volunteer work groups is available at three New Orleans area churches.

++ October 2005: National Disaster Ministries, working with the Justice and Witness Ministries, Washington, DC office released the following statement via the Justice and Peace Action Network asking members to contact their Senators. "Keep Katrina Workers Safe: Thousands of disaster responders, workers and volunteers in the Gulf Coast areas affected by Hurricane Katrina remain inadequately protected against exposure to environmental health hazards. The flood waters were contaminated with an estimated eight million gallons of petroleum and the disaster area contains highly elevated levels of sewage, bacteria, lead, mercury, hexavalent chromium, arsenic, benzene and pesticides. Yet, Sen. James Inhofe (OK) has proposed legislation to allow the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to temporarily relax or suspend its rules in the clean-up effort for 120 days."