

Caritas

A publication for the Sisters of Providence and Friends ● SPRING 2006



Editor's Note:

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, the strongest ever recorded in the Gulf of Mexico, struck the coastlines of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, bringing death and destruction. That was only the first blow the people suffered. The second was the inadequate response to

the tragedy by governments at all levels. Disaster relief agencies hastened to the region to offer assistance, along with volunteers



Karen Hawkins, SP

from around the country, including Sister Karen Hawkins, who went to New Orleans for two weeks in November.

Sister Karen writes of her experience there: "The people of the Lower Ninth Ward touched my heart with gratitude for all who have been a part of helping life come back in New Orleans through prayers and contributions. Providence of God, we thank you for all." ●

SISTER GOES TO NEW ORLEANS to join in relief effort

From New Orleans - Lower Ninth Ward:

Here we are in the midst of what once was a neighborhood. We are journeying back with those who survived, traveling on buses and in vans to see what once was home. The air is heavy. Many don masks supplied by the Red Cross before boarding the bus. Col. Sneed comes on the bus and announces to those going back for a glimpse of a treasure left behind that nothing is to be found.

The levee broke; some say it was dynamite, since the hurricane already had passed. Others say a barge was pushed into the levee. Still others say it was an act of God and that they are counting on a better home on the other side.

One man clung to his roof for 23 hours before being rescued. A grandmother describes how her grandbaby was washed from her arms. A woman cries, "Please let me look in my Mama's house; she did not make it out." The woman's brother begins singing praises to the King and everyone in earshot knows there is a spirit that runs deep.

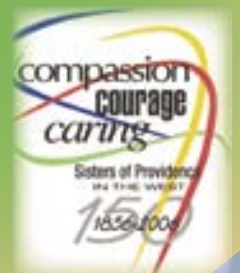
Another woman asks what happened to her Daddy. He looks in the mirror and no longer recognizes himself. He beats at the mirror. Nothing is the same. Families are torn apart, put on the next plane according to order of rescue. Family members are missing, yet one hopes for a better tomorrow.



150th Anniversary

Sisters kick off yearlong celebration of their arrival in the West

On December 8, 1856, Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart and four sister companions arrived in the Washington Territory at Fort Vancouver. The celebration of that milestone officially began last December with gatherings of Sisters of Providence, Providence Associates and friends throughout Mother Joseph Province. See inside for photos from those events plus a preview of upcoming celebration activities. ●



INSIDE:

March for peace ●

Thanks to donors ●

Chinese New Year

How did I, a Sister of Providence from Great Falls, Mont., come to be on this Holy Ground with a team of psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, clinical social workers, pastoral care counselors and substance abuse counselors? I and three of my coworkers at Gateway Community Services were chosen to be part of a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) emergency response team. As members of NAADAC (The Association for Addiction Professionals), our role was to ensure that mental health and substance abuse assessments, in addition to crisis counseling, were readily available to residents and evacuees of areas impacted by Katrina. We also were to help establish a long-term plan to ensure that they would receive continued services.



SISTER GOES TO NEW ORLEANS to join in relief effort



This team of mental health, pastoral care and addiction counselors went to New Orleans as volunteers in the relief effort in November. Sister Karen Hawkins, of Great Falls, is in the back row at left.

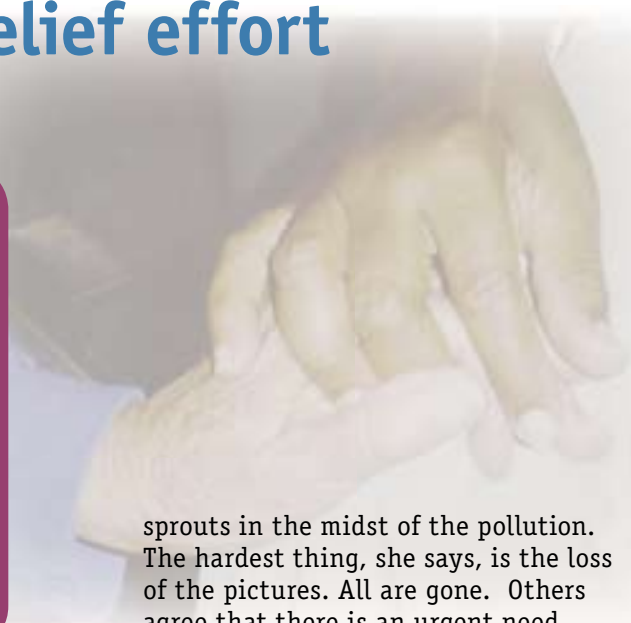
To prepare for our work we were given a list suggesting that we bring food and water for a 24-hour period, boots and closed-toe sneakers, heavy work pants, long-sleeved shirts, one business/casual outfit, reading material (as if there would be time for that), a light jacket, hat, toilet seat covers, cell phone, resume and credentials. Into the unknown -- New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward -- we went.

We entered into a world of darkness. Power lines were down and houses had washed away. One house now sat on top of a car. A sea of X's marked homes that were structurally unsound. The team

that searched the home when the waters receded is noted, as is the number of bodies found there.

One young man enters his home to find his grandmother dead, her body in her chair. Three months later and bodies still are being found.

A woman sitting next to me tells the miracle of her rescue from her attic. She cannot swim, she declares, yet God sent the boat just in time. What will come next she does not know. Still, families wait for trailers and pay mortgages for homes that no longer stand. "I am alive," the woman says, yet wonders why. She has lived here 60 years, but her neighbors, her family and her church are gone now. The statue of Mary remains on the lawn and green grass



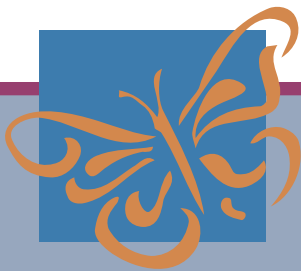
sprouts in the midst of the pollution. The hardest thing, she says, is the loss of the pictures. All are gone. Others agree that there is an urgent need to take photos of what is no more.

One person snaps a picture of the school, the neighborhood grocery, the park where swings yet stand. The laments are loud as neighbors go by the homes of friends who have crossed over to the other side. One can almost see the young man in the tree; he held on for oh, so long. Stories are shared of other days, of Second Line funeral celebrations, of Mardi Gras, of life on the edge.

Some drink, some search for a drug to take away the pain, yet some stand strong and lift their voices to a God who understands. Yet, a cry is heard for justice; for people to listen to their loss. The poorest of the poor mourn homes that are uninsured, electrical power that has not been restored and a disaster not yet over.

In the aftermath

of the tragedy, the survivors are sent to what amounts to a foreign land, removed from family and friends. The people of the Lower Ninth Ward are exiled. They are told they may not ever be able to return home and that funds have run out for trailers or hotel rooms. Yet, life will come back, as our team leader so aptly wrote in the following poem:



Life Comes Back

*Today I saw a butterfly
Orange against a bright blue sky,
Beneath its flight a battered earth
Having just come through the worst,
Cars and homes turned
upside down,
Trees uprooted from the ground.
Families broken-hearted
with too much loss
A community unable
to bear the cost.*

*Piles of rubble that
once were homes
Standing silently alone.
Here and there lay a favorite toy
Once loved and cherished
by a girl or boy.
Utter destruction of a
village called home
Lost a life so familiar and known.
And here and there grew
grass bright green
Lending hope to a somber scene.*

*I saw a smile on a small child's face
Delighted to have found
a playing place.
No matter what happens
– Life comes back
Over and over that is a fact.*

*Today I saw a butterfly
Orange against a bright blue sky.*

*Megan Bronson, New Orleans,
Louisiana, November 12, 2005*



First Sisters of Providence in the West. Seated, from left: Praxedes of Providence, Mother Joseph and Mary of the Precious Blood. Standing, from left: Vincent de Paul and Blandine of the Holy Angels.

Celebrating God's Favor

Coming in April

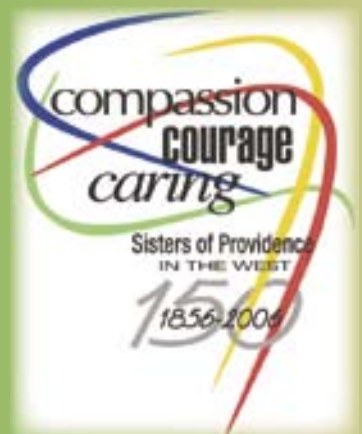
Seattle is the location of a major community celebration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Providence in the West and of the 2006 Jubilarians. Mass will be celebrated at 11 a.m. Saturday, April 22, at St. James Cathedral, 804 Ninth Avenue. (For list of other events, see Page 6.) Presider will be The Most Reverend Alex J. Brunett, Archbishop of Seattle. A reception will follow at the Yesler Community Center, 917 East Yesler Way. If you plan to attend this event, please call 206-464-4730 to RSVP.

That same weekend, Providence Connection, a reunion gathering with former Sisters of Providence, will be held at the former Providence Heights in Issaquah. More than 110 former sisters from the United States and Alberta, Canada, have registered to attend the three-day event, along with 50 current Sisters of Providence.

"We believe all women who share the Providence experience, however long or short, are Providence Women," says Sister Mary Wilson, organizer of the Providence Connection. "It is our desire to reconnect and renew with each and every one possible."

Not only renewal but some healing of relationships is needed for women who left the religious community in the wake of the tremendous changes brought by Vatican II, Sister Mary adds. In the past, small numbers of former sisters occasionally have gathered after the annual Jubilee celebration, but no assembly of this magnitude has occurred before.

The group's activities will include attending the 150th anniversary celebration at the cathedral on Saturday. ●





Charlene Hudon, SP

Editor's Note:

Charlene Hudon, SP, and Mary Ellen Robinson, SNJM, went to Washington, D.C., September 24-26 to join a broad cross-section of an estimated 300,000 people making a unified statement of opposition to the war on Iraq and a plea to bring our troops home. The two sisters represented the religious communities who sponsor the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center (IPJC). This is Sister Charlene's account of the events.



Photo captions are from Sister Mary Ellen Robinson, SNJM.

Another MARCH ON WASHINGTON



IPJC delegates Sisters Mary Ellen Robinson, SNJM (left), and Charlene Hudon, SP

Going to D.C. was an experience of meeting people from all over the world. Though the marchers themselves were mostly white, interracial solidarity was strong. ▼

