



Saltwater damaged trucks in lot that flooded after Katrina
New Orleans, LA
Photo by P.I.M.C.

APPENDIX 3: SERMON

JESSICA CHADWICK, UTS AND CUSSW

A SERMON PREACHED ON RETURN FROM THE TRIP.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release of the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor... They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations... I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” (Isaiah 61)

“LET THIS HOUSE STAND” “DO NOT TEAR DOWN” “WHERE IS FEMA?”

“WE’RE COMING BACK” “TWO PEOPLE FOUND HERE” “DESTROY THIS HOUSE”

These are some of the signs painted on what remains of houses in neighborhoods affected by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. Spray painted on fronts of houses. Houses without roofs, without furniture, without people. Some houses had been moved off their foundations and moved to other neighborhoods. And some houses, luckily, are standing.

The devastation we witnessed was astonishing. The stories we heard were intense. It is difficult even to describe the experience. We heard stories of survival and stories of death; stories about God’s mercy and about God’s will. We heard conspiracy theories and thoughts of thankfulness for government aid.

But the need to rebuild was the theme that tied our trip together as we traveled. Some people we met had already begun this process, like the Ashbakers in Ocean Springs, who

were cleaning up debris from the storm surge that swept away all but the foundation of their house. And like Mr. Morgan, a 78-year old African-American man from New Orleans, whose house had been flooded and was now filled with mold. Others, like many of the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, had not even returned to assess the damage. But for everyone, the question was, "How will we rebuild?"

In today's reading from Isaiah, the prophet brings God's word to the people of Jerusalem, instructing them how to rebuild their destroyed city. Surely many passionate ideas and conversations were floating through the minds and lips of the Israelite people at the time. Many questions: Who exactly was to blame for the destruction? What of God's protection and God's covenant? How shall the city be rebuilt?

Jerusalem was a holy city; the mountain where God resided - Mt. Zion. And the Israelites were a holy people with whom God had made a holy covenant, an everlasting covenant, a promise of protection in exchange for worship, justice and service. And although the Israelite people had faltered many times in upholding their end of the deal, God had always remained faithful. That is, until the Babylonian army showed up. Now many empires had dominated the city of Jerusalem. Yet, nothing caused as much destruction and damage as the exile that occurred under the leadership of the Babylonian Empire.

A people in exile, refugees in their own land. Can't you just hear people asking why God had forsaken them? Can't you just hear the debates of blame? Was the Babylonian army solely to blame or was this God's doing? Some prophets cited the lack of faithfulness among the Israelites as the cause for God's wrath, which in turn caused the destruction. Was it the fault of the Israelite leaders? Should they have been prepared and provided more substantial, punctual relief to the exiled people?

After years of exile the Persian Emperor permitted the Israelites to return home to begin the rebuilding process. And so the questions, "Who will return home? Which

neighborhoods will be rebuilt and which will remain devastated? Will there be enough resources, jobs, schools, houses of worship in the city to sustain the population that existed before the destruction. Will the covenant with God be re-established? Like the Ashbakers and Mr. Morgan, the people of Jerusalem were ready to pick up the tools and get to work – ready to begin the clean-up process. But how? What should the city look like?

In Mr. Morgan's house, rebuilding began with destroying. I was with a group of students who went to help Mr. Morgan gut the basement of his house. The house had severe flood damage inside; the drywall, the insulation, the floorboards – everything was moldy. It was so moldy, in fact, that we were not permitted to enter without suits, goggles, and masks covering every part of our body. We tore out nail after nail, brought down board after board, ripped out pieces of this man's life, so it seemed, and we called it rebuilding.

This is not so different from Isaiah's directive to rebuild. The prophet preaches that the barriers of society must be torn down, that the walls of separation must no longer exist. He preaches good news to the oppressed, words of liberty, release, comfort, repair, justice and promise. Isaiah writes that God requires a new community - a community of justice. We discern that God is speaking to those who have experienced the destruction of their homes as well as the oppressions of poverty and captivity. We hear God declare that the rebuilt community must include justice. A new community must be built on solid rock and not on sinking sand.

This is true of the Gulf region as well. We've heard various debates these past few months. Not only about blame, but also about what to do now – whose responsibility is it to rebuild. If we heed Isaiah's advice, we will not build tourist attractions (casinos) to increase revenue, but communities to increase justice. We will be concerned about the racial and socio-economic composition of the Gulf region. God tells us what things to be

concerned about — affordable housing and the input of minority and poor communities in rebuilding efforts. These are what would please the Lord, according to the prophet.

By now the flood waters have receded, some supplies and resources (though certainly not enough) have arrived; the people who survived have begun to return to their homes, or what's left of them. And there is hope in Mississippi and New Orleans. Within that hope there is the ever-present question, "How will we rebuild?" That question comes up in political debates, in the media, in the hearts and minds of the victims of the disaster. We heard story after story of how people were tired of the blame-game debates. They are ready to move on. But how?

The Gulf Coast region is not the only place struggling with building community, justice and a renewed covenant with God. The region affected by the tsunami of last year, the wild fires and mudslides of California, the tornados in the Midwest, the recent mud slides of the Philippines, the mining disasters in West Virginia, the many countries affected by war and violence and genocide and poverty, by oppression, tyranny, and colonialism. There are many communities and neighborhoods in the world that are asking the questions that the Israelites asked so long ago - questions that doubt God's will and protection. And when the time comes, they ask questions about how to rebuild.

It can seem overwhelming. What can the people in our church do to help these communities in the rebuilding process in the way that Isaiah has described? Rebuilding, focused on community, compassion and justice? I believe it begins with us, here. By building our own community based on the values that Isaiah describes - liberty, justice, compassion. This church, this community, this town can become a model of what God's covenant to rebuild can look like. But we must not stop there; we must also stand up and attempt to influence the rebuilding processes in this country and beyond. And we must influence the rebuilding processes in neighborhoods that have been destroyed by

the disasters of poverty and oppression in near-by neighborhoods. As bearers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the promise of an everlasting covenant, it is our responsibility and privilege to continually preach about the covenant of community and justice that God demands.



Ocean Spring, MS
Photo by E.C.

TALLU SCHUYLER, UTS

“WHAT IS NATURAL ABOUT IT?”

I just finished cooking burritos and fajitas for fifty. Cooking for large groups of people is a skill I have to offer these movers and shakers. Sometimes I am struck silent by the talents of the others on this trip for organizing and mobilizing and analyzing and theorizing and explicating and remembering statistics. I figure one thing I can offer is to cook for them – provide a healthy meal.

And I can offer my feelings. I’ll jot a few down. I remember on Thanksgiving in New York, my father paid the full, suggested donation at the Museum of Natural History and the total tab was a hefty \$80 dollars for four of us. I said to him, “Papa, I don’t want you to pay that much! We don’t need to pay that much.” He gently asked me whether or not I felt it is our duty to pay the full amount for others who cannot. His response to me was simple and profound. This set me thinking...

It is, of course, socialism on a basic level. I love my Papa for so many reasons, one of them being this gentle reminder that it matters what we do with our money.

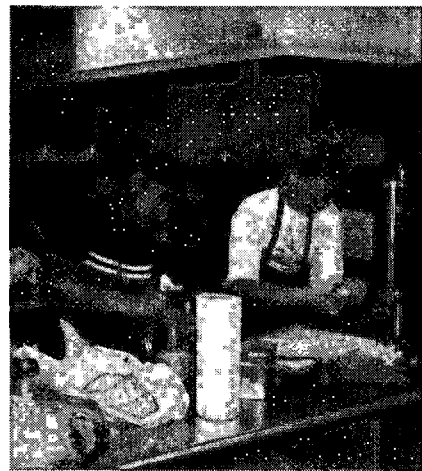
We are on this trip to explore the ramifications of this natural disaster, but the more questions I ask and the more answers I receive, the more it becomes obvious that there is more to this disaster than just the hurricane. The disaster already existed before the storm hit and before the levees broke. The disaster is and has been deeply rooted in the blatant and systematic oppression of the

poor, the working class. This disaster doesn’t exist only along the Gulf Coast, but all across this country. Lack of affordable housing, lack of legislation calling for a living wage, lack of adequate health care, lack of laws to protect all people, lack of politics that truly represents the people – these are the disasters. This is THE disaster. What is natural about it?

As someone who wants to be in ministry committed to social justice on local and national levels, I am immersed in this experience and wondering why faith communities want only to respond to a disaster like Katrina or Ivan or Rita, when a disaster exists for millions of people in our country who are devastated all the time, every single day. How can we get our communities of faith to situate their ministries in ending the systems that oppress poor people, rather than cleaning up after the death that oppression delivers?

What does it mean to have no home? What does it mean to be home-less? These problems we are exploring are so big. They are so huge and where do I enter in? Where will I find my work within this movement? Do I focus on health care, welfare, prison reform, environmental racism, policy writing, advocating for voting rights, teaching, childcare, youth work, domestic violence, affordable housing, chaplaincy – where? I am so small. And while I feel small, I also feel important. It is important to ask these questions. And it was important to make that meal.

I go to bed wondering how I can live a life committed to doing this work. And I pray.



Pakhi Sengupta and Tallu Schulyer
preparing dinner
Pensacola, FL
Photograph by C.W-M.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

On August 28, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Louisiana Coast. Possibly the largest hurricane of its force ever recorded, it devastated much of the coastline of Louisiana and Mississippi and its winds damaged parts of Alabama. While initial reports indicated limited damage in New Orleans, subsequently the storm surge breached the levee system that separated New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain, and waters quickly flooded 80 to 90 percent of the city, much of which is below sea level.

As many as 1,400 lives were lost in the storm and more than 3,000 people are missing. Over 200,000 homes were destroyed and up to 1.5 million people were displaced - an unspeakable humanitarian tragedy.

In the next week, students began to gather at the Union Theological Seminary to begin the 2005-06 academic year and immediately began considering how they could answer the inner call to respond to the tragedy.

We must respond as when a child is hurt we rush to hold the child, and when friends are in mourning, the heart cries out to be with them, in love, to share their grief, to pray with them, to affirm that they are not alone. Though for most of us the hurricane's victims



Local grocery store
Biloxi, Mississippi
Photograph by P.I.M.C.

were strangers, we knew at the same time that we are all brothers and sisters.

The immediate response was to contribute to the relief efforts of congregations, denominations, and various charitable institutions; it was too early to go in person, but later we would go.

As the days passed, it became clear that this was a tragedy of human failure as much as a natural disaster. It was a failure of the government: Studies had shown that the levees would not hold in a storm of this magnitude, yet the responsible bodies of the federal government lacked the will and the funds to improve them. It was later shown that the existing levees were poorly constructed. While the Weather Bureau had provided adequate warning, the plans to evacuate were totally inadequate, lacking any understanding of the real-life situation of the inhabitants of low-lying areas. How could they evacuate if they had no cars? Only twenty-one of sixty nursing homes were evacuated because not enough buses were provided.

The Katrina tragedy was also a FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) tragedy. The effectiveness of FEMA appeared to be undermined by the patronage appointments of incompetent leaders. FEMA was further weakened when it was subsumed under the Department of Homeland Security, which is geared to fight terrorists, not deal with natural disasters.

This was also a tragedy of the sin of society in general: We live under a banner of individual responsibility that proclaims that each person is liable for his or her own salvation. Success or failure --

these labels are our own creation. The society no longer affirms the common good and that we are members one of another.

The students were increasingly aware that this hurricane revealed some of the stark realities of poverty and race in this country. While in some cases the media expressed surprise at the extent of poverty in New Orleans, the students recognized a human tragedy that is manifest among White and Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian in cities and rural areas throughout the country. The pain of poverty and the economic divisions between rich and poor in this country are obvious to anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

The initial mission of the Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary, the movement at Union that helped organize a response to this nationwide problem, has been to expose the seminary family to the burdens of poverty around us and to bring poor and non-poor together to develop a movement to end poverty. This injustice demands our response. That between one-fourth and one-fifth of the children in this, the wealthiest country in the world, are growing up in poverty, that forty million or more people lack health insurance, that increasing numbers of our citizens are unemployed or living on the margins, is a moral outrage. Why does this outrage not burn in the conscience of every American of good will? Why do we remain immune to this most devastating sickness of our society? For a flashing moment the victims of Hurricane Katrina, in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, became representative of the much larger population of poor people around the country. Would

the awareness last or soon be forgotten? Would anything change or would there be only political posturing, blather and inaction?

To fulfill their longings to express human solidarity with those who were hurting, and to further deepen their understanding of the situation, a group of students began planning for an “immersion trip” to the area that would be held in January 2006, between the fall and spring semesters. The trip would be planned with the help of organizations of poor people, including organized evacuees, who have unique and authentic insights into the nature of the disaster. Thanks to Jessica Chadwick, a student registered at both Union Theological Seminary and the Columbia University School of Social Work, the trip became a project of both graduate schools. The administration of both schools agreed to give academic credit for the trip which included organized reflection and evaluation both before and after the experience.

Resolved to include poor people in all of our programs to end poverty, the Poverty Initiative has been responsible for bringing a poor and formerly homeless man to Union Seminary as a Scholar-in-Residence, Willie Baptist. It is he, together with Liz Theoharis, a Ph.D. student and one of the founders of the Poverty Initiative and Professor John Robertson of the Columbia University School of Social Work who “taught” the course, which was entitled “Katrina, Poverty, Race, Ministry and Ethics: an Immersion Experience.” They were joined by Steed Davidson and Jan Rehmann, members of the faculty of Union.

This book is a report from the immersion experience – reasons for the trip, photos, and the personal reflections of the students. This volume is not intended as a comprehensive study of the effects of the hurricane on the lives of those who were affected, but rather the deeply personal feelings of forty-nine people, mostly graduate students, who traveled, who saw, and who listened. It is written to share the longings of our hearts with you, and to demonstrate our resolve to sustain these memories, that we may respond with our lives.

THE COURSE DESCRIPTION

The following course description was distributed to Union Seminary students, inviting them to register for the course:

“The systemic realities exposed in light of Katrina are not newly present, newly discovered, newly studied, newly impactful or newly important. Poverty, racism, violence, governmental irresponsibility and disregard, and all the other system-level realities that can be recognized in this disaster have been brought to the general consciousness of the American public in vivid Technicolor through Katrina’s focusing mirror. Their interrelatedness and the need for an integrated systematic approach are also vividly clear. Forty-five million people have no health insurance; three million jobs have been eliminated in New York City since 9/11; soup kitchen visits are up 15 percent; child homelessness is at an all-time high. What are religious leaders and other people of conscience to do in the face of growing poverty, homelessness and misery? How are religious

leaders responding to the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma?

“This course will explore the reality of poverty and race relations in the Gulf Coast, in the towns and cities where Katrina evacuees have moved, and across the United States, and offer tools for overcoming and eliminating poverty. A hands-on and experience-based course, it will include dialogue with leaders and members of local and national congregations and poor people’s organizations, documentation in poor and other affected communities, Bible studies, video showings, and reality tours. Significant time will be spent discussing the theological implications of a “natural” disaster like Hurricane Katrina and the role of religious communities in responding to such disasters as well as the long-term disasters of poverty, homelessness, and racism.

“We will spend time in four affected cities – Atlanta, Pensacola, Biloxi and New Orleans – where students will be hosted by local congregations and community organizations involved in the relief effort.

“Before leaving, participants will prepare for the visits to the Gulf Coast by reading about the history and culture of the area, poverty programs in the South and nationally, and the economic and social impact of Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters.

Participants will have the opportunity to learn about relief efforts and the situation of Katrina evacuees in the New York City area. Upon return from the Gulf Coast region, students will have time to

reflect further on the theological and ministerial implications of the visit and course.”

VIRTUAL TRAVELING

Students as well as the general public who were not able to go to the Gulf were invited to “travel” with the group by following the trip’s blog that would be posted online each night. The blog included Biblical passages and contemporary writings for theological reflection and the thoughts of the students as the week progressed. Many of those reports and reflections are included in the text that follows.

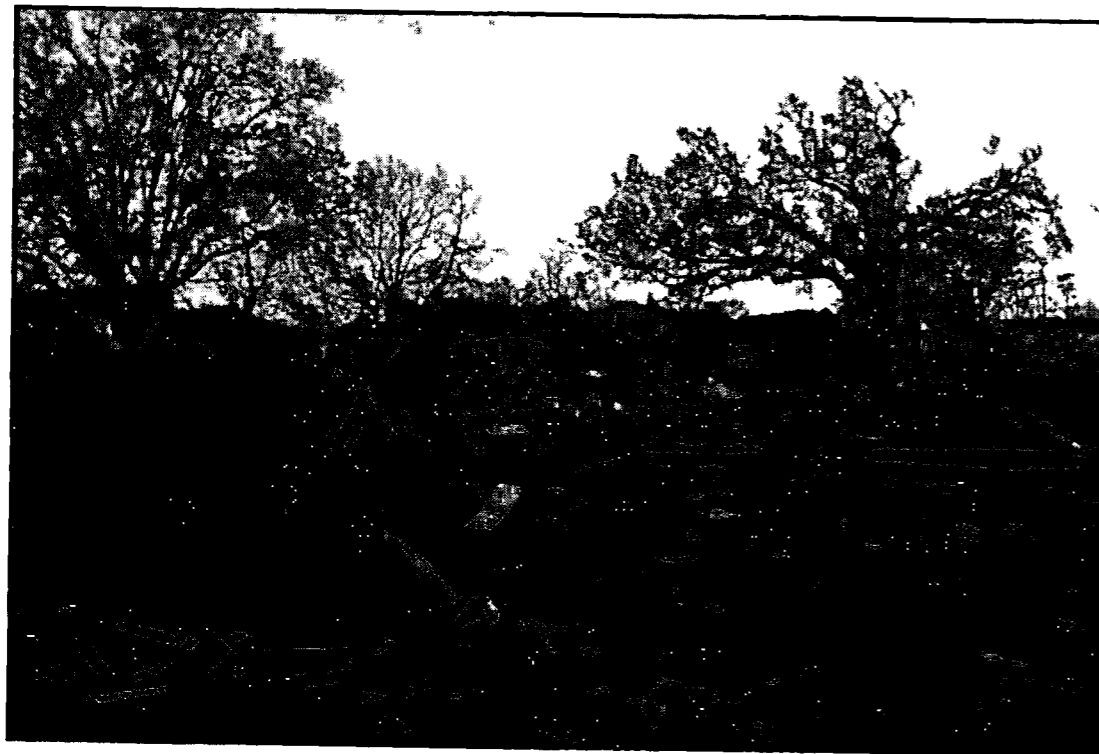
LISTENING

So often, programs designed to benefit poor people and to alleviate the burdens of poverty are designed by non-poor people – people who have not known in their own lives the burden of hunger, homelessness, untreated illnesses, inadequate educational opportunities, or unfulfilled lives. Too often the people who personally understand and know effective ways of overcoming poverty are excluded from the discussion. In many ways their voice and their talents are ignored. Even in the days immediately following the Katrina disaster, many of those affected were not allowed a role in the recovery process.

It was the conscious goal of the Katrina course to listen to the victims, to hear and value and document their stories. A paper, written by Hannah Hofheinz and distributed to the students before the trip, reads in part:

"We will listen to the voices and the wisdom of people who were disproportionately affected by Katrina. We want to ask the questions that aren't normally asked. For example,

- 'What keeps you in poverty?'
- 'Who benefits from having a poor class of people in our country?'
- 'How does race, religion, or ethnic background affect your life and the life of your children?'
- 'What can be done to eliminate poverty?'
- 'What hope or possibilities do you see for progress on race relations in this country?'"



9th Ward,
New Orleans, LA
January, 2006
Photograph by E.C.

MEDITATION

CHAPTER 2

PAUL CHAPMAN, POVERTY INITIATIVE

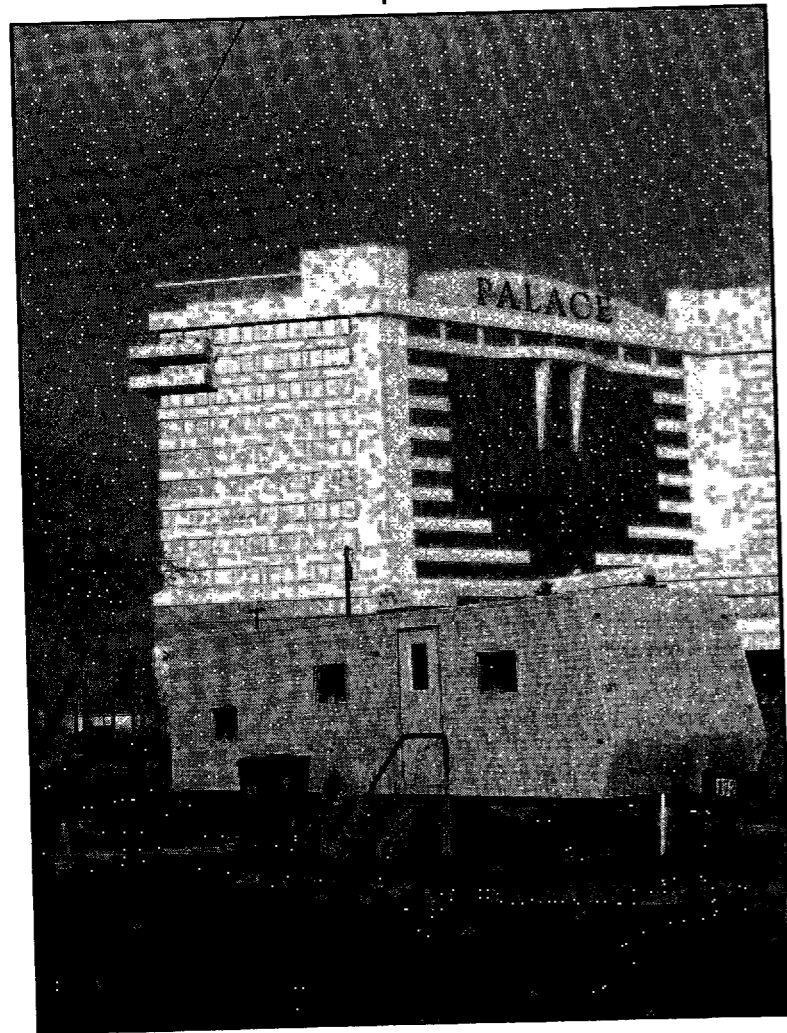
While reading the Katrina blog, day by day, I was also reading an English translation [from the German] of Rainer Maria Rilke's, *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*. Rilke's search for God is the search for relationship.

I know that nothing has ever been real
without my beholding it.
All becoming has needed me.
My looking ripens things
and they come toward me, to meet and be met.

Was not this the goal of the Katrina trip? To behold those who are otherwise ignored? We bring others to life when we take heed of them, and they move toward us as we move toward them.

We all have a story to tell, but who will listen? If there is no one near, no one to hear, in the silence the value of life diminishes. In the student's encounter with the victims of Katrina, people who are traditionally ignored are now respected in their wholeness. Seeing the image of God in "the least of these" affirms their dignity. The encounter releases power and creativity in us and in them. The relationships that developed during the trip were acts of creative love for all those who could hear and see.

Isaiah does not envision assimilation in new lands or settling down in exile, although some Israelites did start over and chose not to return. In Isaiah it is important that the city is restored, that the people survive as a people, not only individuals. Cultures and communities are valuable. God's justice in Isaiah is communal rebuilding and communal flourishing: God's people are the focus and priority, not wealth. Perhaps this is why the Bible is so important—it imagines what should be there when we cannot picture it.



FEMA trailer and Palace Casino
Biloxi, MS
Photo by N.K.

LIZ THEOHARIS, UTS

While talking with Diane in her trailer (it wasn't a FEMA trailer, it was the trailer of a friend; the government still hasn't come through), I noticed a statue of the Last Supper complete with Jesus and the twelve disciples. The statue has a story; it looks and smells like it's been through the seventh level of Dante's Hell. But there's a story everywhere in Ocean Springs: 30-foot high water, no animals for miles, homes and cars completely washed away. And now five months later, everything in Ocean Springs has a distinct smell, the smell of mold and sewage and salt water and fire. The statue smells, but the biggest thing about it is what's missing. The statue is perfectly intact (no chips, no scratches) except that Judas' head just isn't there. It's gone. Is there meaning in that?

This statue is just one of the things broken by the Hurricane. And for a while now, I have struggled to make sense of the destruction and devastation from Hurricane Katrina. Especially the devastation of the thousands of lives created by God. I can't say that God willed this. Or even that God did this. But I can identify some of the complicity that led to all the death and destruction. Death and destruction that I know God doesn't approve of. How is it that as many as 5,000 people have died in Mississippi and no one knows? How is it that the only rebuilding going on in Biloxi is of the casinos? Why is it that to sign up for assistance from FEMA you have to get on-line and sign onto the FEMA website? Or wait in a line in a casino where the federal government is paying rent to a private company?

We saw a lot in eight days. Diane has been living through it for five months. Ron, for over a year. We saw undocumented immigrants doing clean-up and working the casinos. They aren't getting paid, nor are the thousands of unemployed residents of Biloxi. We saw many Vietnamese families with nowhere to work or live, their fishing boats destroyed in the storm. Their boats were their homes and their jobs. FEMA isn't handing out any boats. Really, FEMA isn't handing out anything.

People asked us, "Can you imagine?..." No. I can't. How can I imagine thirty feet of water? How can I imagine having to swim down from the ceiling of my house to swim out the window? How can I imagine seeing my house disappear under the water and never re-emerge?

I've seen devastation: My grandma's house burned down and she lost almost everything that Adeline and George Theoharis possessed.



New Orleans, LA
Photo by E.C.

Kensington, North Philadelphia, looks like a bomb dropped decades ago (a bomb of deindustrialization and neglect) and continues to drop. Immokalee, Florida, where thousands of farm workers live in trailers with eight or ten people for their entire lives is a devastation. But, I still can't imagine. I saw just a

fraction of the devastation and I still can't imagine.

But then, maybe I can. Right now, people are outraged. I am outraged. We all should be outraged. Part of what has outraged us will dissipate. Much of it will stay. Families are going to try to rebuild but it seems impossible. We've lost whole communities. People live in utter devastation. There are no jobs. The government doesn't seem to care. The churches will never be able to do enough. The general public doesn't even know what's going on.

And yet down South this January, I saw the beginnings of a real social movement. People are moving. Their minds are moving; they realize that their tax dollars and their children are going for war in another part of the world, but they can't get help in the face of devastation and disaster here. They are talking about this. People are building communities across diversity that never existed before the Hurricane. Folks said to me that they now realize that love and life and community are what really matters. This is the stuff that social movements are made of.

So, back to that statue of Judas Iscariot. I have spent a lot of time over the past months studying the Gospel of John. I am obsessed with John 12 where Jesus says, "The poor you have with you always." In John, Jesus says this to Judas. Judas, the one who will betray him; Judas, the keeper of the money box. The Gospel of John says that Judas liked to steal the community's money. Judas' challenge to Jesus that the money from the ointment used to anoint Jesus could have gone to the poor (in John 12) perhaps was a scheme to line his own pockets. Did Judas use the poor as an

excuse to make money for himself? Just like the casino owners who are using this disaster in the Gulf Coast to make a lot of money. But the Hurricane washed Judas right off that statue. Can the new communities being built in the Gulf Coast wash the greed and corruption of the casinos and other opportunistic groups and people away?

Thinking about Judas and "The poor will be with you always," I am moved by the passage in Acts 4:34 where it says, "There was no

needy person among them." This passage is a response to Judas and his money grabbing; it is a response to a "prediction" that poverty will never end; it is a response to governmental and religious authorities who insist that poverty is the fault of individuals, not the whole of society. Acts 4:34 continues, "For as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

I saw the beginnings of this community emerging in Mississippi and along the Gulf Coast. The people there lost everything they had in Hurricane Katrina and yet are rebuilding their communities, taking care of each other, sharing their food, lending a hand, and asserting that poverty can and will be ended.



Local resident bringing supplies to his car at the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Center. Bayou La Batre
Photo by P.I.M.C.

NEW ORLEANS

CHAPTER 9

CRYSTAL FARRE, CUSSW

"THE PAPER HOUSE"

Today I woke up feeling helpless and emotional about all I had witnessed and experienced over the last week. The last two days specifically were very difficult for me. I witnessed mass destruction and devastation in Biloxi and wasn't quite sure how I would emotionally be able to handle visiting New Orleans. I went through the first half of my day on the verge of tears wondering if I had made the right decision in choosing social work as a profession. I mean, how could I even make a dent in all of the injustice I had seen thus far?

Upon our arrival, we were told we could go into homes and help gut them or stay at the main site and help at the distribution center. Of course, I chose to gut a home in the Lower Ninth Ward. I was determined to get as far into the Lower Ninth Ward as possible to do work. I felt like I needed to witness for myself the nucleus of the destruction to help me heal. How would this help me? I wasn't sure. I guess it's kind of like being afraid of heights and going to the Empire State Building; I wanted to face my fear head on. My heart was heavy and my stomach in knots on the way to Common Ground. I know so many people wanted to go and I also know that I needed

in my eyes. But it took a simple conversation with a very ill man to make me actually feel.

The devastation we witnessed was, on some level, too massive to process. I saw neighborhoods in pieces around us, and I did not cry. I saw body counts painted on remnants of doorways, and I was still. I saw hundreds of homeless people, faces brown like mine, trying to fall asleep on a cold linoleum floor, and I watched in silence. It all seemed too much. I was objective, cold, wondering where my tears for them had gone. In all of this, it is Arvin whom I remember most. It is this man, so similar to my sister, who finally touched me to the core.

My story of Arvin is in some ways the story of our trip, or of any journey we as witness someone else's suffering. It is the story of our limited human capacity to truly connect; of our need to break down all of the pain and find in it ourselves. To look for our own lives and experiences in another person's story – that is the grace of emotion that finally comes when you find your family face in a stranger's.

TEXTUAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 10

Each morning we began with a Bible reflection led by Steed Davidson of the Union faculty. We studied passages from Isaiah in dialogue with more contemporary writings. These reflections helped us find our place among that great cloud of witnesses who throughout the centuries have sought to live faithful lives.

OUR TEXTS

Isaiah 6:1-13, read with "The Trumpet of Conscience" (excerpts) by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Isaiah 40:1-11, read with "Survival" by Bob Marley

Isaiah 49:1-26, read with "Ain't I a Woman?" (excerpts) by Sojourner Truth

Isaiah 61:1-9, read with the *Declaration of Independence*

Isaiah 62:1-12, read with "The Dilemma of Negro Americans" from *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Isaiah 64:1-11, read with "The Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln

Additional texts: Isaiah 1:1-28; 5:1-7; 10:33-11:12; 19:18-25

Written in spray paint on the side of a destroyed house in Biloxi "Habakkuk 2:3"

Habakkuk 2:1-4

1 I will take my stand to watch, and station myself on the tower, and look forth to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

2 And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision, make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it."

3 For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

4 Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

COLLEEN WESSEL-McCOY, UTS

PHOTO ESSAY

ISAIAH 6:8-12; 61:1-4, 8-9

⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

⁹And I said, "Here I am; send me!" And he said, "Go and say to this people:

'Keep listening, but do not comprehend;

Keep looking, but do not understand.'



Lower 9th Ward
New Orleans, LA
Photo by P.I.M.C.

¹⁰ Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed."



Biloxi, MS
November, 2005
Photo by M.L.

"Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said:
"Until cities lie waste without inhabitant,



Biloxi, MS
Photo by L.P.

And houses without people,



Lower 9th Ward, one block from the Industrial Canal Levee
New Orleans, LA
Photo by K.Z.

And the land is utterly desolate;



Biloxi, MS
November, 2005
Photo by M.L.

¹² Until the Lord sends everyone far away,



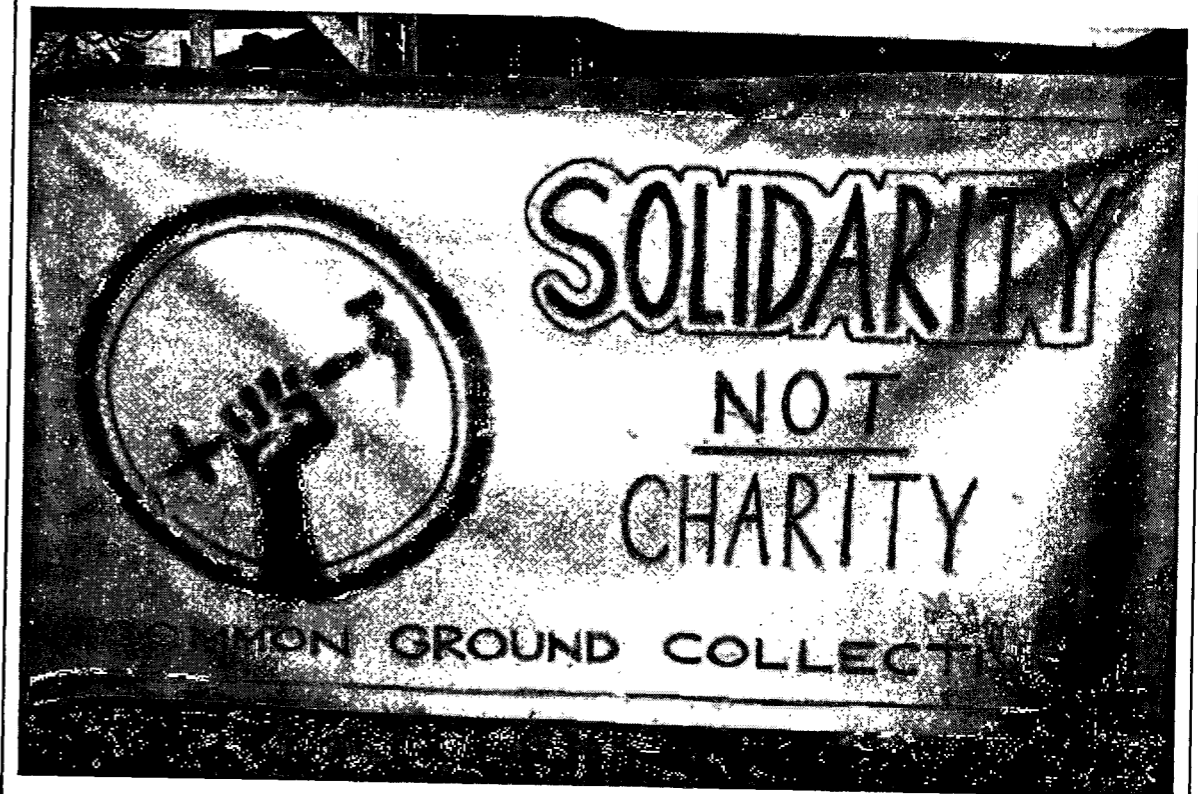
Biloxi, MS
Photo by M.L.

And vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.



Biloxi, MS
Photo by L.P.

^{61:1}The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed;
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;



New Orleans, LA
Photo by N.K.

³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.



Photo by K.Z.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

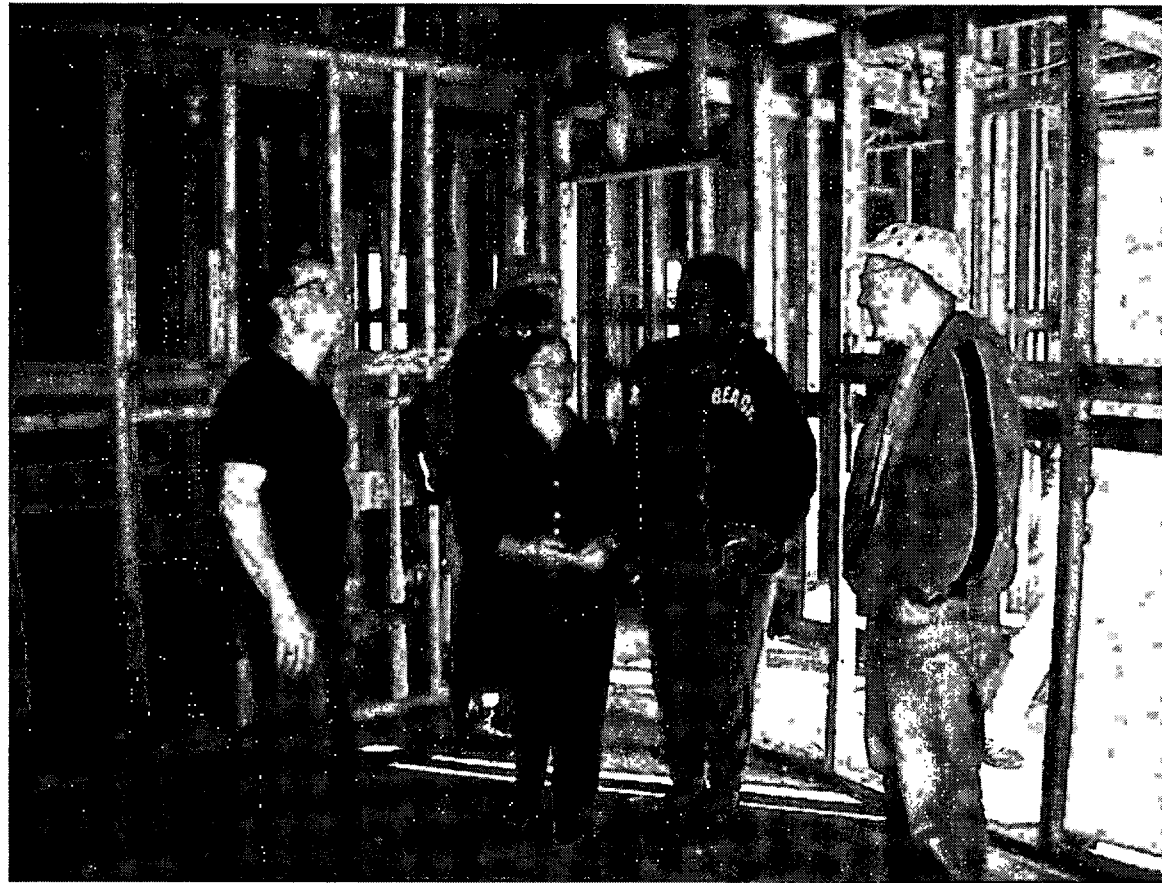


Mama Dee's house,
Seventh Ward,
New Orleans, LA

Mama Dee along with groups like the Soul Patrol and Common Ground,
are working to bring people back to New Orleans.

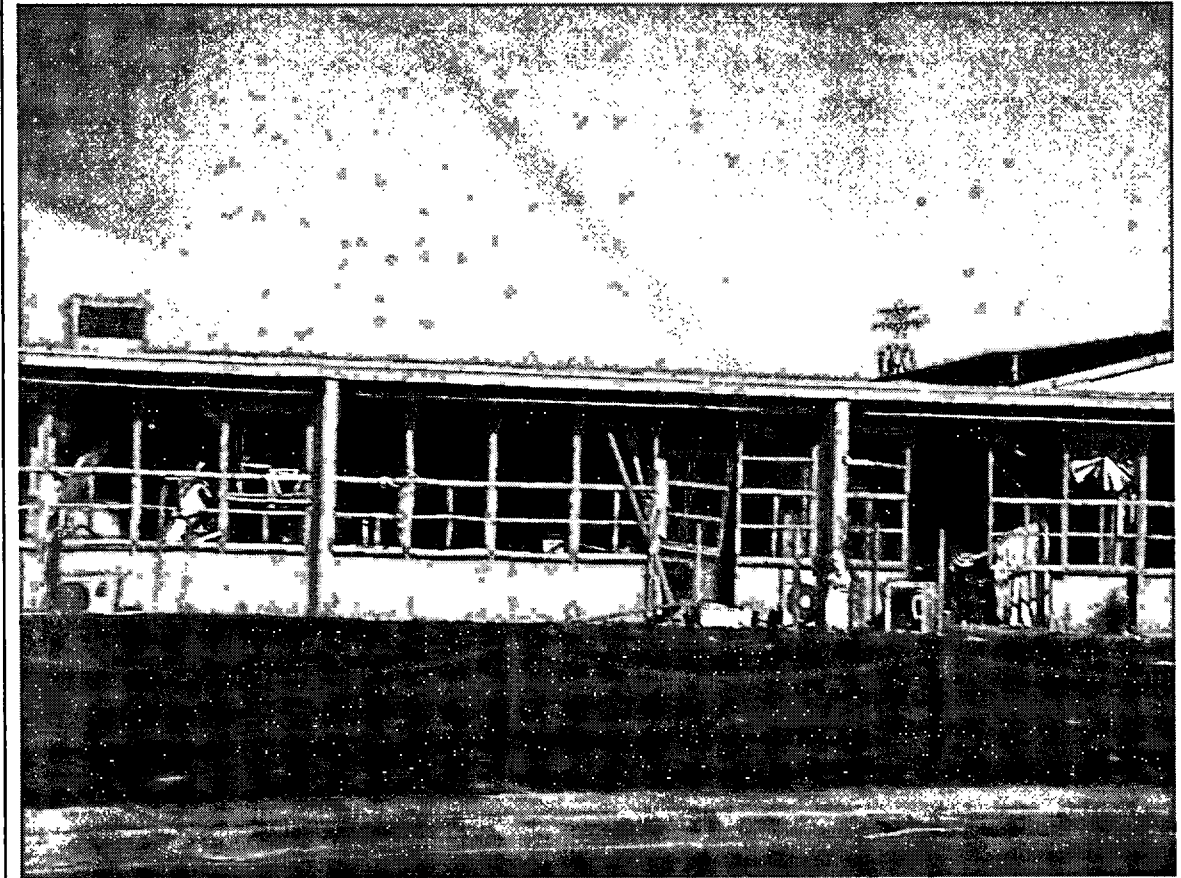
Photo by P.I.M.C.

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;



Cynthia Wilson (right of center) speaks with UTS alum Rev. Carol Burnett (left of center) from the Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative about the rebuilding of their facility.
Biloxi, MS
Photo by S.H.

they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.



School
Biloxi, MS
Photo by M.L.

^{61:8} For I, the Lord, love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense
And I will make an everlasting covenant with them.



Biloxi, MS
Photo by E.C.

⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people who the Lord has blessed.



Biloxi, MS
Photo by E.C.



New Orleans, LA
Photo by N.K.

STEED DAVIDSON, UTS

“I LEFT MY SHOES BEHIND”

Part of the briefing for our work on several projects indicated the possibility of leaving our work boots and clothes behind. After one day of work and only having one set of work shoes and clothes, I kept my shoes and clothes for other days. To keep them separate from my other clothes I placed them in plastic bags and fully thought that I would return with them to New York this way. Even after our work day in New Orleans, which included dressing in a Tivek suit along with masks, doubled gloves, and goggles, I felt that I could still return with my shoes. While packing to leave I looked at my shoes with traces of mud and other things not too well known to me from the various work sites between Biloxi and New Orleans. And perhaps there were other things on those shoes that I could not see with the naked eye. The briefing about mold and not getting into contact with it troubled me so that I finally decided to leave the shoes behind.

On the flight home I reflected on the decision to leave the shoes behind and recognized that it was more than just about the dirt, the mud, mold, or other toxic substance. I was leaving behind a path that I could no longer walk once I left New Orleans. I had to leave behind much of the dirt that stuck to my shoes and my path up until that point. Included in that was dirt that I had picked up in Biloxi and New Orleans. It was the dirt that came stuck to me as a result of the hurricane; dirt stirred up by misfortune and injustice, brought to the surface by inequality and unfairness, dirt that was

and is the stuff of poverty. I had to leave this behind, along with an indifference to these issues, as well as the smugness of learning about these issues third hand. Having walked through the dirt of Biloxi and New Orleans, I needed new shoes. I need new shoes in order to walk differently with respect to injustice and poverty, new shoes to confront the issues of racism and disenfranchisement, not from a distance but up close. These new shoes will define a different path for my life and work and as important and urgent as these issues are, these shoes will also surely get dirt on them. I left my shoes behind in New Orleans because I want to walk a different path. Now I need to go buy new shoes, but not in a store. I will shop for these shoes in the experiences of the past week, in the face of stories of the people that I met, in the scenes of destruction and desperation imprinted in my life. I will need to purchase these shoes in solidarity with persons who are committed to the struggle and invested in the creation of a more just society. I wonder what my new shoe size will be?

KATELL ZAPPA, CUSSW

“SOLIDARITY, NOT CHARITY”

This statement, proposed to us by many people with whom we met in the Gulf Coast region, has begun to make sense to me more and more. We didn't go down there just to lend a hand in the clean-up or to offer emotional support to traumatized residents. We also went to join an ongoing struggle to end poverty, work for racial equality, and open our eyes to entrenched problems in our country. Now that we're back, I'm trying hard not to close my eyes again, or not even to squint. Because it's not about "us" here offering charity to "them" down there.

At least, I'd like to believe that it isn't about us and them. But when I try to share a bit of the story, people don't always react the way I hope or want or expect. There are differences. And who am I to judge those reactions? I'm still working to keep my eyes open most of the time.

I know that in time I'll find a way to make a contribution to the struggle for social justice. It might be listening to people's stories in a way that hopefully makes them feel heard. Or it might be something else. I don't know yet. Right now I'm still adjusting to the jarring sense of being home and feeling like part of me should be back there, continuing to listen. That listening didn't feel like charity.

ODIS BRAXTON, JR., UTS

What started out as a class project for me has evolved into a defining, affirming commentary of "Who I am," a socially conscious, prophetic man, called by God to transform the lives of our people. After visiting the area, I had expected to be at peace with the works of Hurricane Katrina, but I still remain outraged by the lack of urgency and compassion that characterized the initial response to her devastation; and I'm heartbroken over the avoidable suffering that shocked all of us as it unfolded along the Gulf Coast of the United States of America. In a previous life, I was a soldier in the United States Army, and I am well familiar with what our government can't do. But, I also know what it can do. I can tell you, without reservation, that our government's performance in the all-important initial stages of this crisis was insufficient. It was a crisis that wasn't just foreseeable, it was foreseen. This tragedy exposed the entire world to the depths of the poverty, inequality, and, yes, racism, that continue to govern the lives of the majority of African-Americans in this country. I use the word "racism" because ignoring the victims in the Gulf region had everything to do with who they were: underprivileged, minority, and voiceless.

I use "racism" with no remorse; racism was clearly present in my mind in the aftermath of Katrina. I can recall seeing a photo in a major publication with a pair of White men who were described in a caption as water loggers "carrying" food, while another picture (in a different publication) of Blacks, chest deep in water, in possession of food and other supplies was labeled, "Looters."

"While about 55,000 Louisiana families are waiting, at least 10,000 trailers are deteriorating in a muddy field in Hope, Arkansas, because FEMA regulations prohibit them from being installed in flood-prone coastal areas. Only about 2,700 of the 25,000 mobile homes ordered at a cost of \$850 million have been installed"

The New York Times
Feb. 14, 2006

Just blocks from the Superdome, 200 New Orleans school buses, enough to have evacuated 13,000 people, had been sitting in water, not being utilized. But an innovative, unnamed African-American male, who had been stranded in the "The Dome" thought of how these buses could best serve mankind. He put his engineering skills to work and hot wired a bus to transport others to higher ground. The media called him a thug but others in the community, like me, called him a hero. After arriving in the area and hearing the stories of what transpired in the Superdome, I now wonder if there was a conspiracy within the media to further degrade the underprivileged, minorities, and voiceless United States taxpaying citizens.

While visiting Biloxi, I shared a few sober moments with Shab who was displaced by the hurricane. Somehow he made his way to Houston to live with relatives, but found himself and his sixteen family members jam-packed into Houston's Astrodome and recognized the anger among his New Orleans neighbors: "People felt neglected, abandoned. They felt that the law enforcement and the government had treated them poorly. It may not be on their agenda today to return," he added, but, "the vast majority of people will want to come back if the circumstances are right." Shab is the owner of The Eating Table, a Vietnamese restaurant in Biloxi, that had ten full-time and four part-time employees. His restaurant had grown by leaps and bounds over the past fifteen years with the legalization of gambling in the state of Mississippi and the considerable influx of Vietnamese immigrants into the community.

Of the \$5.6 billion in Small Business Administration loans that have been approved for Gulf Coast businesses, as of March 13, 2006, only \$473,410 have been paid out.

Newsweek
3/13/06

His family business was growing and had generated \$130,000 in profits the year prior to Hurricane Katrina.

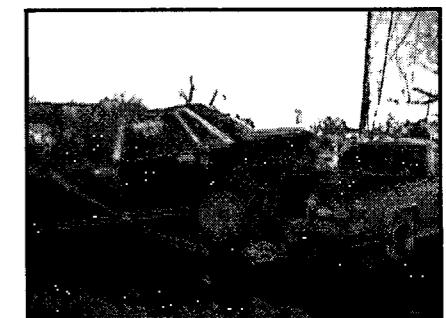
Now he is unsure what will happen to him, his family, or his business. The majority of his customers were Vietnamese (casino employees and renters in the community) but now, since both homes and casinos have been washed away, his customers fled the area as their homes and employment disappeared. Shab is uncertain what steps the government will take to help his business, which was not insured for natural disasters. Thus far, his family received \$360 per adult from the American Red Cross and a \$2,000 check from FEMA on September 12. All he can do is wait and hope. "I'm hoping that through FEMA I can get back on my feet," he said. "Small businesses are the lifeblood of this part of Mississippi."

In January, the Lower Ninth Ward still looked like a war zone while the 20 percent of New Orleans that wasn't flooded seems normal enough. But the pictures don't even begin to convey the scope of what seventeen days of standing water will do to the delicate environment of a metropolitan area. I have to be honest: My confidence in our nation was shaken by what I saw in the days and weeks after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. But my confidence in its people is stronger than ever. While visiting I saw great Americans of all races and backgrounds pulling together, showing a selfless courage and a willingness to do the right thing, which is inspiring and gives me hope. Where I have lost confidence is in our government's unwillingness to purge itself of the racist indifference that has marked every stage of this tragedy. I saw people of every

color, age, sex, and creed sweating to improve the living conditions of some people that they will never meet.

Everyone who lives by the coast in Louisiana and Mississippi knows perfectly well that when a warning comes, they need to quickly secure their homes, get in their cars, and head for their relatives, or a hotel some distance inland. But what if you don't have a car, what if you don't have handy relatives, or what if you don't have money for a hotel? Tyrone (the building custodian at St. Charles Presbyterian Church) lived on Lizardi Street in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans and never heard the mayor's warning to evacuate the city because of the pending storm. Tyrone stated, "Even if I had, I had nowhere to go or money to get there. I work from paycheck to paycheck with very little discretionary spending." The morning of September 1 the floodwaters continued to rise and later the levee on the Industrial Canal that protects the Lower Ninth failed. Tyrone decided to seek higher ground for his wife and son -- the crawl space for what should be an attic was their safe haven. The storm had ripped off their roof and pieces were still flying in the wind along with insulation, articles of clothing and anything else that you could imagine. Two days later they were still in that attic when someone with a boat came to their rescue. They made their way to St. Charles Presbyterian Church, eight miles away and nine feet above sea level from where they were then transported to the "Superdome."

The irony of what happened on the Gulf Coast, especially in New Orleans is almost too painful to point out: Americans are used to



Flood destruction
Lower 9th Ward
New Orleans, LA
Photo by N.K.

"They are better off
in the dome than at home."
Flood of indifference.

John Robertson

sitting back on the sofa and admiring the sporting skills of those athletes who grace the Superdome, a great theater of dreams; but that week Americans gazed at the Superdome in horror as a theater of nightmares. The hurricane has exposed the way America has come to tolerate grotesque extremes of wealth. Of the 30,000 people in the Superdome, no more than 100 were White. How many more people throughout America are living in economic and social conditions that leave them vulnerable to the terrorism of Nature? And why has all of this apparently taken America, or at least its government, by surprise?

Hurricane Katrina has revealed the truth about Nature, that it is always a potential terrorist at our door and is never to be underestimated. Hurricane Katrina has revealed the truth about America, that it is a nation that tolerates potentially catastrophic levels of poverty, and has not yet come to terms with the racial dimension of its social inequalities, and ignores climate change at its own peril. Hurricane Katrina has revealed the truth about God, that however mysterious his ways he has definitively acted in a way that denies death the last word. But has Hurricane Katrina also revealed the truth about us? When you see those pictures, do you react as a child of Nature, a fellow American, or a child of God? Nature has always been dangerous, America has always been a land of extremes, and God has always loved us. But when God is God and Nature is Nature, then it's time for us to do what it is that we must do to help those in distress.



New Orleans, LA
Photo by P.I.M.C.

DIANA BELL, UTS

“BREATHE”

Airplanes. Vans. Chartered buses. Walking. We are going places. We're experiencing so much.

Fatigue has set in. I'm not processing very much or very quickly. We walked around a large building that hasn't been touched yet. Our conversation went something like

Look it's a boat

Wow, yeah

Look, there's a car.

Yes, it is.

That's a car.

Yeah.

The devastation and lack of sleep have caught up with us.

We sat down to look at a bridge that was in pieces. Four-lane highway now in twenty-five-foot chunks. It reminded us of pictures from an earthquake. It took us over ten

minutes to realize we were not sitting on the beach, but on the rubble that used to be the bridge.

Overload.



Biloxi, MS
Photo by P.I.M.C.



Biloxi, MS
Photo by N.K.

We split up this morning into five or six groups and went out into the Biloxi area to work on houses, in distribution centers, and to canvas neighborhoods for people's needs.

One woman and her son came to the church today to pick up supplies for their FEMA trailer. She said she was sick of being called displaced. I asked her what term she would prefer. "Homeless. That's what we are, isn't it," she replied, "Tell it like it is, sister."

It's amazing how simple life is. So many people we've met have lost it all and they have been forced to get back to basics. Over and over I hear people give thanks for simply being alive.

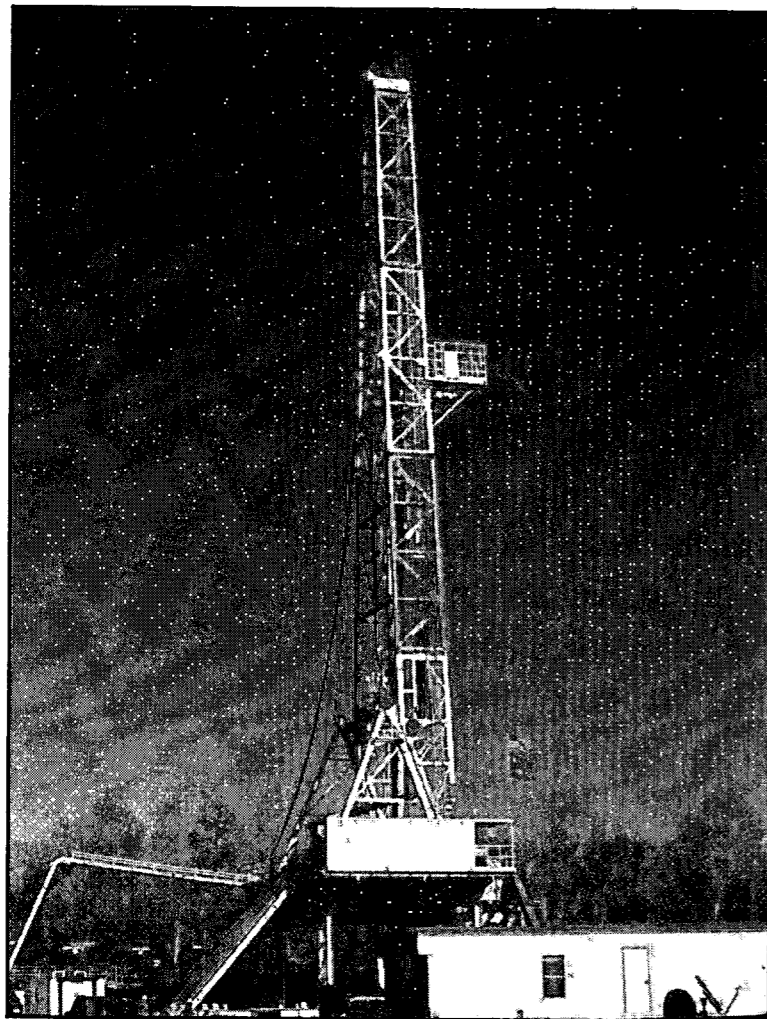
I have not even begun to process all that I've heard and seen. I cannot begin to thank all the people who have shared their grief, anger, faith, and questions.

Two days to go. Pile back in the van. Keep moving. Breathe.



Biloxi, MS
Photo by E.C.

question of how to be good in "Egypt," but how it is possible to get out of Egypt and to be good in the transition to a better world. What would a reconstruction after hurricane Katrina look like that lowered the high ground and lifted up the low ground (cf. Is. 40:4)?



Rick Mathiews showed the Philadelphia Independent Media Center participants this spot, near the 9th Ward, where they are drilling for oil. This well was not here prior to Katrina. New Orleans, LA
Photo by P.I.M.C.

WILLIE BAPTIST, SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE, UTS

Having been homeless for a while and having been poor for all my life, there were many things that I experienced during the Katrina Fact-Finding Tour and Immersion Course that triggered in me deep emotions. I cried every one of the eight days of the course's field engagement. I cried tears of sadness, tears of elation, and tears of anger. Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane FEMA made it clear to the world that the United States is languishing in profound moral, intellectual, and leadership crises. The richest country on earth is itself beset with increasing inequities, relentless racism and life-threatening and life-taking poverty. Its hypocritical refusal to deal decisively with these problems and injustices, particularly now when it has more than the means to solve them, raises serious moral and religious concerns.

At the same time, the unprecedented tragedy revealed amidst all its dark horrors, a light of hope. This inspiration was personified by the dignity and humanity shown especially in the tireless work of the devastated coming to the aid of the devastated. We met people of all colors who had lost everything and yet displayed strength of character through many acts of selfless love which was at once amazing and overwhelming.

Also compelling was how the wrenching aftermath of Katrina evoked within all of us our own internalized Katrinas, unsettling mind and soul. These disturbing hurricanes forced each of us to reexamine long held mistaken assumptions, mind-numbing stereotypes, and deep and displaced fears. Kristin posed the

question, "Is this Normal?" to return home and continue as usual in our daily routines while growing massive numbers of people are hurting? Gabriella afterwards read the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights with its articles affirming what is understood as God-given rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. She said she broke down and cried, angered by the realization that the human rights of the people of the Gulf Coast are being blatantly violated. We were all fundamentally moved by the unforgettable words of Ron Clower, our bus driver, a very wise and caring gentleman who was just recently laid off. He cautioned us to remember that the impoverished people of Biloxi, Mississippi and New Orleans, Louisiana, do not want our sympathy but our respect.

Katrina reaffirmed the necessity and importance of the work of the student-initiated Poverty Initiative at Union Theological Seminary. It has reaffirmed the urgency of the Poverty Initiative's mission which is to raise up generations of religious and community leaders committed to building a broad social movement to end poverty, led by the poor. That is why the Initiative has constituted itself not as a caucus but as a clearinghouse to foster exposure, fact-finding, study, debate, and discussion of the most defining issue of our times; that is, poverty in the midst of plenty.

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER 12

It is painfully clear that the national response to Hurricane Katrina has been an abysmal betrayal of human solidarity. As the Chairman of the House Investigation Committee has said, "Katrina was a national failure, an abdication of the most solemn obligation to provide for the common welfare." (Representative Thomas Davis III, Republican, Virginia.)

We are heartsick that so many people suffered and died as a result of human indifference along the Gulf Coast. As we have reported, it was very important for us to be there and meet the people, listen to their stories and affirm them. Behind the immediate tragedy, we have been exposed to the awful truth that the suffering of the residents of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama is representative of a tragedy of national proportions. The memories that were carved into our lives during that January week have exposed us to the truth that many of us suspected all along; that the curse of poverty, often hidden from public view, afflicts every city, town and village in the country. It was well known that there was extensive poverty in the Gulf states, fed by a dismal education system and an economy that benefited the few at the expense of the many. Sadly, these states are but a microcosm of the whole. We will no longer live with the illusion that this is a land of freedom when as many as half of our citizens are locked in a constant struggle of

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Rilke writes about opening “to another’s life that’s wide and timeless.”

In the same way that he describes bringing the neighbor to life, Rilke brings God to life in his search for God. While the mysterious God is always elusive, in the search and encounter with God, Rilke finds that God brings him to life.

In his poems, Rilke pays special tribute to “the poor” – those who are despised and thrown away, yet longing for God to sustain them. It is troubling to Rilke that many people don’t seem to care.

Addressing God he writes,

Casual, easy, they move in the world
as though untouched.
But you take pleasure in the face
of those who now thirst.
You cherish those who grip for survival.
It’s not too late to drink in the life
that reveals itself quietly there.

The students were brought to life as they entered into the lives of those whom they met, whom the world rejects or ignores. And those people in turn were brought to life by the students’ love. What could be more beautiful?

As we see in the pages that follow, the students longed to help, to take action, to clean out the mess and help prepare to rebuild. But the most important action of all was to express their love for those they met along the way.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God* translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, New York: Riverhead Books, 1996

ITINERARY OF THE KATRINA IMMERSION TRIP

CHAPTER 3

The trip started with a flight from New York to Atlanta, Georgia. In our group, there were twelve seminarians, twenty-one Master of Social Work students, four faculty members from Union, a professor of the Columbia School of Social Work, and nine members of the Philadelphia Independent Media Center. Throughout the trip the central question was: “What are religious leaders, social workers and other people of conscience to do in the face of growing poverty, homelessness, and misery? How are we responding in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma?”

Since returning from the Gulf Coast region, students have had time to reflect on their ministry and vocation. What is the on-going impact of Hurricane Katrina in our own lives and the lives of this nation? Students have led worship services, Bible studies, and public events since returning, including a major public event at Union Theological Seminary on Friday, March 3 and daily worship services in Union’s James Chapel during the week of February 27 - March 2.

The course and trip looked at issues of poverty and homelessness, race and racism, social change and social movements, the history

and role of the South, hurricane and disaster relief, and community development and rebuilding.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7



Radio Free Georgia (WRFG)
Atlanta, GA
Photo by C. W-M.

In Atlanta, Georgia, we were hosted by St. Michaels & All Angels Episcopal Church in Stone Mountain. We spent time with Project South, Radio Free Georgia (WRFG), the Homeless Task Force and other social and homeless service groups. Our discussion included an introduction to some of the problems facing America today, especially poverty and homelessness and how Katrina has impacted those issues. We learned that 200,000 Katrina evacuees are currently staying in Atlanta and that there are housing, food, health care and living-wage job shortages for Katrina evacuees and other poor and homeless people living in the city.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8

We worshipped at Ebenezer Baptist Church, met with Union alumni and current Ph.D. candidate, Rev. Raphael Warnock, and visited the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center. We discussed the history of social change in the South, in particular the role of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Civil Rights Movement and Poor People's Campaign.

MONDAY, JANUARY 9

We met with leaders of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Project South, where we talked about the relief and rebuilding efforts since Katrina. We learned also about the United States Social Forum and the role of popular education in social justice



Rev. Raphael Warnock
Ebenezer Baptist Church
Atlanta, GA
Photo by K.Z.

efforts. On Monday afternoon we traveled south to Pensacola, Florida, where we were hosted by Northminster and First Presbyterian Churches.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10

We learned about the relief efforts from both Hurricane Ivan (13 months before Hurricane Katrina) and Hurricane Katrina. We spent time on Tuesday actually touring trailer camps and other areas impacted by Hurricane Ivan from over a year ago. We discussed the issue of natural disasters and how our government and society will respond in years to come.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11

We traveled to Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where we were hosted by the Emmanuel Baptist Church. We started the day off with a tour of the devastation in Ocean Springs and Biloxi, Mississippi. We heard also about some of the recently unincorporated towns and visited some of the hardest hit places from Hurricane Katrina and heard the story of what has happened and what is still happening there. Our group spent Wednesday afternoon demolishing and rebuilding some of the local houses in Biloxi and Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12

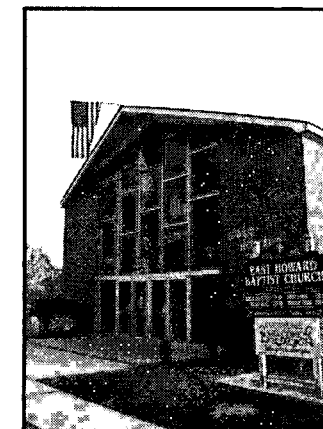
Our group continued with the relief effort. Some people spent the day knocking on doors in East Biloxi on behalf of the East Broadway Baptist Church, asking what help the people needed. On Thursday, we also connected with Union alumni, Rev. Carol Burnett from the



House destroyed by Hurricane Ivan (18 months later)
Pensacola, FL
Photo by K.Z.



Crystal Farre helps remove molded drywall
Biloxi, MS
Photo by M.L.



East Howard Baptist Church
Biloxi, MS
Photo by N.K.

KATRINA: LISTENING WITH OUR HEARTS



Surveying the damaged Moore Community House with Rev. Carol Burnett Biloxi, MS
Photo by S.H.

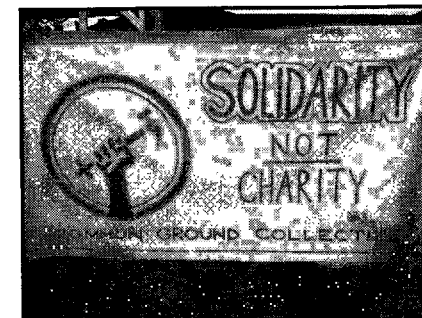
Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative at Moore Community House, a program that offers Early Head Start to families in Biloxi, Mississippi. That evening, we enjoyed dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant in Biloxi.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13

We woke up early to travel to New Orleans, Louisiana, where we were hosted by Ted Quant from the Twoomey Center for Peace through Justice at Loyola University. In New Orleans our group divided, some to visit with Pres Kabakoff of Historic Preservation, Incorporated, and others to spend time with community leaders at the ASHÉ Community Arts Center. Groups present at ASHÉ Community Arts Center included the Sierra Club, local religious congregations, faculty and staff at Loyola University and others. That afternoon, our group broke into small groups to do relief work with the United Methodist Committee on Relief and the Carrollton United Methodist Church as well as Common Ground Relief in the Lower Ninth Ward. That evening, we enjoyed a wonderful New Orleans meal provided by Geoff and Ginger Worden and Dian Winingder. We stayed at the St. Charles Presbyterian Church and heard presentations by Odis Braxton's uncle Timmy, the director of the Music Department at Xavier University and Rev. Patrick Keen of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church. We concluded by looking at the intersection of public policy, development, social services, and the church response to growing poverty and need in the South and the Gulf Coast in particular.



Eva Gordon volunteering with Common Ground Relief New Orleans, LA
Photo by E.C.



"Solidarity Not Charity" Common Ground Relief New Orleans, LA
Photo by N.K.

ITINERARY

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14

We flew home to New York, exhausted, determined and inspired by the people we had met and eager for time to process this life-changing week.



A Vietnamese Christian church Biloxi, MS
Photo by M.L.

JAN REHMANN, UTS

It was encouraging for me to hear the stories of the Radio Free Georgia folks who succeeded in renting a large old school building for \$1 a year for twelve years and then to purchase it at an affordable price. They were able to transform this building into a vibrant community center. What fascinated me the most was the organic connection between local rootedness and global perspectives: They consider themselves as local organizers of the World Social Forum trying to make sure that the poor people themselves become a leading factor in the movement (instead of professional NGOs).

In preparation for visiting the shelters, Liz Theoharis and Willie Baptist talked about the unholy alliance between the shelter system and the day labor system that became a crucial factor during and after the Olympics: When the shelters close early in the morning and everyone has to get out, the vans are already waiting to take the laborers to the pooling places, racially segregated.



Atlanta
Photo by E.C.

PENSACOLA

CHAPTER 7

JAN REHMANN, UTS

"STARS OVER PENSACOLA"

The stories told by the clergy charged with organizing and coordinating the relief effort were horrifying. What else would you expect? We heard about the creaking of the houses, the screaming of the children whose fear could not be tamed by a family's card games, manifold misery after the floods receded, including the experience of "compassion fatigue," a new word (for me, at least) to describe the burning out of helpers. And suddenly, in the midst of all this horror, a different moment captured in the narrative of Pastor Walk Jones: The electricity was gone for weeks, and they could see the stars again. They were lying in the grass together with neighbors and friends and watching the star-lit sky. A moment of hope, for a moment.