

From the Community Pulpit

Mission Trip Report

or

“19 Things I Learned in New Orleans”

Text: Hebrews 13:1-2

Message by Dr. Robert Lee Hill

“Report from New Orleans” Agape Feast

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Centennial Hall – Community Christian Church

Kansas City, Missouri

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Text: Hebrews 13:1-2 – 1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The fourteen participants in Community’s New Orleans Mission Trip have returned, and, as promised, we’ve come back with stories aplenty.

Our thanks are many. On the way to and from New Orleans we enjoyed the warm welcome of Rev. David Brice and Rev. Barbara Driscoll who opened their hearts and the doors to the Family Life Center at Kings Highway Christian Church, Shreveport, Louisiana, for road-trip overnight stays. In Metairie, Rev. David Coleman and the kind members of First Christian Church of Greater New Orleans provided generous hospitality and gracious accommodations in their Family Life Center. We thank Rev. Josh Baird, coordinator for the Disciples’ Gulf Coast mission stations in the area, sponsored by Disciples Home Mission and funded by the generosity of Week of Compassion, who guided us all along the way. We say thanks as well to the field representatives of the National Council of Churches who included us in the Ecumenical Work Week they sponsored while we

were there. And last, but never least, the prayers offered by Community's family of faith were truly strong sources of encouragement and support.

Over the course of our week in the Big Easy, our group worked on a total of five houses. Because of the hard-working character of Community's mission trippers, there were occasions for some Community folks to be sent to multiple sites in the 7th and 8th Wards of New Orleans for jobs such as window framing, carpentry, mold remediation, termite fumigation, and gutting/tear-out. But the bulk of our work was done at the home of Ingrid Hearn at 2127 Tonti in New Orleans' 7th Ward. Until Katrina came, Ingrid, a life-long resident of New Orleans, had lived in her traditional New Orleans "shot-gun" home with her brother Kerry and her dog Fred, an aging and lovable Rottweiler. A year after evacuating to South Carolina, Kerry died of cancer. Just this past April, Ingrid was allowed to return to her property and live in a FEMA trailer behind her home while restoration work proceeded. A teacher who served the New Orleans School System for 34 years prior to Hurricane Katrina, Ingrid is now retired. Perhaps the best way to describe what was actually done at Ingrid's home is to quote (with permission) from a message she sent out to friends after our group had been on the job for three days.

"Once again I am overwhelmed by the generosity, love, and tireless labor of volunteers! This week, a group from Kansas City, Missouri, worked on my home and were joined today by a group from N.Y. Let me tell you what they accomplished toward restoration of my home..... They replaced bad weather boards up near the roof, they painted the house -2 coats, they scraped and painted all downspouts, and ironwork, replaced

bad studs in the bathroom and the hall, ... replaced bad beams and sill under the kitchen and replaced a portion of the kitchen floor, took the windows out and scraped them, etc.They replaced the back door frame and my back door as well. I have a metal door now with a dead bolt! God has truly blessed me beyond my wildest dreams! When I returned I felt forgotten, beaten down, hopeless, faith shaken and thrown away. I had NO idea of where to begin or how! I was overwhelmed and ready to just give up and walk away from the only home I have known since birth.... All I saw was a Herculean task and knew that my funds were limited.... The volunteers are just so wonderful! No, they are phenomenal! What a blessing they have been in so many ways!.... I wish that Kerry was alive to see the way our home has been restored thus far. The house looks like it did when Kerry last painted it in 2002! It makes my heart feel so full! I am so wonderfully blessed! God IS still speaking!"

And now for the "19 Things I Learned in New Orleans":

- (1) Handi-wipes can take off nearly any paint!
- (2) A tired body is a gift from God in preparation for a solid night of sleep.
- (3) If given the "up-and-at-'em" and "out-the-door" times, Community's faithful can rally and be on the bus at the break of dawn.
- (4) A pile of junk can be a sign of hope.
- (5) The pump stations and levee systems of New Orleans are nothing like anything I've ever experienced living in a city.

- (6) People are coming back to their neighborhoods pretty much in relation to the numbers of their neighbors who are coming back.
- (7) A neighborhood can come back, if given enough encouraging hope from local folks and friends from across the nation.
- (8) The talents among Community's faithful are untold and multitudinous.
- (9) You can't drink enough water when you're working outside in August in New Orleans.
- (10) What Oscar Romero declared we all experienced: "*Everyone can do something*" - from painting to cooking to crafting woodwork to refinishing wrought iron grill work to driving the bus to shot-gunning in the front seat to loading the bus to praying to assuming a positive attitude to tearing out to
- (11) There's really nothing like eating gumbo in the Crescent City.
- (12) It is people of faith and other non-profit groups who will see New Orleans and Gulfport and Slidell and Houma and Port Arthur and all other devastated locales to their eventual restoration.
- (13) The right kind of tools and the right size of paint brushes are true blessings. A cordless drill is one of the genius creations of humanity.
- (14) Bitter experiences of injustice, unfairness, and desolation are made bearable and sometimes even sweet by the arrival of strangers at your door, or so Ingrid Hearn has said.
- (15) Lumber can be recycled like you've never imagined. Scavenging and cannibalizing among the houses of New Orleans for restoration projects must make for significant cost-savings in the overall restoration work in the Gulf Coast.

- (16) After a while, denominational, theological, and ecclesial distinctions fade into insignificance when you're trying to get two coats of paint on the exterior of a house before keeling over because of the heat. Painting can be a true revelation of God's incarnational presence and an effective stimulus for ecumenical unity.
- (17) Lowe's and Home Depot are definitely good stock suggestions for the next five years in the Gulf Coast.
- (18) New Orleans will eventually gain a fresh emphasis on the first portion of its name. There will definitely be something "new" about New Orleans when it welcomes a full complement of its citizens, some homegrown and some new immigrants, into its embrace.
- (19) It's a toss-up as to who received more - the mission trip workers who worked for three and a half days at 2127 Tonti in the 7th Ward of New Orleans or Ingrid Hearn's whose house is being restored there.