

Louisiana Mission Team, 2009  
Louisiana Conference of the UMC Disaster Response, Inc.  
United Methodist Disaster Response  
Dulac, Louisiana  
"serve one another in love", Galatians, 5:13

Thirteen residents of the Finger Lakes area spent one to two weeks in Dulac, Louisiana helping with hurricane recovery efforts. This is a bayou area at the very southern tip of Louisiana, inhabited by 51% Houma Indian and 49% Cajun. Dulac has been at the receiving end of at least six hurricanes in the last six years and the effects are evident everywhere. They are also experiencing land that is "subsiding" at the rate of 1/2 inch per year.

As a result of the sinking land, swamp is replacing areas that were once used for cattle grazing, raising sugar cane, etc. As the land "subsides" and the oil companies expand canals, there is less and less land to protect the area from hurricanes. Things are only going to get worse. Their future is very uncertain and they are concerned about losing services such as local schools, grocery stores, banking, post office, etc. With all these problems, one would wonder why the people just don't leave. The Houma has been in this area since the 1600's. This is their home. Grandma and Grandpa will not leave and the younger family members will not leave them. Many live in the family home and have lived there for generations, some not even having deeds. It is just the "family home". Our team was honored to be able to spend time working with the people of Dulac!!!!

The team was organized by the Hammondspport First United Methodist Church with members from Italy Valley Baptist Church and Lansing United Methodist Church. It worked from February 6 to February 22 under the auspices of the disaster response division of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Dulac Community Center and the Clanton Chapel United Methodist Church. Funds for this effort come through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), particularly through donations to the United Methodist Church's One Great Hour of Sharing. In most cases, UMCOR provides funding and volunteers (like us) provide labor. UMCOR now provides \$7,500 to qualified homeowners and works in conjunction with other agencies to complete renovations. Individuals from the Dulac Community Center and the Clanton UMC were active in recovery efforts but depend on individual donations for funding renovation in their buildings.

During our orientation session, the Site Coordinator, Darryl Guy, explained that our work is valued at \$19.00/hour per volunteer. Glenn did the math and calculated that we had worked 382 hours at a value of \$7,550. UMCOR provides reimbursement to the local site based on volunteer hours. So, when we question the individual expense of participating in a mission trip such as this, we have to look at what it brings to the community. In our case it was \$7,550 to be used for materials that they would not have had if we had not volunteered.

This year the team was housed in four different locations. Lots of packing and unpacking!!!! The first night we were housed in an UMCOR staff shelter in New Orleans, the People's Volunteer Shelter. It was a secure shelter in a "needy" section of New Orleans. Many volunteers were staged out of this area at the height of Hurricane Katrina recovery. Now it seemed to be available to house transient teams such as ours and weekend recovery teams. The tool supply there was amazing.

Since there was no room for us to stay in Dulac, we were hosted by the Methodist Church in Houma, about 30 minutes North of Dulac. Our hosts graciously offered us their youth meeting room and recreation area. Some of us slept on their futons and others on inflatable beds, etc. They had a portable shower unit hooked up in the parking lot for us. We used their kitchen to cook two meals and their Men's Group served us dinner one night. Their youth group welcomed our youth and even invited us to watch a Mardi Gras parade at a business belonging to a church member.

In the middle of the week, we were able to move into the dormitory in Dulac. This is a new building built by UMCOR to house 40 volunteers. We were able to eat in the dining room and no longer had to drive 30 minutes or prepare meals, a relief after a hard day of work!!!! Two other teams from New York worked at

the same time we were there, lots of teens on winter break and a total of 90 volunteers working. The Methodist Church NOMADS had 17 motor homes parked on the grounds and were working for three weeks.

UMCOR also has a small house, on stilts, that is part of their staff-sheltering complex. We had to move to that spot on our last day, as another large group came to move into the dorm. Micah made some "mean" chili for our last meal in the new location.

On Sunday night, before we knew what our job assignments would be, Scott led devotions and referred to Haggai, Chapter 1, "A Call to Rebuild the Temple". Chapter 1:4 states, "Why are you living in a luxurious house while my house lies in ruins?" Scott chose this scripture in preparation for what we thought we were going to be doing, rebuilding houses (which we did), BUT, we were also called to "rebuild the temple" when we were called to work on the Clanton Chapel United Methodist Church in Dulac. This church is located on the grounds of the Dulac Community Center, which is owned by the Global Ministries of the United Methodist Women. UMCOR funds were not available to do the work on the church. However, donated funds had been earmarked for the church floor and the materials had arrived. WE were going to have an opportunity to "rebuild the temple". What an honor that was.

Our work on the church floor took all week. Glenn was our crew leader under the guidance of another volunteer. Glenn, Micah, Diane W., Kelly and Arley, never left the church job and actually never even got to look at the surrounding area as they were so focused on their work. The rest of us helped at the church either one or two days. There were lots of blisters on hands and knees, from running electric drills for hours on end, and lots of sore muscles!! The job started with us taking out all of the chairs, which were sitting on warped plywood, covering the floor with another layer of plywood and then concrete board. Friday afternoon the chairs went back in on the concrete board and we were able to attend the Sunday service in the "temple". The ceramic tile was sitting in boxes when we left, having been donated and was ready for the next team to come and finish the job. There was no doubt that the Lord had His hand on this project in a big way!!!! Praise the Lord!!!!

Diane A. was called away from the church project to coordinate some painting jobs and they took the rest of the week. Mattie, Rachel, Alysia and Diane worked on the Parfait home, located at the Southern most end of the waterway. Mr. Parfait had been a tugboat captain working on the oilrigs. He had helped repair some hurricane damage at his home but was in ill health and could not finish the work. Trying to help in some way, he was right there with us, stirring the paint and laying out finished wood to dry. He and his family were very appreciative of the work we did for them. He related that he had gone to the Indian school, which was located to the South of his home. Looking out to where he pointed, all you could see was swamp. That land has "subsided" and is no longer fit for a building site.

The rest of the week the painting crew, which now included Bonnie and Hannah, worked on Antoine Gregorie's house. Mr. Gregorie's family had built a handicap ramp for his wife and it needed to be painted. Mr. G. had started the painting and then was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor. His wife was upset because he was so worried about getting the painting done. We were sent to paint the ramp and anything else that needed painting. Mrs. G. asked us to paint the 10' pilings that were under the house as well. It took us three days to finish the job. The Gregories were very happy. (Another handicapped ramp was partially built for another family the previous week as well.)

Scott, Debbie and Hannah spent most of their time working on Miss Mae's house where Diane A. had worked on staining and varnishing the previous week. The Groshners replaced paneling, trim and completed other tasks to help renovate the house. Another team followed the next week to, hopefully, complete the renovation in this multi-generational family home.

Each evening our team met together for devotions, singing, debriefing and planning for the next day. We all enjoyed singing along as Arley and Micah led with their guitars. We talked about where we had seen God that day (our "God Winks"), how members of the team had blessed us and what we were taking away from the experience as well as how we could best provide financial support to the area.

Through the generosity of the Hammondsport UMC, Italy Valley Baptist Church and the Lansing UMC we were able to donate \$1,837 to help the people of the Dulac area. Seeking advice from the UMCOR leadership team and the Dulac Community Center coordinator we all agreed to use the majority of this gift to "bless" the Community Center. We also provided \$160 worth of screws to complete the floor project in the church.

The Dulac Community Center was once the hub of the community. It housed a library, meeting rooms, clothing ministry, computer access, craft classes, training for children in native dancing and customs, etc. It no longer can be used for all of these services because it has received water and wind damage. It needs a new roof and complete renovation inside.

A contractor is willing to donate services to put a new metal roof on the building as soon as supplies have been purchased. Jamie, the DCC coordinator, related that the Center has to depend on individual donations to purchase the supplies. This is not part of the mission of UMCOR. Our team agreed this was the greatest need for the entire community so, thanks to the generosity of folks in the Finger Lakes, we were able to donate \$1,677 to the roof project. You can probably imagine Jamie's smile when she heard about the donation! And, members of the church were so happy to see progress being made on the floor in their church!!!! YOU helped us make a difference in the lives of God's children!!!!

Hopefully, through our actions and words we were able to show our faith and our call to "serve one another in love".

Believe it or not, there are more stories to tell. The Mission Team shared experiences and pictures at a Pot Luck Supper on Sunday, March 22, in the Fellowship Hall of the Hammondsport First United Methodist Church.

If you are interested in joining a mission team in February, 2010, please contact Diane Albright at 607-868-3945 or the Hammondsport UMC at 607-569-3511.