

REFLECTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PEARLINGTON, MISSISSIPPI MISSION*

Presbytery of Mississippi

OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE

Barbara Anderson “There will always be a special place in my heart for the beautiful people of Pearlington, MS. I am humbled by their faith and their indomitable spirits. May God continue to bless them with the help they need.”

Ed Ballard “Without being there, there is no way to comprehend the scope and depth of impact on human souls and life-infrastructure. Many of the few folks still living there are fighting to regain some of what they had, and are just amazingly strong and resourceful. However, some of those remaining are not coping so well and losing hope.”

Pam Ballard “The emotional devastation needs to be taken as seriously as the physical devastation. In the midst of all this we found people with beautiful spirits.”

Gail Bolin-Kaenel “Building one house at a time to rebuild a community describes our efforts but love and faith describe Pearlington to me.

Tom Boynton “I was truly moved and inspired by the cooperation and genuine affection between the citizens of Pearlington. Everyone had been through the same devastating experience and the community seems to have strengthened the bonds between people. Our tour of New Orleans was breathtaking. I have never seen anything like the destruction Katrina wreaked on this city and the slow response to rebuilding. There are portions of New Orleans that just don’t look like they will ever recover.”

Bruce & Joyce Callahan “Joyce and Bruce Callahan will always drink from their saucer from now on, because we truly now know our cup overflows.” **Joyce:** “The mission was indeed an eye opener as to the total devastation of Pearlington. Working, listening, sharing and making many new friends made it an unforgettable week.” **Bruce** “I got more out of the Pearlington trip than all the people we helped. I saw people with a beautiful attitude after going through devastation that I still can’t imagine.”

Betsy Fikejs “I was blessed to be a part of this group who acted with kindness, grace and love, and to witness the bond that developed between us and the very special people of Pearlington as everyone pitched in together. Thank God for the NGOs and human kindness.”

Cerena Fischer “My experience goes beyond clean-up and devastation, 15/18 feet of water and a 25 foot wave. Just can’t imagine this. However, the emotional needs of the people has touched me the hardest. The need for psychiatric counseling, social needs such as medical help, veterans help (legal counsel) and ALL types of medical help. This is a long term problem that needs addressing. The children will feel it for years.”

Rudy Fischer “Reconstruction of the devastation in New Orleans may never happen, but the smile on Glen’s face and the twinkle in his eyes as he sat in his freshly painted cocoa colored bedroom replacing the white switch plates – that **did** happen!”

Jan Foster “Our trip to Pearlinton was such a humbling experience for me. We saw such devastation that will take years to repair and we could only do so much in a week. I also was in awe of the faith of the people working their way through this, and their thankfulness to the volunteers.

Randy Foster “It was hard to believe how bad it is seventeen months after Katrina. I’m glad our group could do our small part to help the local residents.”

Gary Graham: “I was amazed to see a place and hear stories from people who experienced, first hand, a situation that was similar to the tsunami of Indonesia we all saw on TV.

I was touched by Herman’s comment of “disgusted depression” at the work he had in front of him and how our efforts gave him hope.”

Kathie Hurley “Now any problems, troubles or sacrifices we face seem insignificant to the devastation that we saw in MS and N.O...this all should still be on the National News every night of the week until some progress can be seen.”

Mabel Koshy “I was overwhelmed with the amount of destruction and experienced the pain and suffering of the people...and also saw the unity amongst diverse groups working together to serve...love in action.”

Anthony Lechiara “ I think the greatest impression I took away from our trip to Mississippi was the amazing strength and powerful faith that the current residents exude. I am not sure I could fight the overwhelming struggle they face everyday to rebuild their lives in their community. And second, the selfless help so many people pour out down there. It may be out of the news but it is not forgotten.”

Judi Nychay “The devastation we witnessed in Pearlinton represented, without a doubt, the worst of natural disasters. What made the trip so worthwhile however was the spirit, hope and abiding faith of the people we met.”

Phil Rowland “It was gratifying and uplifting to be able to bring some hope for the future to the people of Pearlinton. I wish that we would have had more time to finish some of the projects that we started.”

Caryle Aitken Wilkie “We were “privileged” people to have gone and had the privilege to serve these hardy, courageous people, who just “keep on keeping on” with such grace and humor, in the face of overwhelming circumstances. It was a life-changing experience for me, as it was a resounding example of the strength of the human spirit to survive and to continue to believe in God’s grace, presence and love.”

Knox Williams “While all elements of the community were suffering, the thing that struck me most of all was the continuing effect on the children. You almost never saw them. For the most part, they didn’t play outside. They seemed to be still fearful that something else would come and get them. When the Fireman were building that wonderful playground next to our camp you never saw any children watching, gleefully or otherwise.

One other aside was the lack of a community central government or organization of any kind and the resultant disproportionate distribution of assistance. The most timid and or proud people frequently seemed to take a back seat to the pushy and sometimes unscrupulous. Their greatest need now, I think, is for them to elect a responsible and authoritative leader to help right the inequities. Fortunately, the homeowner I worked with was both deserving and a fine, hardworking family man.”

Bob Young “Though we were there in Pearlington to help people restore their homes, we did “invade” them with our presence. Still, the grace they *showed us* was truly amazing.

When I was helping restock the Pearl Mart (The Red Cross food and home goods repository in Pearlington), I noticed many cartons of bed/bath textiles from Saudi Arabia. I found out that Saudi Arabia gave millions in support of the Katrina Disaster. I do not remember hearing this good news in the paper or on radio/tv.”

* (Each participant was invited to write 2 lines on their experience in Pearlington.)