

## Katrina was big, But GOD is bigger

Signpost by: Catholic Church (destroyed)  
St. Clare Parish

On August 29, 2005, the eye of Hurricane Katrina passed through the town of Pearlinton, Mississippi. Three lives were lost when 23 feet of muddy flood waters rolled through the small border community of less than 2,000 people. Most of the homes in Pearlinton were either completely destroyed or so badly damaged they were barely inhabitable. As the polluted flood water from one of the worst hurricanes in U.S. history receded, it left behind a contaminated water supply, poisoned fish and toxic soil.

*\*“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands  
in moments of comfort and convenience,  
but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”*  
Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963

Initially, the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) was established as an assessment organization providing money for relief. After Katrina it became evident that Presbyterians felt the need to get involved in the physical rebuilding of peoples' lives. PDA responded by erecting six volunteer villages in the storm-stricken communities across the Gulf Coast and adopted the slogan, “Out of Chaos, Hope.”

*\* Gracious God, thank you for so richly blessing us from your bounty.  
Help us to know that we have enough and give us the will,  
the strength and the way to return a portion  
of our blessings to those who do not.*  
Devotion prayer

Armed with a willing spirit and a variety of job skills, on Sunday, January 13, nineteen members and friends of the 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church of Wheaton arrived at the Pearlinton PDA site. Volunteers were introduced to their new homes which consisted of 10' by 10' hard corrugated polypropylene pods containing two cots and a heating unit. In addition, the village was equipped with portable toilets, a dining tent, a kitchen, as well as indoor showers and outdoor sinks. Volunteers were asked to sign up for a variety of camp cleaning duties in addition to cooking several meals while at the village. These responsibilities, together with planning evening devotions, were shared with a group of PDA volunteers from Pennsylvania.

*\* “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is,  
‘What are you doing for others?’”*  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

On Monday morning, 1<sup>st</sup> Pres volunteers set out to begin work on three home sites in various stages of reconstruction. Jobs ranged from installing insulation, repairing

walls, painting inside walls and outside trim, as well as working on a variety of electrical and plumbing projects. Before beginning their afternoon work, volunteers gathered at the First Missionary Baptist Church Hall where a noon meal was served to them by church staff members and PDA volunteers.

IN THIS PLACE...by Jonathan Bates  
*None of us heard of this place before we went.  
Now, we will never forget it!*

Memories of chilly nights, sore muscles and a rainy day will eventually fade, but other memories will not. Among these recollections will be the courage of the people of Pearlinton who lost so much but kept their faith; their heartfelt stories of hope; their words of gratitude as they welcomed 1<sup>st</sup> Pres volunteers into their community and homes; the prayers offered by Pastor Rawls of the First Missionary Baptist Church each day as volunteers joined hands before sharing their noon-day lunch and finally, the Celebration Dinner for “assisted” family members and volunteers which included the beautiful solo rendition of “Amazing Grace” followed by the voices of volunteers and guests as they joined in singing the gospel hymn “A-men, A-men.” Katrina survivor Henrietta B. closed the evening program with her special words of appreciation to the volunteers, “May you all receive God’s blessing for the rest of your lives.”

*“For where two or three are gathered in my name,  
there am I in the midst of them.  
Matthew 18:20*

Humbled by their faith, 1<sup>st</sup> Pres volunteers will always remain grateful for the privilege of serving these people in the rebuilding of their lives and their community.

Marion Robbins

\* Selection from evening devotions