

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

Generosity, Compassion and Faith in the Face of Tragedy

Stewardship Report on the UUA-UUSC
GULF COAST RELIEF FUND



PREPARED

BY

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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION
OF CONGREGATIONS

June 30, 2006

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Dear Friend:

This stewardship report on our UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund is written with a sense of overwhelming gratitude:

Gratitude for the extraordinary generosity of thousands of individuals and scores of UU congregations who, as of this date, have contributed \$3,550,911.84 to help with relief and recovery efforts following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Gratitude for the hundreds of volunteers who put their own lives on hold and rallied to help coordinate emergency shelter and supplies, and those who mobilized trauma ministry teams to attend to the spiritual wounds of hurricane survivors and aid in the recovery process.

Gratitude for the adaptability and uncommon skill of the staff and leaders of the UUA and the UUSC, who reconfigured their daily jobs overnight and, infused with a spirit of compassion and cooperation, successfully coordinated this unprecedented effort.

Most of all, this report expresses my profound gratitude to you for responding with faith, compassion, and generosity in the face of disaster.

In faith,

Bill

The Facts of Disaster

The one-two punch of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita created the costliest and one of the most deadly natural disasters in U.S. history. The hurricanes' storm surge flooded most of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish and caused catastrophic damage to the Gulf Coasts of Mississippi and Alabama.

As I write, the official combined (direct and indirect) death toll now stands at 1,604 – although there are many people unaccounted for even today. The total economic damage caused by Katrina is estimated by the United States National Hurricane Center at about \$75 billion. Hurricane Rita, another intense tropical storm, caused an additional \$10 billion in damage to the United States Gulf Coast region in September of 2005.

Our Response: Hope and Action in the Face of Tragedy

As the news of the horrible aftermath from Hurricane Katrina filtered in, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations and the independent Unitarian Universalist Service Committee mobilized to find a way to help the victims of the devastation. Within 48 hours, I posted a letter on the home page of the UUA web site, asking for contributions to the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund (GCRF).

In a follow-up pastoral letter, I focused on the great need in the Gulf Coast, saying, “Tens of thousands of American citizens, almost all of them poor and Black, living in unimaginable conditions with no food and water, waited for days while evacuation buses passed them by to pick up tourists from luxury hotels. Citizens in devastated small towns on the Gulf Coast are still without evacuation or adequate supplies.” It was an angry letter, and a letter filled with hope for the future, faith in our beliefs and our community and those of like-minded individuals. “We are,” I noted, “a gentle and a generous people.”

A Chronicle of Generosity: Our Beloved Community Responds

Indeed, I was right. The response from all areas of Unitarian Universalist life and the greater community was phenomenal. We saw more than \$90,000 in donations within the first thirty-six hours. Hundreds of additional envelopes containing checks arrived in the mail right after the Labor Day weekend. By September 12, thirteen days after we began receiving donations, the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund had received 6,388 contributions totaling \$1,169,567.95.

I wish you could have seen first-hand the letters of concern and generosity – dozens upon dozens from children – that filled our bulletin boards in those weeks right after Katrina hit.

In fact, half of all the contributions received from individuals were from first-time donors to the UUA.

Next, we established a Gulf Coast Relief Fund Panel to work closely with UUA staff, UUSC staff, and countless volunteers to ensure prompt and effective distribution of the funds and human resources. A spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and urgency infused the entire operation.

Although we're not a disaster relief organization, you wouldn't have known that by the speed and effectiveness of this mobilization:

- The UU Service Committee had a telemarketing campaign in progress when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. They quickly adapted their appeal to include requests for donations to the Gulf Coast Relief Fund. All donations to the UU Service Committee earmarked for Gulf Coast relief were added to the total available to the GCRF Panel for distribution where most needed.
- A mailing that was scheduled to go out on September 6 to 16,000 households through the Friends of the UUA program became an email appeal that was sent out on September 3 with a new message asking constituents to contribute to the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund.
- The UUA Professional Leadership Coordinating Council sent out an email appeal for funds on Friday, September 9.
- The UUA district executives contacted every UU congregation, asking each to join with other congregations in taking a special collection on Sunday, September 11, 2005.
- Here in Boston, the UUA staff fielded hundreds upon hundreds of phone calls and emails from Unitarian Universalists who wanted to help the Hurricane survivors in a variety of ways.

A Generous Challenge Is Met

On October 11, 2005, the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, New York, issued an extremely generous challenge grant to spur giving to the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund.

For contributions given beginning October 2, Shelter Rock pledged to match each dollar up to a total of \$500,000 for community relief!

Our gratitude and joy at the generosity of this congregation was equaled only by our amazement at the response from the whole community of UUs and like-minded individuals. *Within a month, the challenge grant had been matched entirely.*

The Measure of Generosity

As I write, the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund has raised \$3,050,911.84. This money comes from 12,760 gifts, including contributions from 664 congregations and their members. When combined with the funds from the Shelter Rock challenge grant, a total of over \$3.5 million was given. This is money that made, and continues to make, a real and practical difference in the lives of thousands of people in need.

Use of Funds: Our Work in the World

To ensure that funds were put to work quickly and effectively, Charlie Clements at the UUSC and I named a diverse group of eight, called the Gulf Coast Relief Fund Funding Panel. The Panel was and is charged with distributing gifts in a manner consistent with donor expectations. The majority of the funds, 95 percent, would go to relief and recovery work, with no more than 5 percent used for administrative costs incurred by the UUA.

Together, Charlie Clements and I decided that approximately one-third of the existing funds for relief and recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita would be earmarked for UUA congregations to restore their ministries in their communities.

Approximately two-thirds of the funds would be earmarked for the neediest and most marginalized communities and longer-term amelioration efforts.

A major goal of the Panel has been to make a difference in the region by funding grants that have a lasting impact for those wouldn't have found relief from other sources. It is my firm belief that the manner in which we have funded recovery efforts will lead to a vibrant, robust UU presence in the affected communities.

The Funding Panel will operate at least through December 2006, at which time evaluation of the remaining funds and needs will dictate any further timeframe for its work. You can find reports of the Panel's work online at www.uua.org/news/gulfcoastrelief/.

Examples of Our Faith in Action

So far, \$639,872.74 has been designated for congregational support in the Gulf Coast area. These funds have made an enormous difference for UUs caught up in the disaster by helping to pay the costs of rent on interim worship space, ministerial and religious professional aid, and rebuilding.

Another \$893,797 for community relief funds has been committed to a variety of local organizations chosen for their ability to positively affect the area, their economic need, and their alignment with the goals of the fund and the UUA and UUSC at large.

As Rev. Meg Riley, chair of the Relief Fund's grant-making panel notes, "It's very inspiring to work to get this money out to the people who can use it. Some of these grants are going to groups that aren't getting a lot of other support, but they fit very well within our Principles. You can feel Unitarian Universalism's presence in these grants. People are beginning to know who we are." Below is a sampling of how the funds given for Gulf Coast Relief have been put to effective use.

- Funds to pay the salaries of religious professional staff members of North Shore Unitarian Universalists, Lacombe, LA; Community Church Unitarian Universalist of New Orleans, LA; Spindletop Unitarian Universalist Church, Beaumont, TX; and First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans, LA.
- Grassroots grants of \$25,000 each to be further distributed by the corresponding advisory boards to North Shore Unitarian Universalists, Lacombe, LA; Community Church Unitarian Universalist of New Orleans, LA; First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans, LA; Spindletop Unitarian Universalist Church, Beaumont, TX; and the Mid-South District of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.
- \$100,000 in Community Aid Grants divided among PICO WIN of Baton Rouge and PICO ACT of New Orleans, the Vietnamese Initiative for Economic Training, the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance, and the East Biloxi Center for Coordination and Relief.
- \$81,000 to Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, to launch a community ministry and hire a volunteer coordinator.
- \$20,015 to Neighbor Works America through their affiliate Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc. to launch grassroots community organizing for evacuees.
- \$164,200 to First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of New Orleans for infrastructural expenses.
- \$40,390 to Community Church of New Orleans for rental space and rental equipment expenses through June 30, 2006.
- \$30,000 to Neighbor Works America through their affiliate, Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc., to continue the work of the team begun by an earlier grant for grassroots community organizing.
- \$43,750 to the New Orleans Network for salaries for three full-time community organizers for five months. The New Orleans Network believes that the next six months are a crucial window of time, during which long-term policy will be set for the rebuilding of New Orleans. It is essential that they concentrate all their efforts

on bringing community voices in to help structure that policy.

- The New Orleans Network works with many of the grassroots community organizations in New Orleans, such as PICO, People's Hurricane Relief Fund, ACORN, IAF, NOHEAT, and Common Ground, to provide reliable and current information about the community and about legislative initiatives, connect projects and people, and build bridges between organizations around common initiatives training and shared resources. New Orleans Network coordinates particularly closely with Neighborhood Housing Services and the League of Young Voters Education Fund.
- \$60,000 to PICO – Louisiana Interfaith Together (PICO-LIFT) to pay an organizer for ACT in New Orleans and to provide transportation costs for PICO and ACT leaders to attend meetings in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. This more broadly supports the goals of (1) creating an effective and legitimate voice for the displaced and host families in the public debate over the future of New Orleans and Louisiana and (2) rebuilding community bonds, which are the necessary basis for a New Orleans region that serves the interest and needs of all its citizens. This is one of a series of grants made by the Fund to strengthen and support community organizing in areas affected by Katrina so that people, particularly people of color and low-income families, can have a greater voice in how their communities are rebuilt and access fair housing, services, and employment in the wake of the disaster.
- \$10,000 to Neighborhood Math Place for an intergenerational community grief ritual facilitated by Sobonfu Somé on February 24-26 in Audubon Park in New Orleans. This event will be open to people of all races and ages (several hundred are expected) free of charge. The purpose of the community grief ritual is to create a space to facilitate formal recognition of and closure to a period of personal, neighborhood, and community loss and devastation. This collective grief and healing is fundamental to a sense of true partnership in community-building efforts in New Orleans.
- \$28,500 to Turkey Creek Community Initiatives, primarily to empower the residents of the Turkey Creek watershed to make informed decision about their future, with knowledge of the resources that are available to them and their rights in the rebuilding process; to ensure that residents' voices are heard in the rebuilding process; and to ensure that residents get their fair share of the rebuilding resources. This is another grant made by the Fund to support community organizing among marginalized groups.
- \$63,000 to Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc. to establish eleven community centers, called Beacons of Light, in low-income neighborhoods of New Orleans in order to provide support, encouragement, respite, and critically needed services to residents whose homes have been damaged and whose lives have been dramatically disrupted. The vision is that these centers will provide both services and information—including housing services and home ownership services—to residents, and will be centers for community organizing, discussion, and strategizing while providing a physical space for these activities. Each Center will be staffed by a

community organizer and will host regular meetings, providing opportunities for the community to gather together and to form the cornerstone for developing Neighborhood Councils.

- \$125,000 to Advancement Project to provide legal support and defense to a range of community and grassroots organizations working to help their members return and rebuild in the face of evictions and municipal plans for demolition and bulldozing. The project is focusing on building and sustaining the grassroots legal network and working to ensure that workers involved in rebuilding the Gulf Coast region are no longer blatantly exploited or discriminated against.
- \$1,500 to the Unitarian Universalist Congregations of New Orleans for radio outreach advertising on National Public Radio in the New Orleans area.
- \$55,000 to the Jeremiah Group, a multi-racial, multi-issue organization in metropolitan New Orleans bringing about positive change through broad-based community organizing. Our purpose is to build a power base of relationships within our communities so that people have political and social power and are capable of representing the interests of both family and community during neighborhood discussions, public actions, and political decisions. The Jeremiah Group trains and develops community leaders to decide their own direction instead of leaving decisions in the hands of a select few.
- \$40,000 to the Gulf Coast Missionary Baptist District Association, which has appealed through the Baptist Laymen's Association for men and women of different faith communities all over the country to organize work teams to come down to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to rebuild homes devastated by Hurricane Katrina for families who are not covered by insurance, whose insurance will not pay for flood damage, or whose FEMA grant will not cover repairs. This grant will create:
 - An opportunity for UU congregations across the country to volunteer with organizations in the region that are rebuilding houses for low-income groups.
 - Support for building materials for house repair.
 - Technical support in incorporating low-cost hurricane and flood mitigation measures into repair processes.
- \$15,000 to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee for a discretionary fund for immediate response to urgent requests up to \$5,000.
- \$1,000 rental payment to Jefferson Presbyterian Church in New Orleans to be matched by \$500 from Community Church of New Orleans and \$500 from First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans.
- \$20,275 to Hands Off Iberville to facilitate organization among displaced public housing residents now in Houston and Baton Rouge and their return to their homes in the public housing complexes in New Orleans, principally Cooper and St. Bernard. Many public housing apartments are still habitable, but residents have not

been allowed to return. The grant will be used to pay for an organizer to mobilize residents so they can advocate for their return.

- \$41,450 to Zion Travelers Cooperative Center, a community-organized relief and rehabilitation center in Phoenix, Plaquemines Parish, that responds to the needs of returning residents on the East Bank of Plaquemines Parish, LA. The East Bank has been almost totally ignored by the mainstream relief agencies. As more people in Phoenix and the surrounding area return to and work on their houses, this grant will match funds from Oxfam America to expand the services offered by the Cooperative Center. The funds will go toward constructing, outfitting, equipping, and running a tool and equipment center where community members and residents of Plaquemines East Bank can borrow tools and equipment to repair and rebuild their homes.
- \$65,000 to ACORN for Community Organizing around the Right to Return. This grant funds ACORN's grassroots work in New Orleans in four areas: gutting a total of 1,400 flood damaged houses so residents can begin repair; community participation in neighborhood viability plans, with particular emphasis on the Ninth Ward; voter rights, including voter registration for the mayoral elections in New Orleans; and information and education on environmental protection in New Orleans
- \$56,540 to The People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition (PHRF/OC): Reconstruction Work Group for Right to Return advocacy. PHRF is working with survivors' groups to get their participation in an alternative "grassroots" plan for reconstruction of New Orleans. Their work will include working with other community organization groups in New Orleans for consensus around common points for the right to return that reflect the point of view of people who have been marginalized from the current planning process. This includes getting input from returnees to New Orleans and a widespread effort to gather and include the input from survivor groups in cities all over the nation. They are seeking to distill this process into an advocacy tool for the rights of marginalized groups in the reconstruction of New Orleans.
- \$57, 528 to the Mid-South District to launch a community ministry project in the Mississippi Gulf Coast. A staff person based in Mississippi will coordinate UU volunteer efforts in the area and foster relationships with local community partners.
- \$16,550 to North Shore Unitarian Universalist Society for a part-time administrator to assist in the daily functions of the congregation. The new staff member will maintain church office hours; coordinate church publications, including Sunday bulletins and newsletters; facilitate communications; and work with the congregational archivist to preserve the history of the North Shore Society.
- \$16,500 to launch a volunteer program for the Greater New Orleans area focused on bringing Unitarian Universalist volunteers from around the world to New Orleans to assist in recovery and rebuilding efforts. The program will coordinate volunteer

efforts with The Hurricane Relief and Social Justice Project of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge and with First Unitarian Church of New Orleans.

This report is a testimony to your amazing generosity and to Unitarian Universalist faith in action. I am profoundly grateful to you all.

For More Information

If you have questions about the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund or wish to learn what more you can do to help us meet the challenges ahead, you can find a full report on the progress we are making, the grants distributed, and the ongoing work of our Gulf Coast Relief Panel by going online at www.uua.org.

We welcome your donation of funds to the [General Fund for Gulf Coast Relief](#) (including aid to affected UU congregations and community relief efforts) and to the [Community Relief Effort Fund for Gulf Coast Relief](#). For inquiries on giving, please call Larry Stritof in the UUA Stewardship and Development Office at 1-888-792-5885. General inquiries about the Gulf Coast Relief Fund should be directed by email to gulfcoastrelief@uua.org.

Members of the Gulf Coast Relief Funding Panel and Working Groups

Funding Panel: Rev. Meg Riley*, Eunice Benton, Rev. Steve Crump, Rebecca Cureau, Rev. Jacqueline Luck, Joe Sullivan, Martha Thompson

Mississippi Strategic Planning Advisory Board: Eunice Benton*, Cindy Brown, Luanne Buchanan, Trina Cameron, Robin Clark, Pat Cruise, Gwen Dennis, Margaret Drake, Melinda Harthcock, Tom Head, Hank Jaeckel, Mike Kayes, Gail Stratton, Gwen Wages

New Orleans Strategic Planning Advisory Board: Rev. Burton Carley*, Jyaphia Christos-Rodgers, Dr. Wayne B. Clark, Dr. Rebecca Cureau, Mary An Godshall, Dick Harris, Marilyn Malone, Rev. Marta Valentin, Rev. Jim VanderWeele, Mark Westergard

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