

FARISH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH'S RESPONSE
HURRICANE KATRINA
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THE RE-SETTLEMENT INITIATIVE: FRIEND TO FRIEND

As Chairman of the Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference's Disaster Task Force, following the 1979 floods, I gained a unique perspective on disaster relief and recovery. There is often a great deal of confusion in the days immediately following a disaster. Disaster relief agencies, volunteers, local, state and national governments are often overwhelmed and the response is less than effective, to say the least. Charities appeal for donations and unscrupulous charities fleece the unsuspecting.

Churches can do much when they work together and in cooperation with other social service agencies to complement their response. I have spent much of this past week at the trade mart and coliseum. What struck me, almost as much as the need for assistance, was the lack of organization and coordination. Who was in charge? was the question that I asked myself, since people were forced to stand for hours in long lines in the hot sun, asking anyone who appeared to be an "authority figure" the question, "where do I go for help?"

The Mississippi Regional Housing Authority No. VI is in a position to help those displaced families from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast who already hold a section 8 housing assistance voucher. A section 8 housing assistance voucher pays all or part of an income eligible family's monthly rent. Section 8 voucher holders can live anywhere they choose, either in an apartment or a house, and the housing authority (HUD) will pay all or part of the family's monthly rent. The overwhelming majority of New Orleans' poor, who received housing assistance, either lived in public housing or were section 8 voucher holders. It appears that section 8 voucher holders lost every material possession they owned. As of Friday, MRHA VI had taken applications on approximately 100 families, from the New Orleans and Gulf Coast areas residing in temporary shelters or with Jackson families, who are eligible to receive a replacement section 8 housing voucher. With this section 8 replacement voucher, they will be able to find permanent or temporary housing within the City of Jackson or in one of the surrounding communities served by MRHA VI. This will solve, in part, the housing crisis for 100 families or 400 or more individuals.

Today, I am asking this congregation to respond to the crisis created by Hurricane Katrina. I know that many of you have made personal and individual responses. Some of you have contributed to The Red Cross or one of the other relief agencies or volunteered

your time to work at one of the temporary shelters. I commend you for that! But I am asking this congregation, as a whole, respond to what I am calling: **THE RE-SETTLEMENT INITIATIVE: FRIEND TO FRIEND**. The re-settlement initiative will seek to assist 100 families re-settle into a new community. Working in conjunction with the Mississippi Regional Housing Authority VI, Farish Street Baptist Church will issue clothing and furniture vouchers that can be redeemed at the “Storehouse for God Closet and Attic”. The “Closet” will be stocked from donated clothing from church members and friends. Likewise, the “Attic” will be stocked from donated furniture from church members and friends. These may be modest donations, but for someone who has lost everything, it could mean the difference between hope and despair.

Through contributions received from today’s special mission offering, \$50 gift cards will be purchased and given to qualifying families to be used for: food, household ware, clothes, etc.

I am asking volunteer cooks to prepare and serve at least 20 breakfasts and 20 lunches daily—breakfasts and lunches for those persons who are waiting at the Housing Authority’s office to complete the required paper work preliminary to the issuance of housing vouchers. (Many of these people are living in shelters and may not have had a hot breakfast or money to buy lunch.)

Working in cooperation with an established agency, e.g., the Mississippi Regional Housing Authority No. VI, this congregation can be assured that its gifts/contributions will be directed to those persons who are most in need of disaster relief, without having to implement its own certification process.

This response is the most effective. It will help with the re-settlement of 100 families displaced by Hurricane Katrina. By reaching out to 100 new residents, we roll out the welcome mat as friend to friend, inviting them to become members of this community. In a time of crisis, what they and we need most are friends. By this response we become friends reaching out to friends.

The second response to the crisis is a collective response as churches. This church is a member of the General Baptist State Convention of Mississippi and the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Dr. Jerry Young, President of the General Baptist State Convention of Mississippi and 2nd Vice President of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., has requested that member churches contribute to a fund, administered by the State Convention, to assist in the disaster relief effort. I talked to Dr. Young briefly this morning. He informed me that he has scheduled a meeting with denominational leaders, city leaders and others on the Gulf Coast this Tuesday to discuss the most effective

response convention churches might make. I've asked him to communicate with member churches following this meeting. We will contribute financially to this state-wide effort of churches.

These are the things that we need:

- 1) financial contributions in the amount of \$7,000-\$10,000
 - a) \$5,000 will be used to purchase \$50 gift cards for 100 families;
 - b) Money for food for 20 breakfast and 20 lunches each day, as long as the need exists;
 - c) At least \$1000 to be donated through the General Baptist State Convention

- 2) volunteers
 - a) cooks to prepare and serve breakfast and lunch

- 3) donations
 - a) clothes/furniture
 - b) volunteers to sort and size
 - c) volunteers to operate the "Attic" and "Closet"
 - d) volunteers to assist with the hauling of large furniture items.

Will you give and volunteer in this response? At the offering, I am asking all of us to give. Following the benediction, if you are willing to volunteer or donate clothing and furniture, I am asking that you will remain so that we might organize the response. Thank you.