

I graduated from a high school that has “Enter to Learn – Go Forth to Serve” over the front door. After walking through that door for 3 years, you can’t help but be influenced. After hearing at church for years, “Protect the dignity of every human being”; “We are all God’s children.”; “Guard each man’s dignity and save each man’s pride”; “When you do this to the least of these, you do it unto me” – you can’t help but respond.

Confession 1st – When I was called and asked to talk about New Orleans, I said no – I’m not a speaker – I don’t do that. Well, I thought about it and called her back and said yes because I firmly believe that you should know what has been done in your name. We went to NO as individuals, but we also went, representing St. Matthew’s. You sent, via the Outreach Commission, \$500 two of the times we went, not to pay our way (we paid for our own transportation and food), but to be given to EDOLA to use for relief.

I am not an expert on New Orleans. But I do care about NO. Why? – because of the suffering, seemingly made worse because of class and the slowness of FEMA. In the words of Jim Williams, we were sent there to be a witness to what has happened. If it were not for the churches’ help, NO would be much farther behind in progress. Volunteers came from everywhere.

Our group from St. Matthew’s has been to NO 3 times since Katrina – in July (10 mo), in Dec. (16 mo) and in March (19 mo.) We will go again in Oct. Linda and Jim Fryer are heading up the group, so if you are interested, please contact them. I believe there are 5-6 more spaces.

As you know, Katrina hit the eastern edge of NO and continued on to Miss. The City of NO breathed a collective sigh of relief. Again, they had been spared the direct hit of the storm, AND THEN THE LEVEES BROKE. Water came pouring in until the

water was level with that in Lake Ponchatrain. When the waters receded, 80% of the city was under water to a greater or lesser degree.

Merrill told us that our help would be like a marathon, not a sprint – We collected items for hygiene kits to be given out at the Convention Center, had a kitchen shower for about 80 families who had come from NO with nothing, counseled folks at the Convention Center and adopted 4 families to help through the rough spots of relocating. After several months, it became apparent that we needed to do more.

9 women went to NO. We decided we wouldn't be able to gut or muck houses, but there are jobs for everyone. We were assigned to the Mobile Respite Unit.

We arrived at our home away from home (**PIC - 2**) and settled in. Tell about EDOLA and housing.

The next day we headed out for the Lower 9th Ward where we were assigned. As we passed over the Industrial Canal, we looked into the Lower 9th and this is what we saw. (**PIC -3-10**) Crossed right at the breach – homes and lives lost in minutes.

Went to corner of St. Claude and Caffin, set up the Mobile Respite Unit and people came out of the woodwork (**PIC - 11**). We gave out bleach, water, some food and gave a listening ear to all comers.

Stories – grandfather was 1st Black fireman
Father was preacher
Bakery with good smells

It was home – no matter how humble.

Fats Domino

Barbeque sold across street – worked on generator – no electricity in neighborhood. Man raised in Lower 9th, moved to KS and had successful business – came back to help

Mobile Loaves and Fishes – given from Austin – run that day by a family who had been flooded out. They had returned the week before.

Books brought by kids from PA, organized by librarian there for convention. **(PIC – 12-13)**. They loved it. This gave a little bit of unexpected joy for those who love to read.

That night we took a “Devastation Tour” for 2 hours and then ate at a nice restaurant in the French Quarter. NO is like 2 cities – if you just saw the Garden District and the French Quarter, you would never know anything had happened (except the restaurants close earlier because of lack of wait staff and kitchen staff.)

Our last day, we saw some women older than we were, mucking out a house, so we decided to do that next time

11 women went next time

Changes we saw – 1. many of the houses in previous pictures were gone 2. Cars piled under the freeway were removed. 3. More restaurants opened 4. Still lots closed

This time we stayed in St. Paul’s HOMECOMING CENTER in Lakeview area. Downstairs were facilities for counseling, help in replacing documents, filling out forms, etc. and upstairs were our 4” mattresses.

Lakeview area has middle to upper middle class area with many houses owned by people older than me. Didn't move back because it was too hard. 4-5 dark houses to every 1 that was lighted.

We worked in an area called "Broadmore". Good community spirit – "Broadmore Lives" flags. The house we worked on had been owned by the same family for a long time. The children had grown up there. When parents died, eldest daughter and her family lived in one side and her sister and family in the other. Gunshot house – 4 rooms, kitchen and bath.

We wore our "marshmallow suits" – hot but clean. After the first day, we stripped to our undies with marshmallow suits on top.

We took down plaster walls (**PIC – 14-18**) and piled everything on the curb. The Corp of Engineers would come with a bobcat and cruise the neighborhoods, picking up trash every day. We were there 12-26/12-29. Rumor had it that they would stop picking up the trash Jan. 1st., but when we went in March, they were still picking up.

We all got great at crowbars, axes and sledge hammers and wheelbarrows. If you see Susan Barnes with an ax in her hand, do what she says. She swings a mean axe. We all found that we were capable of doing a lot of things we didn't know we could do.

People were very grateful that we (and others) had come to help. They had a hard time believing that we would come that far just to help them. Our last day on our demolition job, a group of teenagers from Westlake came to gut the other side of the duplex.

Took 20 prayer shawls. Tell about Hannah - praying for her – nobody since her mother died. We also gave one to the owner of the house that we were gutting. (**PIC – 19**) We left about 10 of them with the priest at one of the churches. He counseled people

every day. He told of one woman he definitely wanted to give a prayer shawl. Before she came to see him, she had been raped and abused. He had been seeing her for weeks, and she was about to the point of letting him touch her. He thought the shawl would help her immensely.

People there seem to have a very deep faith. Seems like you would have to go on. As in all Outreach, we were really fed by those we went to serve.

3rd Visit

9 women, 2 men

Changes – 1. Under highway where cars were, are now pictures on the pillars – vines, flowers, people. 2. Superdome was completed 3. Zoo open. 4. Some more houses in states of repair and more restaurants opened.

This time, we did not wear marshmallow suits, and we had a crew chief – college students who have taken a year off to help – one lost his car in a NO tornado a week after he arrived

“Its not about the property. Its about the homeowner”.

Carol Barnwell, (**PIC – 20**) editor of The Texas Episcopalian came with us on this trip. She mucked, but she also interviewed lots of people. The article came out last June..

1st day – garage apt. In St. Bernard Parish – next to Lower 9th. Its hard cleaning out a lifetime of “things” – pictures, Xmas trees, marde gras beads. Even found a pistol behind the plaster in the wall. “Don’t touch”. It was a water pistol.

Again we put everything on the curb. We separated it into piles – hazardous material, electrical and other. Several people came by looking for aluminum and copper wiring to sell. Nothing goes to waste.

2nd day – NO East. Worked with a group of Episcopalians from CA- owner wanted to look at everything (Its not about the property, its about the homeowner), so we gutted one room – walls and ceiling, swept and then moved all of the belongings into that room. Then we gutted the rest of the house – took everything down to the studs, door frames off (**PIC – 21-22**)

We would sit on the curb under a tree for lunch. A group from church had lovingly packed us lunches for each day. We were very grateful.

3rd day – Algiers across MISS. R. We worked with a group of Unitarian Universalists. We finally got to meet one of the homeowners. Lisa and her family had been living in a FEMA trailer on her property – actually her parents. A tree fell on the house and opened a big hole in the roof, so it was soaked, moldy and really yucky.

She had needed help and saw an ad on TV by EDOLA and called. After the house was gutted for free (We saved her \$6,400) , she can get loans to re-do. Lots of paper work. It is not an easy path to travel through the land of beauacracy.

Several people stopped and asked if we could help them. We gave them the EDOLA number.

Before we left, we gave Lisa a prayer shawl and SHE PRAYED FOR US . “Bless these your children who came from far away to bring blessings on me and my family. Provide for their needs as

you have provided for me...” It was a beautiful prayer and a wonderful way to end our time.

Starfish story: As she said “Now I can see the light at the end of the tunnel – before it was a dead end.

Who knows what plan NO will choose. New Orleans is coming back slowly; it will be different. Maybe like this **(PIC - 23)** Who knows.

The Episcopal Church is starting a new endeavor called Jericho Road – a rebuilding effort. They chose about 50 properties in a neighborhood and rebuild. An enticement to return – good place to raise your children. **(PIC – 24)**

Not everyone can go on our NO trip, but there were plenty of folks who supported us through prayer, \$\$, lunches and goodie bags and prayer shawls. To those of you who helped in any way, Thank you.

You don't have to go to NO to do OUTREACH. You can volunteer time at Caritas or El Buen Samaritano, the Women's Storybook Project, Kairos, cook for Casa Marianella once a month, build on the Habitat House and a myriad of other places. You can bring a can of veggies or a bag of rice or beans for the food basket on Sunday. Outreach is OUTREACH whether you do it through the church or not. When you help someone else, you fulfill what Jesus asked us to do. **GO DO OUTREACH!**