

Hurricane Rita – Second anniversary next week

LAKE CHARLES – It has been nearly two years since the angry winds and rain of Hurricane Rita roared through Southwest Louisiana and, for many, destroyed everything they had worked a lifetime to gain. Monday, September 24, will be the second anniversary of the passage of the storm.

Initially the Diocese of Lake Charles, at the mandate of its administrator, Rev. Msgr. Harry D. Greig, began a program called Relief Effort of Catholic Social Services (REC-SS) to provide assistance to all those who had been devastated by Rita throughout the Diocese.

Msgr. Greig appointed the Rev. Henry Mancuso as the leader of the Diocesan Relief and Recovery Management Team out of which came REC-SS.

Catholic Charities USA initially gave the Diocese a \$10,000 grant, which was quickly distributed. An additional grant followed for \$2.067 million, which was meant to provide immediate assistance to people as well as more long-term aid, like appliances, furniture, building materials, and utility assistance.

A second grant for \$1,512,260 came about after Catholic Charities personnel came into the Diocese and realized that we needed a lot more than what we had previously requested.

It was from this second grant that the Diocese established the Office of Disaster Response with Sandy Gay, the longtime head of the Office of Religious Education, taking on the leadership role. She had also directed the REC-SS program.

"I have been on a tremendous learning curve," Gay said. "The first almost year was filled with meetings – meetings with Cameron Unmet Needs Committee, Cal-

casieu Unmet Needs Committee, Beauregard Unmet Needs Committee, Red Cross, and the United Methodist Committee on Relief, all of which were on the ground after the storm. I have been meeting with the parishes and finding out what they did during the storm. I am just now beginning to figure out

Hurricane Relief through Catholic Charities USA Grants for Hurricane victims in the Diocese of Lake Charles since 2005			
Cash Assistance	\$509,200	Administration	\$387,689
Household Appliances	\$446,560	Counseling	\$1,760
Furniture	\$337,054	Other Assistance	\$7,182
Gasoline Vouchers	\$59,200	Transportation	\$4,498
Wal-Mart Gift Cards	\$50,000	Warehouse	\$36,844
Building Materials	\$39,519	Total	\$2,255,831
Temporary Housing	\$25,864	Unredeemed Vouchers	\$220,470
Utility Assistance	\$14,778		
Case Management Assistance	\$335,683		
		3,907 families helped	\$2,476,301

what I can do."

Gay, who has administered the two Catholic Charities USA grants, noted that the help from personnel from Catholic Charities was of great importance.

"They really helped us see there was a need for case management," Gay said.

"Our original assistance was directly to people, to people in Cameron particularly who were in need. As time went on it became important to not only help people with a one-time need but to also help them plan ahead and look holistically at their lives. The second grant enabled us to start this office and also for us to work with Family and Youth Counseling to provide case management for people we sent to them."

Others see the work done by Gay and the assistance provided by the Diocese as nothing short of impossible to have done without.

"I think that the involvement of the Diocese of Lake Charles was instrumental in the overall recovery effort," said Catherine Thomas, Disaster Recovery Specialist with the United Way of Southwest Louisiana. "Actually it was instrumental in shortening the overall recovery effort because without it we

now. It was wonderful."

With the reorganization of the Diocese under Bishop Glen John Provost, a number of clergy have been appointed to aid different law enforcement agencies, according to Gay.

"We will be much better prepared for such disasters," Gay said. "But disasters are happening here every day. When someone loses their home to a fire, Red Cross can help for one or two days but not after that. We are beginning to see what our role could be in local disasters. We have contacted Catholic Charities to see what they might be able to do to assist us in that regard."

For instance, one of the many people helped after Hurricane Rita was impacted again recently following an environmental incident.

Oysterman Adley Dyson, Jr., who lost the home he was living in to Rita, was out of business for several months last year due to the spill of sewerage that found its way into prime oyster grounds. Dyson, who has a medical condition that requires medicine that costs over \$300 per month, was helped after Rita through a grant that provided funds for such medicine. He was also provided a voucher to replace his washing machine, dryer and freezer in the travel trailer that now serves as his home.

"I can't say enough about them, they really helped me with the medicines and other things," Dyson said. "It was either food, electricity or my medicine and I can't go without my medicine."

"Every last thing they have provided to me means a lot," he said. "It's amazing how difficult it is to get along without modern appliances. Any time I called to ask for any help they were willing to see how they could provide me with assistance."



The Most Reverend Glen John Provost blesses the new offices of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Lake Charles, now located at 612 Louisiana Avenue. Pictured with Bishop Provost are, from left the Very Rev. Daniel Torres, Vicar General, Lou Colbert, Mary Ann Johnson, Deacon Edward Lavine, and Rev. Henry Mancuso, Secretary for the Ministry of Pastoral Services.

Two-time evacuee now directs Catholic Charities

LAKE CHARLES – Evacuating New Orleans due to Hurricane Katrina and having local family ties brought Carol Fernandez and her family to Lake Charles in August 2005. In September 2005, she evacuated to Texas to escape the wrath of Hurricane Rita.

Today, she and her family call Lake Charles home and she has a new job as the director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Lake Charles.

With family in Lake Charles, three aunts, and with her mother being originally from DeRidder, Southwest Louisiana became the evacuation destination in the wake of Katrina.

"We evacuated here and, of course, we thought it was just going to be for a weekend and it did not happen that way at all," she said. Of course, less than a month later she was forced to leave Lake Charles because of Hurricane Rita but returned after the all clear.

Katrina and the flooding aftermath left her home in New Orleans under six to eight feet of water for three weeks. "It's gutted now and we haven't decided what to do with it," Fernandez said.

What she has decided is that Lake Charles will be her family's home for the foreseeable future.

"It's been two years now that we have already been here," she continued. "We decided in 2005 to stay because we didn't want our oldest son, who was a high school senior, to be moved around too much. We wanted him settled and in place for his final year of high school."

For a while both Fernandez and her husband traveled back and forth between Lake Charles and New Orleans for their jobs. "We were blessed to have that available to us," she continued. "It worked out well for us to do it that way. Then it came time to think about the next school year and New Orleans was not in any shape that we thought we wanted to go back. So, I told my job that I didn't plan to come back to New Orleans. I stayed with them until October of 2006."

In November 2006 her husband gave his notice. "Neither of us had job prospects but we knew we couldn't keep doing what we were doing. We did it truly just on faith that we were making the right choice for our family, to have our family back together as whole unit as we were accustomed."

While her husband was seeking work (he now works for Frito Lay) Fernandez decided that she might want to try her hand at teaching. "I



Carol Fernandez

signed up as a substitute teacher at Sacred Heart Saint Katharine Drexel School and it was through that activity that brought me to Catholic Charities," she said.

First, Fernandez was asked to apply for an upcoming opening as the Director of Religious Education at Sacred Heart Church. Then Father Henry Mancuso, who had been appointed as Secretary for the Ministry of Pastoral Services by Bishop Glen John Provost, told her he had another position he wanted her to consider – Director of Catholic Charities and she got the job.

In the short time as Director Fernandez says she needs that there is a tremendous need in the community.

"The calls we get on a daily basis are just tremendous," she said. "There are just so many calls, requesting assistance. I am not talking about calls about emergency assistance, though we get calls of that nature they are few and far between compared to the calls we get for financial assistance with rent and utilities. We get calls for people needing money for gas so they can drive to apply for jobs, for food, huge, huge number of requests. Catholic Charities has been so consumed with addressing those requests. It really takes up a great deal of time."

"We are challenged because it may take us two or three weeks to get a client finished (with the process of assistance)," she continued. "That is surely not the way we would like to respond."

Without a fulltime secretary, Fernandez has a half-time case manager for interviews and two volunteers to do clerical work in the office.

One thing that has helped is the office's contracting with the 211 Information

Line, which provides information about resources in the community. It is an intake service that takes a caller's information and provides it to the appropriate agency.

"Still we get calls that we have to send to 211 and then the same caller will call us back to ask how soon they can receive help," Fernandez said. "We tell them it will take two or three weeks but they are anxious because they have an urgent need. We have to take the people in the order they have applied, it's the only fair way."

The office also does out funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and FEMA has guidelines as to how that money is used. There is also a local governing board that can further restrict the money.

"We can only pay for 30 days worth of service for a client and at the same time we have to be assured that they are going to get an additional 30 days of service," Fernandez said. "For instance, if a person is behind 60 days in their bill, we can only pay for 30 days and they must provide us with proof that they have the other 30 days paid for from another source. We can't pay for deposits or late fees and a client can only get help once every 18 months."

There are attempts to "work" the system to gain aid that might not be really needed and that takes time away from helping the people who really do need assistance, according to Fernandez.

"We exchange the list of people we serve with the other agency which gives out FEMA funds so we know who they helped and they know who we helped and there is no duplication of services," she said.

Fernandez pointed out that the agency serves people of any faith. "It doesn't matter if they are in church, out of church. We don't even ask that kind of question. We help the entire community."

The community can also help Fernandez, she noted.

"They can donate money, they can provide us with some of their time and talent," she said. "We need both. We would like to get our food bank re-established and we would need someone to help administer that."

If anyone would like to make a donation to Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Lake Charles or volunteer they can reach Fernandez at 439-7436 or by writing to her at 612 Louisiana Avenue, Lake Charles, LA 70601.

Annual Catechetical Conference Sept. 29

LAKE CHARLES – The annual Catechetical Conference sponsored by the Office of Religious Education of the Diocese of Lake Charles is scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 29, at St. Louis Catholic High School.

Dr. Carole Eipers, the vice president and executive director of Catechetics for William H. Sadlier, Inc., will be the keynote speaker. Eipers has served in parish ministries for more than 20 years as a teacher, director of religious education, youth minister, and pastoral associate. Sadlier Publishing is the oldest family owned publishing company in the United States.

Dr. Eipers also served as President of the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership. She has been a member of the adjunct faculties of Mundelein Seminary, Loyola University Chicago, Loyola University New Orleans and Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. She has written and presented extensively in the area of catechetics and holds a Master of Pastoral Studies degree from Loyola University, Chicago and a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Graduate Theological Foundation in Indiana.

The conference begins at 7:30 a.m. with registration followed by opening prayer

and welcome at 8:30 a.m. The keynote address will be from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and the first of two breakout sessions begins at 10:30 a.m. Lunch will be from noon to 1 p.m. followed by the second breakout session. Closing prayer will begin at 2:30 p.m.

Scheduled to take part as leaders of the breakout sessions include Rev. Whitney Miller, Rev. Clyde Thomas, Rev. Keith Pellerin, Rev. Rommel Tollentino, and Msgr. Jace Eskind. Also, Donna Barger, Connie Houssiere, Michelle Cutrera, Annalisa Huffman, Paula Stuckart, Sharon Gaspard, Leo Trahan, and Chip Gauthe.

Topics included Prayer and Spirituality, the Creed, the Sacraments, Scriptural Foundations of Marian Devotions, and Liturgy. Also to be covered will be the Ten Commandments, Art and Environment, the Beatitudes, Family Life, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, Technology and Scripture.

The registration fee is \$25.00, including lunch or \$20 with out lunch. Deadline for registering and being guaranteed lunch is Monday, Sept. 24.

To register or for more information call the Office of Religious Education at 337-439-7426, Ext. 309.



Carole Eipers

Correction



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