

Catholic Calendar

A PAGE DEVOTED TO LOCAL CATHOLIC INTERESTS † THE DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES † LCDIOCESE.ORG

Vol. 34, No. 20

September 26, 2008

Ike damages churches repaired following Rita

CAMERON – Less than three years after Hurricane Rita severely damaged the Catholic churches in Cameron Parish, Hurricane Ike has repeated the deed.

The five church parishes in Cameron along with the chapel at Johnson Bayou were inundated by the storm surge of Ike. Estimates of the total cost of the damages have not yet been finalized but the loss also includes four rectories and four halls along with damages to the cemeteries and mausoleums at Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady Star of the Sea and the cemeteries at St. Peter the Apostle and St. Eugene.

The Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel in Johnson Bayou, a mission of St. Peter the Apostle, which had been the closest church to the landfill of the eye of Hurricane Rita in 2005, took the worst damage of any of the churches from the water of Hurricane Ike. The Chapel had been the diocese's first church below the Intracoastal Waterway to be operational following Rita. Masses were held in the church at Easter 2006.

All parish buildings – the church, rectory, hall, and CCD building – were reduced to the two by four studs under what remained of their roofs by the storm surge of Ike.

St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in Hackberry took about 35 inches of water destroying the pews, the organ, carpeting, walls, and damaging a number of other items. The parish hall and CCD classrooms was also flooded with about 26 inches of water, also destroying carpets, contents, and damaging walls. The still under construction office building at the church had about 21 inches of water ruining carpets and walls.

St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church in Big Lake, which had taken about 22 inches of water from Hurricane Rita, took a bigger hit from Ike. This time 30 inches of water damaged the entire complex, including the rectory, the office, church, religious education classrooms and the hall. Damage estimates for office equipment as well as contents of the residence and the classroom desks are still being made, according to Msgr. Harry Greig.

Damage to the pews in the church as well as equipment in the hall's kitchen, including refrigerators, freezers, stoves, etc. will have to be assessed. Even the outside air conditioning units, which had been raised more than two feet into the air sustained damage from the water.

In the church, Msgr. Greig estimated that the sheetrock walls would have to be replaced about four feet up from the floor.

Msgr. Greig also noted that he felt the repair this time at St. Mary could be easier than after Rita. "We had to wait so long to actually get in after Rita because there was no power," he said. "This time it is repair rather than reconstruction."

Estimates are that the Cameron's lower east coast may have sustained about 11 feet of water at its deepest level. The water left layers of mud and debris in all of the churches.

Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Cameron, whose reconstruction was finished about a year ago took in about 6 1/2 feet of water damaging the pews and blowing out the eastern wall. Damage was also sustained to the roof and brick structures protecting the outside air conditioning units.

Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church in



Pews deposited outside of Sacred Heart Church

Creole, whose reconstruction was nearly complete, succumbed to about 5 1/2 feet of water, destroying the pews and inside walls as well as several stained glass windows and doors. The roof was also damaged by the winds of Hurricane Ike.

The portable office building which had been brought up from St. Patrick Chapel in Sweetlake where Father Joseph McGrath had overseen the pastoral care of the parishioners in Sacred Heart and Our Lady Star of the Sea for many months after Hurricane Rita was severely damaged.

St. Eugene Catholic Church in Grand Chenier, the first of the lower Cameron church parishes to be rebuilt, suffered about 2 1/2 feet of water. A carpet of mud covered the floors of the church while marsh grass was piled up inside the rectory, which had been decimated by Rita. The mobile home where Father Vincent Vadakkedath was living was also damaged by the storm surge. Work that had begun on the parish hall and religious education building was also destroyed by the storm surge.

We need your help!

There are two ways in which you can assist the Diocese of Lake Charles during this disaster - humanitarian aid and rebuilding assistance.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese and the Office of Disaster Response continue to address the humanitarian need, providing help to more than 300 families totaling over 2,000 individuals since the storms. In addition Catholic Charities has taken some 300 calls for rental and utility service aid, having worked with about 125 families so far.

"Because the devastation in Cameron and other low lying areas was so great the needs of the people are just now beginning to become known. It is estimated that we will be called upon to help thousands. We helped 5,000 families following Rita and we anticipate a similar need after this storm," said Sandy Gay, Director of Disaster Response. Thousands of pounds of supplies have been distributed and more is on the way. If

you have the time, please volunteer to help. For more information on volunteering call 337-439-7436 or e-mail sandy.gay@lcdioocese.org or trish.trejo@lcdioocese.org.

If you can't volunteer your time, consider making a monetary contribution to help those who have been devastated. Six churches were severely damaged, along with four parish halls and four rectories. Insurance will not cover all the expenses of rebuilding.

If you can help with any of these needs, your donation will be designated for humanitarian relief and the needs of the diocese brought about by the hurricane.

You should write your check to Diocese of Lake Charles, noting that the contribution is for "hurricane relief," and send your gift to the Diocese of Lake Charles, P. O. Box 3223, Lake Charles, LA 70602-3223. God bless you.



The hall and religious education building at Our Lady of the Assumption Church was devastated by the massive wall of water.



Mud was everywhere in Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Creole as the force of the water dislodged the pews and ruined them in the process.

An Eyewitness View of Post-Ike Cameron Parish

By Bishop Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles
September 19, 2008

In the midst of the devastation and destruction caused by Hurricane Ike, my first and abiding impression as Bishop is an observation made by a utility worker I met in West Cameron Parish. He was a Doucet from Canada and had come all that way, along with an entire crew, to restore electrical power. I pointed out to him that his name along with a number of others—there was a Savoy with him also—were common to Southwest Louisiana. Tragedy had brought these "cousins" from Canada and Louisiana together. As though in the family, he offered his observation about the residents of the area. He said, "These are courageous people." Indeed they are.

Traveling along highways eroded by the storm surge, I saw trailers overturned, shrimp boats capsized, homes gutted as though by some explosion, trees stripped and browned by salt exposure, alligators and snakes slinking lazily across our path, and water like an apocalyptic sea of glass everywhere. Six churches were severely damaged—one of them left naked with nothing but a frame, along with four rectories and four parish halls. And these were only the Catholic churches. Our brothers and sisters of other faiths suffered as much. What was so sad, and it returned in conversation with every Cameron Parish resident, was the repetition

of the event. The words used to describe post-Ike could have been used to describe post-Rita. What is so discouraging is that the remaining homes, churches, parish halls, and businesses destroyed by Ike were rebuilt from another storm. Some had just been dedicated. Some still had the smell of wet paint. "These are courageous people."

In the midst of this surreal landscape, as I walked into the waterlogged churches of Hackberry, Cameron, Creole, and Grand Chenier, I met local people of courage cleaning them out. The two days I visited Cameron Parish along with Father Torres, Johnson Bayou was inaccessible and crossing to Big Lake was limited and problematic. I saw the pastors. Father Tolentino accompanied me to Hackberry. Father McGrath brought me to East Cameron, courtesy of a kind parishioner in the OEP. We met Father Vincent along the way, having just returned from a look at his church. Msgr. Greig had been busily surveying the damage to his parish and supervising the clean-up. And there were the work crews, throwing away, in many cases, new pews, just installed, but now rendered useless by salty water and mud, laminated wood peeling and cushions dripping wet. They were sweeping up stained glass made by a local artisan, retrieving hand carved wood statues from the marsh, cutting away wet sheetrock, mahogany panels and insulation, and attempting to quickly hook up generators to dry the humid

air before black mold made what remained irretrievable. The mud was inches deep, the residue of six to eight feet of water, now being washed out. I saw courage in every face, shaken, yes, but resolved.

Would they return? That was the question I heard everyone asking. I asked it myself. Doubtless there would be some, perhaps many, who would decide it is better to live in a more benign location. However, one can never underestimate the virtue of courage. And virtue, as a grace, comes in ways that surprise us because only God can give it.

One of the more dramatic episodes of my visitation was in a cemetery. The coroner had asked me to pray graveside prayers. So the workers gathered around with the utility personnel from Canada and the priests and a few parishioners, and we joined in prayer, blessed the ground, and commended the deceased in their proper place to await the Resurrection. Hope is a precondition of courage. So is faith.

The statue of St. Peter in Hackberry never fell, I was told, either with Rita or with Ike. The shrine at Our Lady Star of the Sea, erected after Hurricane Audrey in '57, still stood. Over five hundred people were lost in that tragic event. Thanks to evacuation, better prediction, experience, and God's grace, Rita and Ike had seen far fewer fatalities. The tragedy of those two storms had taken another route.

Many shared their tragedies with us, those without insurance, others terminally ill, some

physically unable to rebuild, hundreds left homeless. No one asked me the meaning of it all. If they had, I might have answered that it was a mystery, which it is. Perhaps the answer came when a gentleman turned to Father McGrath, his pastor, and asked, "When will we get back into our church?" What his good pastor answered at the time was important, but I think the question is just as important. We return to the courage that our Canadian cousin found remarkable.

Tragedy, besides its necessity and reason for existence, can bring out the best in us. Had not St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, "As you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement" (II Corinthians 1:7)? Through affliction came encouragement because the sufferings were redemptive. A parishioner's yearning for a place of worship was not only a desire to return home but also a profession of faith. Tragedy had prompted a good.

My visit to Cameron Parish left me with a sense of having touched something profound. Every tragedy opens up to a human the possibility of entering into a deeper mystery. That mystery places everything else in perspective. I got into my car the next morning to drive to the office and did what I usually do. I turned on the radio for the news. With lightning speed, I turned the radio off. I could not listen. I had heard and seen too much. I wanted silence. I wanted to dwell with the mystery a while longer.



Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Johnson Bayou is merely a roof and the supporting two-by-fours following the more than 11-foot storm surge of Hurricane Ike.



The force of the water piled up pews and brought down the altar at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron

Scholarship fund memorializes Msgr. F. H. Gouaux

LAKE CHARLES -- A special fund honoring a well-known priest who served half of his priestly ministry in four parishes of what is now the Diocese of Lake Charles has been established with the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana. The fund, which will honor the memory of Msgr. Ferdinand H. Gouaux, was begun with an initial contribution from the Most Reverend Jude Speyrer, Bishop-emeritus of the Diocese. Bishop Speyrer and Msgr. Gouaux were close friends in school and also served together in the 1960s at Our Lady of the Lake Church in Lake Arthur.

Grants from the fund, to be known as the Bishop Jude Speyrer Fund in Honor of Monsignor Gouaux, will not be made until the principal reaches \$1 million. At that time financial assistance will provide for ordained clergy of the Diocese of Lake Charles to seek advanced degrees in church studies.

In addition, the Bishop has made provisions that at his death the property near Carencro where he resides, will be sold with proceeds going into the Fund as well. Over 30 years ago Bishop Speyrer and Msgr. Gouaux began paying on a house and land where they had hoped to retire together.

"He and I bought this house long before there was a Diocese of Lake Charles, in 1977 or 1978," Bishop Speyrer said. "After we purchased the place we used it together once or twice a month, on our days off. In the country east of Carencro the place wasn't all that far from where we were then stationed, 10 or 12 miles from Lafayette, at most.

"We agreed to leave it to each other, to whoever survived," the Bishop continued. "Our intention, after our deaths was to give it to the Diocese, the diocese in those days, being Lafayette. It was to be done with the expectation that the Bishop would need a quiet place in the country."

It wasn't until recently that Bishop Speyrer realized what little usefulness the place would have for the Bishop of Lake Charles. "When you are almost two hours away it's no 'hop, skip and a jump,'" he continued. "So I thought, just sell the place and put the money to good use and remember Msgr. Gouaux by establishing this memorial.

"The purpose of the fund for the Diocese of Lake Charles is to continue building on the benefits we experienced when our three students (Msgr. Jace Eskind, Bonnie Landry, and Father Bert Borel) returned from Canada with degrees in Canon Law," he said "There will always be a need for similar specialized degrees."

The Bishop reminisced about his own time studying



Msgr. F. H. Gouaux, left, and Bishop Jude Speyrer

abroad. He graduated from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. "I remember gratefully the advantages I had doing my theology abroad," he said. "I thought what an advantage it would be to expose the clergy in future years to similar contacts, and give these priests the benefit of an education abroad, of travel, and perhaps of picking up a language or two. A serious degree will take a couple of years and, if there long enough, you will learn the language."

The discussion between Bishop Speyrer and the Diocese

occurred in the time between Bishop Edward Braxton and the appointment of Bishop Glen John Provost, when Msgr. Harry D. Greig served as Administrator. "Msgr. Greig formally accepted my proposal but we knew that only after a Bishop was appointed could it be finalized," Bishop Speyrer said.

"The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana came to my attention through a press release from the United Way," the Bishop noted. The release described how the Baton Rouge Area Foundation intended to help develop a comparable entity in the Calcasieu area. "I had heard of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, which successfully oversees more than \$500 million invested for charitable purposes. I thought this vehicle would be a good way to get started."

The fact that a local Foundation was being established made it even more appropriate. The Bishop also knows that his seed money is far from enough.

"The Gouaux Fund will not consist exclusively of money from the sale of the property," he continued. "Msgr. Gouaux served in eight parishes in his lifetime, four of them in the area of the Diocese of Lake Charles. I think his memory is still alive in these parishes. I invite his former parishioners to support this. He was greatly loved wherever he went."

Within the geographic region of the Diocese of Lake Charles, Msgr. Gouaux served in Lake Arthur as assistant pastor and Administrator pro tem. Later he became pastor of Bell City, St. Margaret in Lake Charles and Our Lady Help of Christians in Jennings. Msgr. Gouaux, who was ordained in 1956, died in December 1985. "He was such a good priest, he served well, was loved wherever he went and did a fine job," the Bishop said.

Noting that there might not always be candidates for advanced degrees, with this fund there "will always be money for their studies. In fact, if you don't have anybody in the program for four or five years, nothing is lost, the money continues to accumulate. We hope the Fund will generate about \$50,000 a year once the principal peaks at \$1 million."

Those interested in making a contribution to the Bishop Jude Speyrer Fund in Honor of Monsignor Gouaux, may contact Chip Gauthier, Director of Development, Diocese of Lake Charles, 439-7400, Extension 307 or Lisa Verrette, President/CEO, Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, P.O. Box 3125, Lake Charles, LA 70602 or 337-491-6688.



More than two feet of water damaged classrooms and furnishings in the Religious Education building at St. Peter the Apostle.



More than 30 inches of water inundated St. Mary of the Lake's buildings. Here even raising the outside air conditioning units didn't keep the deluge from damaging the units.



Floodwaters forced burial vaults from the ground and carried the contents away at the cemetery at St. Peter the Apostle.



Bishop Provost prays at the Shrine which was erected in front of Our Lady Star of the Sea in 1963. Note damage to wall in background.

Water rose slowly at St. Eugene in Grand Chenier depositing a carpet of mud on the floor and ruining these pews.

(This page paid for by the Diocese of Lake Charles.)