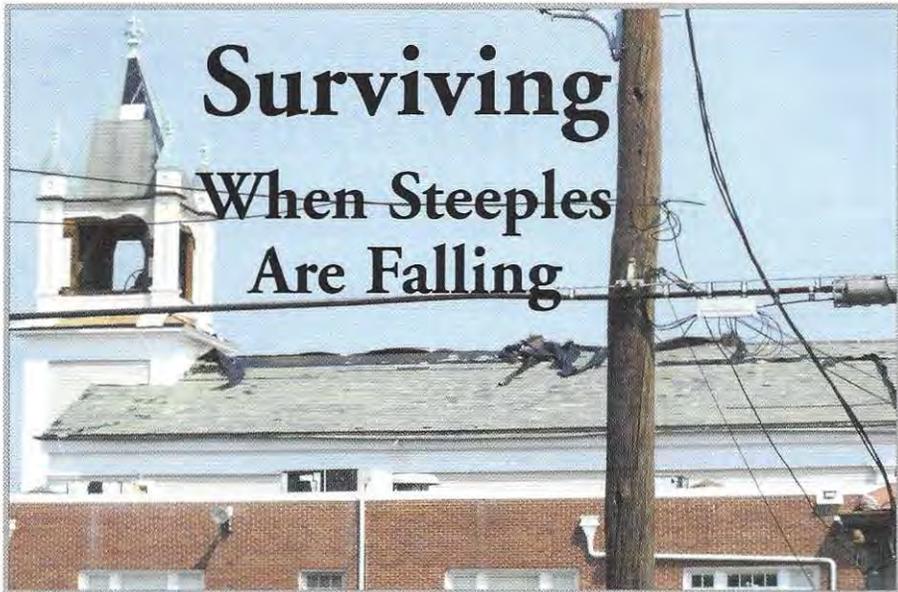


# Surviving When Steeples Are Falling



By Elizabeth Goodine

*"Built on a rock, the church does stand,  
even when steeples are falling..."*

I will not soon forget singing that hymn on Sunday, August 28, 2005, and how during the next week the devastation of Hurricane Katrina became a beautiful example of God's provision.

The city was nearly deserted on Sunday morning before the storm, but at St. Paul Lutheran Church in the Faubourg Marigny neighborhood near the French Quarter, about twenty-five people gathered for worship. One couple, who followed the sound of the ringing bells, came after finding their own church doors closed. Pastor reminded us that our hope is not in earthly things and that *whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's*. Our voices joined in song,



*Damage inside St. Paul's sanctuary (top photo) Church steeple with the sides of the bell tower blown out and the bells displaced*

one which was to become eerily appropriate the next day as the bell tower fell and the building itself shifted: *"Built on a rock, the church does stand, even when steeples are falling..."*

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*Billy, Leah (Elizabeth's daughter-in-law), Adam (Elizabeth's son) and another Billy are on a neighbor's roof placing sign to alert helicopter crews of our where-abouts and needs. The sign says, "Camp Marigny—Troops, ice, water, gas, Troops!"*

Let me set the scene. Our neighborhood is often described as "quirky"; it's filled with people you might not expect to meet on your main street. Settled around 1805, the Marigny is adjacent to the French Quarter and is considered the first suburb of New Orleans. Filled with shotgun houses and Creole cottages, the Marigny is home to colorful characters including a silver-winged woman with glittering hair and a toothless old man with a Santa Claus beard and well-worn shrimp boots. This is a neighborhood where dogs are welcome in restaurants. Speckled with coffee shops and small

businesses, it's a residential neighborhood where people produce coffee, pies and pralines.

In the midst of this neighborhood stands St. Paul Lutheran Church where His Word is proclaimed.

On Sunday evening our church began to fill with some morning worshippers and other neighbors who decided to sleep at the church for the night. We reasoned: If the water should rise, we could move to the upper stories—even to the bell tower, if necessary. Little did we know we would spend an entire week together in the church, and that God would provide us with resources



*Water rising down the block*



*Uprooted tree in our neighborhood – in front of Elizabeth's daughter's house*

well beyond anything we could imagine.

*“Built on a rock, the church does stand, even when steeples are falling...”*

So why did we stay in the city when officials were pleading with people to evacuate? We knew the church, which had never flooded, could be a shelter for our stranded elderly and poor neighbors who had no means to escape the impending disaster. Built on high ground—six feet above sea level—the mid-19th-century church could become a refuge for the

community when the winds started blowing and the waters began rising.

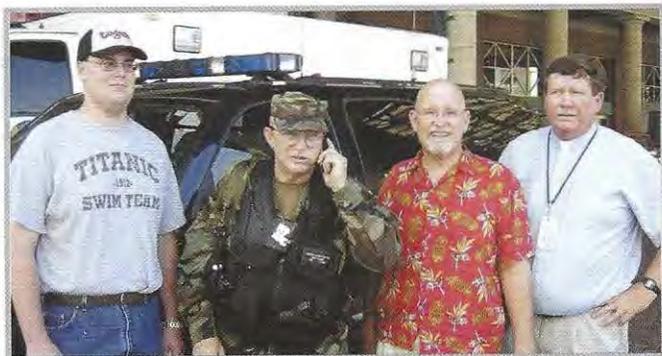
As Hurricane Katrina bore down on us, we were huddled beneath the shaking steeple and bell tower of St. Paul Lutheran Church. The hurricane struck our neighborhood with ferocious 135 mile-per-hour winds leaving destruction in its wake: uprooted trees, flooded streets, debris and rubble everywhere. St. Paul endured its share of damage; the roof was torn up, the sides of the bell tower were blown out and the bells were displaced.

You'd think there would have been calmness after the wind and pounding rain ceased. However, our fear and tension only escalated in the aftermath. For starters, we had no electricity or running water. As the hours turned into days, looters began to ravage the nearby French Quarter and armed gangs roamed our neighborhoods.

Yet with each new challenge, God provided the people and resources to meet our needs. Although the communication systems were completely down, one telephone in the neighborhood continued to work. While we had no electricity, we could cook with gas. When the faucets ran dry, we found the neighborhood swimming pools.

The gifts of every person from oldest to youngest were used to the fullest.

*Jacob (a captain in US army just returned from Kuwait the week before Katrina), First Sgt. Moore of the Louisiana National Guard, Rev. David Goodine (Elizabeth's husband) and Chaplain Stephen Lee on a trip back into New Orleans the week after evacuation.*





*Elizabeth wields power tools as she assists a crew replacing the roof on the Goodine home.*

Children painted signs for the rooftop to alert helicopter crews to our situation. Some adults functioned on little or no sleep as they stood guard each night in case our ad hoc community, “Camp Marigny,” should be attacked. Others took it upon themselves to do daily trash removal as well as the less glamorous job of manually flushing toilets. Still others cooked enormous amounts of food in the dark kitchen with dripping water.

Given these circumstances, it may be difficult to understand why those of us living in “Camp Marigny” felt a certain sadness rather than elation when, on the sixth night after the hurricane struck, First Sgt. Moore and his unit of National Guardsmen and Border Patrol officers arrived to escort us safely out of the city. Grateful as we were, we also realized that throughout the week, we had glimpsed a bit of heaven on earth.

Like the widow of Zarephath whose oil never gave out, we learned that the more we gave, the more we received (1 Kings 17:7-16). Earlier, we had worried there would not be enough food to feed ourselves, let alone the steady stream of homeless and hungry people who passed through on their way to the Dome and the convention center. Yet, as some of



*Jacob and Elizabeth carrying food supplies.*

our neighbors evacuated on the second day after the hurricane, they handed over their generators, bottled water, frozen foods and canned goods. In the midst of tragedy, our neighbors gave freely.

*“Built on a rock, the church does stand, even when steeples are falling...”*

The people of St. Paul thank God for the gifts He has given us to use to His glory in ministry to the people of the world. Hurricane Katrina reminded us that the Church is built on the Rock — Christ Jesus. Even when fierce winds are blowing and steeples are falling, His Church does stand.



*Elizabeth Goodine is Assistant Professor of Early Christian History at Loyola University, New Orleans. She attends St. Paul Lutheran Church where her husband is pastor. The*

*Goodine's have four grown children, a daughter- and son-in-law, one dog, two grand-dogs and two grand-kitties.*