

A Symphony of Open Hearts:

Compiled by Quarterly Editors

IT would seem that Hurricane Katrina brought only ugliness, destruction and devastation to people everywhere. Yet in the midst of the storm, God has conducted a beautiful symphony with notes of compassion, love, kindness and generosity. LWML women, blessed by the grace of God through His Son, opened their hearts and gave their resources to reach out to those in need.

RESPONDING

TO KATRINA

After Hurricane Katrina pounded the Gulf Coast, people everywhere kicked into missionary mode and wondered, "How can I help? What instrument can I play in this symphony?" Lutheran Women in Mission across the country joined this symphony when President Linda Reiser called for Katrina kits for babies, children, women and men. Tens of thousands of kits were assembled and distributed to needy families.

Louisiana–Mississippi District Response

As a part of this ongoing effort, societies throughout the Louisiana–Mississippi District who were less directly affected by the Gulf storms, joined sisters throughout the nation in gathering items for these Katrina kits. Trinity Women in Mission, Trinity Lutheran Church in Baton Rouge, LA, had a Katrina kit ingathering, sorting and assembling activity on September 11, 2005. Eleven women and four children assembled 78 kits that were distributed directly to those in need. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Covington, LA, located just north of Lake Pontchartrain, was transformed into a distribution center of clothing, food, water, personal items and household supplies.

The ingathering was like the jar of oil belonging to the widow of Zarephath.



LWMLers of all ages helped assemble kits for Katrina relief. Josie Edwards and Jenna Schmieding of Trinity, Baton Rouge, LA hold up a completed kit for a baby.

"The longer the volunteers worked, the more supplies we had for kits," said



Katrina kits were assembled by all generations at Trinity, Baton Rouge, LA.



Marcia Wittenberg (LA-MS District LWML President in purple LWML shirt), along with other LWML members, put together Katrina kits at Trinity, Baton Rouge, LA.

Marcia Wittenberg, Louisiana–Mississippi district LWML president and a member of Trinity Women in Mission, Baton Rouge. She continued, “For those of us in the Louisiana–Mississippi District, one of the most heartwarming things happening in the wake of such tragedy has been the outpouring of love and prayers from our fellow sisters in Christ throughout the LWML.” Melissa Meeks, Louisiana–Mississippi district LWML public relations chairman shared, “We have received numerous e-mails and messages of comfort and concern which remind us that no matter how difficult the situation we face, Christ is always with us.”

Central Florida Response

A year ago the people of Florida area received many blessings from those who helped them recover from hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne. Doris Engstrom, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Orlando, FL helped her church assist the Katrina relief effort when she organized over 50 volunteers who assembled nearly 800 kits. “This project gave everyone the opportunity to respond to Christ’s love by serving others outside our own space,” Doris said.

Trinity Lutheran Downtown was asked to be a collection center for Central Florida and took over 1600 kits to both the Red Cross and Catholic Charities. “We were impressed with the people who distributed the kits in that they tried hard to be good stewards of our gifts,” Doris said.

Doris shared how the kits demonstrated a tangible expression of love and service to others in the name of Christ: When the Red Cross ran out of kits one morning, “a family came out empty handed, looking so lost. We gave a child’s kit to the little girl. She and her mom smiled and hugged the kit. Someone really cared.” Doris added, “This



Trinity Downtown, Orlando, FL

gave us an opportunity to truly be the 'hands and feet' of Jesus!"

"Giving money is good, but it is so easy to let it go from the head through the hand and never hit the heart," Doris said. "Because of His great love for us, there is great joy in serving the Lord with the gifts and strength He has given us."



Margaret Kletecka and Maureen Consiglio

Atlantic District Response

LWML women in the Suffolk Zone (Long Island, NY) enthusiastically joined the effort and gathered materials to fill 49 kits. When they shipped the heavy boxes, the price tag hit hard. "Even though the shipping company didn't charge us for boxes or packing material and they gave us a huge discount on the shipping, the total cost was still almost \$250," said Margaret Kletecka, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Centereach. "A good cause to spend money on, but not the best way to spend it," agreed Maureen Consiglio, Long Island resident and Atlantic district LWML president.

Margaret knew the women could collect donations for many more Katrina kits, but there was no way they could



Suffolk Zone (Long Island, NY) and other Lutheran groups helped a local synogogue fill this 53-foot trailer with kits for disaster relief headed for Louisiana.

afford to ship them. "I started to pray," Margaret said, "and asked others to pray, too, for God to open doors for us to get our kits to those in need."

At the same time, Maureen remembered seeing a large Katrina Relief sign on a truck on her way to work one morning. The 53-foot trailer truck sat in a Jewish synagogue parking lot, and she thought, "Why couldn't the LWML and members of the synagogue help each other?"

Rabbi Marc Gellman, one half of the "God Squad" on Long Island, heads this synagogue. He is the co-author of a popular local newspaper column, "The God Squad," whose September 17 article summed up the disaster ("Replace finger-pointing with post-Katrina action") and referenced helping at the synagogue's 53-foot trailer truck.

Rabbi Gellman had heard of the LWML and LCMS World Relief and Human Care and was only too happy to accept the evacuee kits the women had assembled. The news spread and many other societies and churches filled their vans and delivered more kits to the synagogue. Nearly 500 kits, each one containing a Scripture card, were loaded onto the synagogue's truck and sent south for Katrina Relief. "We wanted all



Women from Our Savior, Centereach, Holy Trinity, Middle Island and St. John, Holbrook, NY, assemble Katrina kits.

those receiving our kits to be touched by God's love for them through His Word," Margaret said.

The women in the Suffolk Zone of the Atlantic District had prayed for God's guidance, and through a beautiful symphony of events—seeing the trailer, reading the newspaper, putting the right people in touch with one another—their prayer was answered.

"I continue to be excited to see what God has in store. What a privilege and joy it is to serve Him through our precious Savior and Lord Jesus Christ," Margaret said. "God is good, all the time; all the time, God is good," echoed Maureen.

The Unending Response...

And the symphony has played on as societies across the country have contin-

ued to serve in a variety of ways. Some have collected quilts and blankets and sent them to Lutheran World Relief. Others contributed financially to LCMS World Relief. Even the Sunday morning offering from the Interdepartmental LWML Meeting in St. Louis, MO, last October was designated for Hurricane Katrina relief. The women of the LWML were poised to turn the destruction of the hurricanes into a period of growth and an opportunity to share the Gospel with those desperate to hear its message of hope.

Praise God for the open and caring hearts of Lutheran women! To God be the glory, great things He has done!

For more stories about the LWML response to the Gulf storms, turn to the news section, heartbeat: Lutheran Women in Action, on page 36.



The fellowship hall of St. John, Holbrook, NY is abuzz with activity.