



Katrina Anniversary: A Year Later!

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A year later and what does New Orleans have to show for the sundry responses to Hurricane Katrina from across this nation?

If you listen to the lyrics of the song, ***Hurricane Katrina*** by **R & B artist Allan Wattey**¹ you may experience a fresh rush of angst, pain and fist-shaking anger. Wattey's song paints a bleak picture of those still victimized and traumatized by the aftermath of our government's failed response. The lyrics also serve as a wake up call to those tranquilized by the twin narcotics *capitalism and materialism* that racism in America is far from dead!

The peace-disturbing refrain of Wattey's song represents a challenge to reckon with,

*Every thing is gone...clothes on my back is all I own.
Then it hit me, ain't nobody coming to get me.
No one feels my pain.
Once again the color of my skin, reminds me things ain't
changed.*

The various public, private, religious and governmental responses, however late, cannot eclipse or erase the undeniable fact that many people did, indeed, feel others' pain. However late arriving, many came to get others who were left behind. Many came from the North, South, East and West. They came from faith communities and non-profit organizations. Some came on buses. Others came in cars fueled by prayers that they would hold up under the weight of all the clothing, food and other supplies contained therein.

Having given credit where credit is due, despite the cumulative positive responses, one year later there is still much to be desired according to the experiential reflections of those who remain in New Orleans. One such person is **Mrs. Freda Jones**, a wife and mother of nine and ten year old children, both of whom attend Lake Forrest Charter School.

My interview of Mrs. Jones, a self-described “survivor,” revealed a Christian woman of great determination and tenacious faith. When I asked her about conditions a year later the content of her response spelled a mixed bag of hope and despair.

In Mrs. Jones’ well-informed opinion as Executive Assistant of the National Association of Katrina Evacuees in New Orleans, the city is *“one tenth of where it was a year ago.”*

The number one problem for Mrs. Jones is Housing. When I asked, *“why housing?”* she indicated that much of the housing problems have to do with *“how homeowners were being treated.”* Many home owners have to pay mortgages on their home while juggling rental payments in their temporary residence. I thought as I listened inquisitively, how I would feel dishing out ***nine hundred dollars for a one room Post-Katrina apartment*** that rented for three hundred dollars in its Pre-Katrina days. And, how would I feel paying eighty-nine cents a pound for the same couple of pieces of chicken that cost twenty-nine cents in their Pre-Katrina days.

To add insult to injury, Mrs. Jones shared how difficult such juggling is when city housing officials are breathing down peoples’ backs with the policy threat of seizing their homes if they are not gutted or boarded up in time. Furthermore, many citizens, many of whom had no pre-Katrina insurance, *“don’t qualify for government rebuilding grants.”* The challenge does not stop at housing addresses. Equally important are the challenges in such areas as water, public education and health.

Water, according to Mrs. Jones, is a basic necessity where the price is also ***just not right***. The same brand and case of twenty-four bottles cost four dollars in Pre-Katrina days and ten dollars and fifty cents in Post-Katrina days. **“What about schooling,”** I dared to ask Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. Jones has to send her two children to a charter school that a year earlier was 97% Black-American. Although the majority of

students are still Black-Americans, they now share classes with larger percentages of Asians, Vietnamese, Indians and Mexicans. They must also do so without the presence of their former friends that have been taken from them by the Katrina exodus to other cities, or much worst, death.

The picture is even less bright when it comes to **health concerns**. Mrs. Jones understands from personal experience the frustration of visiting a Health Clinic for treatment. She and others are told they can “report back tomorrow at 5:30 am and hope to be one of 20 individuals who may be seen by 4 p m that evening, or schedule an appointment that will not take place until approximately a month and a half later.”

In the face of such testimony and reflections, those of us that are **feeling better than blessed**, might be challenged by her closing words. Mrs. Jones stated that she is a survivor who looks forward to the future by faith. She indicated, (without knowledge of Wattey’s Hurricane song),

“The struggle is not over...I don’t want people to fall asleep on us.

“We want people to keep us in their prayers.”

Keeping persons like Mrs. Jones in our prayers is what the Home Mission Board has been about –a year later. More than our prayers, we have been able to supplement prayer with good works.

I am pleased to report that the Home Mission Board has over **\$90,000.00 thousand** less dollars in its Katrina account to show for our response to the Katrina disaster. That’s good news! It means we have been engaged in our Master’s business of delivering **“Mercy and Might” in the name of Jesus Christ Only, Always!**

The Home Mission Board was privileged to join the **Laymen’s Movement** under the activist, hands-on leadership of **President Harold Simmons**. Joining forces we have been able to serve the Gulf States in a way which has brought hope and joy to many victims.

The Home Mission Board was more than pleased to provide more than **\$70,000.00 dollars to the Laymen for their ministry efforts of restoration and repair to some of the hardest hit homes in the Gulf states**. Katrina provided opportunities for difference-making ministry in Mississippi and New Orleans as well. The Laymen and the Home Mission Board have plans this new year to strengthen our

cooperation for the sake of those seeking to rebuild not only of their homes, but their lives.

In my visits to Alabama and Louisiana, your Katrina contributions allowed me to bring encouragement and a smile to the face of pastors whose churches were heavily impacted by Katrina and Rita. For example, we provided financial assistance to **St. Louis Street, Mt. Zion, Mackey Branch #2, Pleasant Hill, and Ebenezer Baptist Churches to name just a few.**

Our Katrina relief efforts also provided opportunities for developing working relationships with other non-profit organizations such as the **America Bible Society (ABS)**. The Home Mission Board was invited by President **Paul Irwin**, the newly elected President of the American Bible Society, to join him in New Orleans for a Katrina related television interview entitled "**ABS Presents**" in New Orleans and Baton Rouge LA.

In a spirit of inter-faith cooperation, we assisted **ABS** in their commitment of **15,000 thousand Bibles**--10,000 of which were distributed to members of National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. Churches in the greater-Baton Rouge area. In addition, thousands of Bibles have been committed to churches in Alabama through the hands of our Regional Director, **Dr. Robert Webb**. The Home Mission Board and the **ABS** have been in prayer, seeking our Lord's will on how we can be mutually beneficial as evangelistic partners in Christ. We are excited about new possibilities of how we can get the Word out to as many churches, families and individuals as possible.

Dr. Leo Cyrus, District Moderator of the Fourth District Baptist Missionary Association is particularly appreciative of the cooperation of the American Bible Society and the Home Mission Board. Moderator Cyrus stated,

"In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Fourth District Baptist Missionary Association is assisting people that have been devastated by the storms. Through our Association, a distribution center was set up at our headquarters in Baton Rouge. Evacuees were able to receive clothing, non perishable foods, personal hygiene supplies, water, shoes, sheets, blankets, as well as toys for the children. While the district is currently providing assistance to individuals, we also provided assistance to many Churches that were sheltering Evacuees. Cots and bedding were distributed to shelters all over the Baton Rouge area."

The Katrina ministry efforts of the Fourth District Baptist Association is one of a number of examples of the Home Mission Board's current motto, "***Caring and Sharing the Master's Mercy and Might,***" that could easily serve as a template for an even more effective response in the future.

Similar redemptive responses were made through the leadership of **Dr. Harry Blake**, President of the **Louisiana Baptist State Convention** which reports that over one hundred churches have been served and over one hundred and thirty-nine thousand dollars distributed to pastors and churches. **Dr. Julius Scruggs**, President of the **Alabama Baptist State Convention** reports a similar redemptive response.

A year later, I am encouraged by what the Home Mission has done on behalf of **President William J. Shaw's** office to lessen the pain of those referenced in the Hurricane Katrina Song. We were pleased to have served a mediating role on behalf of President Shaw's office. Our office has responded to over two hundred inquiries from churches and pastors in need of services or information.

The following is just a sample of the kind of caring and sharing we have done:

Abbreviated Listing of Home Mission Board Katrina Distributions

Name	City	State	\$Amount	Reason
Rev. Mack Stokes	Norris	LA	\$2,000.00	Church Repairs
St. Louis Street Baptist Church	Mobile	AL	\$1,000.00	Roof repairs, medicine, groceries
Mt. Zion Baptist Church	Mobile	AL	\$1,000.00	Roof and window repairs
Mackey Branch #2 Baptist Church	Whatley	AL	\$1000.00	Clothing, medicine, grocers
Pleasant Hill Baptist Church	Lisman	AL	\$1000.00	Clothing, medicine, grocers
Ebenezer Baptist Church	Valley	AL	\$1000.00	Roof and window repairs
Morning Star Baptist Church	Gulfport	MS	\$1000.00	Roof and window repairs
First Baptist Church	Christiana	MS	\$1000.00	Roof and window repairs
First Baptist Church in Bay St. Louis	Bay St. Louis	MS	\$1000.00	Roof and window repairs
Fourth District Baptist Missionary Association	Baton Rouge	LA	\$5000.00	Roof and window repairs
Laymen's Movement	Kansas City	KS	\$19,242.22	Transportation, food & lodging

In the September 2006 issue of the Home Mission Board's *Mercy & Might Connection* newsletter, we report on how we will use the "**Overground Railroad**" to more effectively deliver mission ministries and services to the constituency of the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc.

Web Content Manager's Notes:

1. To listen to Allan Wattey's *Hurricane Song* or download it for free, visit: <http://www.hurricanesong.com>. The website also offers a poignant PowerPoint presentation of Hurricane Katrina images that can be downloaded and shared with others.
2. Be sure to see the Spike Lee HBO Documentary, "When the Levees Broke A Requiem in Four Acts." For more information, a schedule and interviews with Spike Lee visit: <http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/whentheleveesbroke/index.html>