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*“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me ... And they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”
Nehemiah 2:18*

Disaster Partnering for Disaster Response *Times*

Thank You to Volunteers and Supporters

For two consecutive years, Lutheran Disaster Response of North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana have spearheaded a mission effort in the Gulf Coast aptly named *Rise Up & Build*. Faith based and ecumenical in nature, *Rise Up & Build* has pulled inspiration from its chosen scripture verse, Nehemiah 2:18; “Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me... And they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”

As this verse demonstrates, those involved in *Rise Up & Build* have been blessed with skills, time, talents and willing hearts; they have served as the eyes, ears, hands and feet of God to those in need of help. These

volunteers have given a gift so generous, so amazing, that it is impossible to put into words its ultimate value.

However, I’ve found from the stories that have been shared with me in the weeks past, that the true beauty in this effort has come from God’s master plan to change lives. Many of *Rise Up & Build* volunteers have returned home and said, “We saw the face of God when talking with the homeowner,” or “This experience has changed my life,” or “I received so much more in return and was happy to do a small part to help.” Let me assure you, there are no small parts in these efforts; every nail pounded, stroke painted and meal prepared is essential in helping the survivors move forward with

their lives.

I thank all of you -- volunteers, leaders coordinators, pastors, congregations and families for making *Rise Up & Build* 2007 so powerful and successful. As you move forward with your busy lives in the coming months, I encourage you to remember the people you saw and the stories you heard, to share that experience with family and friends and to encourage them to volunteer with you next year, so that they may see the face of God in service to others.

-Bonnie Turner, Director
Rise Up & Build/Lutheran Disaster Response of ND



What's it all about?

The host camp for *Rise Up & Build 2007* was Camp Victor in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. The camp itself is housed in a converted garment factory and is set up as a relief effort that will run 5-7 years.

My brother, Stanley Ames and I, were the lead Volunteer Coordinators for *Rise Up & Build* going in to Camp Victor in January. Our job was to get familiar with the Ocean Springs area and to set up jobs with the camp Construction Coordinator, Mary Goodwin. We soon found out that we wouldn't be working in just Ocean Springs, so Gulfport, Biloxi, Gautier, Pascagoula, Moss Point and D'Iberville were all communities to get familiar with as well. All of these areas had damage and some, such as East Biloxi and Pascagoula, carried a greater percentage of that damage.

Hurricane Katrina hit over a year and a half ago, yet there are many survivors that have not been able to return to their homes, and reconstruction is still a long way from being completed. Here are some of the reasons why it is taking so long:

1. The damage extends for hundreds of miles along the Gulf Coast.
2. A huge number of structures were so heavily damaged that repairs are not feasible.
3. Many owners do not have the finances to make homes livable again.
4. The damage is so wide spread, the ability to locate reliable contractors is sometimes limited and difficult.
5. A large number of the home owners are of the age where they cannot physically repair their property on their own.
6. Some survivors don't have the knowledge or experience to go about recovery.

A Typical Week

Saturday was reserved for arrival, checking in with the camp, touring and becoming familiar with the camp and surrounding area. On Sunday, volunteers could go to church and then help prepare for Monday's work by gathering materials and equipment at camp for the work to be done. Monday through Friday were spent on job sites, usually from 8 am to 5 pm or later. Volunteers at all skill levels were needed at job sites for anything from sheet rocking and painting to roofing and flooring. The final Saturday, which came all too soon sometimes, was a day to say goodbye and return to respective homes, perhaps promising to come back someday and to remain in contact with new friends.

Highlights of Volunteering

Meeting the people that you were helping; we found that the individuals in need down in the Gulf are so thankful that people all over the country care enough to lend their time and efforts. It was also a joy to meet the individuals and groups from around the country that are continuously going down to volunteer.

The wonderful staff at the camps are committed to helping the region get back on its feet, one home and family at a time. It seems that churches, not only on the Gulf Coast, but from all over, are the backbone of the recovery effort.

-Vince Ames, 1st Volunteer Coordinator
Grand Forks, ND



The Mission

that keeps calling and inspiring

Flying over the Gulf and returning to Mississippi for the second time, I was preoccupied with my new assignment as a Volunteer Coordinator for Rise Up & Build. Despite my preoccupation, it didn't take long to feel the grief of those whose hurts were not yet healed.

Visually the scene was deceiving. Most businesses were back on line, school buses were running, commuters and commercial traffic was speeding by. On second look, though, last year's damaged elementary school was gone. A familiar half mile stretch of homes was leveled. And whole subdivisions seemed vacant of children and families.

Statistically, over 60,000 Mississippi Gulf Coast residents remain displaced from their homes, and many of the people we met needed to share their stories again, as if Hurricane Katrina had stormed through there within recent months. Recovery, it seems, takes all too much time.

However, this experience went on to reveal wonders both large and small. People of faith from all across the country keep coming on their own schedules and at their own expense. Women and men, college students, retired folks and those in between feel called to serve. Willingness and generosity enliven working teams and Camp Victor. Strangers and residents we served shared their deep gratitude for our efforts and to God.

I was often struck by the skills and commitment among us. Personally, I was enriched in body and spirit each day during the two weeks I worked. As an amateur graced with the title "Volunteer Coordinator", I felt privileged to assist in giving a positive experience to over 78 other volunteers.

The generous and hopeful Camp Victor community inspires enthusiasm and a sense of mission that I will always remember. And, no doubt, I'll feel compelled to return; to listen, encourage and build.

To what end, we ask? Because the prophet continues to call out, "they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities...so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations." Isaiah 60:4, 11

-Curt Haney, Volunteer Coordinator/Pastor
Billings, MT

Seeing the Face of God in the Ruins

Life in Camp Victor is good. It is where 17 of us from Jamestown, ND and St. John's Lutheran Church joined another 29 people from Montana and North Dakota and spent a week together volunteering. The camp houses over 200 people who come to volunteer and also serves as a distribution center where hundreds of people come to receive bags of groceries. It is quite an operation! The camp is supported by the generosity of churches and individuals like you and me, and receives no government money. It is a faith venture. Truckloads of supplies are still coming in from various parts of the country along with financial support and the constant flow of people power. God is certainly working in this devastated area of our nation.

Monday through Friday our mission teams worked on all kinds of projects, rising each morning at 6 a.m. and working until 5:45 p.m. with only a short break for lunch. After work we returned to camp and ate dinner; we talked about the day, laughed a lot, listened to survivors' stories... At 10 pm we were in bed with lights out. This was our routine for five days and oh, how the time flew by as God's people worked together with a quiet joy!

I went away from our week in Camp Victor rejoicing in God's people who took a week of vacation time and who cooperated together in joyful service day after day. I took with me a growing awareness that I was participating in a miracle. God is not limited to the pages of the Old and New Testaments. God is at work in the Gulf. He is doing something very big. God is working in and through the lives of His people at Camp Victor and in other camps throughout the Gulf Coast. God is calling us all to be a part of this huge restoration project.

I am thankful that I had this wonderful opportunity through *Rise Up & Build* to be a small part of this huge faith venture. The Lord willing, I can go again.

-Pastor Dennis Ellingsen, Senior Pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church
Jamestown, ND



Volunteers Bring Help and Hope

Rise up and Build 2007 Overall Statistics

- TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOLUNTEERS.....200
- TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER HOURS WORKED.....10,065
- VALUE OF VOLUNTEER HOURS WORKED.....\$ 181,874.55
- NUMBER OF RISE UP & BUILD "ADOPTED" VOLUNTEERS.....9
- TOTAL NUMBER OF "ADOPTED" VOLUNTEER HOURS WORKED.....104
- VALUE OF "ADOPTED" VOLUNTEER HOURS WORKED.....\$ 1,879.28
- TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS.....17
- NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR HOURS WORKED.....1,360
- VALUE OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR HOURS WORKED.....\$24,575.20
- GRAND TOTAL OF VOLUNTEER HOURS.....11,529
- GRAND TOTAL OF VALUE OF VOLUNTEER HOURS WORKED.....\$208,329.03

From “Trip Coordinator” to “Taper”

My experience with *Rise Up & Build* started over a year ago. I was asked by my boss, Pastor Dave Peters of Lutheran Social Services of Montana, to be a State Trip Coordinator for Montana. I would be answering questions, making sure forms were filled out correctly and entering information into the computer to send to the Head Trip Coordinator in North Dakota. I asked myself, “How hard could that be? How many people would really sign up to travel across the country to muck out and rebuild houses of people they didn’t know?” I quickly found out.

The calls came...a lot of them. I soon found myself spending mornings answering calls, sending out packets and talking to people who were excited about helping others. The fever was contagious and soon I, too, wanted to go. I figured if we could “talk the talk” and ask others to go, we better be able to “walk the walk”. So I, along with my co-worker, Dia, signed up to go to Biloxi.

During our week in Biloxi, I was amazed at the kindness and gratefulness shown to volunteers by survivors. After asking

where we were from, reactions were, “You came all the way from Montana to help us? Bless You and Thank You!” It was very humbling to be thanked by people who had lost everything, including their family members and homes.

I left Biloxi with a hollow feeling in my heart. I didn’t know if I would ever return. A part of me was left in Mississippi. There was so much more to do. But later that year, I learned that *Rise Up & Build* would have trips in 2007. With six trips planned, I knew that I would again be called to be a State Trip Coordinator for Montana.

Before the information went out, I started to get calls. How heartwarming it was to hear from many of the folks that went last year! When talking to someone new, I always asked, “How’d you hear about this?” and many times the response was, “We heard about it from someone who went last year!”

I again was amazed at the number of calls and volunteers from all over Montana that were eager to go. With all this enthusiasm, I knew that once more I needed to go,

too. This time I talked my co-worker Rita into going along. Being an “experienced” volunteer, I assured her that she would be able to do the work and that she would never forget her time there.

This year I was assigned to work in “the big house” that had been passed along to *Rise Up & Build*. I spent the week trying to be a “taper” while other members of the team installed sheet rock, repaired the front of the house, and installed the bathrooms. It was a total team effort.

At the end of the week the owner of the home and his son, who was about ten years old, came to the house. I walked with the son around the house and asked him to show me his room. As we walked into his room he turned to me and said, “It looks exactly as it did.” And in just that moment I knew that my small part in *Rise Up & Build* was worth the whole trip!

-Ruth Lindabury, State Trip Coordinator/
Volunteer
Rise Up & Build/Lutheran Social Services
of Montana

The Difference Volunteers Make

Rise Up & Build Volunteer Coordinators Vince Ames and Curt Haney were recently in contact with Camp Victor’s Construction Coordinators. Thanks to them, we have updates for you on the jobs that Rise Up & Build worked on from January 13 through February 24, 2007. (All updates are in order according to job number, i.e. Job #1, Job #2, etc.)

1. Homeowners are now in the home.
2. Unfinished and on hold due to lack of cooperation.
3. On hold – no reason given.
4. Rise Up & Build finished; homeowners are now in home.
5. Final door was hung by Rise Up & Build; other details now finished; homeowner now in home.
6. Rise Up & Build installed cabinets, trim and flooring and painted; homeowner moved in and ordered countertops, but finish work is held up while waiting for materials.
7. Camp Victor halted work due to lack of cooperation; paid electrical worker was not admitted to home to do work; currently unfinished and held up.
8. Countertops remedied, moldings set, electrical fixed by Camp Victor staff; everything is finished and family has moved in.
9. Very near being finished, but held up as family is out of town.
10. Clean-up done by Rise Up & Build; other groups have almost finished the rest of the work that was needed.
11. Currently putting in carpet; almost finished.
12. Family still lives in home as construction continues; roof has been replaced; on hold, but only special items left to be done.

Preparation a Team Effort

Upon returning from the first *Rise Up & Build* mission trip to Biloxi in February 2006, I knew it would be a trip I would make again, and so did the other five volunteers whom I traveled with. We were anxious to share our experiences with the congregation, family members and the community.

We began preparing for the 2007 mission trip to Camp Victor in Ocean Springs, Mississippi in November 2006. The six of us agreed we wanted more people from our community to experience the rewarding feeling of doing God's work in an area devastated by Hurricane Katrina. We advertised a kick-off meeting in the church bulletin and the local newspaper. What an overwhelming response we had! It was wonderful to see more than 20 folks attend and listen as we shared stories and slides of our trip. After a few follow-up meetings, we had 17 volunteers from five different faith denominations commit to *Rise Up & Build 2007*. We were mostly strangers to each other, but God's love brought us all together for the same purpose. It is a wonderful feeling to be part of a group that gathers in God's name to help our neighbors when their burden is more than they can carry alone.

In the months prior to the mission trip, we organized several fundraisers and requested donations to aid in reducing the travel expenses. Each volunteer willingly and actively participated in the fundraising efforts, again, bringing strangers to work together in God's name. The support and prayers from our congregations gave us spiritual guidance during our preparations and while in Mississippi.

The excitement and smiles increased as the days neared and when we arrived in Mississippi in February, we were ready and eager to begin God's work.

Camp Victor is a wonderfully organized and smooth-running facility, and once again we were united with strangers, this time from other cities and states, all in God's name to do his good work. We ate, slept, worked, and worshipped with individuals we had never met before, and because of it made many new friends.

The families of the homes we worked in repeatedly expressed their gratitude for the volunteers that continue to travel to the Gulf Coast and rebuild their homes. Without

faith-based volunteers working to rebuild homes, displaced families would not be able to return to their homes and resume their daily routines.

Upon our return from Mississippi last month, many of us had already begun making plans for our next trip in 2008. We all felt a calling to do God's work and will continue to encourage others to join us.

-Jeanne Rosemore, Community Contact
Jamestown, ND



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Lutheran Disaster Response are programs of

Website: www.lssnd.org
Mission: "Guided by God's love and grace, Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota brings healing, help and hope."

Website: www.lssmt.org
Mission: "Lutheran Social Services of Montana is a ministry of caring people and congregations responding to God's love in Jesus Christ by serving children, families and individuals through counseling, education, adoption, and specialized ministries."

Website: www.lsssd.org
Mission: "Inspired by God's love, we care for, support and



If you would like to assist with the *Rise Up & Build* effort, donations may be sent to:

Lutheran Disaster Response
PO Box 389
Fargo, ND 58107

Please make checks payable to
Lutheran Disaster Response