

New Orleans Mission Trip Summary:
Greenfield to New Orleans and Back
December 27, 2008 – January 3, 2009

The excitement and anticipation were building as I stood a few hours before dawn in the parking lot at Park Chapel on Saturday, December 27. It was a damp, unseasonably mild winter morning. As cars drove up and unloaded both passengers and luggage, I peered through the mist trying to remember the names of the team members, most of whom were strangers to me. Although the thought of a 13 hour plus drive ahead of us wasn't terribly appealing, I was looking forward to the opportunity to begin getting to know my fellow teammates.

Praise God our drive to New Orleans was safe and afforded many hours of friendly conversation. As we approached New Orleans we were notified by cell phone by our hosts, Charles and Judy Dillon, that our lodging accommodations were changed from the Carpenter House 2 mission building to a rebuilt Hurricane Katrina-damaged church called Carpenter House 1. This was the first of many "flexibility" exercises we would encounter throughout the week.

Sunday was a day of rest. After church at Carpenter House 1, Charles and Judy took us on an extended tour of hurricane-ravaged New Orleans focusing on the Upper and Lower Ninth Wards and the Chalmette region in neighboring St. Bernadette Parish. The sights were sobering. Although three years have passed since Katrina, many, many homes remain abandoned and unrepaired. Unknown to us, Hurricane Gustav this past August inflicted heavy damage on the area to many homes and properties that had succeeded in being rebuilt from Katrina. Double heartbreak. We witnessed firsthand the concrete and steel levees that had broken during Katrina and a thought began nagging at me: "Why are these people returning and rebuilding in areas that continue to be at high risk for a repeat of the devastation incurred here?" It is common knowledge the levees continue to be weak and vulnerable to future storms. I knew for certain the Lord had called me to be on this trip, yet in a way the work of rebuilding physical buildings seemed a bit wasteful. I presented this dilemma to our hosts. They kindly and helpfully explained that my thoughts were not uncommon among many people including themselves at one time. They explained that the homes and the land on which they stand have been in these peoples families many generations and are therefore treasured by them. They are very poor and this is all they have. It is their roots, their life. Charles asked me, "If a tornado came and took your home, would you rebuild on the same spot?" I had

to admit I probably would. The only difference here was that it was a hurricane, not a tornado. We all live with risks, New Orleans is no different. As I continued to ponder the situation the Lord graciously helped me to understand it was not for me to judge whether or not rebuilding New Orleans was the right thing to do, but rather that helping rebuild lives in whatever way He would lead me throughout the week was what was important. My mind was at peace and I looked forward to the week with great anticipation.

To say our team of “missionaries” from Park Chapel bonded as a group is an understatement. It was truly amazing to see the Lord’s hand at work drawing together a diverse group of people mostly unknown to one another and create “...one body with many parts”. We definitely lived Romans 12:4-8. I praise God for the generous gift of working for Him with a joy-filled body of true believers.

Our week in New Orleans passed quickly. Daily our team divided into small work groups that either worked rebuilding damaged homes, or assisted at Carpenter House 2 with preparing dormitory facilities for future work crews, sorting and organizing myriad donated items for free distribution to the local needy, organizing the storage of an endless supply of tools and building supplies, setting up a game room and movie room, and feeding the hungry on the street outside the mission. On our final night we also drove to the inner city and fed the homeless.

With the Lord’s angels of protection surrounding our vehicles, we returned to Greenfield on Saturday, January 3, exhausted but filled with a peace that only God can give to His own. It is with humble thanksgiving that I would like to thank the Park Chapel family, as well as additional family and friends for your faithful prayers throughout our journey to New Orleans. What a blessing you are. May His name be praised. Hallelujah! Amen.

Faith Ferguson