



August 29th always brings with it painful memories and a feeling deep in my soul that is hard to describe. Although 12 years have passed since Hurricane Katrina the memories are still fresh and especially poignant with the devastation in Texas and Louisiana from Harvey.

St. Patrick's in Long Beach, MS where I was Rector was completely washed away by the storm, but the church remained. As you know, the church is the people, the body of Christ and while we were slam dunked with the breath knocked out of us, we were lifted up by the outpouring of support we received, especially from the faith community, including many of you!

I wanted to offer a few suggestions regarding ways to help after such disasters. Some of these were learned, literally, the hard way. I offer them in love and thanksgiving for all who open up their hearts in any way to those in need.

First of all it is imperative we listen to the folks on the ground as to what they need the most. At this stage they are simply trying to keep people alive and as frustrating and helpless as that may feel to us, until they ask for volunteers to show up we serve them better by waiting. One of the most difficult things we had to deal with was having volunteers show up with big hearts and great intentions, but with no way to sustain themselves and looking for us to provide them food and shelter. The people of Texas and Louisiana will need help and they will need it for a long time, longer than we might even imagine at this point. This is a marathon for sure. They will let us know when they want us and how we can best help and what we need to bring.

Their first responders will become exhausted and thankfully there is a huge network of fire, police, EMT and health care workers who stand ready to give them a hand. We lost every police car and fire engine in Pass Christian, but soon after the storm we were loaned replacements, along with people to man them for a time. There may be a way to financially support those efforts.

Please don't send clothes. Managing the mountains (and they were actual mountains) of donated clothes was a huge burden, and as kind hearted as people were much of what was sent was unusable. From a church perspective, I cannot tell you how many sets of old choir robes and even very heavy, wool chasubles I was sent! They may ask for specific items, but the best way to help with food and clothing right now is by sending money. And especially as local businesses are able to reopen, spending money in the community will be an enormous help to them.

Episcopal Relief and Development was an amazing partner for us. I trust them completely. They supported our establishment of Camp Coast Care as a place for volunteers to come and be fed and sheltered as they worked in the community. Once such places are established in Texas and West Texas I am sure many of you will be able to join in the recovery effort. I believe Katrina was the first domestic disaster ERD (as you know, formerly the Bishop's Fund for World Relief) was involved in. They have increased their capability and staffing for domestic disasters a lot since then and are ready to help. Give to ERD!

Donations to the Diocese of West Texas and Diocese of Texas directly can help tremendously as well. They will know exactly what kind of support the clergy and lay leadership need and how best to manage it. Let us not forget the absolute destruction of the coastal areas in the Diocese of West Texas, a different kind of disaster than the horrific flooding in the Houston area. Their needs will be somewhat different and I hope they continue to receive much attention.

It goes without saying we all need to be praying. I have no doubt that soon they will experience what we did after Katrina, the incredible generosity of thousands of people who will share their gifts of time, money, talent, and love. God bless you all.

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