

## Director's Update

April 17, 2009

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This has been an incredible week! It seems repetitive to say that once again the highlight was another house dedication, but it really was. In a stroke of brilliance, Faith Bontrager invited a couple from the Free Methodist volunteers that sang and played the guitar together. Well, the homeowner decided to get out his guitar also. While we were waiting, the couple led us in singing. It was very powerful and set a great tone for the entire event. While many of us celebrated the fact that this was our 91<sup>st</sup> little miracle, we also humbly realize that this is #1 for these homeowners. Yes, here it is rapidly approaching four years after Katrina and Isaac and Dee (if you post this on the webpage I'd be sensitive about names, just first names and no specific address shouldn't be a problem) finally have a serious chance of getting their life back on track. Moved to tears, Dee thanked all of YOU who have worked on the Ballentine house.

This was another momentous week because we, the Fuller Center Disaster ReBuilders' board of directors, voted to move our operation to Hurricane Ike territory in East Texas. Yes, we're going to finish the houses now underway by May 31<sup>st</sup> (the same time our lease at Camp Gospel expires) and then begin moving to Orange and Bridge City, Texas. We plan to begin accepting volunteers in Texas on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

This decision is driven almost totally by our assessment of the need in Ike country. Eddie Sherman, our construction director, and I were there this week. Eddie couldn't stop commenting on the number of FEMA trailers that he saw. Fundamentally, every one of the 3,500 homes in Bridge City "took water" as you hard core volunteers would say. OK, there were actually 27 homes that didn't flood. Yes, Eddie, you're right—that does make for a lot of FEMA trailers.

It seems like we should be celebrating the victory over Katrina but most of us have another emotion that is almost as strong—we don't want to leave Mississippi. We've fallen in love with Mississippi, and especially the people. Sure we "loved up on them" big time but they loved us back just as hard. Again this week, a grateful "local" picked up Mike Bultemeier's tab just because he was a volunteer. That is amazing! Katrina was powerful but all of us witnessed the power of God's love, and how it totally overpowered Katrina. You heard the call and you responded! And you didn't just respond once but again and again. I am truly humbled by your service, sacrifice and love of your neighbor. All of you are the church to me—you blew away the ecumenical walls with the power of your love and compassion.

As many of you know, we worked very hard to find a way to leave behind a smaller organization here in Mississippi but we just couldn't put all the pieces together. We took that as a sign that God is leading us in a new direction of service. We know there are many in Mississippi still living in substandard conditions, but first of all we must respond to what you all do so incredibly well—rebuilding storm-damaged homes!

Now we're asking that you to heed the call again! Come to Texas with us—you have neighbors that need you in Ike country.

Until then, celebrate our victory—well done, good and faithful servants!

Bart

PS. I'm going to provide a more detailed version of our decision process on the Yahoo Group. If you're not a member, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rebuildingbiloxi/> and request to join.