

Director's Update

May 16, 2009

Dear Family of Friends,

OK ... you got me ... today's section is not *really* the Director's Update 'cause I'm writing it and not Bart. He is so busy tying up all the loose ends for next week's move of FCDR from the Mississippi Gulf Coast to the Texas Gulf Coast that he didn't have the spare time to write this update. I for one am happy that Bart didn't write an update, so I can step in and share with you my feelings ... dare I say, *our* feelings.

It's *our* turn ... "our" meaning Gulf Coast residents. We need to say a final "farewell". Yes, I said it ... "farewell". Don't give me that ... "We'll keep in touch. We are still gonna come back to Mississippi". We all know, it will never be the same.

I have no doubt that many, many of you will e-mail or telephone me, Judy and Jerry Bultman, Judy Jones, Dorothy and Ralph Fox, Evelyn and Sam Reyer, etc. I have no doubt that several of you will stop by from time to time. We truly hope you do. Our Mississippi Gulf Coast is your home, too. The sign on our interstate (used to) say ... *Mississippi - it's like coming home*. The sign has been replaced (how dare them!), but there will ALWAYS be a big place in our hearts for you. You are our family.

Time heals all wounds they say. I beg to differ—time may lessen the sting, but the scar doesn't go away.

I vividly remember that feeling of emptiness and overwhelming loss for all of us as I was driven along the beach a day or two after Katrina with a VA team to check out our Gulfport veterans hospital.

There is nothing left!!! Where am I? Are we in Gulfport or is this Biloxi? What was here? Oh, my God!

Katrina—the 2005 weapon of mass destruction!

Even the "words" that ran down my cheeks the day we drove my elderly uncle back to the house my grandparents built—his home—a few days after Katrina cannot describe the overwhelming sadness that consumed my heart and soul. I can only say that this emptiness is something I hope I never experience again. The home, photos, the loss of tangible treasures were not only happy reminders of years past with family members now gone, but these items were my heritage. Southerners love their heritage as much as their grits!

As some of you have heard over the years in my Eyes of Hope presentation, I was so blessed when Judy Bultman asked me to come to work for the ministry out of Bethel Lutheran Church ... because it brought me to you. It's like I have said over and over again in the presentation, I *never knew there were people*

like you... So filled with love for complete strangers that you would give of yourself in the most genuine of ways to come and rebuild our homes and our lives. You more than anything restored our hope that there will be a tomorrow. And tomorrow has come! Your work is done ... at least here.

No, not everyone is back in their homes ... but there are others who need you, too.

I know you all know the story ... how moved we are when Judy Bultman tells the story ... of how Bart Tucker arrived at Bethel Lutheran Church days after Katrina extending a hand to help. You all know the rest of the story ... that hand was extended to each of you over and over again to come and help. You grasped that hand and gave the other to us ... to each of us. That hand lovingly held hammers, paint brushes, tongue depressors, cooking spoons, scrub brushes, gift cards ...

Because of Bart Tucker and Judy Bultman ... you came to know the wonderful work He was orchestrating here along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. You came and walked with Him. You carried His people.

Time moved on ... Judy and Jerry retired to Georgia ... Bethel needed their church space back so the clinic moved to their own location in Biloxi and “the ministry” moved to Camp Gospel in Pass Christian. What ministry? Bethel Volunteer Ministry? Project REHAB? FCDR?

It’s all been **the same** ministry, dear! When LESM or LDR (sorry this Catholic doesn’t understand all the different letters) elected not to fund Bethel as a disaster recovery site (after the first year post Katrina, I believe), Bethel continued on because Mississippians needed you and you were willing to come. We could stand on our own and serve because we had the expertise of Bart and Peter and your kindness, generosity and compassion. Bart and Judy led together—one providing for the volunteers and the other rebuilding east Biloxi and then Hancock county. You continued to come, to work hard, to raise money, to sacrifice because you not only saw first hand ... **you experienced...** the wonder He created through the combined efforts of Judy and Bart.

Sadly, a few months ago the Bethel Parish Council elected not to continue the ministry and turn the remaining balance of the funding donated for this ministry over to LESM rather than FCDR. I feel sure that they must have prayed about their decision and felt that they were honoring your wishes for the money you donated. But the good news is that their decision didn’t stop the good works of FCDR. Yes, it has made continuing on to serve our Texas neighbors more of a struggle and places a greater burden on Bart and the FCDR Board of Directors, but His path is never the easy one ... is it?

I hope each and every one of you know that “we” (me and my Mississippi neighbors) genuinely love each and every one of you.

I personally have such a deeper respect for the goodness that exists in man because of your response to Katrina’s wrath. You not only served, but served with vigor, served with compassion, served with love—all the while saying, *I am*

really the one who is blessed—I've received so much more than what I was given.

I respectfully reply, "HOGWASH!" With all due respect, dear family, you are **WRONG! DEAD WRONG!** After almost 4 years I still vehemently disagree! You did not receive more blessings than me and my Mississippi neighbor!!! The love you have showered on us these past four years is a surge that tops Katrina's thirty something feet!

I love you and pray our paths do cross again ... Y'all do come back!

Donna Tasker

PS. Keep up with the progress of FCDR on the Yahoo Group. If you're not a member, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rebuildingbiloxi/> and request to join.