

## A WELLS Farewell

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall and forever changed the lives of Gulf Coastal residents. Little did we realize at the time, it would certainly change the lives of a community of folks in this small church in Jackson.

In November of 2005, Wells UMC initiated our long-term recovery/rebuilding effort by sending its first team of volunteers to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Since then, Wells members and friends have doggedly persisted in sending teams to assist where we could. From recovery to rebuilding, the Wells teams were consistent in our efforts to be in this thing for the long haul.

Initial efforts seemed almost useless due to the magnitude of the near total devastation. Our teams were shocked and overwhelmed at seeing for ourselves what news footage could not convey. Some of us had seen the cruel affects of Camille back in 1969. But Miss Camille, while devastating in and around the eye was no comparison to the monster storm, Katrina, whose width depth and breadth of destruction spread from New Orleans, across the entire Mississippi Coast and east onto the Alabama Coast.

Initially our teams were tasked with shoveling the muck and ripping out the moldy, soggy, smelly sheet rock from those houses that were not totally destroyed. Working along side the homeowners, ankle deep in repulsion, our teams worked and sweated in deplorable conditions. We thought our mission was to get in and get the job done. Before long we realized that probably the greatest mission we had was to listen, to hear. The homeowners, after a while of getting to know us began to speak little by little of their storm story. Bit by bit more information was imparted. By the end of the work day, the house would be closer to being purged of the pungent odors as the muck and moldy contents had been removed. So, too, had the inhabitants been purged a bit more as they confided to us their story allowing some of their angst to be released so they could go on and make it, at least one more day.

Our teams gave hope in bushels where hope was a rare and oh so precious commodity. In 2006, Wells sent team after team to our Coast. In February we had almost a hundred WellsFolks brave a horrible storm the whole way to the Coast only to see the skies part as we issued work orders at Main Street Methodist Church in Bay St. Louis. The teams scattered along the Coast from Waveland to Pearlinton (the truly forgotten town) to assist family after family in their specific recovery needs.

We weren't the only ones. I remember Miss Ladner, a staunch Catholic, talking about what a good job those Baptist from Colorado had done the week prior to our arrival and how much she appreciated us Methodist from Jackson helping her sheet rock and paint her storied home. Wells' persistent relief efforts began to wear out our volunteers.

Just when we felt like this would be the last trip, we'd run into a Church of God group from Oregon or the Mennonites from Pennsylvania who'd taken their two week vacation to rebuild homes in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity. Feeling humbled we'd again schedule our next trip to help where we could.

Sunday, August 29 marks the fifth anniversary of Katrina's landfall. Wells will send perhaps and probably our last team to the Coast over the anniversary weekend. Not that the job is complete nor that the Coast is totally recovered, for it is not and will not be for years to come. Though the job is not complete on the Coast, I feel it is time to proclaim our Katrina recovery and rebuilding effort a job 'Wells done'. It is time now, in my opinion, to move on and focus our efforts on what God is putting on our hearts to pursue. Be it WellsFest, Prison Ministries, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Choir, the Monday Morning Food Pantry Ministry or any other ongoing or potential ministry that Wells is or needs to be involved-let us do it prayerfully and with purpose.

Thank you, Wells Church. You have been faithful in the Katrina recovery and rebuilding effort.

Barry Hannah, my author friend had what I consider a great take on what our teams were attempting to do. In the preface to a commentary on the Book of Mark, Barry tells of the death of Christ and what his death meant to "the Church." He explains that Christ's death ushered in a whole new paradigm as to what the church should be. Instead of worshipping only in the Tabernacle on the Sabbath, the Church is the people and the people are the hands and feet of God on earth. No longer is God found only in the temple, but instead He can now be seen in the works, actions and service of the His people, the Church. Barry, in only the way that he can do, summed it up with the following:

"The temple did not fall, but its veil was rent  
Top to bottom.  
God is not in the temple anymore.  
Serve. Help. Love.  
Others as thyself.  
This is impossible but do it.  
Help. Love. Service."

Sounds like the good folks of Wells.

You *helped* with the relief and rebuilding efforts for our brothers so tragically affected by Katrina.

You *loved* the Katrina victims by listening, helping and doing.

And certainly, you were of *service* to those who needed it most immediately following and lo, all these years later.

Thank you for your *help*-

Thank you for your *love*-

Thank you for your *service* in regard to our Katrina relief, recovery & rebuilding efforts.

God is not simply in the temple anymore-you are His living proof of that.

Thank you for a job, indeed, WELLS done.

Bruce S. Reynolds

August, 2010