

Front Line Ministries

FLM

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From Bill

SERVING THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES OF MINISTRY

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Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have had a profound impact on the Gulf Coast and on two of our FLM staff: Keith Boyer and Johnny Ervin. Keith is Senior Pastor of Faith Bible Church in Slidell, LA, and Johnny is volunteer staff of Crosspoint Church in Gulfport, MS.

The devastation seen in these areas is truly amazing. Keith and Johnny have been busy since early September facilitating hurricane recovery in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Keith and Johnny are asking FLM to play a role in helping pastors and their families in the effected areas to handle the stress and pressures of personal and ministry recovery. Our staff stands together in belief that this is an unprecedented time in the lives of churches on the Gulf Coast.

Those supporting Front Line Ministries financially and through prayer have a unique opportunity to join us in encouraging and supporting those who are facing an immense challenge. We invite you to join us in helping those who are bearing the burden of providing for the needs of those devastated by Katrina, Rita, and their aftermath.

Our focus for the brief period of the next 12 months will be ministering to the local church in the Gulf Coast region. Many of you who receive our newsletter are faithful financial partners in the work of Front Line Ministries. We plan to use your financial gifts towards serving pastors in the local church in the same manner in which we have served missionaries overseas (ministering through encouragement, spiritual renewal and practical tools to deal with the overwhelming task of rebuilding). Thank you for your continued prayers and support for Front Line Ministries. *flm*

Bill Wakefield

Ministry Redefined

by Keith Boyer

Imagine the reaction of the congregation if three months ago, as the pastor of Faith Bible Church, I stood before them and suggested the following outreach program: Reduce the size of the congregation by 30%; cut our giving in half; destroy much of the interior of our building; and cancel all of our normal programs except Sunday morning worship. Such a suggestion would have caused a cry of consternation!

Yet that is exactly the plan that God initiated among the churches in the storm-damaged areas. The wisdom of God's plan is evident in the spiritual impact churches and ministries are having in the aftermath of the storm. However, these circumstances are also creating the challenge of surviving as a ministry while at the same time reaching out to families and individuals in need.

Immediately after the hurricane, the churches of Slidell and many other communities began reaching out to those in their communities. In those early days, communication was impossible. Each church responded to the need that God laid on their hearts. Though there was little human coordination, the Hand of Providence orchestrated the individual efforts of His people creating an effective instrument of relief and support. Many have commented that it is the churches and the faith-based organizations that are having the greatest impact.

After evacuating, I arrived back home five days after Katrina and organized a team that would become our church's Katrina Relief Team. Within days, the church was gutted, our sanctuary was turned in to a worship center/ dormitory/ warehouse, and teams started arriving to begin the work of recovery on behalf of our church families and the community.

In these past weeks, we have hosted and organized the work efforts of nearly 600 volunteers from 19 different states, assisted over 150 families, and started the reconstruction of 10 homes to be completed by January. That reconstruction involves providing all of the materials and labor to restore the homes of families without flood insurance and with

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special challenges which would make rebuilding without assistance impossible. The work is exhilarating and God has provided in ways that are beyond our imagination.

While reaching out in the midst of the devastation, the work of the local churches also continue. But the churches' normal finances are diminished, congregations are scattered, programs are slow in returning, and the spiritual needs of congregations and their communities are immense.

These are exciting times but they are also exhausting. Many of the pastors I speak to are working extremely long hours day after day while bearing a heavy concern for the needs that continually surround them. There is a physical, emotional, and spiritual toll that these men and women are paying. They are in need of a short break, away from the destruction and demands.

As a member of the Front Line team and as a pastor in the effected area, it has become evident to us that the same resources that have so successfully reached out to those on the frontlines of foreign missions could be marshaled to reach out to those on the frontlines of Katrina relief.

FLM's goal is to reduce attrition among those in ministry. However, in response to the current national disaster, we sense God's call to temporarily focus that effort at home. Therefore, Front Line Ministries is developing a rest and recuperation program to assist the pastors of churches in the hurricane effected areas. Our hope is to offer to them and their spouses a three-day retreat free of charge, affording them encouragement, rest, and an opportunity to fellowship with those facing similar challenges. *flm*

Preparing for Disaster *by Johnny Ervin*

Since early September of 2005, I have been working at Crosspoint Church helping to coordinate their Hurricane Katrina Relief efforts along with the efforts of First Baptist Church of Gulfport, their sponsoring church who lost their building to the storm. This has been an amazing experience that has given me a ring-side seat to watch our incredible God work in the lives of thousands of people whose lives were disrupted by the storm or who were called to help the people impacted by Katrina.

It did not take long for word of the great work being done through the combined efforts of these two churches to reach the people of the coast and to reach churches all across the United States that were looking for a place to minister. In about two months, we estimate that over 600 homes have been cleaned up by over 1400 volunteers from the states of California, Montana, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, Iowa, Oklahoma, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. And the groups continue to come and serve. The picture of how the Body of Christ works together has been one part of this adventure that I will never forget.

Over these months I have witnessed God provide resources that would not normally be available but would miraculously be where we needed them when we needed them. I have watched Him comfort hurting families who lost all of their material possessions and move them to the point where they were wanting to help others with much less loss. I have seen our God send perfect strangers into the homes of people in despair only to have the people turn over firearms to them so they would not hurt themselves or anyone around them. I have seen Christian business people use their resources to totally rebuild the home of a single parent mom whose home was flooded and ask for nothing but that she know that this was done out of their love for Jesus.

Maybe more important than the stories of physical and emotional help, I have seen people whose homes were greatly damaged accept Christ as their Savior because the people who helped them clean up their home also shared the Gospel with them. I have seen people who came to the coast to volunteer their time on a work crew give their lives to Jesus because other people on a work crew shared the Gospel with them. God has been and continues working in this amazing, chaotic, dirty, smelly, wonderful environment. If past experience is any indication of what we can expect, God is likely to be doing many more miracles in the areas that experience significant devastation.

There are a few rare times in your life when you realize that what you are involved in is something that God has been preparing you for during most of your life. It is an experience with a unique combination of humbling, exhilarating, encouraging and grateful feelings. My life after Hurricane Katrina has been just such a time and I cannot praise God enough for the experience. *flm*



Hurricane-ravaged church in Gulfport, MS