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TEN YEARS LATER

LIVING THE “NEW NORMAL”

On Aug. 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the southeast coast of Louisiana. It is estimated that at least 1,800 people died in the Category 3 hurricane and subsequent floods, making it the deadliest United States hurricane since the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane. Total property damage was reported to be $108 billion, nearly four times the damage wrought by Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

Less than a month later on Sept. 24, Hurricane Rita struck the coasts of Louisiana and Texas. Also a Category 3 storm, Rita was the fourth most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded, according to the National Hurricane Center. The storm surge from Rita impacted coastal communities, worsening effects caused by Katrina.

All of a sudden, the people of Louisiana were living a “new normal.” That tends to happen in a catastrophe.

The entire world watched as our state went through an unprecedented event. Eighty percent of New Orleans was affected by Katrina with major flooding caused when levees failed. Then the world watched as people who had fled the first storm to other parts of Louisiana and Texas had to evacuate to escape Hurricane Rita.

Just about everyone in our state experienced some unusual things because of the two storms. One particular road trip into post-Katrina New Orleans shortly after the event really stands out in my memory.

I was traveling with a conference team from Baton Rouge to the Crescent City with the intention of taking pictures and gathering information. It was surprising to see flood waters on low lying parts of the interstate highway. As a matter of fact, the right-hand side of the Huey P. Long Bridge was closed, so we had to drive on the left-hand side to reach our destination. We stood on the shoulder of the elevated highway, looking down on the Superdome and a once vibrant city that was completely abandoned. There were no people, no traffic, no birds—you could have heard a pin drop.

Less than a month later, I was with Bishop William Hutchinson and a conference team that was assessing the impact of Hurricane Rita in what Louisianians affectionately call “Cajun Country.” Travelers had to be careful to take the right roads because so many were still closed. And you never took off on a road excursion without adequate water and provisions because businesses were closed everywhere.

In several issues of the conference newspaper, the Louisiana Now, we published lists of people who had been scattered throughout the country in the diaspora. “Have you seen these pastors?,” the headlines read. “The conference office has not heard from the following persons since Katrina and Rita. If you have any information . . .”

Indeed, nothing seemed “normal.”

“There’s a lot of pain,” said Rev. Ellen Alston, who was serving as pastor to Covenant UMC in Chalmette at the time. “That’s deepening as people realize as time goes on how permanent the losses are . . . and that’s more than house and belongings. It’s the loss of access to those relationships being right there, the ones that you built your life around.”

The world and the entire United Methodist church was aware of our pain, our heartaches and our hardships. Acts of grace began to pour in from strangers and friends. They helped us rebuild churches and homes. They sent work teams, cleaning buckets, money and prayers.

Louisiana’s United Methodist churches sheltered evacuees, set up collection and distribution sites, housed recovery teams and Red Cross volunteers, offered counseling to storm survivors, and did so much for others that it would be impossible to record it all.

One mother-daughter volunteer team really stands out in my memories of those times. Shortly after people returned to New Orleans, I remember going to one of the local United Methodist churches that was serving as a distribution center for cleaning buckets and water. The two women wore beautiful smiles as they greeted people who had no place to stay, no water to drink and very little hope. I watched as they encouraged individuals who were dirty and probably wearing the only clothes they owned.

While I was interviewing them, it came out that they also had lost their homes. Members of a large New Orleans family, they were all staying together in one brother’s house on the Westbank. These women had significant troubles of their own, but they were able to put them aside to show the love of God to those who needed it desperately.

Through it all, the people of The United Methodist Church in Louisiana were at once exhausted and energized. Folks were weary from stress, worry and incredibly hard work. Yet they were energized by the manifestation of God’s love in the help received and in the help that they gave to “the least of these.”

It seems to me, that’s what being faithful is all about.

Your friend in Christ,
Betty Backstrom
Director of Communication
Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Church
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It’s about Jesus, ain’t it?
HEADING BACK TO THE 7th WARD

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, countless stories were written and broadcast in the national media about the catastrophic flooding that affected nearly 80 percent of New Orleans. The Louisiana city’s “9th Ward” suddenly became a household topic, symbolizing the depth of the disaster that in 2005 had forever changed one of the country’s major metropolitan areas.

The 7th Ward “initiative” is part of the commitment of the Louisiana Conference to develop new faith communities. Ten percent of the conference budget is apportioned for that development, and is the “number one” priority of the conference.

Despite major damage to the homes, churches and businesses in this hard-hit section of New Orleans, many people have returned to the 7th Ward to start over in the city they love.

The United Methodist Church is starting over, too. Rev. Hadley R. Edwards, who has served as the New Orleans District Superintendent for the past three years, has been appointed by Bishop Cynthia Harvey to the 7th Ward of New Orleans to begin a new ministry in this area of the city which has not had a United Methodist church presence since Katrina. This presence will be known as The Spirit Church: A Ministry of The United Methodist Church.

“The name signifies our leaning on the Holy Spirit for strength and inspiration in this ministry that represents a new beginning. Throughout the Bible, stories of new starts were told. In the story of Noah, he released a dove after the flooding rains stopped. The dove returned with an olive branch in its beak, indicating that the storm was over, dry ground was available and new growth had begun,” said Edwards.

The Spirit Church will serve as God’s “hands, feet, boots and hearts ‘on the ground,’” said Edwards, connecting people and “making life better between Sundays.”

Since the most important ingredient in this effort “is people,” Edwards has connected with one...
of the homeowners’ associations in the 7th Ward. The president of the group has invited Edwards to the association’s July meeting, where he hopes to deepen contacts and begin to build relationships.

“Community gatherings and personal contacts made in the community will be our method of operation as we build a parish. I think John Wesley would approve,” he added.

Also in July, Edwards is scheduled to meet with New Orleans City Councilman Jared Brossett to find out more about the city’s master plan for the 7th Ward.

It is fortunate that Edwards is a self-described “people person.” “I am making this personal. I’ve made connections with a barbershop in the 7th Ward, and we all know that you get the real ‘pulse’ of the community in the local barbershop,” he said with a smile.

On June 13, about 26 members of The Spirit Church launch team took a bus tour of the area. One of the newest members of The Spirit Church runs a “party bus” service in New Orleans and made arrangements for the group’s transportation.

“Wearing our ‘spirit’ shirts, we boarded Snake’s Party Bus and traveled from the New Orleans District office in Metairie to the 7th Ward. The old converted school bus—filled with cold water, drinks and snacks—sported the slogan ‘Let’s Go Get It!’ painted in Saints’ black and gold colors on its side. As we made our way through the area, with the bus windows open and the music playing, we definitely drew attention!” said Edwards.

Rev. Lisa Fitzpatrick, director of the APEX Youth Center in New Orleans and a member of the launch team, arranged for a resident of the 7th Ward to lead the group on the tour. “It was an eye opening experience. We heard from one who lives in the midst of the 7th Ward about the culture, the people, the challenges and the need for our ministry in this mission field,” said Edwards.

At several points along the tour, the group disembarked to meet, hug and shake hands with area residents. One memorable encounter was with a woman named Denise, who pointed to a boarded up church building, explaining that the structure used to house her church. “I don’t go anywhere new,” she said.

“I shared with Denise what we hoped to do in the 7th ward. I asked her if we were to open a church in the neighborhood, would she come,” said Edwards. Again, pointing to the building, Denise said, “If you open MY church, I’ll be right there.” “I explained to her that we were United Methodists. She, a Catholic, said it didn’t matter. ‘It’s about Jesus, ain’t it?’”

Another area resident named Noel told us that he had also been a lifetime member of the neighborhood Roman Catholic church. Strongly hoping for a church located in his immediate neighborhood, he did not care which denomination it represented “as long as I get to worship God in my neighborhood.” “I truly believe that Denise and Noel are representative of others in this community starved for the presence of the church,” said Edwards.

Events slated for the summer and the early fall of this year include a block party, a “Back to School Bash,” “invitational” neighborhood prayer walks and the launching of share groups (Circles of Conversation and Care—3 Cs) and Bible studies.

“At the July block party, we will encourage students to sign up for receiving school supplies. This gives us a chance to tell people more about The Spirit Church and to invite them to the ‘Back to School Bash,’” said Edwards, who is reaching out to local churches in the New Orleans District and to area organizations for assistance with the parties and with collecting the supplies that will be distributed.

“The New Orleans District stands ready in support of this new ministry in the 7th Ward,” said Rev. Andy Goff, New Orleans District Superintendent. “After 10 years of virtually no ministry in the 7th Ward, there is a sense of renewal and new life that has come back to this part of New Orleans. I invite all of our churches to partner in prayer for The Spirit Church as God does a new thing among us and with us.”

The prayer walks will be held each Saturday in September with volunteers canvassing the neighborhoods and distributing invitations to the ministry’s inaugural worship celebration. “These walks will be a great volunteer opportunity for college students who attend the schools in the 7th Ward and who are looking for a worshipping community and are in need of community service hours,” said Edwards.

The residents of the 7th Ward have been through a lot. Not only have they been without houses of worship, they have lacked spiritual and emotional support. “Our 3 Cs groups will offer folks a safe space just to talk things out that might be happening in their lives. They may be in crisis, or they just might need a place to have conversation,” said Edwards.

The current plan is to limit circle size to five to seven individuals; meetings places can be “anywhere,” ranging from coffee shops and restaurants to local bars. “Prayer will be offered and help will be given. And our guidelines will include the 3 Cs of being courteous, confidential and compassionate,” he added.

The launch team plans to offer dynamic worship that has a blended style of traditional and new. The inaugural worship is scheduled for some time in September; the group is still searching for the “right spot” for indoor worship. An outdoor candlelight community service is also being planned during the Christmas season. “The Christmas service will possibly be held under the bridge at St. Bernard and Claiborne Avenues,” said Edwards.
The Forgotten Storm

Hurricane Katrina was such a terrible event that permanently affected people’s lives. So a lot of people throughout the country, and even in Louisiana, didn’t realize the extent of the damage caused by Rita in the Southwest portion of the state,” said Brandi Russell, who served as director for the conference Lake Charles Storm Center during the heart of storm response.

The Category 3 hurricane that struck the coasts of Louisiana and Texas was the fourth most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded, according to the National Hurricane Center. Rita reached the state at Holly Beach on Sept. 24, 2005—less than a month after Katrina hit.

In the beginning of the state’s disaster response, volunteers poured into the New Orleans area to help the city rebuild—but the response to Southwest Louisiana was slower. “Many have never heard of Abbeville or Cameron. People knew about New Orleans, which is such a large urban city,” said Rev. Doug Ezell, who was serving as Lake Charles district superintendent at the time.

Despite the challenges, church volunteers faithfully organized distribution centers, helped with clean up and offered counsel to their neighbors. “This area of the state is used to hurricanes. There is a community spirit among everyone who lives here, and folks immediately began to pull together after the storm had passed,” added Ezell.

The examples of generosity abound. Sweet Lake United Methodist Church assisted 450 families during the 2005 Christmas season by providing gifts for those who had lost everything. Warren UMC in Lake Charles helped to operate a food distribution and counseling center for storm survivors. St. Luke-Simpson UMC, also in Lake Charles, housed a collection center and provided volunteers at Red Cross centers and for debris removal teams.

All three of these churches received extensive damage during the Category 3 storm—but they, along with almost every local church throughout the Louisiana Conference, played an active role in the response effort.

First United Methodist Church in New Iberia retrofitted the church’s gymnasium, building bunk beds to create housing for first responders, members of the National Guard, firefighters and members of disaster response teams from across the country.

“We fed the community and we fed volunteer teams with big pots of red beans and rice, jambalaya and boiled shrimp. The church collected flood buckets and water for distribution. This was a big hospitality effort for First UMC,” said Rev. Scott Bullock, pastor of First UMC in New Iberia.

After a few years of disaster recovery work, the church’s efforts gave birth to a long-term response ministry that is very active today. “To provide adequate housing for visiting teams, we bought and restored another building. The Edith McMullen Mission Building became a reality due to a generous gift from Mrs. McMullen. As a matter of fact, we just housed youth and adult workers from the Texas Conference,” said Bullock.

Although the dust has long since settled from Hurricane Rita, volunteers from First UMC continue to collaborate with Habitat for Humanity and other local groups to identify needs and to reach out to help members of the community.

“THERE IS A COMMUNITY SPIRIT AMONG EVERYONE WHO LIVES HERE, AND FOLKS IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO PULL TOGETHER AFTER THE STORM HAD PASSED.”
When it comes to disasters, Louisiana has had more than a few opportunities to hone its response efforts. But two catastrophic hurricanes in 2005, two more in 2008 and an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico served as the primary stages on which response efforts in the state jumped to new heights—at governmental, institutional and church levels.

Through a partnership with United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Louisiana Annual Conference dramatically grew its disaster response ministry in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. “UMCOR worked with us, giving us the guidance and training to take responsibility for our own relief and recovery work. They showed us how to form partnerships with other religious and secular organizations to pool resources and avoid duplicating efforts. UMCOR provided us with more than $26,000,000 to assist with the vast amount of humanitarian work that was accomplished, and helped us set up a case management system that allowed us to help those most in need due to lack of income or insurance,” said Rev. Darryl Tate, who led the disaster recovery ministry for the Louisiana Conference at that time.

The response needs were so great that a group of storm recovery stations were established to focus on the response in specific geographical areas of the state. The Westbank, Uptown, Eastbank and Slidell storm recovery stations organized Katrina response efforts in the New Orleans and Northshore areas while the Abbeville and Lake Charles stations focused primarily on response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Rita.

When the dust finally settled, more than 107,000 volunteers working in excess of 5,700,000 hours were able to muck out, rebuild and repair more than 112,000 homes that were damaged or destroyed by the storms. Volunteers came from throughout Louisiana, from every state in the union and from all over the globe to help the citizens of Louisiana get back to “normal.”

Virginia Tech students Lisa Rubin (left) and Rachel St. John help gut the interior of Ernest Franklin’s home in New Orleans during their spring vacation. The group was one of several working through the Louisiana United Methodist Storm Recovery Center. 3/8/06

A UMNS PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE

DISASTER RESPONSE, THEN AND NOW

Ella Doyle lifts her head in prayer and tells fellow parishioners to “hold your head up” during an outdoor worship service at Hartzell Mt. Zion United Methodist Church in Slidell, La. The church’s sanctuary was ruined by the Aug. 29, 2005 storm surge from Hurricane Katrina. Doyle rode out the storm in a boat with her husband and two sons. 9/26/05

A UMNS PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE
“Without volunteers, there is no disaster ministry,” said the late Rev. Connie Thomas, who served as manager of volunteers during part of the response to Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

The Slidell storm recovery station, originally housed in buildings owned by Aldersgate United Methodist Church, has evolved into what is now The Epworth Project, a long-term recovery organization for St. Tammany and Washington parishes. “The Epworth Center, built on the grounds of Aldersgate UMC, is one of two permanent facilities that were built to house storm recovery volunteers. A second facility is located on property beside the Dulac Community Center,” said Rev. Don Cottrill, provost. “Local churches throughout the state housed volunteers for many years. It seemed best to build these two permanent sites since the need for volunteers in these areas of Louisiana were viewed as long term, with the need beyond hurricane recovery.”

The Epworth Project at Northshore Disaster Recovery, Inc. is a non-denominational, faith-based organization striving to “bring hope and comfort” to those considered to be “the least, the last and the lost.” The project has assisted 7,631 clients and hosted more than 56,000 volunteers who have repaired 2,447 homes.

Clients are typically those who have been adversely affected by storms as well as veterans, the elderly and the disabled. They usually fall into a low-income bracket. Effective case management is the foundation of this program that assists area residents with home building and repair using volunteer labor. Clients can also receive help with emergency housing, food and utilities.

Dale Kimball, executive director of the project, believes that “volunteers are the cornerstone and lifeblood of disaster recovery.” “Volunteers are the emissaries of hope and peace to those we serve,” said Kimball. “We believe that all, regardless of age or skill level, are divinely equipped to make a difference in the world.”

Sometimes it is difficult to feel the impact made on individual lives when looking only at statistics and numbers. Put faces and names to those statistics, and it is easy to understand the difference made through this kind of ongoing recovery work. “In just a week’s worth of volunteer work, Miss Terrie can now leave her home for the first time in four months because of her new handicapped ramp. Mr. George, who is wheelchair bound, can now access his backyard without worrying about snakes and animals. Mr. Landry has access to his entire home for the first time since it was flooded by Hurricane Isaac. And the list goes on,” said Kimball.

Money is needed to complete their work, so fund development is another important task for the Epworth Project board of directors, which draws from local pastors and business professionals. Help from civic organizations, public grants, and corporate and private donations comprise a large part of the funds raised to support the work of the project. Remarkably, the largest amount of money raised comes from the volunteers who give of their time and effort to serve as the “boots on the ground.” “The generosity of the folks who have come time and again, giving of their own personal resources, is a constant source of inspiration,” said Kimball.

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” That is the truth that is found at the center of the response to the hurricanes, the oil spill and in any act of kindness to help another person. Bishop William Hutchinson, Louisiana’s episcopal leader during those years, wrote in a newspaper column, “That’s the story of the millions of dollars, the thousands of workers, the multitude of letters and phone calls, and the countless hours of prayer that have been given to and for us, the people of Louisiana. And we have done our part of trying to help ourselves—churches opening their doors and lives to brothers and sisters in need…”
A DIVERSE CONGREGATION SERVING A DIVERSE CITY

ANY GIVEN SUNDAY

Sitting in the pews and singing in the choir are members of First Grace’s racially mixed congregation. Lively music and services offered in both English and Spanish provide the setting needed to appeal to a diverse congregation serving a diverse city.

This Mid-City church did not always attract such a blended group—at least not when it was First United Methodist Church.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, First UMC served a predominately white congregation. The church, once boasting a weekly attendance of 700 members, saw its worship numbers fall to less than 100. First UMC fell into the unenviable group of once strong urban churches facing a steady decline.

Then in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the city. The storm damaged church was facing serious financial and membership losses.

Just one short mile “down the road,” Grace United Methodist Church was also in dire straits. Like First UMC, Grace took on flood waters when the city’s levees breeched. The church property had devastating structural damage, losing a back wall to the main building.

First UMC and Grace UMC were just two of the many New Orleans area United Methodist churches facing crippling damage and dramatic losses in their congregations due to the diaspora of the city’s residents. Not only did many people in New Orleans have no place to live, they also had no place to worship.

“The bishop and the cabinet developed the concept of Mission Zones in response to the lack of active local congregations in the New Orleans area,” said Rev. Don Cottrill, provost. “The vast majority of local church members were out of town since their homes had been flooded and made uninhabitable. It was not feasible to send many of the pastors back to the local church they had been serving. We decided to recruit pastors who were willing and able to take on the challenge of the circumstances and to organize Mission Zones in which there was an ‘anchor church’ and several other local churches in the surrounding area. In each Mission Zone, a lead pastor was appointed along with a group of pastors who were appointed to the Zone instead of to a local church. They worked hard as a dedicated team, serving local churches, their members and the community.”

Grace and First UMC were partner churches in one of these Mission Zones. Once the property for First UMC was rehabilitated, the congregation invited Grace UMC to use their facilities for

Tia Tucker, left, and Robin Pearce sing in the choir of First Grace United Methodist Church in New Orleans. 8/15/10
A UMNS PHOTO BY KATHY L. GILBERT

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. is reported to have said, “Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of Christian America.”

But on any given Sunday in New Orleans, a walk through the doors of First Grace United Methodist Church paints a very different picture of church worship.
Eventually, both churches decided that the best option was to become one congregation—First Grace United Methodist Church.

Rev. Shawn Anglim has served as pastor for the newly merged church since its inception. “The people of First Grace are ordinary people living wonderful and complicated lives. But they have been faithful to the task of blending two unique congregations, making a decision that changed their lives and the lives of the people in this community for the better,” said Anglim.

“At the time of the decision to merge, I asked the congregations one question: Do you believe that we can do more for our city as one body of Christ than we can do as two bodies of Christ, one mile apart? Fortunately, their answer was ‘yes,’” he added.

One of the most significant ways that First Grace UMC has reached out to the people of New Orleans is through the establishment of Hagar’s House, a shelter for homeless women.

The storm displaced thousands in New Orleans and left behind a population of homeless persons that reached unprecedented levels for a U. S. city—one in 25 residents. In a 2008 article from USA Today, there was an estimated 12,000 homeless at that time, accounting for four percent of New Orleans’ estimated population of 302,000. UNITY of Greater New Orleans, a homeless advocacy group, then reported that the number was nearly double the pre-Katrina homeless count.

After Katrina, a large number of those homeless began to camp under the Claiborne overpass on Interstate 10. In October of 2007, the city began taking steps to relocate the group to safer venues.

When First Grace United Methodist Church was approached by the city to help with the problem, the church took in a group of homeless women in need of shelter.

That action provided the seeds for what is now the church’s full-fledged ministry for homeless women in New Orleans. With the help of generous donations, the church was able to purchase and restore a spacious older home that houses the residents, who moved into Hagar’s House in 2010. Hagar’s House currently serves as home for three women with children and four unaccompanied women who now have a roof over their heads, a warm bed and the compassion of the congregation of First Grace UMC.

In order to receive donations for Hagar’s House and related community outreach efforts, the church has formed a nonprofit organization known as First Grace Community Alliance.

Carolyn Mayes serves as the house director for Hagar’s House. Mayes works closely with Nichol Luebrun, full-time building coordinator. Committed church and community volunteers team up with members of the part-time staff to show God’s love to the residents of Hagar’s House.

“One of the most powerful things to have emerged at Hagar’s House is the community that residents have created. Folks have built relationships with First Grace and among themselves, continuing to support one another even after moving on,” said Mayes.

An outgrowth of the Hagar’s House ministry, Project Ishmael is an immigration legal clinic for children. Housed at First Grace UMC, the ministry was birthed in 2014 as part of the First Grace Community Alliance.

“Project Ishmael is new, it’s open, it’s small, but it’s growing. There is a huge need in New Orleans for this kind of help,” said Angela Davis, New Orleans attorney and project coordinator.

According to Davis, a full-time AmeriCorps interpreter will start working with Project Ishmael in September. “In order to take on more cases, we are working hard to find funding for a second attorney. With that second person, we could more than triple the number of children with whom we currently work.”

For more information about Hagar’s House or Project Ishmael, call (504) 210-5064.

To find out more about First Grace UMC, visit http://firstgraceumc.org/
“This is not your mama and daddy’s church,” said Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey during her Episcopal Address, delivered June 7 during AC2015: Come and See. “We must lead with greater boldness than ever before.”

We Came, We Saw...
AND WE WERE CHANGED

From June 7-10, more than 1,000 United Methodists from throughout Louisiana gathered in the Gold Dome at Centenary College in Shreveport for their annual conference. The scriptural focus for AC2015 was John 1:39-51, where Jesus invites His disciples to believe in Him—and to “come and see.”

The Louisiana Conference continues to work toward our “vision and preferred future.” Compelled by Christ’s love, lay and clergy leaders of the conference are “leading others into abundant life in Christ; engaging with our surrounding communities locally and globally in significant ways; learning, living and telling the gospel story to the nations; and reaching out and drawing in people from all walks of life resulting in vibrant, alive and vital congregations.”

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, in her Episcopal Address delivered Sunday evening, encouraged Louisiana’s United Methodists to “be all in.” “You can’t be lukewarm,” said Bishop Harvey, who also encouraged clergy and laity to be “more efficient and effective with what you DO have.” The Episcopal Address may be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrnrQg6WQkA

Bishop Harvey said that the church’s “delivery mechanism has to change” in order to reach more people. “If we’re not responding to the ends of the earth, I believe our vitality will be in question,” she added.

Continuing a commitment to mission, an offering was received during AC2015 for United Methodist Committee on Relief in celebration of its 75th anniversary. The total collected to date stands at more than $53,000; an additional $5,100 was raised for UMCOR by the sale of a Community Mural, which was collaboratively created by conference members during AC2015.

Louisiana’s local churches also celebrated UMCOR’s 75th anniversary by filling a truck from UMCOR Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, La. with health and school kits.

The 10th anniversary of Louisiana’s collision with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was remembered during AC2015 several times. Most memorable was a presentation of video shot immediately after the storms hit accompanied by the singing of a commemorative song by Stacy Hood during Tuesday night’s Wesley Awards. The Louisiana Annual Conference celebrates the incredible partnership that our conference had with UMCOR during our successful recovery efforts from these two devastating storms.

As AC2015 was being held, parts of the Shreveport/Bossier City area remained flooded from recent devastating rains. Plans began at the meeting to ramp up donations, flood bucket assembly and the staging of Early Response Teams that will serve in the area as flood waters recede.

The Louisiana Conference has as its priority the development of new faith communities, with a commitment of 10% of the Conference budget apportioned for this purpose. A new Benchmark Project will involve 16 of our local congregations participating in this initiative for congregational vitality. Several programs related to clergy training, mentoring and recruitment are being offered for younger and mid-career pastors.

Four significant appointments were announced during AC2015. Rev. John Cannon has been serving as the Acadiana District Superintendent...
since 2014, and while continuing in this ministry, he now begins serving in a dual role as the Conference Director of Congregational Development. In this new capacity, he will be coordinating the strategy and resources for new-church starts and church transformation. Cannon will be working closely with the other District Superintendents to seek out and equip people with the passion and gifts for planting new congregations; to discern the right places for planting new faith communities; and to identify existing churches with a high potential for transforming their ministries of evangelism. He will also be seeking out and recruiting vital congregations willing to extend their outreach efforts by establishing “daughter” churches, multisite ministries or other ministries designed to reach new people.

Rev. Hadley R. Edwards, who has served as the New Orleans District Superintendent for the past three years, has been appointed to the 7th Ward of New Orleans to start a new ministry in an area of the city which has not had a United Methodist church presence since Hurricane Katrina. This presence will be known as The Spirit Church: A Ministry of the United Methodist Church.

Replacing Edwards, Rev. E. Andrew Goff has been appointed as the New Orleans District Superintendent. Goff has most recently served as lead pastor for Cornerstone UMC in New Orleans.

Rev. Juliet Spencer is the new Monroe District Superintendent. Most recently serving as pastor of St. Andrew’s UMC in Baton Rouge, Spencer replaces Rev. Ellen Alston, who has served as Monroe District Superintendent for the last two years. Prior to that appointment, Alston served as Alexandria District Superintendent for five years.

Four persons were ordained elder and one person ordained deacon and received into full connection with the conference; a total of 12 persons were commissioned as provisional elders.

Guest speakers for AC2015 included Dr. Elaine Heath, McCreless Professor of Evangelism for Perkins School of Theology, along with Rev. Eric Huffman, lead pastor of The Story Houston (a satellite ministry of St. Luke’s UMC in Houston), and Rev. Justin Coleman, chief ministry officer of the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville.

During this year’s Laity Breakfast, Mr. Dean Harvey served as keynote speaker and the Daughenbaugh Matheny Scholars were recognized (see page 14 for names).

A report from the Conference Restructure Task Force, which recommended a proposed alternative structure for our work as a conference, was passed.

Local churches were recognized for excellence in ministry during the 2015 Wesley Awards, held in the Gold Dome. Winners were chosen for implementing creative ministries that embody our Conference Core Values and Preferred Vision. The winners are found on pages 12 and 13 of this edition of the Louisiana Now.

More young adults in our Annual Conference sessions were involved as either lay members from local churches, district delegates or observers. These persons, falling into the 19-35 age bracket, held conversations throughout AC2015 and reported to the body with a summary of their observations and discussions at the close of the event.

Prior to the Episcopal Address, conference members gathered for a Louisiana tailgate party outside the Gold Dome to visit colleagues and start new friendships while enjoying treats provided by local food trucks.

Clergy and clergy spouses who entered Life Eternal during the past year were remembered during the Celebration of Life (see page 15 for names and photos).

For Facebook coverage of AC2015: Come and See, visit https://www.facebook.com/louisianaconference
It’s not The Oscars...it’s THE WESLEYS!

Rev. Matt Rawle, pastor of The Well United Methodist Church in Ponchatoula, served as host to the second annual “Wesley Awards,” held the evening of Tuesday, June 9 of AC2015: Come and See in the Gold Dome.

Winners of the award (a.k.a John Wesley bobbleheads!), hailing from United Methodist churches from throughout the Louisiana Conference, were recognized for implementing creative ministries that embody our Conference Mission, Core Values and Preferred Vision. Ministries that were lifted up were submitted for review prior to the 2015 Louisiana Annual Conference.

We went from 20 or so applicants last year to an abundance of over 75 applicants this year. It’s that kind of abundance that reminds us of resurrection. It’s that kind of abundance that reminds us of what it means to live a Christian life.

Here are this year’s winners, according to category of ministry:

* LEADING OTHERS TO AN ABUNDANT LIFE IN CHRIST

Algiers United Methodist Church’s Prison Ministry began with a prayer, an idea and a small group of disciples who wanted to offer hope. Every month, the members of Algiers UMC regularly write letters and send cards to 12 different inmates, leading to a partnership between the church and the Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana. Through the church’s assistance, one young man found out that he was eligible to go to college to pursue his dream of being a nurse.

Southeast Ministries of Broadmoor United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge has served more than 8,000 people over the last year with an unpaid staff of more than 100 volunteers. One woman came to Southeast Ministries because she lost her job and needed extra food to make ends meet. Many weeks later, she returned to the ministry, not for food, but to let Southeast Ministries know she had gotten a full-time job.

First United Methodist Church of Slidell sponsors the “Feed Dat” ministry. Since the ministry began in October of 2014, Feed Dat has fed over 1,000 families in need. There is no screening process. All are welcome, just as all are welcome to the Lord’s Table.

The Brown Bag Ministry of Louisiana Avenue United Methodist Church started with a vision from one of Louisiana Avenue’s college students. Every month, Louisiana Avenue UMC serves more than 150 homeless living on the streets of Lafayette. The Brown Bag ministry reveals that love is the mission of the church. The church meets people where they are, just like Jesus meets us.

* ENGAGING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Asbury United Methodist Church of Bossier City’s Katy Build was named in memory of Katy Watkins, a young girl in the Asbury youth group who gave her time to make a difference in the life of those around her. The first Katy Build, constructed for first-time military veteran homeowners, was the first new construction in the Scott-Dickerson neighborhood in almost 50 years. From idea to threshold dedication, the build took only 64 days.

Lucas Prestenbach, an eighth grader who attends Bayou Blue United Methodist Church in Houma, decided that he wanted to feed the homeless. So he took it upon himself to contact Hope House and meet with Bayou Blue’s mission committee, challenging them to feed the hungry in their community. What began as a middle schooler’s idea is now a ministry that has fed over 100 people and started an ongoing relationship with Bayou Blue UMC and Hope House.

The “Sandbox” ministry (officially called “UM Share”) of Mansfield, Logansport, Wesley, Grand Cane, and other United Methodist churches was established to build relationships and conversation and shared worship between black and white congregations. In addition to the important work of reconciliation, these churches in the sandbox came together to donate over 300 school uniforms for children in Desoto Parish. The “Sandbox” motto is, “The world is our parish.”

The Outreach Ministry of NewSong United Methodist Church in Prairieville has raised funds for a new building and parsonage for a church in the Romelie community of the Guantanamo
Province in Cuba. Because of NewSong’s work in this remote area of Cuba, this new church adopted NewSong as the name of their faith community, “New Song Iglesia Methodista en Romelic.”

St. John’s United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge started the “Consulado Movil de Mexico” so that the Mexican Consulate in New Orleans might help marginalized Mexican immigrants begin the path toward legal U.S. citizenship. The project helps immigrants update important documents so that they can remain in good standing in the United States. Since December, St. John’s has helped 300 Mexican families with the legal citizenship process.

* LEARNING AND TELLING THE GOSPEL STORY

Chatham United Methodist Church in the Monroe District has discovered the power of movies to both share the Gospel story and build community. “Movies Under the Stars” offers family friendly movies in a community where there’s not much to do after dark. In a way, “Movies Under the Stars” embodies the light of Christ, the light that shines in the darkness, a light that will never be overcome.

Faith Crossing United Methodist Church began the Hummingbird Lane ministry to offer a safe place for children to learn the Gospel story. What began as a place where children could receive help with homework has grown into a music ministry during which children use homemade and donated instruments to sing praises to God. The Hummingbird Lane Ministry now offers meals during Thanksgiving and provides Christmas gifts to the children during the holiday season.

The Martin Memorial Garden and Labyrinth at First United Methodist Church in Gueydan has taken a more silent approach to sharing the Gospel story. Inspired by a memorial gift honoring John and Allen Martin, one of whom was a rose enthusiast, a prayer garden and labyrinth in the style of the labyrinth from the Chartes Cathedral in France was begun in February in 2014. With the help of a mission team from Missouri, a garden full of white roses, clematis, hydrangea, amaryllis and other flowers reminds the Gueydan community that a garden was God’s first gift to humanity.

The after-school ministry of Vidalia United Methodist Church accommodates an average of 45 children every Tuesday, offering a place for snacks, homework help and Bible stories. Last year, the children offered a ministry for the church in leading the congregation’s Christmas program. Because of the after-school program, the community and the church have been blessed with the life-giving Gospel story.

* REACHING OUT AND DRAWING PEOPLE IN

Louisiana Memorial United Methodist Church in the Acadiana District provides “Wesley’s Table,” a free community breakfast. The ministry began in February of 2015 with a handful of volunteers committed to breaking down the barriers that too often divide our communities. What began as a feeding ministry has grown into a partnership with the local women’s shelter and a more inclusive and diverse congregation.

“Village of Hope” and “Gumbo of Art, Music, and Culture” programs, hosted by Camphor Memorial United Methodist Church, are children’s outreach ministries for the Scotlandville community. Village of Hope reaches out to young children, providing them with academic enhancement through homework assistance and cultural enrichment. “Gumbo of Art, Music, and Culture” program invites older children to experience, through field trips and interactive workshops, the cultural richness of the Scotlandville community. Through Gumbo, children have learned about history, art, entrepreneurship and financial literacy.

Wesley Chapel in Homer moved into an unused Southern Methodist Church building to offer a place of hospitality of families who were visiting incarcerated loved ones. This holy ground now offers an ecumenical worship experience and revivals and youth services for area churches. Through hospitality and worship, the “Seeds of Light” ministry offers lodging for families visiting loved ones at the David Wade Correctional Facility as well as GED classes, tutoring program, and Christmas gift program.

**LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:**

* Louisiana Methodist Children’s Home
* United Methodist Committee on Relief

Louisiana Methodist Children’s Home is a leading faith-based provider of behavioral health services statewide. More than 560 employees actively provide an array of ministries across Louisiana from home-based services to intensive, trauma-focused, residential care for children and adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral needs who are unable to live in less intentional therapeutic settings or at home even with community-based supports.

UMCOR is a ministry of The United Methodist Church through the General Board of Global Ministries. The agency’s goal is to assist the most vulnerable persons affected by crisis or chronic need without regard to their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

UMCOR’s work reaches people in more than 80 countries, including the United States. The agency provides humanitarian relief when war, conflict or natural disaster disrupt life to such an extent that communities are unable to recover on their own. Louisiana was the recipient of close to 26 million dollars in aid from UMCOR during our recovery from Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.
Local Pastors

A Recognized as new local pastors were, front row, Denise Smith, Cynthia Kaupp, Becky Poor, Leah Gaughan, Bethany Lawson. Back row, John Tellis, Fernando Rivera, Thomas Williams, Jason Harris and Michelle Harris. Not pictured is Laurie Rayborn.

B Bettie Jo Rhodes, Bryan Sibley and Chyrelena Peyton were recognized as the newest Certified Lay Ministers in our conference.

C Recognized at AC2015 for having completed the 20 classes for the Course of Study School were Stephanie Kidd, Robert Johnson, Mary Amanda Carpenter, Edward Lee Cooper and Sandra DeFatta.

D Recognized at AC2015 as having completed License to Preach School were Rebecca Poor and James Wilkins. Not pictured are Shirley Collins, Earl Cumming and Christopher Hyde.

Scholars & Awards

Daughenbaugh-Matheny Scholars
Hannah Bergeron, Acadia
Robin Chailland, New Orleans
Gabrielle Coleman, New Orleans
Calvin Davis, Shreveport
Harrison D. Fois, New Orleans
Ben Green, Shreveport
Jonathan W. Harrel, Jr., Monroe
Allie Hornsby, Lake Charles
Micolette Jackson, Baton Rouge
Cole Laverne, Lake Charles
Catherine LeBlanc, Baton Rouge
Peyton Miller, Lake Charles
Victor Robert, Baton Rouge
Logan Settoon, Lake Charles
Leonesha Sims, Acadiana
Amanda Willis, Monroe
Abbie Woods, Shreveport

Harry Denman Award
Clergy - Lala Ball Cooper
Lay - Freida Capps Peel
Youth - David Lee Prather

Sojourner Truth Award
Evelyn Cloutman

Bishop and Kay Hutchinson Endowment Scholarship:
Micolette Jackson

Bishop and Kay Hutchinson Endowment Scholarship:
Logan Settoon
“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”
John 14:1-3

Clergy

Arthur M. Baker • 1926 – 2014
Michael R. Boyett • 1947 – 2015
Samuel Calvo • 1939 – 2014
Curtis A. Chambers • 1924 – 2015
Angus Lee Carruth • 1924 – 2015
Emmett C. Collins, Jr. • 1941 – 2015
Alan D. Einsel • 1939 – 2014
Barry Hoekstra • 1956 – 2014
Helen P. Marcussen • 1923 – 2014
Curtis Johnson • 1935 – 2015
Douglas L. McGuire • 1921 – 2015
Judy E. Nelson • 1941 – 2014
Paul C. Singletary, Sr. • 1931 – 2015
Gordon L. Smith, Sr. • 1929 – 2014
Robert Ed Taylor • 1931 – 2014

Clergy Spouses

Catherine S. Augustine • 1925 – 2014
Bonnie Bengston • 1929 – 2015
Marie Bond • 1923 – 2014
Earline R. Friedrich • 1926 – 2015
Helen T. Franklin • 1932 – 2014
Elsie S. Cain • 1916 – 2014
James Harris • 1948 – 2014
Madice N. King • 1930 – 2014
Virginia R. Maxwell • 1939 – 2014
Pat Norton • 1936 – 2014
Velma June Patton • 1926 – 2015
Neva Sohl Salter • 1924 – 2015
David Switzer • 1925 – 2015
Elizabeth Trickett • 1924 – 2015
Maude Wallace • 2014

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