

**D R A F T**

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Item \_\_\_ - \_\_\_

**Struck Down, But Not Destroyed:  
From Hurricane Katrina To a More Equitable Future**

**Resolution and Recommendations**

**The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) jointly recommend the 218th General Assembly (2008) receive the attached study and approve the resolution and recommendations below, together titled, “Struck Down, But Not Destroyed: From Hurricane Katrina To a More Equitable Future.” This resolution comes in response to the affirmation of the 217th General Assembly (2006) that:**

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns will continue to explore ways of addressing issues resulting from the Katrina disaster by consulting with the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC), Peacemaking, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), the Office of Black Congregational Enhancement, and other related entities that will ensure the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s appropriate response to these issues.

**I. Resolution**

**Introduction**

The 217th General Assembly (2006) received initial reports on the effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast from several sources: the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), impacted presbyteries and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA). Presbyteries affected by the hurricane immediately began to search for pastors displaced by the disaster, coordinated communications with churches, and assessed the impact on congregations, church members and pastors as they developed a response and coordinated recovery efforts with PDA. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance had swung into action immediately, beginning the double process of emergency support and assessment of long-term needs. Thanks to tent communities and other logistical arrangements by PDA and the hospitality and coordination provided by presbyteries and local congregations, an astonishing number of over 35,000 volunteers have now pitched in to help reverse the effects of a combined natural, governmental and cultural disaster, providing more than 178,000 volunteer days of service, worth an estimated \$21 million in labor plus an additional \$95,000 in donated materials, while Presbyterians overall have contributed \$27 million in funds.

This report begins by saluting the Christian commitment of the volunteers. We believe the whole church should be proud, and we find Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Gulf Coast hosting and giving congregations, and the presbyteries of the Gulf Coast region worthy of honor. Quoting Isaiah 58:12, in 2007 the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) called on the whole church to be “repairer(s) of the breach, and restorer(s) of the streets to live in.” The effects of this disaster on the church itself have also been of great concern, as congregations and presbyteries have been weakened. This is a time when most Presbyterians put aside theological differences to respond to God’s call to care for one another, acknowledging that: “when one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor. 12:26).” But we do not care only for ourselves, and we recognize that all the churches together cannot repair a Katrina-sized breach in our social fabric.

Thus this report complements that outpouring of hands-on and financial concern to look at what the tragedy revealed about New Orleans and its neighboring communities, and about our government’s

response. This is not an exhaustive catalog of devastation, ward-by-ward or parish-by-parish; nor does it inventory all of the weaknesses in systems of criminal justice, transportation, environmental protection, levee engineering, or urban planning. Public housing and public health remain at the core of Gulf-area needs, and the New Orleans school system is now a large and uneven experiment in non-union charter schools. Economic development remains stunted except for the tourist industry. Yet while the church must be aware of these realities, its focus must be on the suffering and vulnerability of families and communities and the responsibility of federal, state, and local government to respond.

Beyond the church's own caregiving, it is the church's divinely ordained mission to stand with the afflicted, and not to minimize the patterns that have made for soul-drowning poverty in parts of every city and rural county. The attached study looks at the "framing" coverage of the disaster, responses by the church and others to the immediate tragedy, but then looks at structural issues of race, gender, and class and the resources of our tradition to face these dynamics.

The primary author of the study was raised in New Orleans and, with their permission, shares some of the suffering of his own family, most of whom have struggled to stay, and stayed to struggle, in that city. As a professor of urban ministry, he also takes us to the hard truths beneath the deluge of data: although the emergence of a Black presidential contender gives hope to our aspirations for a race-neutral society, much of our culture and civic ethos remain stunted by structural racism. Any plans for rescue must recognize these mutually reinforcing legacies of segregation in employment, housing, and education. This is part of the church's work of strengthening its witness of charity with a concomitant witness of justice advocacy, and it prompts the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) to propose a focused continuing study of our urban areas and the capacities of the church within them.

### Long-range Concerns of the Church

We have seen a great process of triage, planned and unplanned, reflecting lines of race and class, which has resulted in the virtual halving of pre-Katrina populations, with the bulk of the population loss among the poor. We have seen scores of deaths and continued hard living in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers and moldy homes. Even for those remaining and still returning to New Orleans and its surrounding parishes, there is a great difference between families getting back on their feet and the wholeness of community. It is for the church to lift up a right of place that goes beyond land value, and the cultural and spiritual losses that require more than physical reconstruction.

Of existing policies that speak most directly to this reality, "Building Community Among Strangers," written following racial and other tensions of the Los Angeles riots in the early 1990s, expresses the need for systemic change. The church's commitments to sustainable development and against "environmental racism" or locating toxic hazards primarily in or near poor communities, often communities of color, also speak to the Gulf Coast situation. In addition to social witness policies, of course, the PC(USA) has strategies of mission and evangelism that look to building up the witness of congregations in areas of disaster and disruption.

The recommendations of this report also look to the vulnerability of countless other coastal communities threatened by accelerated climate change and other geographic challenges. The ACREC and ACSWP chose to title this report with the Bible's promise of redemption despite tragedy taken from 2 Corinthians 4:9. Too many people in coastal Louisiana and Mississippi have indeed been "afflicted . . . but not crushed," "struck down but not destroyed," and we pray not driven to despair. The message of the hope in all disasters must be that God the Creator does not abandon people and neither should we.

This resistance to abandonment is the other side of the church's theological concern for the common good. It does mean special assistance for those in special need, but it does not mean subsidizing ecologically or logistically unsustainable residence patterns. Insurance practices are discussed in the study paper, but wise federal regulation both holds companies to fulfill their agreements and puts scientifically justified limits on shoreline development. Similarly, there need to be limits on development in dry areas with regard to fire and everyday water depletion. In this way, reflection on the Katrina catastrophe's remediation turns

one to issues of prevention, planning for disaster and emergency response, and careful study of the sociology of recovery.

The global prospect of increased internal displacement, in relation to both ecological change and warfare, prompted the United Nations Human Rights community in 1998 to put forward *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. The same group that helped develop the Guiding Principles, the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, has supported a study applying those principles to the post-Katrina situation. (note: *Hurricane Katrina and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* by Chris Kromm and Sue Sturgis, Institute for Southern Studies, January 2008). This and other comprehensive reports review the adequacy and implementation of the 1988 Stafford Act, the basic five-level framework for federal disaster assistance (full name: The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act). It is thus not the church's role to duplicate this kind of study, but for appropriate agencies and representatives to examine and support key recommendations, particularly for the good of potentially affected areas and planning for the church itself.

As the attached study indicates, an extensive bibliography of reports has been distilled in the recommendations below. Both the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy have listened to a range of persons involved, and the latter body has also visited New Orleans.

## II. Recommendations

In response to the catastrophic disaster to Gulf Coast areas precipitated by Hurricane Katrina, the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy recommend that the 218th General Assembly (2008):

1. Receive the study paper entitled, "Struck Down, But Not Destroyed: From Hurricane Katrina to A More Equitable Future," and direct that it and the resolution approved be made available on the web and in a limited printing for all presbyteries, synods and educational institutions related to the church, as well as a copy given to each volunteer group staying at a PDA volunteer village.

2. Declare that in light of the Reformed tradition's understanding of the role of government as the arm of a whole people acting to maintain the common good, the official responses of society's agencies, public and private, to the disaster of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been grievously inadequate regarding the needs of those affected by trauma, loss, and relocation in the Gulf Coast region and, in particular, to the African American citizens of New Orleans, the physically challenged, and the poor of that city.

3. Call the nation to repentance regarding our society's continuing failed responses by taking concrete timely steps, through policy formation and the appropriate marshalling of financial and human resources, to transform New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region into a model of redevelopment with social and environmental justice.

4. Commend those members and bodies within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that have modeled constructive and compassionate response:

- a. The 35,000 plus volunteers who gave over 178,000 days of service estimated to value more than \$21 million in volunteer labor; and all those who contributed funds to face this unprecedented disaster;

- b. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) for its outstanding role in assisting the whole church in responding to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma.

c. The congregations and presbyteries on the Gulf Coast that have welcomed and hosted volunteers and coordinated clean up and rebuilding efforts, and those from around the country and the world who have sent mission teams and resources to the Gulf Coast.

d. Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) for supporting caregivers and engaging Presbyterians from across the country in addressing systemic and specific concerns in New Orleans and elsewhere and in educating Presbyterians on the connection of charity and justice.

e. The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for waiving dues for congregations impacted by the disaster for seven months and for providing more than \$300,000 in emergency assistance grants to church workers in the affected region. The Board also streamlined access to care with its medical plan vendors and arranged additional counseling services to address personal impacts of the devastation and stresses of care giving.

f. The synods of the impacted areas for administering funds raised by PDA for pastor and church staff salary support. Over \$714,922 was distributed to support pastors and staff of congregations.

g. The Interagency Task Force, which brought together representatives from various agencies of the Presbyterian Church to coordinate ongoing, long-term responses to the needs of congregations, including assessment and funding of congregations needing assistance with rebuilding their damaged facilities. Over \$2,218,569 has been distributed for the rebuilding of damaged church facilities.

5. Express concern regarding the health, environmental and safety issues related to the disposal of Hurricane Katrina debris by directing the Stated Clerk to:

a. Communicate to the City Council and Mayor of New Orleans the PC(USA)'s affirmation of the closure of the Chef Menteur landfill in 2007, and to communicate our continuing concern regarding the health and environmental issues involved in the use of the Old Gentilly landfill.

b. Urge the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to work with New Orleans city officials to develop a comprehensive debris management strategy that addresses environmental, safety, and health issues at landfills used for the disposal of Hurricane Katrina waste.

c. Request congressional hearings on debris management post-Katrina that examines the lessons learned from this disaster and provides recommendations for state and federal actions that guide debris management, especially in regards to hazardous waste, in future disasters.

6. Urge the Presbyterian Foundation, through its Creative Investment Program and in collaboration with the General Assembly Council through the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) and in consultation with other offices, to make a loan of \$4 million to Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in order to create a low-interest revolving loan fund which would be available to Presbyterian congregations, presbyteries and coalitions in which church entities are involved, in the affected Gulf region for development loans to support the construction and rehabilitation of affordable permanent rental housing and mixed housing attached to congregational redevelopment, or to fund neighborhood initiatives organized by community development corporations in which a Presbyterian congregation or presbytery is involved. Following the precedent of \$4 million made available for development in Los Angeles in 1991, and limited to a five-year period, this investment would accrue at an interest rate to be agreed upon between the Foundation and LISC and would result in a secure investment for the PC(USA).

7. Encourage PDA and those agencies involved in disaster recovery research to work in collaboration with long term recovery organizations in finding economically viable 'green' building processes, recommended materials (appropriate to context) and models to assist in sustainable rebuilding.

**8. Direct Small Church and Community Ministry, Racial-Ethnic Ministries, and other appropriate ministries of the General Assembly Council, in consultation with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, to produce a resource for pro-active ministry and preparation for disaster in urban and rural areas of concentrated poverty, and provide these to coastal and other vulnerable presbyteries. (This work may be done ecumenically and build on existing resources).**

**9. Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) to review the provisions of “Building Community Among Strangers” and other policies involving urban congregations and populations in light of the patterns of enduring poverty in most major U.S. cities, and to study with urban presbyteries ways that public policies may assist the redevelopment of communities and congregations.**

**10. Direct the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Washington Office and other ministries of the General Assembly Council (GAC), as appropriate, to support the following public policy directions at the federal level, and urge individual Presbyterians, congregations, presbyteries and synods, as able, to support these and other equitable reconstruction policies on all levels of government, especially state and local:**

**a. Re-professionalization of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through careful investigation of its failures of communication, logistics and coordination with local bodies and institution of new policies as necessary to ensure better emergency preparedness, communications with evacuees, cross-cultural awareness training, involvement of affected people and institutions in recovery efforts, and outreach to persons of color and women as employees and contractors.**

**b. Long-range planning on population displacement and study of the impacts and effectiveness of FEMA recovery efforts and state/local disaster management.**

**c. Federal maintenance of prevailing wage levels (under the Davis-Bacon Act), affirmative action requirements, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards, and other worker and union protections in reconstruction efforts.**

**d. System-wide review of the fairness of charter school-based education in New Orleans, including its impacts on teachers as well as children, especially those living in trailers on a long-term basis.**

**e. Full compliance with environmental laws governing hazardous wastes, fairness in locating waste sites and other hazards in the full range of communities.**

**f. Public housing reconstruction on at least a “one-for-one” basis to ensure replacement of housing destroyed and policies to strengthen provision of affordable housing to those whose incomes range up to 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold.**

**g. Preserve affordable housing by instituting rent freezes immediately following disaster and providing for investigation of price gouging in the rental and housing markets in a federally declared disaster area.**

**h. Urge that Congress investigate: 1) whether persons displaced by the hurricanes on the Gulf Coast were allowed to live in FEMA trailers with dangerously high levels of formaldehyde as has been reported in February 2008 by the Center for Disease Control (CDC); 2) why it took FEMA over two years to investigate health complaints from persons living in these trailers; 3) the health impact this delay has created in persons living in FEMA trailers; and 4) how FEMA plans to relocate the 36,000 people still living in FEMA trailers whose health continues to be put at risk.**

**i. Accountable state and federal planning by the Army Corps of Engineers and other bodies to maximize public safety and minimize public exposure to natural risks in the strengthening of levees and other infrastructure improvements.**

**j. Environmentally-sound planning, in light of climate change, to allow bayou and delta buffer area regeneration and the appropriate protection and regulation of fishing and other coastal economic redevelopment.**

**k. Effective insurance regulation to ensure clarity in coverage and fairness to policyholders.**

**l. Rebuilding of full hospital capacity in affected areas, and development of psychiatric resources for communities affected by large-scale depression and post-traumatic stress, with particular attention to services for the indigent and uninsured. Such resources should include youth protective and domestic violence preventive outpatient services.**

**10. Encourage and equip leaders in local congregations in the Gulf Coast area to help in identifying critical needs that may be addressed through local public policy, and to engage proactively in the development and implementation of such public policy. Direct the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Washington Office, and other ministries of the General Assembly Council (GAC), as appropriate, to identify and make available resources to equip and empower local leaders for this task.**

### *Rationale*

#### *Purpose of the Study Paper*

In an effort to clarify facts concerning Jesus Christ from the variety of documents in circulation at the time, Luke wrote the New Testament book that bears his name to a friend beginning with these words: “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us . . . I too decided, after investigating . . . to write an orderly account for you. . . .” (Luke 1:1-3) In similar fashion, Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963, amidst many conflicting assessments of strategies employed to achieve civil rights for all citizens in that era, wrote his famous “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” to clarify his position concerning difficult social justice issues.

Today, a wide variety of helpful studies about the devastating economic, social, educational, cultural, and spiritual realities confronting New Orleans and Gulf Coast regions in the post-Hurricane Katrina era have been compiled.<sup>1</sup> “Struck Down, But Not Destroyed: From Hurricane Katrina to A More Equitable Future,”<sup>2</sup> (2 Cor. 4:7-10) seeks to outline, from among some of these resources, recommended action-steps as set forth above for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The aim here is to affirm the vision and spirit of hope reflected in the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast areas in spite of the devastation that continues to impact their lives to this day. Particular attention is devoted to issues of race, gender, and economic injustice that, with disappointing regularity, are reflected in the experiences and stories of some of the most vulnerable people affected by this natural and human disaster.<sup>3</sup> As such, these recommendations are intended to assist Presbyterian Christians to implement a vision a hope and positive systemic change that safeguards the welfare of society’s most vulnerable constituencies and historically marginalized communities such that, in the words of scripture, “justice will roll down like waters . . . righteousness like an everlasting stream” (Amos 5:21-24) and “the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people shall see it together. . . .” (Isa. 40:5)

#### *Background: What Hurricane Katrina Revealed*

During September 2005, the world watched on television tragic pictures of New Orleans as it was deluged not only by water, but also by apathy, incompetence, and indifference. This situation was largely the result of irresponsible funding decisions of government officials and the Army Corps of Engineers that repeatedly ignored the inadequacy of levees and emergency preparedness plans which should have been in place for a city built below sea level. Indelible images of the flooded city remain in our minds: mostly poor and African American people waving their water-soaked clothing in the air, begging for help; women, some with infants in arms, children, men, and elderly persons perched on rooftops, bridges, or lined up to get into the Superdome. Scene after scene of pathos was daily news fare with sick people exposed to the hot summer sun lying on mats, in

wheelchairs, in nursing homes or hospitals waiting for buses that never arrived, or deceased and covered with newspaper, rags, and even an American flag as grieving relatives sat nearby in stunned disbelief. Crowds of people walked across a bridge seeking dry land and shelter only to meet a wall of armed police from Gretna, a city that did not flood, refusing them entrance.

Unfortunately, the horror of this tragic reality was exacerbated by a wave of media coverage that sensationalized the incidence of crime and looting occurring in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and delayed some assistance. Mainstream newspapers, television, and radio reported that Black residents were raping, looting, and shooting at rescue workers and generally running wild in the streets. These reports spread fear among people in New Orleans across race and class, and were especially terrifying to women. That crime wave later proved to have been largely fictional.<sup>4</sup> Racism is evident in the different ways that actions of Black and White residents were portrayed in the media. In one Associated Press photo, a Black man carrying a plastic bag through the floodwaters carried the notation that he had been “looting” a local grocery store. In another media story, a similar picture of a White couple carried the notation that they were wading through the flood waters after “finding” these items at a local grocery store.<sup>5</sup> The extent of the coverage that the media placed on looting, shootings, rapes, and violent activity gave the appearance that these behaviors were more rampant than later evidence suggests. These reports represented an additional abuse to many people and an entire city already devastated by the largest natural disaster to hit the coastal United States. Moreover, these sensationalized reports overlooked the heroic sacrifices of many of people who were flood victims themselves (children, young adults, older adults, neighbors helping neighbors, medical personnel, police officers and other public servants who did not abandon their posts) and, nonetheless, sought to reach out and help others. To this point:<sup>6</sup>

It became immediately clear that many of the heroes and heroines of Hurricane Katrina were residents of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Atlanta, Houston, Biloxi, and other surrounding communities who, without fanfare and often without outside resources, saved lives and provided not only food, shelter and clothing, but love and care for their sisters and brothers in the days, weeks, and months after the hurricane. And easily overlooked, is the fact that many of these heroes and heroines were victims themselves, who selflessly risked their own well-being of their families to help others.<sup>7</sup>

Hurricane Katrina hit the Mississippi coast heaping devastation and suffering upon thousands who lost their homes, businesses, churches, and schools with their communities torn asunder and lives shattered. Physical, economic, and emotional ruin and trauma was spread across the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama coasts and surrounding areas. Yet, it was shocking scenes from New Orleans that revealed the abandonment of people in crisis that exposed graphic race, gender, and class distinctions that continue to bedevil our society. These realities challenge the PC(USA) afresh to make its public proclamation of the Gospel which plainly teaches the axiom summarized in Galatians 3:28 that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina’s landfall on August 29, 2005, not only did levees break and fail to protect the city from the flood waters, but promises also broke that were supposed to protect people from the overwhelming danger, sickness, and loss of life that occurred. More pathetic than even this catastrophe are the social and economic realities that typified pre-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans which can be found in cities across the nation whether in Seattle, Miami, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, or Atlanta and, indeed, around the globe in even more profound dimensions. Other cities may not be below sea level physically, but educationally, economically, and in terms of social challenges facing poor families in urban centers engulfed by health challenges, drugs, gun and gang violence, and unemployment, they are seriously below needed safety levels.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the human losses and general vulnerability of poorer communities, there were distinctive cultural losses in the wake of Katrina. The Crescent City and The City That Care Forgot are the two most widely known nicknames long associated with New Orleans, Louisiana. The Crescent City is the nickname that bespeaks of New Orleans’ location, noting its early days of having literally been settled in the crescent-shaped bend of the Mississippi River as it winds its way southward toward the Gulf of Mexico. The City That Care Forgot is the phrase that captures the spirit of New Orleans and the emphasis on enjoying life’s simple pleasures. This can be seen in the city’s passion for good cuisine, good conversation, its love of jazz, Mardi Gras, and all the interplay of African, French, Spanish, Haitian, Creole, other cultural, ethnic, and religious dynamics that, historically, have mocked the wider region’s social and political bigotries. Although New Orleans, nonetheless, has always been

governed by them. While legendary artists such as Louis Armstrong, Pete Fountain, Mahalia Jackson, and Wynton Marsalis were born in The Crescent City, their cultural contributions to the world have been shaped by the spirit of freedom and its “gumbo” of social, cultural, and artistic improvisation, syncopation, call-and-response, blues, and celebration that is The City That Care Forgot. It is this latter nickname that the tourist industry has capitalized on as it seeks to help New Orleans move beyond Hurricane Katrina, although that event and its aftermath may well have redefined the phrase into the city that a nation’s compassion forgot.

In the broader area of Louisiana and Mississippi, including the city of Biloxi, also struck by the hurricanes, we recognize the human costs and heroism as well, and note the cultural impacts on areas known for Cajun traditions, Native communities, natural beauty, and tenacity of spirit. Some coastal areas were entirely swept away by the hurricanes; many churches as well as homes and businesses were severely damaged. Partly because of different governmental patterns of response and density of population, rebuilding has progressed farther in Mississippi and Louisiana areas outside New Orleans. We are also grateful for the hospitality shown by persons and churches throughout the region from Houston to the Florida Panhandle; a single Presbyterian-run program for the homeless in Shreveport, Louisiana, Providence House, lived up to its name immediately after Katrina hit, renting all available apartments for New Orleans evacuees through the action of its far-sighted director.

As we approach nearly three years beyond Hurricane Katrina and its devastating impact, the tasks of crafting viable social justice strategies to address compassionately the injustice issues this disaster exposed still remain. Sociologist Iva E. Carruthers has clearly defined the scope of the challenge facing people of faith in the wake of this crisis with these words:

. . . Images of the elderly, the children, the poorest of the poor –the very “least of these” spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 25:31-40)- being abandoned by all levels of government and by much of the disaster relief community still . . . [remain]. More powerful than these images, however, is the apparent impotence of [our society as a whole] to engage expeditiously and forthrightly in . . . [an] effort that affirms the compassionate caring and total commitment of a nation to assess and document what happened and to provide the assistance and assurances needed to the thousands of American families most devastated by this unprecedented natural disaster and national tragedy.<sup>9</sup>

### *Initial Responses*

In the wake of this tragedy, people of faith and goodwill responded nationally and internationally to help fill obvious gaps in government bureaucracy’s inadequate response. PC(USA) congregations and presbyteries responded immediately and generously by assisting those displaced by the hurricane and its aftermath with emergency housing, personal assistance, and recruiting and training volunteers to go to disaster sites throughout the Gulf Coast region to help traumatized victims begin the difficult and painful tasks of rebuilding their lives. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance immediately began a double process of emergency support and assessment of long-term needs.

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, Presbyterian work and commitment in the Gulf Coast continues. Presbyterians walk alongside survivors as they take steps toward rebuilding their communities and rebuilding their lives. This effort has involved lay leaders, ministers and staff who are all part of a collective effort for long-term recovery along the Gulf Coast. This has been a historic event in the life of the PC(USA). Never before have thousands of volunteers from all walks of life responded so faithfully to a disaster of this magnitude and the long-term recovery ahead. Over 31,000 volunteers have given over one million hours of service estimated at a value of \$23 million. “The true impact of transformation in people’s lives cannot be measured in numbers, but can be witnessed in the words of the people who have been deeply engaged in the process of recovery.”<sup>10</sup>

The Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) had begun to identify implications of the disaster as soon as its dimensions became clear and considered ways to develop a “. . . statement of prophetic witness” that would address the “social and spiritual devastation. . .”(internal ACREC document). Several subsequent events contributed to the church’s growing attention to the challenges to a faithful witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ wrought by Hurricane Katrina and the attendant continuing stories of pain and injustice. In September 2006, at a Stony Point Peacemaking conference, Mtangulizi Sanyika, a New Orleans activist and former academic, spoke on the neglect of the city in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Parallel to these efforts,

the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. convened a task force that continues to study the crisis and advocate solutions at the city, state and federal levels.

In January 2007, PHEWA (Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association) held its biennial meeting in New Orleans, allowing persons from across the nation to see many of these challenges firsthand and hear from local residents engaged in rebuilding their lives. Quoting Isaiah 58:12, the PHEWA called on the whole church to be “repairer(s) of the breach, and restorer(s) of the streets to live in.” Additionally, the conference featured major presentations by scholars and church leaders, including one by professor and lawyer, Bill Quigley, who focused on challenges facing the city. On February 16, 2007, the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) held panel discussions in Louisville with presbytery and General Assembly Council staff with participation from the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC). Ideas for this resolution have been distilled from that conversation. Members and the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of South Louisiana, including former General Assembly Vice Moderator Jean-Marie Peacock, and Lisa Easterling of the Luling host site, have proved to be essential resources. On October 24-28, 2007, ACSWP held a meeting in New Orleans that included hearings at Berean Church with a wide range of local officials and volunteer leaders. Yet, grievous challenges remain.

### *Structural Issues of Race, Gender, and Poverty*

Although it is a well-established fact that the notion of race is a social construct and has no genetic significance biologically,<sup>11</sup> the cultural conundrum of ethnicity continues to plague all social contexts and generally plays out in ways that leave economic and political disenfranchisement unequally located among people of color.<sup>12</sup> The stamp of these social realities is seen, for example, in health statistics regarding HIV/AIDS, two-thirds world debt among poor southern nations to affluent northern nations, in the incarceration percentages of U.S. prisons, and in the continuing inequities inflicted upon the poor and people of color in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This is what law professor Victor Goode views as structural racism, the functional outcomes of racially discriminatory behavior in society that manage to avoid identifiable definitions of law:

Structural racism is racism underneath and across society, permeating its entire history, culture and institutions. Our culture, including our education, perpetuates, normalizes and legitimates the effects of racism, while making them invisible to the narrow legal definition of unlawful segregation.<sup>13</sup>

Structural racism not only fails to serve people equally across race, culture and ethnic origin in society through the agencies of private and government entities, but also in such vital information venues as print, radio, television, cinema, and cyberspace as well as in legislative acts ostensibly designed to foster a “colorblind” society while still culturally and psychologically affirming White supremacy and privilege. The overt goals of the colorblind or race-neutral environment are promoted as eliminating ethnicity from consideration in serving human needs, arguing that not to do so only belittles or insults people of color and encourages resentment among several of society’s White constituencies.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, a great deal of attention is paid to race and ethnicity in society whether in housing patterns, educational institutions, health care, employment, business and investment opportunities, nutrition, transportation access, and even in worship practices. It is against this social and cultural backdrop of structural racism that the nationally televised scenes from New Orleans immediately following Hurricane Katrina should be understood. As Wellesley College political science professor Jean Hardisty observed, the nation’s post-Katrina response was a metaphor of structural racism with “wealthy Whites on the high ground [and largely able to escape the city] while people of color and poor Whites were on the low ground [and the least able to escape the city’s floods].”<sup>15</sup>

Addressing the challenge of race, gender, and poverty distinctions in the social context of the United States is not a new phenomenon. Chattel slavery of the antebellum period leading up to the Civil War was a racial and economic injustice as was the extended period of legalized apartheid in the United States known as racial segregation.<sup>16</sup> Yet, what scenes from Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath exposed so shockingly and vividly was the lingering structural race and poverty distinctions of the post-Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s that, while

well known and documented, are typically ignored or hidden in society. Consider the following race, economic, and social justice realities that were well known before Katrina made landfall:<sup>17</sup>

- New Orleans had a Black population of 67.3 percent, 26.6 percent White, 3.1 percent Latino, and 2.3 percent Asian.
- Twenty-three percent of all New Orleans residents lived at or below the official poverty level. The national average is 13.1 percent.
- At the time of Katrina, “5% of non-Latino whites did not have access to a car, while 27% of blacks in New Orleans were without cars.”<sup>18</sup>
- New Orleans median household income was \$31,369. National average was \$44,684.
- 51,707 children (42 percent of all children in the city) were poor; 48,740 of those poor children were Black. Nearly one in two of all Black children in pre-Katrina New Orleans were poor.<sup>19</sup>
- Fifty-seven percent of senior citizens in New Orleans had physical disabilities. The national average was 39.6 percent.
- In Louisiana, 69 percent of Black children live in poverty.
- More than 90,000 people in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama made less than \$10,000 a year.<sup>20</sup>

While these realities were well known before Hurricane Katrina, the fact is that these same challenges mirror race, poverty, and gender inequities that characterize contexts throughout the nation and are in no way limited only to urbanized areas of the Gulf Coast and surrounding regions of New Orleans, Louisiana, Biloxi, Mississippi, or Mobile, Alabama. Consider the following realities that evidence the outcomes of structural racism across the nation:

- Unemployment among African Americans represents more than twice the percentage of unemployed whites.<sup>21</sup>
- In cities such as New York and Chicago, some estimates put the number of unemployed Black males at 50 percent.<sup>22</sup>
- In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, nearly one-in-two Black adults have no full-time job.<sup>23</sup>
- Long-term African American unemployment is now at a twenty-year high.<sup>24</sup>
- By 2002, over one in four Latino and African American families were asset poor, having no liquid financial assets, compared to 6 percent of Whites. Families with small amounts or a moderate amount of wealth drew down their meager stockpile of savings to use as private safety nets.
- Of the 2.1 million inmates today, 910,000 are African American.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, only 740,000 African-American males are in four-year colleges and graduate programs, though most are in a narrower age range.
- Blacks are 12.3 percent of the population, but are 43.9 percent of the state and federal prison population.<sup>26</sup>
- Latinos are 12.6 percent of the population, but are 18.3 percent of the prison population.
- Whites are 69 percent of the population, but 34.7 percent of the prison population.

▪ Studies by the Harvard University Civil Rights Project have shown a pattern of resegregation in education in most regions of the United States; where 34 percent of Black students attended majority White public schools in 1991, by 2002 on 25 percent did so.<sup>27</sup>

These social realities represent the functional outcomes of what is best understood as structural racism and classism that ignores and tolerates poverty. Researchers from a variety of research organizations including the Brookings Institute, Children’s Defense Fund, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and the National Urban League among others have independently concluded that the evidences of structural race and poverty realities that typified pre-Hurricane Katrina have corresponding circumstances that can be found in urban centers across the nation.<sup>28</sup> Political scientist Jean Hardisty summarized the situation and its resulting challenge this way:

We should not imagine that structural racism is only found in the three states affected by Katrina. It pervades the entire country. The visual images of Katrina would be similar in Chicago, Boston, Washington, DC, Atlanta, Miami, and other cities where race and poverty reinforce each other. . . . Until those of us who benefit from white privilege have to confront the consequences of that privilege, it is possible for us to believe the white supremacist line that people of color are victims of their own moral failings, not of [public and private] policies.<sup>29</sup>

### *In Keeping With Our Tradition*

Regrettably, many well-meaning Christians continue to approach social justice issues in the public square as if these were matters of secular social service concern with humanitarian merit, but somehow fail to see the visceral connection of social justice as part of their witness to the Gospel as believers in Jesus Christ. As such, the social, economic, political, and bureaucratic chicanery that characterized our nation’s response to the victims of Hurricane Katrina is often viewed as an unfortunate social situation, but not clearly understood as a sinful condition that calls for a prophetic and redemptive response from us. The fact is that this situation represents an outrage to the essence of our faith in Christ and flies in the face of our Reformed tradition as Presbyterians. Our faith heritage calls us to be forthright in attending to matters of social justice because any abuse of vulnerable people, variously described throughout scripture as the widow, orphan, poor, sojourner/alien/stranger, or sick (for example in Ex. 22:21, 22; Lev. 19:10, 33; Deut. 24:17; 26:12, 13; Ps. 99:4; Amos 4:1, 5:24; Luke 10:29-37; James 2:14-17) and summarized by Jesus in Matthew 25:39-46 as “the least of these,” is an affront to God.

Through the ages the church through its confessional statements has affirmed human dignity as being at the core of its faith and witness and has condemned acts of economic, race, or gender discrimination as sin. Historically, the *Confessions* of the church, spanning more than four centuries from a variety of social, political, and cultural contexts, affirm that the Holy Spirit works through faithful human beings to correct unfortunate situations in people’s lives and that this is, in effect, a means of proclaiming the Gospel and calling people to repentance. Here are but a few examples from our confessional heritage stressing this reality:

#### Scots Confession, Chapter XIII

The cause of good works, we confess, is not our free will, but the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God has prepared for us to walk in . . .

#### Heidelberg Catechism, the Answer to Question 86

Q. Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?

A. Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through the Holy Spirit in God’s own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for God’s goodness and that God be glorified through us; and further, so that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its and by our reverent behavior may win neighbors to Christ.

#### Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter XIV

Of Repentance and the Conversion of Man (People):

The Ministry of Reconciliation. In the letter to the Corinthians the apostle says that the Lord gave the ministry of reconciliation to his ministers (II Cor. 5:18 ff.). . . . And explaining his words still more clearly he adds that Christ's ministers discharge the office of an ambassador in Christ's name, as if God himself through ministers exhorted the people to be reconciled to God, doubtless by faithful obedience. Therefore, they (the believers, ministers and members) exercise the keys (to the Kingdom of Heaven) when they persuade (people) to believe and repent. Thus they reconcile (people) to God.

### Shorter Catechism, Question 102

Question: "What do we pray for in the second petition (of the Lord's Prayer)?"

Answer: In the second petition, which is, 'Thy kingdom come,' we pray that Satan's Kingdom may be destroyed, and that the Kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it, and that the King of glory may be hastened.

### Declaration of Barmen, Part II: From Evangelical Truth #3

The Christian Church is the congregation . . . in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit. . . . It (the Church) has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely (God's) property and lives and wants to live solely from (God's) comfort and . . . direction . . .

### Confession of 1967, Part II, Sec. A-4a (Inclusive Language Version)

. . . The church is called to bring all people to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it.<sup>30</sup>

### Brief Statement of Faith, lines 65-71:

In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage  
to pray without ceasing,  
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,  
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,  
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,  
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

While not a part of our constitution, the Belhar Confession, first produced in 1987 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, provides a faithful witness in the Reformed tradition. "Belhar's relevance is not confined to Southern Africa. It addresses three key issues of concern to all churches: unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within church and society, and God's justice."

### Belhar Confession of the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa

Section 4. We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

John Calvin used the notion of the image of God to capture the essence of the biblical understanding of what it means to be human: human beings were made by God for relationship with God and each other. For the Reformers, this understanding served not only to highlight God's purpose for human community, but as evidence that as beings who bear the indelible stamp of God's image, humans are to be accorded special, sacred status in creation as part of God's crowning achievement if this Hebrew concept is read as a future promise within creation. God calls us to fulfill the meaning of being in God's "image" by the way we live together, thereby making God's presence in the universe known. Thus, in Scripture God is portrayed as one who recognizes the value and worth of human life, and affirms the inherent dignity of human beings.<sup>31</sup> In 1999, the PC(USA)

affirmed “that racism violates God’s purpose for humanity and is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ” and defined it as sin,<sup>32</sup> stating that:

God created human beings, a diverse family, to live together and to love one another as God loves us. We violate God’s intention for the human family by creating false categories of value and identity, based on identifiable characteristics such as culture, place of origin, and skin color.<sup>33</sup>

The movement from our confessions to public policy is not automatic, but depends on a whole tradition of public engagement, the sense that we have a personal and corporate responsibility to reform not only ourselves but the world. This requires understanding both complex issues and the resources that are available for change.

### *Toward A More Equitable Future*

While Hurricane Katrina has been replaced in the nation’s headlines with other issues and many in society have moved on to preoccupation with other realities, it is important for people of faith to recognize that the legacy of this devastating human catastrophe continues for many people. Individuals and entire families have been affected and labor under the weight of physical, emotional, economic, and spiritual trauma to this day. Although their lives have been permanently altered, the processes of government and, in some cases, even non-governmental relief agencies to help these persons repair the harm they have experienced are far from adequate. These are ordinary people of all age ranges and social conditions, whether poor, middle income, working, retired, or unemployed, whose post-Hurricane Katrina continuing struggles of survival and faith in God largely go unnoticed and undocumented. The story of Oliver Sennett,<sup>34</sup> a deeply religious man, represents but one example of tens of thousands of ordinary and unnamed human beings who fall into this category.

Oliver is a seventy-three-year-old life-long New Orleans resident who has been living in a FEMA trailer since April 2006. In June 2004, Betty, Oliver’s wife of nearly fifty years died from pancreatic cancer following its diagnosis three months before she died. Oliver was still coping with this loss when Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005 and wiped out their house. Although Oliver Senior earned his living as a carpenter, he lost all his tools during Katrina. Slowly, he’s gotten enough to begin rebuilding his house, but moves slower than he used to. His goal is to complete the work on restoring his house before April 2008. Of the few neighbors he has these days, most also live in trailers as he does.

Still living in the trailer, it was the after-shock following Hurricane Katrina, however, that truly tested Oliver’s faith. One year after the hurricane his oldest son, Oliver Junior, died at age forty-eight leaving a wife and three teenage boys. The family wonders whether this death may have been facilitated by a misdiagnosed assessment of his chest pains by overworked and understaffed New Orleans area emergency room personnel. Oliver Jr. called his Dad on the cell phone from the emergency room to report that the two attending physicians were arguing over whether he should be sent home or kept for further observation. He was sent home. The family’s perspective on the attention Oliver Jr. received during his emergency room visit is better understood when one considers that one year after Katrina (August 2006), only three of the city’s ten hospitals were reported open.<sup>35</sup> According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, throughout the metropolitan area of New Orleans, only fifteen of twenty-two hospitals were open, with only 2,000 of the usual 4,400 beds available<sup>36</sup> leaving the capacity of area’s post-Katrina healthcare delivery system severely reduced:

The number one current problem is total hospital capacity, says Joseph Uddo, chief of general surgery at East Jefferson General Hospital in neighboring Jefferson Parish. “Emergency department patients can’t move into the hospital because beds aren’t available . . . Common at all facilities include complications in patients with untreated chronic diseases, particularly hypertension, diabetes, and AIDS . . . Many believe that mortality has also increased substantially . . . As a crude indicator, there were 25 percent more death notices in the *Times-Picayune* in January 2006 than there were in January 2005.”<sup>37</sup>

The situation of former lower Ninth Ward residents, William and Alberta Sanders,<sup>38</sup> provides an example of the bureaucratic insensitivity that insurance companies have shown in light of the complete devastation of that area by flooding following a break in the levee aside the Industrial Canal. Their home was located three blocks from where the breach in the levy occurred that decimated their neighborhood, including the circa 1964 brick ranch house that was their home. They recalled quite clearly the floodwaters from 1965’s Hurricane Betsy that

forced them to be rescued via canoe from the roof of their newly constructed home back then. As such, when the advisory to evacuate was issued, they joined the hosts of people leaving the city, traveling with their son and his family to higher ground further north in central Mississippi.

Like several times before when hurricanes were predicted, they took only a few essential papers with them and did not bother to pack much thinking they would return home soon. In fact, they left their car preferring to let their son drive. They looked forward to returning home soon until they learned that, once again, the levee in the Ninth Ward had broken. Like thousands of others in that area, there was no way they could know that they would never see their home again or any remnants of the irreplaceable items that accompany forty-eight years of marriage. Their house was literally washed away by the tidal wave that rampaged through the neighborhood when the levy breached and leaving nothing but a pile of rubble on their property along with their neighbor's house that sat where their house used to be. Though shocked, what surprised them even more was the letter dated June 30, 2006 received from their insurance company.<sup>39</sup> The letter notified them that assessors had surveyed the damage to their home and concluded that it had sustained \$234 in wind damage, but since their policy carried a deductible of \$500, they would receive nothing from the policy that had been in force from the days following the 1965 hurricane.

A December 2006 report from the Special Commission for the "Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast" established by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA<sup>40</sup> found that:

Insurance companies have been very slow to respond to claims. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, many insurance agents covering New Orleans made a distinction between wind damage from the hurricane, which was covered, and flood damage from the breach in the levees, which was not. Similar situations occurred in Mississippi because of the flood from the storm surge following the hurricane. This indecisiveness and the subsequent lack of coverage for homeowners has been a debilitating factor for many trying to rebuild.<sup>41</sup>

These stories are not unique, but help put a face on the tens of thousands of people whose lives have been forever changed by this situation and for whom the processes of governmental and business responses have proven totally inadequate and insensitive as a result of structural racism. The list of injustices heaped upon the citizens of this area and the surrounding communities of the Gulf Coast is staggering, whether reference is to the ugliness of the Chef Menteur Landfill controversy and the ecological disaster that is post-Katrina New Orleans,<sup>42</sup> the educational catastrophe that has become the New Orleans public system of post-Hurricane Katrina Charter Schools and the largely poor and Black children enrolled or all the educators and staff who lost their jobs,<sup>43</sup> the abuse of mostly Latino migrant workers employed in clean-up and rebuilding efforts, the huge increase in crime, homelessness, as well as private security firms operating in the area, or the issues of people who continue to be in other cities across the nation unable to return home.

The magnitude of these injustices is only exacerbated by related acknowledgements from FEMA more than two years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (February 2008), that some 144,000 trailers the agency issued to hurricane victims contained unsafe levels of formaldehyde, an industrial chemical classified as a probable carcinogen.<sup>44</sup> Hurricane victims struggle to cope with depression and ongoing stress without the ordinary social, medical, and other emergency support services and giving rise to market increases in the incidents of domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, and suicide.<sup>45</sup> For example, only one domestic violence shelter in New Orleans survived Hurricane Katrina.<sup>46</sup> and one organization, the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a statewide network of support organizations for battered women based in Baton Rouge, reported that one year after Katrina, the plight of victims of domestic abuse remains greatly endangered due to the lack of intervention and shelter resources:

Since Katrina, Orleans Parish has had no beds for women suffering from domestic violence. The YWCA has closed with no hope of re-opening, and the building that housed transitional living for Crescent House burned to the ground. St. Bernard Parish lost its shelter in the storm; they now have a FEMA trailer for an office. . . . one year after the storms the Greater New Orleans area has only eighteen beds for women experiencing violence; now many women won't leave their homes or FEMA trailers because they know that there is no safe haven to be had in the area.<sup>47</sup>

The miracle is that Oliver Sennett or William and Alberta Sanders, and the others like them, are people whose faith in God has revealed a resilience and hopefulness of spirit that defies human logic. Their determination to

return to New Orleans and rebuild new lives for themselves in the future is an inspiration. They represent the very essence of what apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

It is against this backdrop that the above recommendations have been formulated to assist the PC(USA) affirm that as believers in Jesus Christ, we stand with these people in their suffering and struggles. Moreover, we also affirm that our church, too, is “afflicted in every way . . . crushed . . . perplexed” and often “struck down” (2 Cor. 4:7-10) by the challenges faced by the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region as well as by those challenges which repeatedly call our attentions away from their plight.

The PC(USA) recognizes that analysis of the multiple evidences of institutional failure, social callousness, and bureaucratic dysfunction exposed by the structural racism and poverty revealed in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita ultimately are not helped by our society’s penchant for blame and outrage. In light of this, we affirm that the PC(USA) shall not succumb to despair nor see destroyed our witness to the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us, through faith in Jesus Christ, to prophetically aright grievous wrongs in society. In the face of the structural iniquities exposed by these disasters, as people of faith, we are called to lift a new vision of what God can enable us to do, through faith and action, to transform ugly injustices into transformed and uplifting communities where love and justice are not merely utopian ideals, but form the basis of public policy informed by faith in Jesus Christ. It is toward this type of more equitable future that the above recommendations have been framed for the prayerful consideration and adoption of the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Some examples of special reports exclusively devoted to assessing post-Hurricane Katrina realities include Alan Berube and Bruce Katz, “Katrina’s Window: Confronting Concentrated Poverty Across America,” Brookings Institution, January 2008; National Council of Churches “Report Card: The Triumphs and Struggles in the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast” (Dec 2006); National Urban League, Inc. “2007 State of Black America;” and the Samuel DeWitt Procter Conference, Inc. “Report of the Katrina National Justice Commission, “The Breach: Bearing Witness” (September, 2006). William Quigley, professor of law at Loyola University, has written many valuable reports including: “Trying to Make It Home: New Orleans One Year After Katrina,” August 22, 2006, and “New Orleans: Locked Outside the Gates,” December 28, 2007, both available online at [Truthout.org](http://Truthout.org).

<sup>2</sup> The title of this proposed resolution, “Struck Down, But Not Destroyed,” is drawn from a presentation by Ronald E. Peters entitled “What Hurricane Katrina Revealed Concerning Race and Poverty” given at the January 11-14, 2007 PHEWA Conference and references 2 Cor 4:7-10.

<sup>3</sup> It has been forcefully argued by Chester Hartman that while Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster, the lack of adequate protection from levees caused by irresponsible decisions and actions of government agencies and legislative bodies reveals that the aftermath of the hurricane was a man-made disaster. A summary of the between \$7 and \$14 billion to be spent on levee repair in New Orleans can be found in John Schwartz, “New Orleans Flood Plan Upgrade,” *New York Times*, August 23, 2007. In that same issue, Schwartz also reports, “East St. Louis Levees Fail Test,” pointing to the widespread nature of infrastructure neglect.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*: New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006. “Television reports and newspaper accounts brimmed with the unutterable horror of what black folk were doing to each other and their helpers in the Superdome and the convention center: the rape of women and babies, sniper attacks on military helicopters, folk killed for food and water, armed gang members assaulting the vulnerable, dozens of bodies being shoved into a freezer . . . Nearly every one of the allegations provided to be baseless rumor. [Susannah Rosenblatt and James Rainey, “Katrina Takes a Toll on Truth, News Accuracy,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2005, A17; Brian Thevenot and Gordon Russell, “Rape, Murder, Gunfights. For Three Anguished Days the World’s Headlines Blared that the Superdome and Convention Center Had Descended into Anarchy,” *The Times-Picayune*, September 26, 2005, p. A01], p. 170; and “The real total [of bodies] was six.” “Four had died of natural causes, one overdosed on drugs,” and one committed suicide...There is one possible case of homicide at the Superdome, but the case is “murky,” page 172.

<sup>5</sup> This incident and others are analyzed in: “The Press, Race and Katrina,” by Madison Gray, August 30, 2006, *Time.com: BBC News*: “New Orleans Violence ‘overstated’ by Laura Smith-Spark, September 29, 2005. Those observations do not contradict the sad later truth that crime plagues poorer communities. See Adam Nossiter “Storm Left New Orleans Ripe for Violence,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> The Breach; The Great Deluge, The Children’s Defense Fund.

<sup>7</sup> The Breach, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Portions of this paragraph appear on page vii of *Urban Ministry: An Introduction* by Ronald Peters, published by Abingdon Press, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Iva E. Carruthers, Bernice Powell Jackson (eds). *The Breach: Bearing Witness – Report of the Katrina National Justice Commission*. Chicago: Samuel DeWitt Procter Conference, Inc. 2006. 10.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.pcusa.org/pda/response/usa/gulfcoast/katrina-2yearslater.htm> / December 2007.

<sup>11</sup> There is broad consensus among social and medical scientists that race and/or ethnic distinctions in the human family of homo sapiens document culturally learned differences rather than substantive genetic variations within the species, a position affirmed in a variety of other disciplines as well. Representative articulations of this perspective are found in W. Michael Byrd, MD, MPH and Linda Clayton, MD, MPH's book *An American Health Dilemma – Volume One, A Medical History of African Americans and the Problem of Race: Beginnings to 1900* (New York: Routledge, 2000, pp 46-47); Kevin J. Christiano, William H. Swatos, Jr., and Peter Kivisto, *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 154-159; Matthew Anderson, M.D., Susan Moscou, FNP, MPH, Celestine Fulchon, Ph.D., Daniel R. Neuspiel, MD, MPH *Journal of Family Medicine*, 2001; 33(6):430-434 and Cornel West's "The Genealogy of Modern Racism"(chap. 2) in *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982, 47-65.

<sup>12</sup> Peters, 2007. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Goode. "Crisis on the Campus: Affirmative Action at the Crossroads: in Color Lines Mag. (Spring 2003) quoted in

<sup>14</sup> Jean V. Hardisty, "Hurricane Katrina and Structural Racism," Wellesley Centers for Women, [www.wcwonline.org](http://www.wcwonline.org). See also Michael Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water* (Phila: Perseus, 2006). The city's current recovery plan also focuses on high ground: ". . . 14 of the 17 areas Dr. Blakely (recovery chief) singles out are in the more promising, less flooded western part of the city," in Adam Nossiter, "Steering New Orleans Recovery With a Clinical Eye," *New York Times*, April 10, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Hardisty, op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> The period beginning with the 1898 *Plessey v Ferguson* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioning the establishment of race-based "separate but equal" facilities and the initiation of legal dismantling of such arrangements in *Brown v Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1954.

<sup>17</sup> Except as otherwise noted, the following statistics are from Michael Eric Dyson, 2006, pp. 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Marian Wright Edelman, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Berube and Bruce Katz, "Katrina's Window: Confronting Concentrated Poverty Across America," Brookings Institution, January 2008; National Council of Churches "Report Card: The Triumphs and Struggles in the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast" (December 2006); National Urban League, Inc. "2007 State of Black America;" . . . other documentation to be supplied. . . [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/10poverty\\_berube/20051012\\_Concentratedpoverty.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2005/10poverty_berube/20051012_Concentratedpoverty.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Tavis Smiley, *The Covenant with Black America* (Chicago:Third World Press, 2006), 170.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, Oct. 17, 2005, <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05290/588966-28.stm> Accessed Oct. 31, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Smiley, 2006, 166.

<sup>25</sup> All incarceration statistics cited in this and the following bulleted items in this section, except as noted otherwise, are from Smiley, 2006, 53.

<sup>26</sup> See Alan Berube and Bruce Katz, "Katrina's Window: Confronting Concentrated Poverty Across America," Brookings Institution, January 2008; National Council of Churches "Report Card: The Triumphs and Struggles in the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast" (Dec 2006); National Urban League, Inc. "2007 State of Black America;" the Samuel DeWitt Procter Conference, Inc. "Report of the Katrina National Justice Commission, "The Breach: Bearing Witness" (September, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> The numbers given are averages; regions differ. See "Is Resegregation Real? By Chungmei Lee, October 2004, p.5, at [www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu) a paper which also addresses methodology and demographic patterns behind their determinations. An earlier publication by Gary Orfield and John T. Yun, "Resegregation in American Schools," June 1999, gives much more data.

<sup>28</sup> Berube and Katz, op.cit.

<sup>29</sup> Hardisty, op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> *Book of Confessions*

<sup>31</sup> *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community*. A policy statement adopted by the 211<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1999) of the of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1. Many today are less willing than the Reformers to assert as a given the centrality of human beings in God's evolutionary design of the universe. They read the sense of the Hebrew to imply a future tense.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>34</sup> The information presented here on lifelong New Orleans resident Oliver Sennett, Sr. (the brother-in-law of Ronald and Mary Smith Peters) and his family is used with permission.

<sup>35</sup> Report Card: The Triumphs and Struggles in the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast. National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, December 2007, [http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/ReportCard\\_6P.pdf](http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/ReportCard_6P.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> *New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 354:1549-1552, No. 15, April 13, 2006. <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/354/15/1549>. January 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. See also "Shattered Hospitals Ensure Slow Recovery in New Orleans," Leslie Eaton, *New York Times*, July 24, 2007, p.1.

<sup>38</sup> The information presented here on lifelong New Orleans residents William and Alberta Sanders (the sister and brother-in-law of Mary Smith Peters) is used with permission.

<sup>39</sup> A copy of the letter is available from Professor Peters upon request.

<sup>40</sup> Report Card: The Triumphs and Struggles in the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast. National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA [NCCUSA], December 2007, [http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/ReportCard\\_6P.pdf](http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/ReportCard_6P.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Hurricane Katrina generated an estimated 22 million tons of debris, and Rita produced an additional 2.6 million tons. This was 26 times more rubbish than was hauled out of the World Trade Center site in New York after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which created 1.5 million tons of waste. The debris and high levels of mold within New Orleans has caused concerns that those who are the most vulnerable socio-economically, namely low-income and African American residents, may be exposed to adverse environmental side effects. NCCUSA Report Card. [http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/ReportCard\\_6P.pdf](http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/ReportCard_6P.pdf). Information on the Chef Menteur and Gentilly landfills

can be found at the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), <http://www.deq.louisiana.gov/portal/tabid/2403/Default.aspx>. See also information from "Citizens for a Strong East New Orleans" at <http://neworleans.indymedia.org/news/2006/05/7620.php>.

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that New Orleans public school systems was in crisis prior to Hurricane Katrina and the state took control of most of the schools and the school system. 176,000 K-12 New Orleans students were displaced because of Hurricane Katrina. Of the 128 public schools in the city prior to Katrina, only 53 were slated to open by Fall, 2006. In comparison, most of Mississippi's schools resumed operations within two weeks of Hurricane Katrina.—Ibid. Also see *Katrina's Children* published by the Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>44</sup> Almost immediately from the time families started occupying the trailers, complaints began to surface about respiratory and other health problems associated with formaldehyde exposure, but the agency was slow to respond. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Feb. 15, 2008, A-6.

<sup>45</sup> June 2007 speech given by Avis A. Jones-DeWeever, Program Director, Institute for Women's Policy Research, "Women and Katrina Two Years After the Storm," <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/vitalspeeches.pdf> /15 Feb08.

<sup>46</sup> The Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, <http://ms.foundation.org/wmspage.cfm?parm=390> / 15 Feb 2008.