



The Presbytery of South Louisiana

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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An Open Letter to the Members of the General Assembly Council

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I am writing to you from that section of the still storm-ravaged Gulf Coast known as South Louisiana. Over two years have passed since the storms of 2005 and I want to express our gratitude for the work of our denomination through the agencies of the PCUSA and the General Assembly Council, especially through the ongoing, visible presence and support of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

A disaster or trauma, such as a hurricane, can be graphed with highs and lows indicating such points as the actual event and initial response (in the case of Katrina, a real low), the outpouring of help in the days and weeks following (a high), the long descent into disillusionment as the hard work and slow pace of recovery and rebuilding becomes the new reality (a low), leading eventually, we pray, to the high of a new life. Would that everything could fit into such a compact pattern, but the truth is we go up and down . . . a lot. There are even attempts to force a timeline on recovery, but any timelines fall apart when confronted with reality.

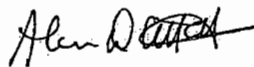
When I arrived in my current position as General Presbyter ten months after the storms, house gutting was in full swing; we are still gutting houses two years after the storm, though we have also begun the work of rebuilding. Progress in this part of the recovery work has varied; the North Shore group, the Bayou efforts, the Rita area have actually moved more quickly than the parishes surrounding New Orleans, but then the scope of what occurred in greater New Orleans remains overwhelming to many and progress has been very slow. I thank God for the good sense of the Presbyterians that held us back from immediately throwing all the money we had received at the initial problems and led us to have a more measured response. Other denominations and non-

profits are running short, while we, in cooperation with other partners, are really up and running as the real work of rebuilding is both continuing in some areas and just beginning in others! The stories we can tell, and the stories of the many volunteers who have come and continue to come, are and will be a beacon of hope and inspiration for the future health of Christ's people.

As impressive and encouraging as this commitment has been, I want to share with you an even more important perspective on this on-going event, a view which touches on the wounded soul and spirit. Much has been made about the effect of trauma on a human being; presentations about this reality often address physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral issues and even occasionally spiritual issues. I have endured a number of these presentations and would share with you that not one has addressed the real spiritual wounds arising out of trauma, injuries arising out of the experience of being betrayed, abandoned, and forsaken, an experience which is played out in the life of Jesus yet not often intentionally addressed. To illustrate, the people of the Superdome were betrayed when their community leaders failed to provide accurate and timely information and the means to act upon that information when the storm was approaching; the people of the Superdome were abandoned when they discovered they had been left behind; and the people of the Superdome were forsaken when no one came to help them. The journey to healing from a trauma begins with an experience of companionship, a realization that someone has come to be with you. The healing continues as resources are brought to bear and basic human needs are met, and progresses further when the possibility of promise exists once more. This journey cannot be rushed and to leave too rapidly only reinforces the terror of being forsaken. So I rejoice in the wisdom of our Reformed witness that seeks to put real flesh on the words of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you always."

The many visits made to our Presbytery by members of the General Assembly Council, staff of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, members of the Interagency Task Force and the PDA Advisory Committee, as well as the many others who have come are important sources of strength and encouragement; your willingness to be present with us gives us strength to go forward. I hope that when you come through South Louisiana you will call our office that we might have an opportunity to meet and talk together, and to offer prayers of thanksgiving for the continuing partnership that supports the witness that together we make in the midst of this recovery effort.

Wishing you true blessings during this Advent
and in Christ's service,



Alan Cutter

ADC:gk

cc: Members of the General Assembly Council
Susan Ryan
John Robinson