DEVASTATED

Rebuilding begins

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Water lapped at the heels of Father Michael Galea, steady rain an arduous reminder of Mother Nature’s unfinished business.

With a sadness in his voice, Father Galea, pastor at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant, estimated that as many as 90 percent of his parishioners were impacted during the recent historic flooding that touched nearly every corner of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“It’s going to change the whole dynamic of Holy Rosary as a parish as we know it,” Father Galea said. “It’s not going to be the same. And we are going to lose quite a bit of people if they choose to move away.

“But hopefully with love and compassion and a lot of hugs we can become a family all over again. What is most important is for us to be to-

SEE REBUILDING PAGE 23

Faith important tool for family rebuilding their lives

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The lives of Debbie and Phil Pike were ripped up as quickly as the currents of the floodwaters in the Baton Rouge area that began on Aug. 12. In the wake of the devastation, they like many who lost everything, are rebuilding materially and internally with steel determination and faith.

“We were 100 percent survival mode,” said Debbie Pike as she and her husband woke up Aug. 13 to the sight of water approaching their home. They live on Thibodeaux Road in Central, which is sandwiched between the Comite and Amite Rivers and has surrounding tributaries as well as a water canal running behind their home.

As they saw the waters rise, the Pikes quickly moved items higher onto furniture and moved their children still living at home, Conner, 12, and Tanner, 13, both students at St. Alphonsus, and animals to safety. The Pikes have a farm in the back of their home that schools would often visit.

The water got so high they swam five horses, three of their neighbors and two of their own, to safety. One miniature horse, Little Bit, drowned, as well a pig, two male goats and 20 chickens.

All but one of their cats, which was elderly, survived because Debbie Pike put them on top of a bed. When they returned later to their home, which eventually took on six feet of water, to get their cats, they were still on the mattress, which by this time was floating in water.

And the Pikes went on saving as many lives and items as they could. Phil Pike said he thought his wife had evacuated, but she was still trying save what she could, down to the last sur-

SEE FAITH PAGE 17
‘Angel from heaven’ significant part of St. Aloysius response

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“Take my hand” has been the response of church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge spared from the worst damage during recent historic flooding in the Baton Rouge area as they help those suffering from great loss.

Among the church parishes pouring out their hearts through food, supplies, clothing and assistance as they try to put their life back together is St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge.

Mary Dawson, communications director for St. Aloysius, said the parish council met for what was supposed to be a retreat on Aug. 13 as rains saturated the area. But as members received alerts and text messages about the flooding, it quickly turned into a discussion of how the church would respond. They met again the next day to continue their planning to address the needs of the employees and students of the church and school so they could be “up and operational” to help those in need.

While the church and school were spared of serious damage, several of the homes of the employees and students were flooded and they had to be relocated.

Dawson said she likes the answer a friend gave her to the question, “I’m so overwhelmed. How do I help everyone?”

“She said, ‘One bite at a time,’” stated a smiling Dawson.

Working in a “communications post” type setting in the administration building sending out emails and recording information gathered from the emails and website on the needs and the volunteers available to meet those needs were Ann Michael Lagard, Erin Mosely and Leanne Foreman.

A volunteer was assigned to each person who had been affected by the flood.

The atmosphere around St. Aloysius was a calm, focused energy with a steady traffic of people around the campus as they dropped off donations and sorted through items. Its St. Vincent de Paul Society council has also been very active helping those in need. The Knights of Columbus also cooked jambalaya and other dinners.

“People overwhelmed us in helping us out,” said Dawson.

“I saw people were losing everything, and I thought, “What am I doing is for a good cause,’” said St. Aloysius student Emily Carpenter as she made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

“People are desperate for stuff and I want to make sure they are going to have something to eat,” said St. Aloysius student Lauren Zapata as she made her sandwiches alongside Carpenter.

“We didn’t lose our home,” said a grateful St. Aloysius student Leo Patriarco as he carried boxes of supplies.

“But for others this is an issue and I want to help them recover from what happened.”

St. Aloysius had such strong help they contacted other church parishes to see how they could help them.

As waters rose at French Settlement, the parish worked around the clock to get supplies to them.

In God’s show of provision, when the question was asked, “How are we going to get these supplies to them, a parishioner said, “I have a friend who is a helicopter pilot.”

The pilot, Jon Gonsoulin, initially said, “Okay, I’ll take one load.” But after he saw the devastation, he came back and asked, “What else do you have?” said Dawson.

He made many trips to flood-affected areas in the diocese. When he returned from a supply run, volunteers loaded his helicopter again.

“I said, here comes the whirl bird with supplies from St. Aloysius,” said Dana Vienair, a volunteer from St. Joseph in French Settlement who called Gonsoulin “the angel from heaven.”

Second collections locally and nationally

A second collection was taken up for flood victims at Masses the weekend of Aug. 27-28 at the local and national levels.

Monetary donations continued to be a critical need to allow the diocese to respond to the “immediate needs of our parishes, schools and flood victims. Every parish community has differing needs and cash donations allow us to specifically address the varying needs,” Bishop Robert W. Muench said in announcing a second collection in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

On a national level, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ president Archbishop Joseph E. Kuritz of Louisville also called for a second collection at all Masses.

“Our prayer and material support is urgently needed to help rebuild lives,” Archbishop Kuritz said.

Donations can be made directly to Catholic Charities USA. More information is available at: https://catholiccharitiesusa.org

Father Randy Cuevas, pastor of St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge, center, and St. Aloysius volunteers load a helicopter to bring supplies to areas impacted by historic flooding in the Baton Rouge area that began Aug. 12. Photo provided by Mary Dawson | St. Aloysius Church

Donations poured into St. Aloysius to send to people in need after their homes were flooded. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Dr. Debbie Shelley, assistant editor of The Catholic Commentator, is a freelance writer and editor. She can be reached at debbi.shelley@gmail.com. The Catholic Commentator is the voice of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. For more information and to contact us, visit thecatholiccommentator.org or Facebook.com/thecatholiccommentator.
Disaster helps unite North Baton Rouge community

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Her mother’s Bible was the only thing Park Forest resident Lawand Johnson, a parishioner of St. Paul the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge, escaped with when flood waters deluged the Baton Rouge area beginning Aug. 12. Those divine words are enough for her and many other residents in North Baton Rouge who lost everything to stand on as they put their lives back together.

“The water came up so fast, we didn’t get any advance warning,” said Johnson, whose mixed-breed dog, Buddy, alerted her about the weather at 4 a.m. on Aug. 13. Later that morning, she grabbed her Bible and Buddy and was rescued by boat.

“There’s a lot of history in that Bible,” said Johnson.

Johnson said the rescue process was frustrating because phone service was down and she was unable to communicate with family members. She was finally able to call her mother, who was panicked.

Her home took on over five feet of water and her neighbors had water up to their rooftops.

“It was heart wrenching,” said Johnson when she returned home to survey the damage, all of her treasured pictures and other mementoes destroyed.

She often thinks of her neighbors, such as her elder-

ly neighbors who lived across the street, who have been displaced.

Johnson was staying with 13 people at her cousin’s home and is working on “getting things straight” where she is going to live and her main concern, where her daughter would go to school.

“I keep assuring her that everything is okay,” said a tearful Johnson.

Doing this has been challenging as she has been without a job and she was without a car and getting a rental car was almost impossible.

She said she is grateful for her cousins, who have been “giving and not asking for anything.”

Even during such a tough summer for the Baton Rouge area, with the shooting death of Alton Sterling and the killing of three law enforcement officers, Johnson has seen positive things develop.

“Something good is coming out of people. They are pulling together,” said Johnson.

Also walking alongside Johnson were volunteer organizations, most especially her St. Paul faith family.

“My faith has been very strong,” said Johnson. “I want to thank St. Paul for reaching out to us. I’ve heard a lot from them.

“We’ve had a lot going on in this community and Father Rick (Andrus SVD) has been a voice to help us become a better community.”

Life is getting better daily for Johnson. She was set to start a new job with the State Department of Children and Family Services helping with disaster assistance.

“I can certainly empathize with them because I experienced it myself,” said Johnson.

A call from a neighbor was the “saving grace” for St. Paul parishioner Carla Jones-Johnson and her daughter, Aaliyah E. Johnson, who escaped with pet gerbil “Oliver” and toy poodle, “Michael.” They knew things were bad when they learned an aunt who lived in Clinton had water up to her rooftop.

Johnson’s family helped her and her daughter evacuate from their Breeden Street home off Hooper Road.

Once again, it was St. Paul that has been helping Johnson rebuild her life. Brothers from Father Andrus’ order helped her gut her home.

“I reached out to him (Father Andrus) because I didn’t know where to go and he came through,” said Johnson. Prayers and other support have been pouring fourth from the parishioners.

A senior counselor at Broadmoor High School, Johnson said such support has been a lifeline as she struggles to balance work and getting her personal life in order.

She is organizing an Aug. 29 graduation at McKinley High School for East Baton Rouge Parish high school students who took summer courses in order to complete the requirements for graduation.

On a positive note, she said Aaliyah started her first year in college in Alabama on time.

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help,” said Johnson. A lot of people didn’t know what I was going through because I didn’t open my mouth.”

As she has received help, she has seen people sharing information and “being their brother’s keeper.”

“We (Johnson and our neighbors) should have known each other better before this happened, but we didn’t because we were all doing our own thing,” Johnson said.

Carroll Jerome Long, another member of St. Paul, likewise saw how the flooding brought neighbors out to really meet each other. Long, who lives in the Feliciana subdivision in Baker, took his grand-

dughter to school on Aug. 12. The rain came down so hard that within a couple of hours after returning home he and his neighbors made trips to get sandbags, but they were not enough to keep his home and the entire subdivision from flooding.

“I’ve been a resident here for more than 30 years and I have never experienced something like this,” said Long.

He was able to escape by truck before the worst of the flooding and is staying with his daughter and grandchildren.

While he has been able to salvage a couple of things, he chooses not to mourn over what he lost.

“I am thinking of others, not myself,” said Long, pointing to Jesus’ statement, “Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me.”

“Maybe that’s what it’s all about. Maybe that’s what it took to bring people together and help each other,” said Long.
Hispanic community dealt severe blow; relief still needed

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

They live in relative obscurity yet are a vibrant part of the Baton Rouge community. And they are feeling like the forgotten victims.

A significant number of Hispanics were dealt a severe blow by the recent floods, and while donations have been generously pouring in for so many others, the need remains dire in the Hispanic community. Donations being spread out to so many others, the Hispanics felt neglected.

“Nobody has been in touch with us,” said Julie Scarnato, director of the Hispanic Apostolate. “We had to call for help. Nobody remembered that we are here and are still in need.”

Scarnato said she cringes when she hears organizers at various shelters saying they don’t need any more of a particular item.

“We say we need everything,” she says, adding that those needs include food, clothing, shoes and cleaning supplies. “Just bring it here. Everybody sent their donations to the shelters and (the Hispanic community) did not receive anything.”

Exacerbating the challenge is that many members of the Hispanic community will not evacuate to shelters for fear of being arrested and potentially deported as well as the difficulty posed by the language barrier.

While others apply for FEMA relief, or some other type of government assistance, Scarnato said those options are not available to the community she serves.

“Once they get in the shelter they can’t understand what is going on and they get scared,” she said. “They know that if they contact any of the authorities they will be in trouble. That is why they are scared to ask for help. You have to have some documentation to apply for things. There is a real fear they would be arrested and deported.”

“They feel like they don’t have a place (to go for help),” Scarnato said, adding that she and Hispanic Apostolate chaplain Father Eliecer Montanez-Grimaldo found 30 people living in one small apartment. “We try to help them even if they don’t have documents. We’re for people. We can’t say no. We see Jesus Christ in every single human being.”

Father Montanez-Grimaldo said the strength of the Hispanic community is their unwavering commitment to family values. He said even as the waters were rising, Hispanics were trying to find out what happened to their neighbors and how they could help.

“The Hispanic community, like everybody else, they suffer a lot because they lose their houses completely,” Father Montanez-Grimaldo said. “They lost everything that they have. Like the American community, they were affected so badly. They don’t have food, enough shelter, enough beds but they prefer to stay together.

“Now they don’t have anybody that can help them.”

Scarnato said Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and the Salvation Army have dropped off some supplies, but praised the St. Vincent de Paul Society for delivering the largest donation they have received. A truckload of supplies from the Archdiocese of Mobile, Alabama was also delivered.

Scarnato said she was disappointed the city did not follow through on a promise to deliver a truckload of supplies to the apostolate. Scarnato said she initially received an email on Aug. 18 from Andy Allen of the Mayor’s Office of Homeland Security that the Baton Rouge Police Department would deliver food and supplies later that evening to the apostolate, which is located on the grounds of St. Pius X Church in Baton Rouge.

In the email, a copy of which was obtained by The Catholic Commentator, Allen wrote, “We want to make sure you get the supplies you need and any additional supplies and are aware of any additional help that may be available to you.”

“Today, we are still waiting,” Scarnato said.

Allen, when contacted by The Catholic Commentator, called it a “misunderstanding” and said supplies were delivered by the officers as well as by the Capital Way United Way at a Hispanic church located on Old Hammond Highway.

“There may be some confusion because there are two different religious-affiliated locations where we have several hundred Hispanic families (the Hispanic Apostolate and the church on Old Hammond Highway),” Allen said via email. “We also created a link between Bethany Church and the Hispanic church on Old Hammond Highway so that while Bethany was operating as a distribution center, they were sending their Spanish-speaking pastor and supplies to the families gathering there.”

Volunteers have been able to provide more than 2,000 meals to families, many of whom are now sharing apartments or houses while they search for new living arrangements. But the need remains.

Scarnato also revealed the annual Hispanic Festival, a fundraising event for the organization, scheduled in September has been canceled but she is hopeful some of the organizations scheduled to participate might be able to donate some funds.

Anyone interested in assisting in the needs of the Hispanic community can contact Scarnato at 225-927-8700 or via email at hapostol@bellsouth.net or apostolado@diobr.org.
‘Not the time for crying’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“It’s a work in progress. This is the worse devastation I have experienced … worse than anyone could have expected,” said Father Mike Moroney, pastor of St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs about the vastness of the destruction and recovery efforts of the church, school and community after it was submerged in historic-level flood waters.

The entire St. Alphonsus church and school campus were flooded. At one point 35 evacuees who were brought to the church by boat stayed in the second floor of the school after the floodwaters forced them to evacuate from the school’s cafeteria.

Tears flowed from the church community, but they were more for what others experienced rather than for themselves. They were assessing who needed help, who needed food and supplies, etc.

“It’s frustrating because I know so many people need help,” Olga Johnson, director of religious education said through tears.

JoAnn Stein, executive director at St. Alphonsus, came to the church with her husband by boat.

“The water was moving very swiftly. You couldn’t see the parking lot and water was in the church,” said Stein.

She was sad at first, but the tears turned to resolve.

“This is not the time for crying, this is the time for action,” Stein said.

And her thoughts were shared by many in the St. Alphonsus community, who rolled up their sleeves, opened their hearts and said, “Keep going.”

Even as a majority of the St. Alphonsus staff and families have been impact-ed, their response from the beginning has been to stay strong and to minister to others even while dealing with their own loss. Although many had lost everything themselves, as soon as they could find a way to the church, they asked, “how can I help?”

“St. Alphonsus is blessed with great people,” said Father Moroney.

Parents of students and parishioners were on-hand to help mop, remove items from the classrooms and other buildings, sort items, clean and help “wherever they could.” Computers, tables, chairs and other items were moved so carpeting could be ripped up.

Youth, some who were SAS graduates, pinned items on classroom bulletin boards, looking forward to the day students would be back in the classrooms.

“They came ready to work even though they had their own issues. It was baffling,” said Johnson.

“I was devastated,” said volunteer Mikelyn Smith said concerning her thoughts when she looked out at the flood-ravaged community as she helped sort through wet sleeping mats brought from the classrooms. Her son Ethen is in third grade and son Elliot is in kindergarten at St. Alphonsus. “I was thinking ‘What can I do?’”

“When the contractor saw the volunteers, he was amazed at the outpouring of love and support,” said Stein.

Supplies and “manpower” also started rolling in, some coming from out of state.

Meals and supplies have been offered at St. Alphonsus, according to Stein. Dinners were provided after the vigil Mass on Aug. 20 by the Knights of Columbus from Metairie, and Covington.

Area chefs helped provide meals after the noon Mass on Aug. 31. The multi-purpose building was opened to provide supplies and the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry was open to assist with food.

Masses will be celebrated in the Family Center, which was spared from the heaviest flood damage, until they can resume again in the church.

Dr. Cindy Ryals, principal of St. Alphonsus, who is from New Orleans and has been through Hurricane Katrina, understands the stress families undergo when their homes have been affected by a natural disaster. Children may have difficulties parting from their favorite toys or other items dear to them. But she is confident of the ability of the students and families to come through their difficulties by their resilience.
Keeping Lord’s day holy/Positives in the church

Q I write to ask for guidelines on the Third Commandment – keeping holy the Lord’s day. I do not consider some of the things that I do to be work – cooking, for example, minor cleanups, mowing, trimming, weeding. Does the church look upon all chores as work? I find it very hard not to do some of the things that need to be done around the house.

I am thankful that God did give us this commandment, for I certainly do look upon Sunday as a day of rest – to spend with family when possible and to simply enjoy the day.

My husband (who is not a Catholic) is a business owner who can work from home. He is in a very challenging situation right now, without sufficient staff. On Sundays, he puts in a good six to eight hours of office work before he rests – otherwise the remainder of the week’s schedule would be overwhelming. (Chestertown, New York)

A I credit you for your sincere desire to set Sunday aside as a special day, which honors the fact that even the God of all creation rested on the Sabbath. You have captured the spirit of the Catechism of the Catholic Church that says, “Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life” (No. 2186).

Basic household maintenance is exempted from the prohibition against “servile work” on that day; doing the dishes, preparing a meal and what you describe as “minor cleanups” are certainly permitted. A modest amount of gardening or lawn cultivation can be recreational and surely not “servile.” What the Sabbath command means to avoid is unnecessary shopping or heavy housekeeping that could be deferred.

Employment needs or economic circumstances may prevent one from observing the Sabbath rest, and this the catechism envisions and exempts. Your husband’s current challenge, in my mind, fits in here.

I would hope, though, that his circumstance will only be temporary; while I don’t know his religious history or principles, wisely does the catechism note, “The faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life and health” (No. 2185).

I might point out that, among American males, there can be a slavish addiction to Sunday televised sports, doing damage to the Sabbath goals of family time, reflection and rest.

And finally, nowhere does your question mention Sunday Mass, which must always be the central feature of a Catholic’s Sabbath observance. For 2,000 years, followers of Jesus have come together as a family of faith to celebrate the day of Christ’s resurrection and to be nourished by his body and blood.

Q I am grateful for the work you do with your question-and-answer column. Your responses reflect both wisdom and patience. And this prompts me to ask the following: What are some of the things in today’s parish or church that you find exciting? Or, to put it another way, what are some changes that you have been happy to see over your years in the ministry? (Virginia Beach, Virginia)

A Normally I would not choose to answer an open-ended question like this one. Readers, I believe, are more interested in factual answers than in my musings. But since I have just celebrated my 50th anniversary of ordination, I welcome this chance to share a few thoughts about those years.

Space constraints limit me to two developments that I view as great blessings in Catholic life. First is the broader involvement of laypeople in the work of the church.

When I was ordained a half-century ago, many parishes had two lay organizations: a rosary society, which consisted of several women who offered prayers for the parish and helped out with church decorations, and a Holy Name Society, men who would make a yearly retreat and sponsor an annual parish smoker.

In the parish from which I just retired, there are now more than 400 lay parishioners who help with the work of the church – lay catechists; lectors and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion; those who visit and take Communion to shut-ins, patients in hospitals and residents of nursing homes; men and women who staff a parish food pantry and host homeless families overnight in a parish facility, etc.

The other is the 2013 election of Francis as pope. As the editor of Time magazine put it, “He has not changed the words, but he’s changed the music.” Whereas many may have associated the church in the past with rules and prohibitions, some of those same people now link the church first of all with help to the poor, mercy and forgiveness.

FATHER DOYLE is chancellor for public information and a pastor in the Diocese of Albany, New York. Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 40 Hopewell St., Albany, NY 12208.

Question Corner
Father Kenneth Doyle

The Catholic Commentator is Being Printed

The 2016-17 Baton Rouge Diocese Directory is being printed

The new directory has all of the current listings and information on churches, clergy, schools, diocesan departments and personnel of the diocese, religious, retreat centers, deaneries, institutions and organizations and more!

To place your order, fill out the form below and mail to The Catholic Commentator, P. O. Box 3316, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3316 with a check or money order for $9.50 for each directory ordered. The directory will be mailed to you.

Number of Diocesan Directories Ordered__________________________

Name_________________________________________________________

Address_________________________________________________________________

City_________________________ State______

Zip_______ Phone with area code ______

Visit thecatholiccommentator.org
Displaced families ignore their own needs to help others

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Under a canopy of blues skies and the occasional passing of puffy white clouds, volunteers at St. Thomas Chapel in Springfield eagerly greeted motorists who were there to pick up a free hot meal, for many their first since flooding ravaged their homes.

Among the volunteers was an Albany family who has an exchange student from Denmark spending the school year with them. The family could empathize with those waiting in line, share in the agony of so many others for they, too, were victims.

Only days after escaping their home by boat with only the clothes on their back and facing a future riddled with uncertainty, the family, including mom, Trish Barras; her daughters Ashleigh and Avereigh; and exchange student Anna Louise Varona Esmann were on the front line at St. Thomas, delivering a hot meal, a cheerful smile and encouraging words to all.

“At first I was hesitant (when her mom first approached her about volunteering),” Ashleigh, 15, admitted. “But there were all of our friends who have been at our house helping us. Now we have an opportunity to come out and see this, and help others, and make us feel better.”

Trish said she was thankful the family was able to give back, adding that people had been bringing her own family clothes and other necessities. The Barras family, parishioners at St. Margaret Mary Queen of Scotland Church in Albany, has even found lodging at a house owned by a friend of the family.

“I am thankful we are able to be here and doing our part,” she said. “It was just a matter of realizing that although we have unpacking and many things to do we have to help because there are people in more dire need that do not have a shelter, or do not have a meal today. It’s just a matter of realizing we have to get out there and help others.”

Avereigh, 17, said she was eager to volunteer because of the assistance so many others provided to her family. She said the community must come together to move forward and said she has been moved by the number of donations from so many different organizations.

“It’s beautiful how everyone comes together even though they need help,” she said. “I have never actually been in a flood or lost my house. I have only seen it on TV and always said I will pray for those people but never understood what it meant. Now I do.”

Esmann, who had been in Louisiana for 14 days when the waters rose, said she never expected to be in a flood and admitted to some fear.

“I just wanted it to be over and not have wet feet and wet clothes,” she added. “I just wanted a sandwich.”

Trish admitted she was panicked early that Saturday morning her mother called of the flash flood.

“The biggest fear was the current,” she said, adding that although her family, including her husband, Mike, were all swimmers they quickly realized they would not be able to keep up with the pace the water was moving.

“It was very, very scary,” Trish said.

Surviving a life-threatening ordeal has certainly put things in perspective, not only for Trish but also for her teenage girls.

“I lost a lot of stuff but in the whole scheme of things that does not matter because I have my sister and my mom,” Ashleigh said. “Getting on the boat to leave we were not worried about things as much as I thought. We were more worried about each other. We were very humbled by this entire experience.”

Avereigh said he realizes that material things are not needed and that “as long as we have Jesus and our families and the necessities we are good. We don’t need all of the little things.”

The trauma of staying one step ahead of floodwaters has been traumatic for Esmann but she was even more amazed by how the tragedy galvanized the communities of Albany and Springfield.

“I have seen how great these people are,” she said. “It’s amazing how these people have come together and help each other.”

The Barras were one of countless families throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge who despite their own misfortune put aside their difficulties to ease the pain of others. In Port Vincent, Baton Rouge fireman Tim Hasenkampf was confronting his own challenges, his house claimed by the waters of the Amite River.

Rather than work on his own home, however, he was at St. Joseph Church in French Settlement helping unload truckloads of donation that were pouring in from throughout the area as well as Texas.

“I can’t work on my house yet so I am working on other’s people stuff,” Hasenkampf said. “I am helping other people now. I will deal with my house when I deal with my house.”

“The kindness of strangers is amazing,” he added. “The donations, the people that have come in to help, whatever they can do.”

“This is how we do it.”
Bishop Muench inspired by resolve, faith of evacuees

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench easily glided through the large number of evacuees at the River Center in Baton Rouge, offering words of encouragement, bringing a smile to the faces of many and perhaps most important, praying with those whose lives have been shattered.

It’s a scenario the bishop has layed out numerous times since the weekend of Aug. 13-14 when floodwaters began to unleash their fury throughout the diocese. He ministered at evacuation centers throughout the area and visited the hardest hit church parishes, comforting priests and parishioners.

“Without exception my experience with the people in evacuation centers was positive, uplifting and inspirational,” Bishop Muench said. “I went to minister to them and they appreciated my presence and support, and profusely thanked me for showing care to them.

“While most of them had lost everything other than their life, their family and the clothes on their back, they had me feel so fortunate in a special community.”

He called the “ministry of presence” the most fundamental ministry and added that “being there is always the first step; trying to identify with and empathize with each person or family is the next step; carefully listening to them about what they had/ were experiencing and facing; supporting them in their time of real need; acknowledging with them the obvious reality of no quick fix; assuring them that God has not abandoned them, nor has the commitment of others to assist; offering them sincere concern and fervent prayer; wanting to help in any way (the Catholic Church) can.”

Bishop Muench said the crisis, as unwelcomed as it was, provided an opportunity for the community to show its true character of neighbor helping neighbor. The bishop said he believes the flooding brought out the best in everyone.

“It forced people out of their private comfort zone, and in my opinion they exceeded every challenge,” he said. “In the midst of my sorrow with them for all they lost, I felt so proud of the deeper character of the people.”

The bishop recalled several experiences from his visits, including one with a woman at the shelter at Southern University. Upon greeting her, the women told Bishop Muench that “God is tired of all of the shooting around here. He sent the flood to teach us that everyone needs to get along with everyone else.”

He also recalled an experience at the River Center with a woman who described herself as agnostic. According to Bishop Muench, the woman profusely thanked him for the assistance Catholic Charities had provided her years ago when she was unable to pay her rent one month.

“She was impressed that we help whomever we can, regardless of any or no religious affiliation,” he said. “She told me she used to live in New York and everyone knew the teaching Catholic sisters there were the best teachers and operated the best schools.”

“She went on to say she was very impressed with (then she apologized if she was going to use the wrong word) the “pageantry” of the Catholic Church. (I told her we used the word “liturgy”). She praised Pope Francis. I told her she was always welcomed to find out more about the Catholic Church and we would be delighted if she ever chose to become a member.”

Although the hours were long, Bishop Muench said he actually had the easiest task, calling it a privilege to be able to visit with those in the shelters, witness to priests and volunteers.

The strength and the faith of the people he visited proved to be inspirational to the bishop.

“It is heart-breaking to see people lose virtually everything they had,” he said. “By their faith, trust, resiliency, resourcefulness and goodness, they ministered more to me that I could ever minister to them.”

The bishop called “awe inspiring” the response of pastors, parochial vicars, deacons, parish staff members and volunteers.

“I refrain from naming names because invariably someone would not be mentioned who deserves mentioning,” he said. “To priests and others who assisted me in visits to the emergency centers and parishes, and helped me tour some of the most affected areas, and those with whom I spent time and prayer, I sincerely say ‘thank you.'”

(Rachele Smith contributed to this story.)
St. Vincent de Paul overcomes challenges to help relief effort

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The St. Vincent de Paul Society is meeting the immediate needs of people in crisis due to historic flooding in South Louisiana that started Aug. 12 and will be there in the long run as people's needs continue but their resources run out, according to SVDP Executive Director Michael Acaldo.

“This was supposed to be a rain event. I don’t think in anyone’s imagination so many people would be impacted,” said Acaldo.

“When the water started rising, we immediately went into response mode. Our first goal was to keep operational, which we did,” said Acaldo.

This was a challenge. While the Bishop Ott Shelter was not flooded, it was evacuated because of sanitation issues. Thirty percent of the employees were impacted, as were volunteers, some losing their own homes. Communication was difficult.

But in the Vincentian spirit, people pulled together.

Support has come from out of state, according to Desha Martin, volunteer coordinator for SVDP.

“We have received calls from Illinois, Georgia and Texas from people that want to help with the flood relief efforts. A company from Texas called and wants to send diapers with the names of NFL teams emblazoned on them,” said Martin. “An author of children’s books from Georgia is sending a shipment of children’s books to us. Individuals in Illinois and Atlanta are doing a clothing drive for us and driving the donations to Louisiana. Ursuline Academy in New Orleans has collected clothing and other items to donate to us.”

Additionally, a company from Minneapolis, Minnesota donated six boxes of “high end” new robes. Red Cross volunteers from Georgia cooked chicken dinners that fed 500 people, according to Martin.

In order not to duplicate any of the services provided by the larger response organizations, SVDP reached out to the smaller disaster shelters, providing clothing, mattresses and sheets and blankets, water and various items.

“I’m pleased that we have impacted so many lives,” said Acaldo.

He added there had been a lot of cooperation between the Catholic churches and agencies.

“Catholic churches are asking how they can help,” said Acaldo.

At this time the local church parish St. Vincent de Paul conferences are assessing the needs of people in their area and carefully working with them to make sure there would be no duplication of services that they might be questioned about from disaster response agencies, said St. Vincent de Paul Conference President, Crystal Chatelain.

“I think a lot of people are still in shock,” said Chatelain. But requests are coming in as people start the recovery process.

She noted some civil parishes have been hit particularly hard, especially Tangipahoa Parish, which is reeling from flooding this past March and again in August, this time with an estimated 7,500 homes flooded; Livingston Parish, which saw 98 percent of its homes affected by the floods; and other surrounding areas.

That is where the cooperative spirit comes in, said Chatelain. She has seen SVDP councils in the less impacted areas reaching out monetarily or with supplies to councils in need.

“Our conferences love one another,” said Chatelain. “They work together. One volunteer gives an idea and another will pick up on it. It does a great service to the greater community.”

The SVDP headquarters had also done the same. Hot meals, for example, were recently prepared at the SVDP dining hall for St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs.

The distribution center on North Street hums with a steady traffic of supplies and volunteers.

“Volunteers have just been showing up,” said volunteer Cary Karney. A mother of a student at St. Jude School in Baton Rouge, for example, sent out a text message and several St. Jude students helped at the distribution center unloading trucks and sorting items while their school was closed.

“She asked me, ‘What can I do today?’” said Teddy Martin, father of Meredith Martin, a fifth-grade student at St. Jude. Meredith said volunteering at the distribution center showed her, “We seem to take for granted what we have.”

Volunteering was “cousin time” for Matthew Maynard, a fifth-grade student at St. Jude, Corrine Maynard, a seventh-grade student at St. Theresa School in Gonzales, and Grey Maynard, a third-grade student at St. John Primary School in Prairieville.

“I watched the water come up to the steps of the house,” said Matthew Maynard, who felt the responsibility to help friends and neighbors.

Corrine Maynard, likewise, saw the devastation on television and at her friends and neighbors homes and said, “I have to do something.”

Demonstrating the dedication of the SVDP employees is Lucille Cox, director of the distribution and stores program for SVDP. She checked on donations and volunteers with an energy and cheerfulness that belied the fact she had lost everything to flooding.

“It’s the love and the joy of meeting people’s needs that brings me here,” Cox said. “It’s not about me.”

She said she could easily give up, but then she thinks about Jesus’ words to ask the Lord to send out workers to the harvest.

During times of natural disasters the distribution center doubles as a service and staging area. Following the flood, items were taken from the distribution center to neighborhoods impacted by the flood. The distribution center then sent donations out into impacted neighborhoods.

Because homes and jobs have been affected by the floodwaters, Acaldo said that the need for basic assistance, such as food, clothing, medicine and assistance in finding affordable housing, the need for SVDP will be greater than before.
Immaculate Conception begins arduous task of rebuilding parish

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

As rains flooded the Baton Rouge area on Aug. 13, Father Frank Uter, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs, said he approached it with the thought ICC would be all right and helping “those others” who were affected by the flood.

“We opened the parish hall as a place for people to have lunch, get water and have a safe place to stay,” said Father Uter.

“We were not set up as an overnight shelter,” said Father Uter as volunteers “cooked up what came in” and helped people as best as they could.

“The police came around 2 p.m. and said it would be necessary for those who were there at that time if they had a car to go to Walker because this was not going to be a safe place to be,” said Father Uter. “That was the first definite word I had about us.”

The National Guard started taking people who did not have transportation to Walker, according to Father Uter.

That afternoon Father Matthew Dupré, pastor of St. Patrick Church in Baton Rouge, called Father Uter to see how he was doing.

“I said, ‘Matt, water is coming over the road while I’m talking to you. It’s coming closer and closer,’” said Father Uter.

He and parochial vicar Amal Raj Savarimuthu IMS, slept that night on the floor of the church’s faith formation center, the only structure that remained intact from the flooding.

When Father Uter rose the next morning, he was out on the porch and noticed that the National Guard and other rescue trucks were having trouble making it through the water.

“Everywhere you looked there was water,” said Father Uter.

He went almost waist-deep in water to survey the damage to the campus. Each building was damaged with the rectory and adoration chapel the most extensively damaged.

“It was like we lived on a deserted island for a few days with no means of communication,” said Father Uter, who had lost cell phone service.

But as the campus dried out, Immaculate Conception raised its head above water and began its recovery.

Micah Dugas, an active member of the youth group said, “I jumped the fence and opened all the doors (to the youth hall) and started throwing out everything and swept it and cleaned it out,” said Dugas. His friends helped him pull out items and take them to the road.

There were many parishioners helping out in the community in the midst of rescue efforts and losing everything themselves.

Mike Perault, an usher for the 9 a.m. Mass, said he was awakened by a knock at the door by a neighbor who wanted to park his vehicle in his driveway because of the high waters. Around 9 a.m. he had to leave his house, when it had a foot-and-a-half of water in it. It eventually took on six feet of water. His wife was in Baton Rouge at a hospital where her mother had just had surgery.

When he left, he paddled to his neighbor’s house and rescued them and went on to rescue other people.

“My thoughts were to get out there and help other people. It wasn’t a time to think about myself,” said Perault, who eventually reached his daughter’s house in Lockport.

He teared up when speaking about his thoughts when returning to his home, which is a complete loss. But he brushed them aside as he said, “We are alive. It’s in the Lord’s hands now.”

Like Perault, many ICC members are coming together to reach out to others. ICC itself has become a center for those seeking relief. The campus hummed with activity as it fed and provided supplies for flood victims.

Several organizations from out of town helped ICC in its relief ministry.

“We saw the flood damage and we had a board meeting on what we could do to help,” said Darian Fuselier, vice-president of the men’s club of St. Margaret of Mary Men’s Club in Slidell who, along with the Knights of Columbus from that church parish, helped provide more than 5,000 meals over the couple of days they were at ICC.

Fuselier said, “Having lived through (Hurricane) Katrina we knew what it was like to go through something like this. We also knew that if people can receive a meal, a smile and a hug, they’ll know it’s going to be okay.”

A sense of humor also lets people know they are going to be okay.

Father Uter said as much effort as possible has gone into making the church operational and clean so Mass can be celebrated there so people can have a sense of normalcy when everything at home and the community is not normal.

“I tell parishioners, ‘I’ll see you Sunday. Be sure to clean your shoes,” said Father Uter wryly.
Flood forces Cristo Rey to move to new location

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Dr. James Llorens surveyed the carnage that only two weeks ago was a new school offering a beacon of hope to an impoverished community.

For two years, Llorens had put his heart and soul into establishing and eventual opening of Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School, which offers an innovative education model to low-income children.

On Aug. 5, the atmosphere was euphoric as the ribbon was cut and Bishop Robert W. Muench blessed the new school, which was housed at the former Redemptorist High School.

What took years to build, however, was gone in a matter of hours. Flood waters that reached at least four feet throughout two buildings, as well as the gym, rendered the school uninhabitable for the 2016-17 school year and perhaps longer.

For the upcoming school year, Cristo Rey will be housed at the Bon Carre Business Center on Florida Street in Baton Rouge. Classes were scheduled to resume Aug. 29.

“It’s extremely disappointing; it’s heartbreaking,” Llorens said, his emotions mirroring his feelings. “We had completed our summer orientation program. One week of classes. Students had started reporting to their corporate work positions.

“The students had over the three or four weeks developed a real family connection.”

As evidence of the early bonding, Llorens said the staff had started receiving emails from students inquiring about classmates and their situations. They were also communicating with each other via social media.

“Those are the things that is sort of difficult to have to put on hold until we regroup,” Llorens said.

Cristo Rey was leasing the old Redemptorist High School from the Diocese of Baton Rouge and had renovated several classrooms, administration areas, and was putting the final touches on an impressive new entrance to accommodate the 80 freshmen that are part of the inaugural class. More renovations were planned for the following years as the school continued to add class levels.

Llorens said he is unsure of the future of the building, noting that is in the hands of the diocese and Joe Ingraham.

“We anticipate at a minimum we will not be here for a year,” Llorens said.

Joe Ingraham, chief financial officer for the diocese, said he is researching options and added the diocese did not carry flood insurance for the building. He noted that the cost would have been $28,000, and at the time the insurance was discontinued, the building was vacant.

Llorens said work is required at the new site because “it’s just a big open space that we have to convert to classrooms.”

On a positive note, Llorens said he was grateful because the school’s business partners, who play a major role in Cristo Rey’s corporate work component, has been supportive.

He said businesses have been reaching out and asking what the school needs in its recovery effort.

“Our priority is to get an assessment of what our student situation is, bringing them back in the classroom and getting them back out on their jobs as soon as possible,” Llorens said.

Up to four feet of water inundated Cristo Rey’s classrooms and administrative offices, toppling desk chairs and rearranging furniture.

Thousands of worms swarmed the floor of what was to be the new school entrance. Several days after the water had receded, many of the worms were still alive and moving.
United in faith

Our buildings

Inmaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs, above, took on several feet of water during the historic floods. The carpent was removed leading up to the tabernacle. Photo by Wanda Koch | The Catholic Commentator

Water levels reached as high as four feet at Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School, right. The gym floor was destroyed and the new school has been forced to relocate for the 2016-17 school year. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Massive sandbagging efforts at St. Anne Church Parish in Sorrento, top, and St. Therese Middle School in Gonzales, above, helped minimize what could have catastrophic damage. An army of volunteers at both locations braved the rising water to protect the churches and buildings. St. Anne Church did take on some water but damage was not severe. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

When the waters rose

Father Jason Palermo, pastor at St. Joseph Church in French Settlement, displays his dishwashing skills, above, in the parish hall. The church served several hundred hot lunches daily. When asked where he learned his skill, he jokingly replied from his sandwich-making days at Subway. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Our heroes

The Barras family of Albany, who lost their home in the flood, nonetheless took time to assist in serving hot lunches at St. Thomas Chapel in Springfield. Pictured, from left, are Avereigh Barras, Trish Barras, Father Jamin David, pastor at St. Thomas and St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany, Aishleigh Barras and Anna Louise Varona Bismann, an exchange student spending the school year with the Barras family. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

The scene was eerily similar at the cemetery in Port Vincent, where one casket is shown being driven out of the ground. Several other gravesites were damaged. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

What rivalry? Archrivals on the field, the University of Alabama football team and their fans sent a truckload of donations to flood-stricken Baton Rouge. Volunteers from Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge unloaded the truck, which arrived early on Aug. 24. The delivery will help flood victims with basic items, such as toiletries, infant needs, pet food and other supplies. At no other time in history has a truck sporting the Crimson Tide been so welcome in Baton Rouge. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Our buried

High water in St. Amant caused flooding at Holy Rosary Church and in the school. The cemetery also took on water, causing at least two caskets to surface. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

What rivalry? Archrivals on the field, the University of Alabama football team and their fans sent a truckload of donations to flood-stricken Baton Rouge. Volunteers from Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge unloaded the truck, which arrived early on Aug. 24. The delivery will help flood victims with basic items, such as toiletries, infant needs, pet food and other supplies. At no other time in history has a truck sporting the Crimson Tide been so welcome in Baton Rouge. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

The Barras family of Albany, who lost their home in the flood, nonetheless took time to assist in serving hot lunches at St. Thomas Chapel in Springfield. Pictured, from left, are Avereigh Barras, Trish Barras, Father Jamin David, pastor at St. Thomas and St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany, Aishleigh Barras and Anna Louise Varona Bismann, an exchange student spending the school year with the Barras family. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator
High school students live out their faith by assisting others

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

From helping with clean up and demolition to collecting and sorting donations, area Catholic high school students have been living out their faith and taking their classroom lessons of mercy and compassion to those impacted by the recent flooding throughout East Baton Rouge and the surrounding civil parishes.

At St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge, the activity center served as a shopping mall of sorts, offering a ready place for families to pick up needed supplies donated by the community.

SJA faculty members and students sorted the many items collected to make it easier for flood victims to find what they needed, according to Mindy Brodhead Averitt, communications director at St. Joseph’s Academy.

Members of the school’s volleyball and cross-country teams also helped one of their own SJA Sticker coaches, whose home was inundated with water from one of the nation’s worst natural disasters since Hurricane Sandy.

In addition, the team members also assisted at a second residence, the home of the coach’s mother.

Like these SJA student athletes, many other high school students and teachers from Catholic High School in Baton Rouge and St. Michael the Archangel in Baton Rouge and St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Hammond also provided help in moving heavy furniture and water-soaked mattresses, ripping out floor-ing and tearing out sheetrock and insulation for families hit hard by flooding. In many cases, these families were simply unable to take care of the work themselves and expressed their thanks over and over again to the work crews lending a hand.

Richard Beaugh, communications director at Catholic High School, said that CHS students and faculty members also helped the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank clean out its facility at the Fraenkel Center, which took on floodwaters during the storm.

Flooding especially impacted the neighborhoods near St. Michael in southeast Baton Rouge.

Kristi Watts, public relations director at St. Michael, said that while the school itself did not take on water, many high school families and faculty and staff members were left with horrific flooding.

Watts added the school community immediately stepped up to help everyone in need, offering manpower as well as collecting and organizing donations.

One of the largest donations to the St. Michael community came from alumni parents Scott and Angle Simoneaux, who helped with securing supplies from the Houston office of their company, Atchafalaya Crawfish & Cajun Specialties.

The Simoneaux’s son, Chris Simoneaux, a 2010 graduate of St. Michael, said the manager of the company’s Houston store is from Plaquemine and sent out a Facebook post about taking collections. That post was shared over and over again, resulting in truckloads of supplies.

Chris Simoneaux noted that since crawfish are not in season, the company’s trucks were empty and provided lots of space for the donations destined for Baton Rouge.

For Chris, who explained that he and his parents were not able to get to their home during the height of the flooding but returned later to find it unaffected, giving back and helping others is more than just a way of life; it just makes sense right now.

“If you have a house, you need to be out there doing something. It’s just like how Christ gave up his life and everything for us. We need to be out there helping others,” he said, adding that people impacted by the flooding will need help, not just now, but for the next three to six months before they can resume a normal life again.

Nicole Lato, a teacher at St. Thomas Aquinas, noted that seniors at STA helped gut homes and businesses as well as sorted and collected donations for shelters.

“The seniors were so moved by the heartbeat of their community that they started their own donation drive at St. Albert’s Church (on the campus of Southeastern Louisiana University),” she said, adding that she is so proud of the seniors for taking charge and doing what was needed as well as all of the students who came out to help with the hard work of clean up and demolition.

Students from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Hammond help flood victims in their community by collecting and sorting donations. Photo provided by Nicole Lato | St. Thomas Aquinas High School

Catholic High School 10th-grade student volunteers, Patrick Gravey, from left, Jordan Candilora and Clay Thompson, loaded up water bottles that were distributed to shelters, then stayed busy during the week volunteering their time to families of St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge whose homes were flooded. Photo by Erin Candilora | St. Aloysius School
New gym at St. Jean Vianney sustains severe damage

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Like many of its parishioners, St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge was heavily impacted by the recent flooding, sustaining damages close to $2 million, according to Father Tom Ranzino, pastor of St. Jean Vianney.

One building heavily affected by water, and probably one of the hardest to witness for many parishioners, was the parish’s new gymnasium, which opened only nine months ago.

Construction crews began pulling up the wooden boards on the gym floor immediately, and Father Ranzino said it will take some time for repairs to be complete. He anticipates reopening the gym sometime in November.

Water also damaged the rectory, forcing Father Ranzino to evacuate ahead of the high water. He said he drove to St. Patrick’s Church in Baton Rouge, where Father Matthew Dupré, pastor of St. Patrick Church, welcomed him.

He returned to SJV the next day (Monday, Aug. 15) thanks to a National Guard high water vehicle.

“It was then that I could assess the damage. I was also able to go through the water to get my two cats. We had others in the same vehicle, trying to get to pets from homes. It was inspiring and sad at the same time,” he said.

In addition to water damage in the parish gym and rectory, water also entered the parish hall, but that building can still be used. Only the bathrooms will be rebuilt due to water damage, Father Ranzino noted.

At present, the parish hall has become a staging area for salvageable items from the parish preschool, which was affected by flooding.

Angel Gonzales, a construction worker helping with demolition in the preschool classrooms, said he helped New Orleans rebuild following Hurricane Katrina, and he is “glad to help Baton Rouge recover, too.”

With repairs and construction moving at a steady pace, Father Ranzino said the preschool should be ready to open on Sept. 6.

“I am so pleased with our two companies on campus (Faulk and Meek Construction and Belfor Property Restoration, working in cooperation with Catholic Mutual Group). Really good people,” he said.

St. Jean Vianney School also suffered damage due to the high water. The school’s two kindergarten classrooms as well as the library were severely impacted. But dozens of parents, students, school staff and even some SJV graduates volunteered their time to help throw out damaged books and prepare the rest of the school for students returning on Friday, Aug. 19.

“The generosity of parishioners who were not affected by floodwaters was overwhelming,” said Father Ranzino, adding that people of all ages worked “hard, hard, hard to get the campus back in some livable shape. It seemed to never end but with so many hands it did.”

St. Jean Vianney School is hoping to finish repairs to the kindergarten area and library by mid-September.

A day after floodwaters receded, construction workers at St. Jean Vianney Church remove the water-soaked wooden boards from the parish’s gym floor. Photo by Rachele Smith | The Catholic Commentator

In addition to the physical labor on campus, Father Ranzino also noted the incredible concern and compassion SJV has received from others. Parishioners at Holy Family Church in Port Allen, St. Aloysius, St. Jude and St. Patrick churches in Baton Rouge as well as groups at St. John Interparochial School, Catholic Charities and other individuals and organizations across the country have given food, supplies, money and prayers.

“One wonderful gift was from the Teresian Sisters in Covington who opened their convent to allow one of our large families to move into an apartment attached to the convent,” Father Ranzino said, adding the support has been “so generous.”

Catherine Davidson, director of social responsibility, explained that the parish is working hard to help anyone in the community affected by flooding, which includes staff in the church office as well as school employees. Davidson said her ministry has been busy providing immediate relief to victims. A survey, conducted at all Masses during the weekend of Aug. 20–21, will help further those efforts.

Father Ranzino noted that although these days are hard, he is happy to be with SJV at this time.

“It is an opportunity of grace I would not want to miss,” he said. “I am uplifted and encouraged by the good people here, my wonderful staff and the courage of our parishioners. I am also so grateful to the support I have received from my fellow priests. I thank them all.”

Hospice is not about giving up
... it’s about taking control

• We rely upon the intercession of our Blessed Mother to assist us in imitating the healing ministry of Jesus Christ as we care for terminally ill patients and their families.

• We call forth the compassion and kindness of our staff, who serve in this health care ministry, to respond to the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of our patients and their families.

• We believe in the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, and we devote ourselves to supporting patients and families through the dying process at the end of life’s journey on this earth and new life in eternity.

Notre Dame Hospice does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, disability or age in admission, treatment, ability to pay, or participation in its programs, services and activities, or in employment.
Ben-Hur
Paramount

Though reasonably satisfying as an action picture, this iteration of Lew Wallace’s 1880 novel suffers from a poorly written script that fails to convince when the classic story’s religious theme comes to the fore. First-century Jewish prince Judah Ben-Hur (Jack Huston) lives a prosperous life in Jerusalem where he carries on a friendly rivalry with his Roman adopted brother (Toby Kebbell), and finds marital happiness with his true love (Nazanin Boniadi). But after he gives shelter to a young zealot (Moises Arias) who was wounded fighting against foreign rule - personified by Pontius Pilate (Pilou Asbaek) - disaster strikes. So, too, does betrayal since his foster sibling, now an influential army officer, refuses to risk his career by helping the family that took him in as a child. Consigned to the miserable existence of a galley slave, Judah thirsts for revenge until multiple encounters with Jesus (Rodrigo Santoro) open his eyes to the value of forgiveness and reconciliation. While aficionados of the 1959 version may find such scenes as the epic sea battle and the trademark chariot race lacking, considered strictly on their own they work well enough. But director Timur Bekmambetov and screenwriters Keith Clarke and John Ridley skimp on the careful and time-consuming character development that would have been needed to make the protagonist’s ultimate conversion believable. Probably acceptable for older teens. Generally stylized but harsh violence with several grisly deaths and mature themes, including rape, not one for those in search of casual fare. Mature themes, including adultery and venereal disease, a morning-after bedroom scene, vague references to homosexuality, at least one profanity, a couple of uses each of crude and crass language. A-III; PG-13

The Innocents
Music Box

Luminescent, unflinchingly honest and respectful of religion, director Anne Fontaine’s drama about a fictional Benedictine convent in post-World War II Poland gently explores the conflicts between duty to the living and the shattered faith that can result from acts of depravity. The screenplay by Sabrina B. Karine and Alice Vial is loosely based on the real-life exploits of Madeleine Pauliac, a French Red Cross doctor, played by Lou de Laage and renamed Mathilde. After delivering the baby of a young nun, the physician is told the horrible story of how this incongruous event has come about: Several months earlier, invading Soviet soldiers, believing it to be their right, raped the sisters, leaving at least seven of them pregnant, and the abbess (Agata Kulesza) infected with syphilis. The film’s ruminations on how believers respond to awful times are superlative. But this is obviously a solidly adult picture, and not one for those in search of casual fare. Mature themes, including rape and venereal disease, a nonmarital bedroom scene, several nongraphic depictions of childbirth. A-III; PG-13

Florence Foster Jenkins
Paramount

Moral complications limit the appropriate audience for director Stephen Frears’ charmantly eccentric, fact-based profile of the titular New York socialite (Meryl Streep) whose yearning to take to the stage as a singer of operatic arias and similar works, though motivated by a genuine love of music, was undercut by her spectacular lack of talent. Protecting her from the truth about her voice, which is, in fact, excruciating to a point that’s unavoidably comic, becomes a full-time job for her husband (Hugh Grant), a failed British actor. Though he gains an ally in this effort when a sympathetic young pianist (Simon Helberg) comes on board as the singer’s accompanist, the duo of defenders faces heightened stakes when she insists on booking Carnegie Hall for a night. With characteristic deftness, Streep gets across both the full ridiculousness and the touching pathos of the situation. But her complex marital arrangement, and her spouse’s concurrent relationship (with Rebecca Ferguson), though mitigated by extenuating circumstances, require viewer discernment. Possibly acceptable for especially insightful older teens. Mature themes, including adultery and venereal disease, a morning-after bedroom scene, vague references to homosexuality, at least one profanity, a couple of uses each of crude and crass language. A-III; PG-13

Kubo and the Two Strings
Focus

Captivating animated fable about a Japanese street urchin (voice of Art Parkinson) whose troubled family history launches him on a quest for a magical set of armor. He’s accompanied, and protected, on the journey by a prudden monkey (voiced by Charlie Theron) and by a courageous but accursed samurai (voice of Matthew McConaughey) whose body a spell has transformed into that of a beetle. Rich visuals along the lad’s odyssey are matched by the deep emotional appeal of the interaction among the characters in director Travis Knight’s feature debut. But conflicted familial relationships - the young hero’s principal adversary is his own grandfather (voice of Ralph Fiennes) - and an outlook on death suggesting that the departed survive only in the memory of the living put this out of bounds for impressionable youngsters. Most teens, however, will recognize that the story is obviously far removed from real life and that plot ingredients borrowed from native mythology need not be taken to heart. Nonscriptural religious beliefs, stylized combat with minimal gore. A-II; PG
Church parishes creative in relief effort

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Below is a summary of what many church parishes have been doing in relief efforts. If a parish would like to submit additional information, please send to rmeek@diobr.org

Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge

Executive Director David Aguillard said the agency has been asked by FEMA to gear up for Immediate Disaster Case Management, something, he said, is new for the organization in Louisiana. Traditionally, Aguillard said, a four-month lag exists.

“That means for this disaster’s scope, we’ll be hiring about 155 disaster care managers/recovery specialists and 40 support staff/supervisors.”

He said other agencies, including Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and Catholic Charities of Biloxi, Mississippi, are lending case managers.

He said the agency’s initial focus has been in the evacuation shelters, noting that the state has “asked us to touch everyone in the shelters.” Through Aug. 24, the agency had completed case work on 780 families and identified 5,080 needs.

CCDBR has also distributed $5,000 in gas cards, $5,000 in gift cards and 100 tons of supplies.

Church parishes the agency have helped include St. Alphonsus in Greenwell Springs, St. Jean Vianney and St. Paul the Apostle in Baton Rouge, St. Helena in Amite, St. Joseph in French Settlement, St. Anne in Sorrento and Holy Rosary in St. Amant.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church – St. Francisville

Working in rotation with local churches, the Knights of Columbus Council 7856 on Aug. 17 prepared and delivered spaghetti meals to 175 displaced people. The Ladies Auxiliary prepared and delivered 206 lunches to residents in flood-impacted areas in West Feliciana Civil Parish.

The Ladies Auxiliary has been collecting and delivering meals for non-parishioners affected by the flood whose own parishes are overwhelmed.

The Clothes Closet in St. Francisville, which has a volunteer staff the majority of whom are Our Lady of Mount Carmel parishioners, has been distributing a variety of needed items to those in need.

St. Ann Church – Morganza

On Aug. 15, St. Ann opened their doors as a collection center to collect donations for those in need.

A phone network was also organized to contact parishioners to alert them to collection efforts. Flyers were placed around town and neighboring communities, and the drive was advertised through social media.

On Aug. 19, a caravan of two trailers filled with donations and volunteers delivered the donations to a Denham Springs distribution site.

Volunteers also assisted at the shelter set up in New Roads and donated

Faith ▼

From page 1

viv...
Who tilts the water jars of heaven?

T he Advocate called it a “1,000-year storm,” while one of the flood victim’s put it on a more personal level: “It’s just bad.” It was the perfect storm, heavy rain coming from the west, then held up by a strong high pressure system to the east and turned into a circular pattern which sucked up all the warm moisture from a large low pressure system in the Gulf of Mexico. It just sat over us for three days and rained and rained and rained. The rivers, bayous and creeks burst their banks north, east and south of Baton Rouge, and waters rose in places that had never been flooded before. It moved far enough west to seriously damage some Acadiana parishes as well. Then all of that water drained south and devastated parishes south of us.

Insurance companies designate such events as the flood of 2016 “Acts of God.” The title isn’t a theological determination of cause or blame but rather a method of deciding whether they pay or not. Nonetheless, catastrophes of this proportion raise many questions. Is God punishing us? Why did we pay or not? Nonetheless, catastrophes of this proportion raise many questions. Is God punishing us? Why did we pay or not? And why if we paid?

The book of Job is a poetic debate. Finally, God enters the discussion. His words, for the first time in the book, are not a question but a clear statement: “Surely now you are cursed.” Job comes face to face with the idea of God’s justice and his own capacity. Job is not ever able to understand God’s actions or reasons.

Job submits to God (Jb. 42:1-6) “Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be hindered. I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know. I have heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you. Therefore, I disown what I have said and repent in dust and ashes.” For his faith and humility God restores the prosperity of Job.

So we don’t know why calamities happen to good people as well as bad. For his own reasons, which we will never fully understand, God chose to create not only our own humanity but also the entire universe through an evolutionary process. That process includes suffering and death. But we do know because of the crucified Christ that God has the power to bring good out of evil, and no good person suffers in vain. And like Jesus, we will not remain in our graves forever.

Job is everyman. In arguing his own case with his friends, Job comes close to the teachings of Jesus. In chapter 29:24 he says, “Yet should not a hand be held out to help a wretched man in his calamity? Or, have I not wept for the hardships of others? was not my soul grieved for the destitute? Yet when I looked for good, then evil came; when I expected light, then came darkness.”

Jesus gives us the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of how we should treat our neighbors who are suffering. Life gives us more opportunities than we would like to follow that example. No one who has ever helped muck out a flooded home can imagine the stench and destruction that water leaves behind. Now in our area of South Louisiana we are experiencing it. We don’t know why, other than the explanation of those weather conditions that produced a very unique storm. However, I do believe that God is pleased with the generous response of so many, and with the faith and courage of those hardest hit.

May God bless and heal those who lost so much and treat them as he treated his servant Job: “Thus the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his earlier ones.”

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for The Catholic Commentator. He can be reached at johnnycarville@gmail.com.
Unwelcome flooding provides opportunity for spiritual growth

(On Aug. 18, Bishop Muench celebrated and preached the homily for the annual Back to School Mass for the Diocesan Catholic School Office personnel, Catholic school administrators and others. In original form the homily was unscripted. After a request from The Catholic Commentator to publish it, the bishop submitted the following, slightly revised version.)

Forty-eight years ago, while preparing to be ordained a priest, I had a simple card printed quoting Pope John XXIII, now St. Pope John XXIII: "When people are united by the love of Christ, they feel united and the needs, sufferings, and joys of others are felt as their own" (Journal of a Soul). In essence St. John XXIII was reflecting two passages of St. Paul: Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep" and 1 Corinthians 12:26, "As a body is one, though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also with Christ ... If one part suffers, all suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."

We know the word “sympathy.” To sympathize with someone is to “feel sorry for” them. More than sympathize, we Christians are called to empathize, to “feel sorrow with,” people undergoing a difficult time, not in some superficial way with a catchy, tricky phrase. Rather we realize that as called to represent Jesus, we must go beyond our own personal feelings to interiorize what others are experiencing.

The effect of severe and widespread area flooding brought about the loss of human lives (the latest number I heard was 13), the loss of or severe damage of homes (the latest count I heard was 60,000), the loss of possessions, the inability to communicate with loved ones or traverse roads, and the loss of a sense of security upon which we depend for comfort and reassurance to manage the day.

To you, our Catholic educators, I express great admiration and respect, thanking you for your service in good times and in bad, in easy times and in difficult times, to help our young people understand the dignity and preciousness of their individual lives, the uniqueness of youth as a special time of life, and to support, affirm and encourage them to navigate the turbulent waters of life and develop a confidence by which they learn to cope, even as we ourselves may find ourselves struggling. What a privileged gift and what a special vocation it is to be an educator in a Catholic school. For in our Catholic schools, we not only can teach our students about God, the meaning of life and how to pray, we must do so.

Yesterday, I received a message that an Air National Guardsman requested to see a priest. After a most productive, detailed planning meeting of our diocesan priest consultants, deans, and many other diocesan office holders and other leaders (including Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul Society), I went to the Celtic Media Centre shelter and prayed with the serviceman. As I was leaving, I thanked the group of guardsmen there for their service. Their leader also thanked me and added: “We routinely do this work as the need arises. I must tell you that I have never experienced the magnificent spirit of the people directly affected nor the extremely generous outpouring of volunteer help from others in a community that I have witnessed here.” His fellow officers quickly affirmed his comment. I replied: “Thank you for sharing that insight with me. As a local I have independently been saying the same thing. Now I can say that an outsider to the community confirmed and validated that observation.

I have consistently called this extensive, massive flooding an unwelcomed tragedy, but ultimately a graced opportunity for personal development and spiritual growth. Too often we humans can become attached to materials things, which do not, because they inherently cannot, make us happy. Only connection to God and neighbor, through prayer, love, commitment, service and outreach can we work towards achieving ultimate happiness. Incidentally I add how heart-warming it has been for me to receive messages from graduates of our schools asking: “What can I do to help?” In this process I have personally felt more ministered to than how I was ministering for. How both humbling and inspiring that has been.

One woman in a shelter interpreted what has happened to us very vividly. “God is tired of all the shooting that was going on here and sent this flood to teach us we need to be more kind to each other.” I profess I can’t always understand God, about whom the Prophet Isaiah documented: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts, my ways are not your ways” (Is 55:8-9). I do conclude what the woman at the shelter told me might well have been more eloquent than anything I’ve ever preached. For if this circumstance does not draw us closer to God and every neighbor, proximate and remote, we have a double calamity on our hands. God has faith in us and we must have faith in God. I am thinking of ourselves personally and individually, as well as our being part of a family, a people, a community – in the faith and beyond the faith. The deprivation experienced call forth from us a positive response, one already so far being observed. We need to understand it’s larger than just me and our immediate group. People inside and outside our area have generously responded as partners with us in the recovery and for what yet needs to be done. And so as we hear in today’s scripture (Philippians 4) St. Paul consoles the people and tells them not to be disturbed by things which can cause anxiety. We need to know the context of his letter. St. Paul wrote this message while imprisoned in Ephesus. Years ago a Catholic high school graduate traveled to Florida with some of his neighborhood guys. On their way they were pulled over in Mississippi where the officer found some marijuana in the car. All the passengers were arrested and put in jail. This former student of mine later related this incident to me, saying: “You have no idea what it is like to be behind a locked cell.” Well, being behind a locked cell did not deter St. Paul. He composed his letter to the Philippians while imprisoned in Ephesus. He did not engage in self-pity. He thought more about his flock than himself and instructed not to worry no matter what they are going through. In today’s Gospel, Jesus taught: “For whatever you need, ask” (Mt 7:7). So it’s fair to say what we are asking God, for others as well as ourselves we should have confidence will be granted. I understand most, if not all of you, are going through hardship of one kind or another. Nonetheless it is important to feel the bonding with Jesus and one another closer now than ever before. I have always been proud of the community which comprises the Diocese of Baton Rouge, for the leadership and service of our Catholic Schools Office personnel, for the dedication and the cooperation that you administrators provide, working together, trying to help each other. You are not and we are not competitors and should not act as competitors. How well you understand and exemplify that is a source of deep inspiration to me and I thank you for it. As our circumstances have chastened and challenged us, we realize “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20). I have recently said our community is neither paradise (that is in the next world) nor Camelot, (a fictional creation). It is a good and wonderful place and I say to you very sincerely, there’s no place in the world that I would rather be than here, and with you. God love you.
to Hope Ministries to provide food and shelter for local flood victims.

**St. George Church – Baton Rouge**

Parishioners gutted and helped repair 25 homes within the two-week span after the flood, in addition to the countless volunteers who helped neighbors and family recover, said Kristel Neupert, social responsibility coordinator of the parish.

The church parish also collected and sent out a large amount of cleaning supplies to places such as St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge, St. Michael High School in Baton Rouge and Redemption Life Fellowship Church in Baker.

“We received truckloads and we gave out truckloads,” said Neupert, who was proud of the response of the church in time of need.

“I think it’s beautiful to see the commitment of people in giving of themselves to help each other,” Neupert said.

**St. John the Baptist Church – Zachary**

Parishioners made 200 to 300 sandwiches daily to deliver to those gutting homes and beginning the repairing process. The Men’s Club and the Ladies Alter Society also prepared hot evening meals.

The Knights of Columbus and nuns at St. John donated items to 175 disaster victims in the diocese.

**St. Joseph Church in French Settlement advertised to anyone who might be traveling on Highway 16 that water, food and hot lunches were available daily. Donations poured into the church, which was distributed some of the hardest hit victims in the diocese.**

St. Joseph Church in French Settlement advertised to anyone who might be traveling on Louisiana Highway 16 that water, food and hot lunches were available daily. Donations poured into the church, which was distributed some of the hardest hit victims in the diocese. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

**St. John the Evangelist Church – Prairieville**

An estimated one-third of parishioners had to leave their homes, at least temporarily, according to pastor Father Jerry Martin. Initial relief efforts focused on collecting and bringing needed items to the Ascension Parish Red Cross shelter at the Lamar-Dixon Civic Center in Gonzales.

Once the shelter filled its storage units, efforts turned to helping neighborhood residents return to their homes. Several work crews are assisting households with post-flood clean-up and, when possible, house gutting.

**St. Joseph Church – French Settlement**

Pastor Father Jason Palermo was elbow high in dishwasher, washing out pans that were being used to serve food at a distribution center set up in the parish hall.

“I learned this at Subway,” Father Palermo joked.

The relief efforts at St. Joseph were multi-faceted, beginning with volunteers using church buses to transport people rescued from their homes in boats. They were initially being housed at the parish hall but when electricity went out Aug. 15, the evacuees were transported to nearby Killian Baptist Church and Frost Elementary School.

However, as the Amite River continued to rise so did the number of evacuees, especially from Port Vincent, so, according to Father Palermo, the focus shifted to hydration of those individuals, feeding them, getting them clothes and their pets fed, if necessary.

Donations began arriving immediately and a steady stream continued for at least a week.

Father Palermo joked that he wanted to set up a “free version of Sam’s Club.”

He was also quick to compliment St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge for sending in supplies, including flying in a helicopter.

“We have a lot of angels at St. Aloysius,” he said.

He was also thankful to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

“It’s good to see we have good people,” he said. “We’re very appreciative of that and we are quite humbled.”

**St. Jude the Apostle Church – Baton Rouge**

Parishioners were active in helping meet the needs in surrounding areas, including preparing 1,000 meals that were served at St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge. Volunteers spent several nights cooking hundreds of hot meals that were distributed in the community.

Perhaps a bigger benefit, pastor Father Trey Nelson said, was to see the young people, especially elementary school children, pitch in and help. He said because schools were closed students were spending the entire day at the church helping sort and categorize donated items, of which there are many.

“When you have an opportunity to get a third (of parishioners) to get involved, and to serve the poor, it’s huge,” Father Nelson said.

He said the parish began receiving large amounts of donations within days of the flooding, and at one point he said the building looked like a department store.

“Our students got an up close and personal look at what it is like to help others,” Father Nelson said, adding the flooding and the relief effort are a call to humility and submission to God. He said it’s an opportunity to “try to give God more control in your life.”

**St. Louis King of France – Baton Rouge**

As floodwaters continued to rise on the night of Aug. 13, the parking lot at the church became a command center and staging area for the National Guard and other rescue personnel. Pastor Father Michael Alello said he had gone to dinner after vigil Mass and upon returning to the parish learned that nearby neighborhoods were flooding and people were being evacuated via boat.

“It was a little chaotic, and a long night for us,” he said. “A lot of people were coming and going.”

Evacuees were initially transported to nearby Bellaire High School but when that began to take on water they were moved to Scotlandville.

After the water began to recede, Father Alello began ministering to people in their homes, bringing water and food to those who either stayed or were in the process of gutting their homes.

His ministry also included talking to those affected, telling them that it’s okay to be frustrated, it’s okay to be heartbroken, it’s okay to be angry with God.

“Tell God you are angry, ask him to take you by your hand and guide you,” he said.

Father Alello, who has been pastor at St. Louis since July 1, said the church needs to be the “beacon of light” and a place of prayer and hope for the community.

**St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church – Albany**

Pastor Father Jamin David set up a most unusual ministry, tending to the needs of those stranded on Interstate 12, which runs near the front of the church. Once the highway was closed, thousands of motorists were stranded, and Father David, noticing the need, opened his facility so folks could have use of a bathroom and to meet other needs. Also, a stranded caterer used the hall’s kitchen to cook a meal that served hundreds of folks.

Once the highway reopened, Father David said the relief effort shifted to ministering to his own community and assessing the needs of parishioners.

The church did food drops, including one at the cluster parish in Springfield and one in Denham Springs.

“I have always bragged about the people at St. Margaret and St. Thomas and said they are the most generous parish I have been at,” Father David said. “This is proof. With 70 to 80 percent of homes flooded, with all of the adversity we are facing, people are still rolling up their pants’ legs and doing the good work.”

**St. Paul the Apostle Church – Baton Rouge**

The church set up a free distribution center for all residents in the area of the North Baton Rouge church. Pastor Father Rick Andrus said staff members attempted to contact parishioners to assess their needs and notify them of the distribution center, which included food, water, clothing and even shovels.
From page 20

Father Andrus said donations came in from Catholic Charities, the Diocese of Lake Charles and the Red Cross. The distribution center, on the days that it is open, has been serving hundreds of people.

“We will not turn anybody away,” said St. Paul parishioner Vera Dunbar, who lives in Port Allen and who helped coordinate the distribution.

“It’s very rewarding,” Dunbar added. “It shows how people can share and take care of each other. It is a community now. They are coming together and showing love. It’s been very powerful.”

**St. Theresa of Avila Church – Gonzales**

St. Theresa parishioners were perhaps the most creative regarding the coordination of relief efforts. Even while many were digging out of their own homes, they organized a four-prong approach to the recovery.

The first was called the Laundry Brigade, which consisted of inviting flood victims who could recover their clothes to bring them to be laundered and returned the next day. Volunteers were even picking up clothes from families to be cleaned.

The St. Theresa Taxi provided transportation for those folks who needed to get to the doctor or other errands.

The Cooks for Christ were cooking meals and delivering them to residences where numerous victims had gathered because of their own homes being flooded. According to pastor Father Eric Gyan, parishioners recognized the increased financial burden on families who have taken in relatives or friends.

Finally, a group called God’s Gutters have been helping clean out carpet, dry wall and furniture that is damaged.

“I was excited (about the relief efforts),” Father Gyan said. “We are going to try to help to become part of the recovery efforts. Tons of folks in this area are affected. It’s heartbreaking.”

A yeoman’s effort of sandbagging by volunteers helped spare the church and school major damage.

**St. Thomas Chapel – Springfield**

On Aug. 8, volunteers helped distribute up to 1,000 jambalaya dinners to residents in the entire area surrounding Springfield. Zatarain’s donated the ingredients and a company representative cooked 70 gallons of the popular Louisiana dish on site.

Pastor Father Jamin David said he had been working with Tom Costanza of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and Second Harvest Food Bank about doing food drops, and the meals arose out of those connections.

“Probably about 60 to 70 percent of our parishioners flooded, especially those north of Albany and Springfield and in the Holden area,” Father David said. “It’s sort of (Hurricane) Katrina all over again but on a much larger scale I think.”

**St. Thomas More Church – Baton Rouge**

It started as a simple phone call, an S.O.S. of sorts, that culminated in a convoy of vehicles sent to help area residents devastated by floodwaters. Featuring two semi-trucks overflowing with donations collected by parishioners of St. Catherine of Sienna Church in Metairie, the convoy was escorted by four Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office deputies. The help arrived in the parking lot of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge on Saturday, Aug. 20, a church community hard hit by flooding but still offering hope to those in need through ministries of food preparation, laundry washing and collecting necessities.

The donations from St. Catherine of Sienna included food, water, clothing, cleaning supplies and other items. However, this was more than just assistance to flood victims. It was also an outward sign of friendship, one that was forged by the two church parishes in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

“During Katrina, I was a youth minister at STM,” said Father Timothy Hedrick, parochial vicar of St. Catherine of Sienna. “STM welcomed a lot of kids from New Orleans, including many families from St. Catherine of Sienna,” he added, noting that the STM youth house was turned into a nursery to accommodate the many displaced families. Today, many of those babies are now members of the Metairie church’s youth group.

Father Hedrick explained that on Saturday, Aug. 13, members of the St. Catherine of Sienna Men’s Club arrived for a regularly scheduled church work day. They had no idea what was happening in Baton Rouge. But during that morning, one parishioner helping, James Carter, received a phone call from a friend in Baton Rouge. As those calls continued and the severity of the situation in the Baton Rouge area was made known, Carter approached Father Hedrick with an urgent plea to start a collection immediately.

In addition to the tons of donations, the St. Catherine of Sienna Men’s Club also brought 24 pans of cooked jambalaya and provided lunch for volunteers and anyone else at STM that afternoon.

“We were just really thrilled to see them here,” said Father Eddie Martin, parochial vicar at St. Thomas More Church.

(Associate editor Debbie Shelley and staff writer Rachele Smith contributed to this report.)
Kairos Angola Prison Ministry  – An informational meeting about Kairos Angola prison ministry will be held Wednesday, Sept. 7, 6 – 8 p.m., at the St. Aloysius Church Parish Hall, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. There will be a dinner and social at 6 p.m. and panel discussion from 6:30 – 8 p.m. For information and to register, call 225-276-7476 or 225-205-9376.

Ava and Jacob Saucier Scholarship Benefit – A jambalaya dinner to benefit the Ava and Jacob Saucier Memorial Scholarship at Holy Family School in Port Allen will be held Sunday, Sept. 11, 10:30 a.m. – 1 p.m., at the Holy Family Church Parish Hall, 369 N. Jefferson Ave, Port Allen. Tickets are $8 each. There will also be a silent auction, sweet shop and raffle for a cypress slider swing. Raffle tickets are $5 each. For more information, call 225-344-4100.

Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites – The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites welcomes all who are interested in developing their prayer life according to the Carmelite saints. The next meeting will be Sunday, Sept. 11, 1:30 p.m., at Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center in St. Gabriel’s Room, 444 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-349-3181 or 225-803-3391, or email robertwhitej56@att.net

Parenting Seminar – Family psychologist John Rosemond will speak on “Parenting With Love and Leadership,” on Monday, Sept. 12, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., at St. Aloysius Church, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-931-8582.

Metairie Retreat House Events – The Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie, is hosting several upcoming events: Women in the Bible study, Mondays, 10 a.m. – noon, beginning Sept. 12; “Local Holy Men and Women of Mercy,” Tuesday, Sept. 13, 7 p.m., with Archbishop Albert Hughes; Intercession formation series, Wednesdays, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., starting Wednesday, Sept. 14; “Mercy Me: Living the Year of Mercy” Day of Prayer with Father David Caron O.P., Tuesday, Sept. 27. For more information and to register visit retreats.arch-no.org or call 504-267-9604.

Pro-Life Mass – A pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, Sept. 13, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. For information, call 225-383-4127.

Blue Mass – St. John the Baptist Church, 402 S. Kirkland Dr. (River Road), Brusly, will celebrate a Blue Mass honoring law enforcement personnel Sunday, Sept. 25, 9 a.m. For more information, call 225-749-2189.
We cultivate Catholic minds by teaching our students to pursue truth in the light of faith so that they are formed in the Catholic intellectual tradition, with a heart for the Gospel no matter what field of human endeavor they choose to pursue. We believe faith is important, that we should practice it and that every person is made in the image of God.

To make a gift or to find out more visit collection.cua.edu.
The Catholic Commentator

Support the advertisers of The Catholic Commentator. They make your Catholic newspaper possible!

Tailgating?
Bring Some Fresh Sandwich or Meat and Cheese Trays! Muffulettas, Roast Beef with Provolone, Turkey with Swiss, Ham and Cheese! Phone orders welcome!

Anthony’s Italian Deli
Baton Rouge’s only TRUE ITALIAN DELI Since 1978
5575 Government St., just west of Jefferson Hwy. Phone orders welcome! 225-272-6817 • Open Mon. - Sat. 9:30 - 6

Hot Rod Vinnie says:
“Who do you call? St. Vincent de Paul!”

Calling All Cars

We even take flooded cars!

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul needs car, boat, camper and motor-home donations. Proceeds benefit the poor and homeless served by the Bishop Ott Shelter Program, St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room, St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy and Myriam’s House.

Call (225) 383-7837, ext. O to make your donation or online at www.svdpbr.org

Hot Rod Vinnie says:

“The Catholic Commentator needs your help. They make your Catholic newspaper possible!”

REBUILDING
From page 23

ly damaged,” Ingraham said. “The worst thing is the damage to our parishioners and their homes.”

He said St. Alphonsus and Immaculate Conception were the most severely dam-
aged, each with likely at least $1 million in damage. Those two churches along with St. Anne and Holy Rosary each had flood insurance for up to $500,000 per build-
ing, Ingraham said.

Although St. Anthony and St. Jean Vianney did not have flood insurance because they were in areas that previously had never experienced any type of flooding, they are covered under a policy through the diocese.

The entire St. Alphonsus church and school campus were flooded. At one point 35 evacuees who were brought to the church by boat stayed in the second floor of the school after the floodwaters forced them to have to evacuate from the school’s cafeteria.

“It’s a work in progress. This is the worst devastation I have experienced … worse than anyone could have expected,” said St. Alphonsus pastor Father Mike Mor-
oney about the vastness of the destruction and recovery efforts of the church, school and community after it was submerged in historic-level floodwaters.

At Immaculate Conception, pastor Fa-
ther Frank Uter and parochial vicar Fa-
ther Amal Raj Savarimuthu IMS spent one night on the floor. By the next morning, Father Uter was walking through waist-
high water to survey the damage.

“It was like we lived on a deserted island for a few days with no means of commu-
nication,” he said. “Everywhere you looked there was water.”

The storm, which first began to un-
leash its nearly weeklong fury on Aug. 12, packed a one-two wallop that drove wa-
ter into areas that had never experienced flooding. Initially, torrential rains from the slow moving system initially caused street flooding, which also forced water into homes.

But the greater damage came in the days that followed as area rivers over-
flowed their banks and flowed unfettered into neighborhoods, businesses and even major thoroughfares. At one point, Inter-
states 10 and 12, the two main arteries in and out of Baton Rouge, were closed. Along I-12, some motorists were trapped in their cars for more than 30 hours, presenting a unique opportunity for ministry for Father Jamin David, pastor at St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany.

After surveying the 20 acres encom-
passing the parish grounds, Father David’s focus shifted to the stranded motorists, who were without food, water or even a bathroom.

“We opened up our facilities to every-
one,” Father David said. “It became a hu-
manitarian effort.

“Really, it was the multiplication of the fishes.”

He said one stranded motorist was a caterer initially headed to Abita Springs, less than 40 miles from Albany. The cater-
er asked if she could use the parish’s stove to cook the food since she was not going to the event and did not want the food to go to waste.

“We opened up the kitchen and fed about 500 people,” Father David said, add-
ing that the 20 acres around St. Margaret were fine, but many of their parishioners have suffered major flooding. “We noticed there was a humanitarian need on I-12 and (parish officials) decided what a better way to minister to people.”

Even as the waters continued to rise, donations, in the form of cash, clothes, gift cards, cleaning supplies and other necessities began to filter in from all over the world. On Aug. 23 the Knights of Co-
lumbus donated $200,000 to the diocese and another $30,000 to the Knights State Council.

In an ironic twist, a tractor-trailer from the University of Alabama dropped off a truckload of supplies at the Catholic Char-
ities Diocese of Baton Rouge’s warehouse.

Pilots for Patients, a Louisiana-based volunteer pilot organization, flew in three Cessna planes loaded with supplies for the diocese to distribute.

“The support and we are grateful to each and every individ-
ual, company and organization that has donated to the recovery effort,” said Tam-
my Abshire, stewardship director for the diocese. “We have thousands of people in need, and each and every one of these do-
nations, in whatever form, brings hope to those struggling with these tragic events.”

Knights of Columbus CEO Carl Ander-
sen said the funds will go “directly to help those affected by this tragedy, and working closely with the Catholic Church and our Knights in Louisiana, we will continue to make a real difference in the lives of the people of the Baton Rouge area.”

Anyone interested in making donations should contact Tammy V. Abshire, direc-
tor of diocesan relations, at 225-242-0108 or tabshire@diobr.org. The diocese has also established a Disaster Assistance Fund to support flood victims. Donations may be made online at diobr.org.