

# **OUR DOMINICAN FAMILY IN NEW ORLEANS: HURRICANE KATRINA UPDATE SPRING/SUMMER 2008**

This story - printed for you in pdf format- is copied from a posting on the [www.domlife.org](http://www.domlife.org) website. We offer it for your continued prayer support and financial assistance for our family and neighbors in New Orleans. The story and photos tell the experience of our Cluster Sisters from the Midwest who traveled to New Orleans to continue our Dominican participation in assisting with recovery from Katrina's devastation.

## **You Can Help!**

**Gift Cards from Home Depot or Walgreen's can be sent to:  
Sister Mary Keefe, OP  
837 Short St.  
New Orleans, LA 70118-2744.**

**Among those helping with recovery...  
Dominicans in Cluster Congregations  
Revisit New Orleans  
to Listen, Assist and Learn**

**Story written by Loretta Sullivan, OP  
(Columbus Dominican / Cluster)**



**New Orleans resident, Judith, shares a moment with Loretta Sullivan, OP (Columbus)**

NEW ORLEANS, LA — July 14, 2008 —The Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic and the Adrian Dominicans have dedicated themselves to support the people of New Orleans who are still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina, the most devastating natural disaster in the history of our country.

Dot Trosclair, OP, prioress of the Eucharistic Missionaries, requested that each of the seven cluster congregations who are currently uniting to create a new congregation, send one Sister to share life and mission in a week of outreach to the people of St. Bernard Parish in New Orleans.

This was a first endeavor of life and mission outreach together for our Cluster congregations en route to becoming one congregation. From May 8-15 seven of us shared life, prayer and service on behalf of the people of the Eastern St. Bernard Parish. The six who joined Dot were: Juanita

Henley, OP (Akron), John Marie Charniga, OP (Oxford), Ann Metzen, OP (Great Bend), Mai-Dung Nguyen, OP (Kentucky), and Loretta Sullivan, OP (Columbus).



**LEFT FRONT: Srs Ann Metzen (Great Bend), Mai-Dung Nguyen ( Kentucky), Marjorie Millet (St. Mary, New Orleans), Dorothy Trosclair ( EMD), and Loretta Sullivan (Columbus), BACK: Srs. John Marie Charniga (Oxford) and Juanita Henley (Akron)**

Margie Millet, OP (St. Mary), a native of New Orleans lived through the evacuation and was part of the visit. She relayed her stories of reuniting with her brother who lives in Metarie and the first Thanksgiving celebration back in New Orleans. “My heart was saddened even though it was Thanksgiving because it was only then that I really realized the enormity of what had happened only three months earlier with Hurricane Katrina,” she said.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT REALITY**

When Dot Trosclair picked us up at the airport, she began our introduction to the unimaginable destruction that the EMD and St. Mary communities have lived with. Along the drive, she pointed out the water line 8-10 feet up the barrier walls; the many empty lots; the uninhabitable and abandoned homes. Some homes were in the slow process of being rebuilt. We learned that electricity, communications and sanitation were down for long periods of time forcing the sisters, their neighbors and friends to evacuate to distant places.

We continued our orientation with a special welcome by sisters, associates, friends and family at the Central House of the Eucharistic Missionaries. After sharing Eucharist we mingled at a communal dinner and broke the bread of the Katrina experience.

We spent much of Friday in the orientation prepared by Sister Dot and Adrian Sister Mary Keefe who had been hired by the EMDs to direct the outreach to the neglected people of St. Bernard Parish. They conveyed the magnitude of Katrina’s destruction using pictures, maps, videos and stories of death by drowning and suicide, and the reality that there were still people unaccounted for. Despite the suffering, it was uplifting to hear how the people continue to band together to rebuild and to care for the more vulnerable.

In our daily trips we traveled in two cars to St. Bernard civil Parish, a place initially overlooked by the national media coverage of Katrina, even though the devastation there was so extreme. Our 35-40 minute drive was a shocking eye opener. We witnessed numerous homeless people under the

highway in sleeping bags and tents (See photo at right), dilapidated houses boarded up or completely collapsed, holes in rooftops which mercifully allowed some of the healthier survivors to escape, businesses still not open.

We saw the rebuilding efforts of film actor Brad Pitt along the Ninth Ward. (Time magazine recently recognized him as one of the world's 100 most influential people because of his work).



**Musicians' Village  
Rebuilt homes in New Orleans  
Spring 2008**



**One of thousands of homes  
still abandoned in New Orleans  
Spring 2008**

St. Bernard Church which finally reopened in November, 2007 after much help from people as far away as New Jersey, was our base for outreach . Mary sent us out to specific streets in teams of two to tell each person that we were there from the Catholic Church to see how they were doing. She encouraged us to minister primarily by listening, but she fortified us with a detailed brochure of many services that are available, including access to her at her office at St. Bernard Church. We came armed with gift cards to Home Depot and other stores that could provide some needed help.

### **MEETING LOCAL RESIDENTS**

➤ Survivors Faith and Ron were the first to display in their faces and voices how devastating this hurricane was. They had lost everything they possessed and were not able to move back home as they had previously done after so many other hurricanes. Faith, a nurse practitioner, cried as she told what it was like to evacuate acute care patients from a nursing home to safety in a caravan that had to contend with a nightmare of chaotic and uncertain traffic.

➤ Jody shared that her husband and three children still live in a FEMA trailer. She tearfully pointed out the spot where her home once stood, but claimed others were worse off. She told us that she would soon have to give up the trailer with no idea where they would go. Her husband

continued to look for work in vain as employment opportunities are very scarce. Jobs were washed away and have not returned. We gave her a gift card to buy food.

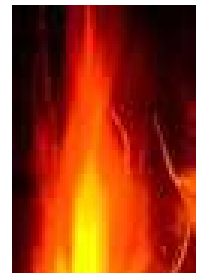
➤ Mark had to come outside his small trailer to tell us that there was no paid employment and that he had applied for work in the Panama Canal because of his skill in the boating industry. He pointed to the next trailer that housed his father with a certain sadness that he is forced to leave him.

➤ Judith opened her FEMA door and invited us in saying she wasn't Catholic but wanted our visit. She is tethered to oxygen. She lost her home and her son. She said she is coping because her daughter stops by each day on the way from her job which she is grateful to have. She said she was hardly making it on food stamps. We gave her a \$50.00 Winn-Dixie gift card. (She shows her happiness in the picture (above) she was willing to pose for with Loretta Sullivan)

➤ Albert, an 83-year-old man, was evacuated to a nursing home in Texas. After searching for him, his great nephew located him and brought him back to St. Bernard Parish. Albert tells of losing all his possessions, but the saddest loss for him is his friends who he regarded as priceless. He says he passes the lonely hours watching TV and praying the rosary.

➤ Helen and Anthony lost everything at their home in Delacroix Island and now live in St. Bernard Parish. They express gratitude for their new home but miss all the friends who have died or have moved away. They say they miss the sense of community they had in their parish which will never open again, but testify that God has carried them through Katrina and gives them hope that they won't have to go through such devastation again.

Pentecost Sunday was a day of hope amidst so many ruins. Mass at St. Bernard was presided over by a New Orleans retired priest who lost his home, but his faith and his ability to lift others was manifest in his homily. He introduced us to the people who then told of their belief that they would worship there again and rebuild community.



**Before taking leave of New Orleans, we asked Sisters Mary and Dot how we could continue to be supportive of their work. Their response: Besides witnessing the tragedy to others, we could suggest that gift cards would truly help people recover.**

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