

# New Orleans Members Exemplify the Rescue

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In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina left the New Orleans area of the United States under as much as 15 feet (4.6 m) of water; homes were destroyed and many lives left in shambles.

Five years later, the recovery of the New Orleans First Ward is evidence of how, through the members of the Church, the Savior provides both physical and spiritual rescue to those in need.

## A Time of Need

The physical damage Hurricane Katrina spread across the southeastern United States was worse than anticipated; its economic damages were unprecedented. The city of New Orleans, in particular, and its people were devastated.

Many lives were lost (more than 1,400). Many others watched their lives seem to disappear before their eyes as the storm washed away their homes and livelihoods. Thousands were left homeless.

Temporary shelters, including the Louisiana Superdome, housed approximately 26,000 people, including many who no longer had a home. LDS

meetinghouses provided refuge for 4,000 people, in some cases for several weeks. Crime rates soared; so did hopelessness.

Four months after Katrina, sacrament meetings were again organized within the city of New Orleans in the only meetinghouse still usable of the three in the New Orleans stake. With many members having been forced to move away and some having drifted away spiritually, an average of 15 to 20 people attended the meetings. Consequently, the New Orleans First Ward, the Chalmette Ward, and the Uptown Branch were reorganized as the New Orleans First Branch.

## Spiritual and Physical Rescue

As with the people of Limhi in the Book of Mormon, often temporal and spiritual rescue go hand in hand (see Mosiah 21:22–36). During this time of need in the Gulf Coast, the Lord's Church offered both immediate and long-term temporal and spiritual support to many who felt defeated and lost.

*Members came from hundreds of miles away to help clean up after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast of the United States in 2005.*



PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG DIMOND

Temporally, with thousands of refugees throughout the area in need of assistance immediately following the hurricane, the Church responded with shipments of food, water, tarps, and other emergency supplies. Bishops' storehouses throughout the region provided everyday commodities free of charge. Members from hundreds of miles away traveled to the area to help with clean-up efforts.

For months teams from LDS Family Services assisted anyone who needed trauma and grief counseling, and as time wore on, Church employment resource services specialists played a major role in assisting people who had lost their jobs.

With regard to the spiritual rescue, the Lord sent rescuers both from among members in the area as well as from the outside.

One of those who felt led to the area was Terry Seamons, who was prompted to come out of retirement to take a job in New Orleans only a few months after the hurricane. Within three months he was called as president of the New Orleans First Branch.

He said there were many who responded to the promptings of the Spirit to move back to New Orleans to help rebuild the Lord's Church and rescue His people. They, along with many members who had endured the heartbreaking disaster, resolved to reach out.

Members who had the means to get to Church meetings took time to pick up those who did not. Home teachers kept careful watch over their families. One home teacher spent time each day with a less-active brother, teaching him how to read so he could study the scriptures. Their love and examples influenced missionary efforts in the New Orleans area.

"People took care of each other and strengthened each other," then President Seamons said. "We have had amazing stories of people wanting to find out more about the Savior."

### **A People Restored**

Five years have passed since the hurricane hit New Orleans. The downtown area has recovered



PHOTOGRAPH BY GLORIA SEAMONS

*Five years after Hurricane Katrina, Bishop Terry Seamons (second from right), his counselors, and many other faithful members have helped rebuild the Church in New Orleans.*

greatly from the hurricane, and the city is growing quickly.

President Scott Conlin of the New Orleans Louisiana Stake said the stake has also grown since Katrina. He attributes some of this growth to members' rescue efforts within the stake. The influence of the members brought inactive families back to church. "We see the arm of fellowship reaching out all the time," President Conlin said. "People are reaching out to those who are less fortunate."

Evidence of this spiritual rescue came when the New Orleans First Branch grew to average more than 125 members attending each week and was reorganized at the end of 2009 into a ward again, with President Seamons as bishop.

However, according to Bishop Seamons, the real evidence of the rescue can be seen "in the lives of those who have accepted the invitation to follow the Lord."

President Conlin agrees. "We see evidence of the rescue in measures of Church growth, including convert baptisms, sacrament meeting attendance, and becoming worthy for and renewing temple recommends," he said.

Natural catastrophes become a catalyst in people's lives, President Conlin believes. "It either brings out the best in them, and they become more humble and teachable, or it brings out the negative in them."

Members of the New Orleans First Ward and across the Gulf Coast have exemplified the best, living in gratitude for the blessings they've received and seeking to bless others. ■