



Fr. Joseph McGrath, right, and Msgr. Harry D. Greig, left, talk about the damage to Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Creole. Every pew in the church was gone but almost all of the kneelers remained. Fr. McGrath's house and the church hall were also devastated.

Diocesan, parish damages in the millions of dollars

LAKE CHARLES — Damages to church facilities and schools in the Diocese of Lake Charles, as a result of Hurricane Rita, will probably be in the millions of dollars. Eight church buildings in lower Cameron Parish were damaged or destroyed by the storm and a number of others in Calcasieu Parish were also damaged, some severely.

The church parishes of Sacred Heart of Jesus in Creole, Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron, St. Eugene in Grand Chenier and St. Peter the Apostle in Hackberry were devastated. Three mission chapels, Immaculate Conception in Grand Chenier; St. Rose of Lima in Creole, and Holy Trinity in Holy Beach, were destroyed while a fourth, Assumption Chapel in Johnson Bayou, sustained heavy damage.

St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Big Lake suffered flood damage from the rising

water as well but its mission chapel in Sweetlake, St. Patrick, received minor damage. St. Patrick Chapel will serve as the headquarters for St. Mary of the Lake until the church is rendered safe to use again as well as the headquarters for the rebuilding efforts of the church parishes devastated in lower Cameron Parish. Trailers will serve as a residence and office for Rev. E. Joseph McGrath, who will minister to all parishioners in the three devastated parishes.

Other church parishes with moderate to severe damage in the Diocese include Our Lady Queen of Heaven, St. Joseph in Vinton, Our Lady of LaSalette in DeQuincy.

Damages to Our Lady Queen of Heaven, including Crossroads Bookstore, the Family Life Center and the office building are extensive. Crossroads lost its roof and

suffered severe water damage. Our Lady Queen of Heaven School was also damaged.

St. Louis Catholic High School and Sacred Heart of Jesus/Saint Katharine Drexel School were only able to open earlier this week after the hurricane and its aftermath. St. Margaret Catholic School was also a major casualty. The Church also suffered moderate damage.

Immaculate Conception in Jennings had roof damage while St. Theodore in Moss Bluff has had its Religious Education building condemned due to mold.

Churches outside the damage zone who have done wonderful work in assisting evacuees and providing pastoral and temporal support have been St. Joseph, DeRidder; Sacred Heart of Jesus, Oakdale; St. Joan of Arc in Oberlin and St. Philip Neri in Kinder.



DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES

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To the People of Southwest Louisiana:

The one month anniversary of Hurricane Rita is this weekend. As I returned to Lake Charles with Fr. Henry Mancuso and the Lake Charles fireman several hours after this tragedy, the realization that our lives would forever be changed struck me. As I rode through Lake Charles and the surrounding communities, downed trees and power lines were everywhere, homes were severely damaged, flood waters were evident in the aftermath, and landmarks were altered or gone. Cameron Parish properties were debris, slabs were where houses once stood, trailers were overturned or moved across roadways.

At the same time, I saw our community unify as the task of overcoming this disaster was faced. We are blessed with strong leaders in our community who dealt with one emergency situation after another as the tragedy of the hurricane continued to unfold. In the first five days of a disaster the crisis revolves around protecting life (rescue efforts) and property – our community leaders get an A+. We are in the relief stage of this tragedy, which involves creating a safe, secure temporary environment. During this 50 day period we are encouraged to avail ourselves of the services provided by others, mainly people from outside our community. After this period we face the recovery of our lives as individuals and as a community. This can take up to two years – a time where we grow in our strengths, where we work together to build a future for ourselves and our children, where we create routines or patterns in our lives once again. Hurricane Rita has brought suffering and grief, anxiety and uncertainty – it takes time to overcome the feelings consuming our lives. We turn to our faith which gives us hope, a newness of life, and a future to embrace. A quote from St. John of the Cross comes to mind: "It is not important what happens to us in this life, what is important is what we do with what happens to us – that's what God cares about." We cannot change the past; we can face the present and make a choice – will we be victims of our circumstances or will we build on this tragedy and be people of faith and hope. While the shock of the devastation of Hurricane Rita has affected our lives forever, we believe that the future is ours to create. The Lord needs witnesses who believe that God is with them, guiding and directing their lives; men and women of faith who stand out as messengers of hope. The Lord Jesus never promised us that life would be easy but He did promise that He would be with us in the midst of our lives. May the truth of His message set us free as we ponder in our hearts how God is with each of us and therefore in the midst of life within our community. The rebuilding process will be long and arduous but with the grace of God and the hope that is ours in our loving Savior we will recover from this crisis.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

Rev. Msgr. Harry D. Greig
Diocesan Administrator



The wind, rain and storm surge removed most of the pews and other furnishings from Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron.



All that's left of the rectory and the Msgr. Curtis Vidrine Education Center at Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron is debris and a few recovered religious statues.



Father Joseph McGrath walks down the sidewalk next to what is left of St. Rose of Lima Chapel in Creole.



A major portion of the roof of St. Peter the Apostle Church in Hackberry Parish was ripped off allowing rain to flood the church. The Church hall and the rectory also received major damage.