

CATHOLIC CALENDAR.

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The Diocese of Lake Charles received \$40,000.00 from the National Catholic Education Association's "Child to Child" Hurricane Assistance Campaign which collected \$1.1 million from children across the nation in Catholic schools and parish religious education programs for dioceses affected by the hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Accepting the check on behalf of the Diocese were Deacon Michael Mathews, superintendent of Catholic schools, second from right, Denise Donahoe, right, Director of Religious Education and Kyra Randall, left, Director of Development. Presenting the check were Dan F. Curtin, second from left, Executive Director of Chief Administrators for Catholic Education, and Dr. Karen Ristau, center, president of the National Catholic Education Association. A share of the grant, \$10,000, will go to the five churches in Cameron Parish (\$2,000 each) while the remaining \$30,000 will be divided among the eight Catholic schools in the Diocese: Sacred Heart of Jesus/St. Katharine Drexel, \$12,000; St. Margaret, \$4,500; Our Lady's School, \$4,500; Our Lady Immaculate, \$3,000; and Immaculate Conception, Our Lady Queen of Heaven, St. Louis, and St. Theodore Holy Family, \$1,500 each.

"Christmas Light Wonder: A Parable of Evangelization"

By Rev. Whitney Miller,
Ph.D., LPC

Somehow this year, the outdoor lighting displays of Christmas cheer have caught my attention more so than in previous times. I have often been caught off guard in the past few weeks as my face responds with a pleasant smile seeing a Christmas tree lit up in someone's front window, or white lights like iced snow cascading from a rooftop, or the Holy Family illuminated with flood lights surrounded by a nativity scene in the background.

Maybe it is because for an extended amount of time, our lives have had so much darkness like never before either. When I returned to the rectory at St. John Bosco in the early morning hours after Hurricane Rita, I was amazed at the depth of the darkness I found there. Streets usually flooded with light from the utility poles, now were mere alleyway passages of branches, debris and shadows. As evening unfolded, I did not need civil authorities to convince me to

maintain the imposed curfew. With no power anywhere in sight, I was quite content to remain in the rectory with my candles on familiar turf.

I have a sense that is why the Christmas lights this year are particularly calling out to me, and to all of us. We have not experienced a season of darkness like we have with this Fall's hurricanes. We also have never needed, as well, lights of hope to inspire and illuminate our doubts and fears as we do now.

During Thanksgiving week, my godchild and her little brother, along with their Mom & Dad, came to spend a few days with me. One evening, so as to give the parents some quiet and alone time, I offered to take the two little ones out for a ride to see the Christmas lights. I'm not sure which was brighter, the lights on the houses or the lights in these children's eyes and faces as they "ohhh-ed" and "ahhh-ed" their way through our neighborhoods.

Upon our return to the rectory, the brother and sister pair immediately ran to their Mom & Dad with great excitement in their voices and a flood of non-stop descriptive adjectives to express what they had just seen and experienced. Later that night, in a few moments of quiet reflection alone in my room, it struck me what a powerful metaphor this parabolic moment was for our challenge and task of evangelization. Our world would be a much brighter and illuminated place if we had this joyful spirit of child like wonder and witness.

Long ago, on some hills outside Bethlehem, angels of light announced the birth of the Christ to shepherds with hearts of children. They told someone else, and that someone to another, and so forth and so on, until now, I share the reminder message with you all once again... "Emmanuel, Christ, our light and our hope, is born! Alleluia!" Pass it on!



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Dear Friends,

The birth of each child is a miracle of life. Each year we hear the ancient Christmas story of God's astonishing entrance into our broken world through the birth of His Son. We are moved by the capacity of God to love us so completely. God made the choice to give Himself away, by emptying Himself, by becoming one of us. God chose to visit His people - not in the words of the prophets but in human flesh - "And the Word was made flesh."

The Christmas story we hear each year is the same, but we are different. The memories of this past year are many. Some have experienced the loss of loved ones, others the birth of a child, or perhaps major decisions have changed us or altered our lives. For those of us in Southwest Louisiana our world is different after September 23, 2005. Our hopes have been tested through the losses we have had. Our love has been called on in new ways. We have been "recipients" of those who reached out to us in our need and we have been "givers" by extending help to those who lost everything. Material possessions have been destroyed; some have become a wandering people moving from one location to another. The future is undecided, "plans" are on hold, life is lived in the moment. The Christmas story speaks to us again of new birth and new hopes that will unfold with the possibilities of our own rebirth. It tells us that things can be different; it gives substance to our hope that new life is possible because of the birth of the Son of God. Jesus became flesh to show us the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

What prevents us from seeing hope in the Christmas message? One word, Fear! So often we allow the fear of the unknown to consume us. An alternative is to accept the message of Christmas hope - God says to us: "Do not be afraid, here is a sign for you...a light shining in the darkness." And what is the great solution to our fear? Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. He brings peace because He brings God's love and when we know such love we have peace however great the unrest around us. And that is why this Christmas message never grows old - because each year we come to embrace more fully the love of God by turning from fear and anxiety to the peace that surpasses understanding. The ideal Christian life should not be a life without cares and concerns but it can be a life without fear. God's peace is offered to each of us today if only we attend to the message of Christmas. The Prince of Peace will overcome all that disfigures our world once we accept Him into our arms.

The gift of God - the birth of Jesus - this is Christmas - this is love. May the spirit of Christmas brighten your lives with renewed gifts of peace, hope, and love as you share these gifts with your family and friends.

In Christ's Peace and Love,

Harry D. Greig

Rev. Msgr. Harry D. Greig
Diocesan Administrator



Deacon Ed Lavine, right, Secretary for Pastoral Services, shakes hands with Rev. Les Fogleman of Johnson Bayou Baptist Church after delivering an 18-wheeler load of supplies, including food, water, paper goods, and hygiene items. The church is serving as the initial staging area for relief efforts in western Cameron Parish.

Relief Effort of Catholic Social Services announced by Diocese

SWEETLAKE - The Diocese of Lake Charles continued its effort to provide relief for people in the areas devastated by Hurricane Rita announcing the beginning of the Relief Effort of Catholic Social Services (RECSS). Father Henry Mancuso, chairman of the Relief and Recovery Team, and members of the Diocesan Relief and Recovery Team met with parishioners of the churches in Cameron Parish, located east of the Ship Channel, which had been devastated by the hurricane. The meeting took place Wednesday, Dec. 14, at St. Patrick Chapel.

Father Mancuso told the more than 50 people in attendance, "My purpose for coming here tonight is to speak primarily about the human needs of the people so that we can be able to respond to those human needs and to take care of those human needs."

"This is new to all of us," Father Mancuso said. "We are learning to do the best we can to take care of our own lives and reach out to people. We have received a significant grant from Catholic Charities USA; a significant amount of money has already come into our diocese and is available. More monies will be available if we can assure them

that we truly have needs. We are here tonight to start that assessment program.

"Beginning the 17th of January we want to be able to provide you with direct assistance - cash money - as quickly as possible," Fr. Mancuso continued. "The money that we want to make available will be for three basic areas - utility assistance, housing needs and gasoline."

Announcements of the beginning of the program would be made in area newspapers, radio and television as well as in church parish bulletins.

"It would work in this way," he said. "There would be a case manager here in Sweetlake, a case manager in Hackberry and a case manager working in Lake Charles. Somebody would come in and fill out a simple application, saying this is who I am, this is where I lived before the storm, this is where I'm living now and these are some of my biggest needs. The case worker would then fax that form into Lake Charles where it would quickly be reviewed, assessed and a determination would be made as to what need could be given to an individual. Our hope is that the immediate grants that we could give to the people at this time would be between \$300 and \$700, averaging about \$500. Within 48 to 96

hours of your turning in the request you would have either a check made out to you - cash money, you would have a Wal-Mart card or you would have a gas card.

"It's a good faith operation. We want to provide assistance to people in need as simply as possible while being able to account for the assistance given. The monies we have asked for, they have not all yet come in, we have asked for over \$800,000 in utility assistance, almost \$900,000 in assistance to people in housing - to pay rent or to help with some of those expenses."

The parishes of St. Eugene in Grand Chenier, Sacred Heart of Jesus in Creole and Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron felt the full brunt of the storm. The churches along with rectories, halls and religious education buildings as well as two mission chapels were severely damaged by the storm. St. Mary of the Lake in Big Lake is still reeling from some 18 inches of water and mud in the church, religious education building and hall.

This was the second meeting at which input was solicited from people most directly affected about their immediate, short term and long term needs. The earlier meeting, held at St. Peter the Apostle Church in Hackberry,

gathered information from parishioners of the western part of Cameron.

The Diocesan Relief and Recovery Team, appointed by Msgr. Harry D. Greig, Diocesan Administrator, are Msgr. Greig, Rev. Henry Mancuso (chairman), Deacon George Stearns, Deacon Ed Lavine, Sandy Gay, Kyra Randall and Morris LeBleu.

"The Church has been present since the storm first hit," Father Mancuso said. "Fr. (Joe) McGrath (pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Creole) has been around, other priests were around. Msgr. Greig and I rode out the storm with firefighters from Westlake and from Lake Charles. When the storm passed, we came back in that Saturday morning. We began to help people, clearing streets, and doing what we could. Then Msgr. Greig began to make his travels into Cameron Parish, first with Zeb Johnson then with General Honore to see what was here. Then he got on the phone asking people for the help we could get."

St. Patrick Chapel will serve as the staging area for the relief effort aiding the coastal parishes. An office trailer has been installed at Sweetlake, with Fr. McGrath

located there where he will help serve the spiritual needs of the people of the coastal parishes as well as aid in other relief efforts for people of all faith traditions.

Fr. Mancuso noted a story told to him by relief workers about the three phases of a disaster such as Hurricane Rita - the crisis phase (lasting five days), the relief phase (lasting 50 days) and the recovery phase (lasting 500 days).

"When they first told me that, I said 'Come on, over a year. They don't know the people of Southwest Louisiana. That might be some other folks, but we are going to do it faster than that.' But, as time begins to unfold and I know that I have still not had somebody come to my house to give an estimate on the roof, I know that it is going to take more than a year. It is going to take more than a year. I don't like hearing that, I don't like saying that, and yet I know that, at the same time, it is a reality."

"When we met with some of the folks in Hackberry last week to listen to the faith and testimony of so many people is remarkable. There are many people who are saying, 'You know Father, re-

ally we appreciate this response and this help, but you know I feel so blessed and there's someone else who could use this more than me, so give it to them.' You know there is part of me that's saying, 'well that's really noble but this is here, this is here for you. We have helped other people a great deal through the years and we may have to help other people in the years to come. Let us not feel brave or be afraid to say 'I need a little bit of help right now'" I just need a little bit of hope."

The Catholic Service Center, now located at 416 Iris Street, under the direction of Deacon Lavine has continued to receive massive amounts of relief supplies from a growing number of sources across the nation and the world. He has brought load after load to affected areas to aid those who are suffering. "We have been very fortunate to have received a large amount of materials - from food and water, to paper goods to pillow cases and clothes," Fr. Mancuso said. "A lot of what has been distributed in a lot of other places has come from the Catholic Church. We've got the ground since the very beginning."

(This page paid for by the Diocese of Lake Charles.)