



Albert Theriot looks at some of the personal items that were salvaged from the home he and wife Margaret shared east of Creole in lower Cameron Parish. Members of parish and school youth groups along with confirmation candidates visited the Theriot homesite to aid in cleaning up debris from Hurricane Rita.

Young people of Diocese help their Cameron neighbors

CREOLE - They came from churches stretching across the Diocese of Lake Charles, from St. Joan of Arc in Oberlin, St. Philip Neri in Kinder, Our Lady Queen of Heaven in Lake Charles, Our Lady of Prompt Succor in Sulphur, and Christ the King in Lake Charles and a number from St. Louis Catholic High School. They came together on Sunday, Jan. 29, to provide aid to those in need in Cameron Parish. As a group, the 56 young people, who are members of parish and school youth groups and confirmation candidates, traveled to lower Cameron Parish to help cleanup four home sites.

It was one of those things that, as one student had put it upon being informed of the trek, "We can't not do this!"

One of the places the group went was to the home-site of Albert and Margaret Theriot in Creole. The couple and their children had lived in the home for nine years before the wrath of Rita took the home. Margaret Theriot served for eight years as the youth director of Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Cameron. Theriot's grandfather, Sopheron Theriot, had originally lived in the house.

"When we left we thought we would be back in a few days and would have to face damage from five feet of water in the house," Theriot said. "But, we experienced a Category 5 storm, although it came ashore as a Category 3." Upon their return, the main house as well as four other buildings, including a structure that had once been his grandfather's grocery store before it was moved to the back of the property and used for storage, were gone as well as nearly everything they contained. Theriot did find an ax that had been stored in the shed. The storm also left a number of homemade concrete blocks

upon which the house had sat.

The destructive force of the storm was also readily evident in the resting-place of a small pickup truck that had been garaged near the house that was found upside down in a drain ditch nearly 80 yards from the house.

For Theriot, who works offshore, it was an emotional return, the fourth he had made since the storm. The event was so emotional that his wife, Margaret, was unable to be present but provided the young people with a written thank you in a letter read to them when they returned to Lake Charles.

The storm surge from Hurricane Rita reached nearly 22 feet, leaving a number of items in the trees that lined the gravel driveway to the site, which sits about six miles north of the Gulf of Mexico but only three miles northwest of the Mermentau River bridge.

Theriot said he believed that when the storm surge hit it flipped the house over, dumping its contents in the water, and then floated the house away. The family did find a number of items upon their return some of which they found amazing.

"From our bedroom we found the ironing board and a digital clock," Theriot said. "We also found some money that we had in the house. It was just amazing that the power that could pick up a house and move it away but leave a piece of paper money or coins on the ground."

The Theriot family is now living in a mobile home on property owned by his family in Grand Lake. "We wanted to get things back to some kind of normal," Theriot said. When asked what his plans might be for moving back and rebuilding, he was uncertain. "Ask me in about five years," Theriot said. "You just never know."

Even with the scope of the

devastation to Theriot's property, some good has come out of the disaster. "I am not angry with God. The storm has brought people from all across the country down here to help us."

He pointed out that when you drive out of Cameron Parish you might find yourself behind cars from Wisconsin, Nebraska, or Colorado. "Lots of people have come down to actually see for themselves what has happened," Theriot said. "They bring their physical presence to do whatever they can do to help and then go back to their homes with message as to what is needed."

The other positive is that Theriot feels his family has become closer together because of the storm and its aftermath.

Two of the students who made the trek to Creole to help with the cleanup were Jana Koch, an exchange student from Germany attending St. Louis Catholic High School and Mary Davidson, also a St. Louis student.

"I was kind of sad and shocked (when I saw the damage)," Jana said. "I don't know what I would think if I had lost my house and everything."

Mary, upon first seeing the destruction, said, "It was shocking and it was difficult to process what I was seeing. I, of course, had seen damage in Lake Charles but it was not nearly as bad as in Cameron Parish."

"If it had been me I think I would stay away," Jana continued. "I would want to keep the memories of what had been."

When asked about the fact that some people might blame God for the disaster, Jana indicated it is a matter of faith and "it is a challenge."

Frequently Asked Questions!

As Southwest Louisiana begins to rebuild since the Sept. 24 passage of Hurricane Rita, a number of questions regarding topics of general interest to the people of the Diocese of Lake Charles, are being asked. The answers to three questions is found below.

1. Since we do not have a Bishop, will the Sacrament of Confirmation be celebrated this year?

Yes, as Diocesan Administrator, Msgr. Harry D. Greig will be the celebrant of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Your Pastors have requested dates and have been informed as to when the sacrament will be celebrated in your parish. Our tradition in the diocese has been to celebrate the sacrament during the Easter season (this year, between April 17 and Pentecost Sunday, June 4).

2. What is the status for a Bishop to be named to our Diocese?

Msgr. Greig responded by saying that we have received no word as to when a Bishop will be appointed to the Diocese of Lake Charles. We do know that Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, has recently retired, at the age of 75. Archbishop Pietro Sambi will be the new Papal Nuncio to the United States. While the appointment of a Bishop comes directly from the Holy Father, the selection process is facilitated through the offices of the U.S. Papal Nuncio.

3. Are all the church parishes in the Diocese functioning following the devastation of Hurricane Rita?

According to Msgr. Greig, the majority of our church parishes are fully functioning. The exception would be in the civil parish of Cameron. St. Mary of the Lake (Big Lake) is in the restoration stage following surge floodwater damage. Its mission of St. Patrick's Chapel in Sweetlake is where worship services are held for St. Mary of the

Lake (Big Lake), St. Eugene (Grand Chenier), Sacred Heart of Jesus (Creole) and Our Lady Star of the Sea (Cameron). St. Peter the Apostle (Hackberry) and its mission of Our Lady of the Assumption (Johnson Bayou) are presently being restored after damages were sustained in both locations.

The planning process by the Diocese regarding the most seriously damaged churches in lower Cameron parish, Our Lady Star of the Sea (Cameron), Sacred Heart of Jesus (Creole) and St. Eugene (Grand Chenier), is ongoing.

Insurance claims are in process. We have been working with Cameron Parish officials to determine the extent of the damage in order to plan for repairs or required rebuilding. The Army Corps of Engineers has completed a Damage Structure Analysis of the buildings and determined that the buildings are structurally sound. The Diocese is awaiting a Cameron Parish Police Jury Damaged Structure Analysis to be completed in order to determine if the three church structures can be repaired or will be required to be rebuilt.

The Diocese has hired an independent contractor specializing in damaged structure analysis to provide additional analysis of the extent of damages to determine the remaining value in the structures and the cost of repairs.

Elevation studies are also being undertaken to determine the present elevations of the churches in order to know what the appropriate elevations would be if rebuilding is required. At this point information is being gathered in order to make the best decisions for the return of the churches.



A birds eye view of the newly completed office building for the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Lake Charles from the top of City Hall shows the architecture of the building emulates the Lombardy-Romanesque style of the Cathedral. Dedication ceremonies are set for Feb. 19, following the 11:15 a.m. Mass. Open houses will be held on the weekend of Feb. 25-26 following each day's masses.

New Parish Center for Cathedral to be dedicated

The new Parish Center of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception will be dedicated Sunday, February 19, following the 11:15 a.m. Mass. Plans include a formal dedication ceremony, a reception for parishioners and visitors, and a self-tour of the building. An Open House will also be held the following weekend, February 25-26, after the Saturday 4 p.m. Mass and the Sunday, 7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. Masses.

The new center will serve the many administrative, educational, and social needs of the parish. "We are very proud and excited about our new building," Father Aubrey Guilbeau, rector of the Cathedral, said, "We feel it will serve the parish and the Diocese for generations to come. I would like to thank everyone who worked so hard and contributed to this endeavor."

"When the original building was purchased in 1980, the parish had a smaller staff and probably fewer parish activities. Over the years as with most parishes, staff and ministry increased, which required greater func-

tional space. "The new building affords us ample room for staff to exercise their roles in a more conducive atmosphere," Fr. Guilbeau continued. "The old building had no windows for any of the offices and now each office has a view of the outdoors which makes for a better work environment."

"An important factor in the building is the larger gathering space," Fr. Guilbeau said. "The reception room in the previous building was smaller thus limiting the types of functions as well as the numbers of people who could gather for receptions, presentations, meetings and other parish and Diocesan gatherings."

"This new reception area can accommodate a variety of activities with larger numbers of people," Fr. Guilbeau said. Ave Maria Hall, the spacious meeting and social hall, provides twice the gathering room of the former building, and the choir now has a large rehearsal room and space for its extensive music library.

The first floor is equipped with a kitchen, library, front office, crafts room, and

workroom, along with ample storage space for the many organizations that will use the building. Upstairs are the administrative offices, including a conference room and five offices for the staff. The building is fully handicap-accessible, with a ramp at ground level and an elevator to the second floor.

Planning for the Center began under the leadership of Msgr. Harry D. Greig, now Diocesan Administrator and pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Church in Big Lake, as Cathedral rector. The demolition of the old office building and construction of the Center began twenty months ago, in June 2004. The architect, H. Curtis Vincent of Vincent and Shows Architects, matched the design of the new building to the Lombardy-Romanesque architecture of the Cathedral, creating a functional structure that combines the convenience of modernity with the beauty of the past. The contractor for the work was Besette Development Corporation.

All are invited to attend the dedication ceremony on Feb. 19 or one of the open houses on the weekend of Feb. 25-26.