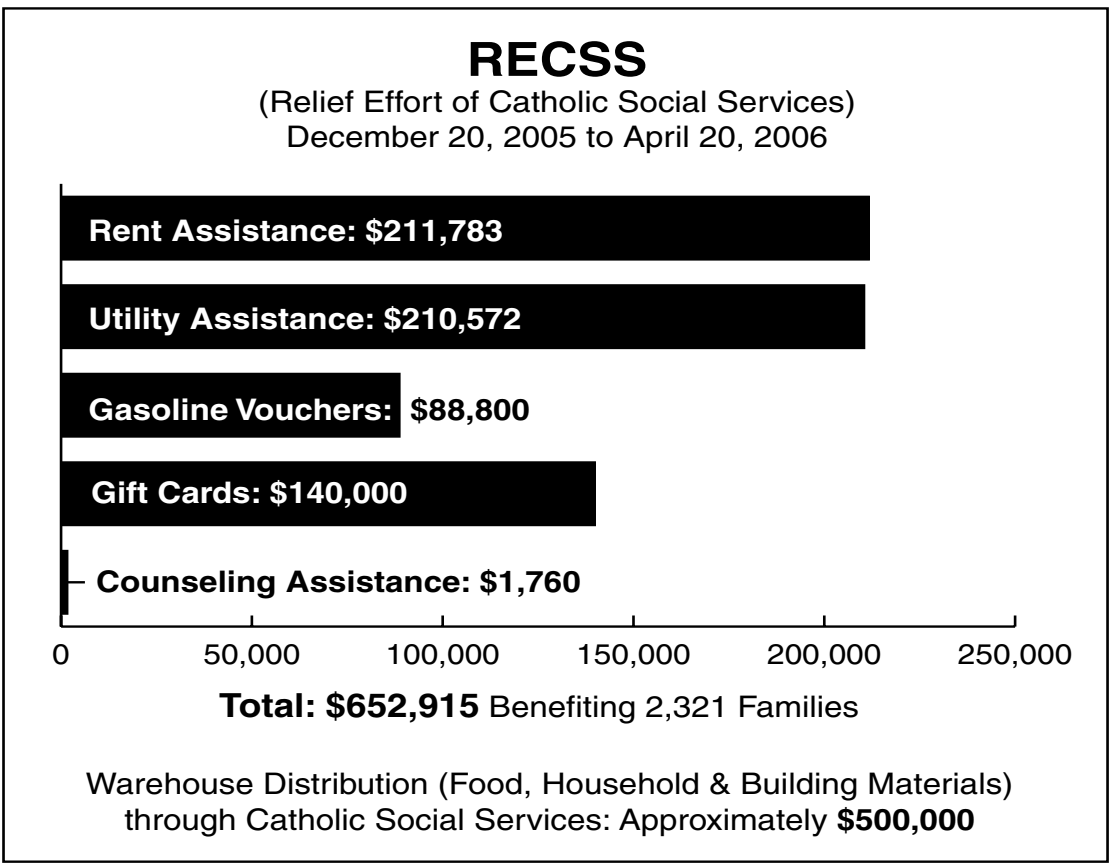


In the photograph above, Monsignor Harry D. Greig, left, Administrator of the Diocese of Lake Charles, and Bernell Ezell, program director of the Relief Effort of Catholic Social Services (RECSS) of the Diocese of Lake Charles look over a report detailing the amount of aid provided by the program to those in need following Hurricane Rita. The program continues to give financial assistance to individuals and families who were affected by the storm. Below is a bar graph that indicates the amounts and areas of assistance provided by RECSS to those in need through April 20, 2006



Louisiana Catholic bishops identify five high priority bills in general session

BATON ROUGE – Louisiana's Catholic bishops have identified five bills concerning abortion, cloning, education, housing and the state's Tuition Opportunity Program for Students as "high-priority" legislation during the general session that runs through June 19, said Daniel J. Loar, executive director of the Louisiana Catholic Conference (LCC).

The bishops of the seven Louisiana dioceses, along with two auxiliary bishops, comprise the LCC, which is the public policy arm of the Catholic Church in Louisiana. New Orleans Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes is the chairman of the LCC board.

The bishops, who met April 6 in Baton Rouge, also are supporting bills concerning immigration rights, indigent defender funding, rules for charitable pharmacies and raising the state's minimum wage by \$1 an hour.

Loar identified the following high-priority issues:

- **Abortion:** The bishops support Senate Bill 33 by Sen. Ben Nevers, D-Bogalusa, that would ban all abortions except in cases of saving the life of the mother. The bill was slated for its first hearing April 19.

"Some people may want to put in a 'rape or incest' clause," Loar said. "We revere all life, and we urge any woman who may be violated in that way to please put the baby up for adoption, because there are hundreds of couples who want to adopt."

Loar also said of the 40,000 abortions reported in Louisiana over the last three years, only one was recorded as the result of rape or incest.

"This does not seem to be a real issue," Loar said. "Our opponents are going to make us look like we're uncaring. But we do care. We don't want there to be two victims – the mother and the baby."

- **Cloning:** The bishops support a bill by Rep. Gary Beard, R-Baton Rouge, that would ban all embryonic stem cell research and oppose a bill by Sen. Donald

Hines, D-Bunkie, that would ban reproductive cloning but allow research on cloned embryos. Both bills have been fought to a standstill over the last two years.

The bishops vigorously support SB 452 by Sen. Sharon Broome, D-Baton Rouge, that would make it illegal for women to sell their eggs, which would be used for "clone and kill" research.

"There are ads in college newspapers in which college women are offered \$5,000 for their eggs," Loar said. "In order to stimulate the ovaries to produce the eggs, they have to use drugs that can cause fertility problems 10 years later. The intent of this bill is to cut off the supply of eggs for research."

- **Education:** The administration is attempting to cut drastically its funding to nonpublic schools for collecting and reporting detailed school statistics such as attendance, health records and teacher certification.

"The state is supposed to pay us for doing that, and right now we're getting only 50 cents on the dollar, and now they want to cut us more (to 25 percent funding)," Loar said. "The public schools get paid the full amount. This is unjust."

Loar said if Catholic schools have to raise tuition to cover these costs, it will drive more students into the public school system, which then will have to pick up the full cost of educating the student (about \$7,000 a year in high school).

- **Housing:** The bishops are eager to support an array of bills that the administration is putting forward to replenish housing stock in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "We want to do what we can as church to help replenish housing stock along the Gulf Coast," Loar said. Some public-private cooperative ventures will be examined.

- **TOPS:** The bishops oppose a bill by Rep. Wayne Waddell, R-Shreveport, that would require a high school student to take the Graduate Exit Exam in order to qual-

fy for the TOPS college scholarship.

"We don't want to be forced to take state tests because we would have to change our curriculum, and who is going to pay for that?" Loar said.

Other issues of interest to the bishops are the following:

- **Immigration:** The bishops support a bill by Rep. Juan LaFonta, D-New Orleans, that would require a judge to advise an immigrant before he pleads guilty to a felony that doing so could lead to his deportation.

- **Indigent defender funding:** Loar said Louisiana is at the bottom of U.S. states in funding for its indigent defender program. "The funding relies on parking tickets and an unstable base of taxes," he said. "We're supporting a bill that would regularize and increase the funding for poor people who can't afford a lawyer."

- **Charitable pharmacies:** The Society of St. Vincent de Paul operates free pharmacies in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Houma-Thibodaux and Shreveport. A bill that would allow surplus medications to be distributed to these pharmacies is being amended so that the pharmacies would not be required to accept "objectionable items" such as birth control pills.

- **Minimum wage increase:** The bishops support a \$1 increase in the hourly minimum wage to \$6.15. "The minimum wage hasn't been raised in nine years," Loar said. "It's only fair."

Loar said individuals can keep track of bills that are of special interest by accessing the LCC Web site, www.louisiana.nasccd.org. The status of important bills will be updated regularly. There are also e-mail links to state senators and representatives and the governor. The site also includes the bishops' statement on "Approaching Death: The Moral Choices," with a model healthcare advanced directive for Catholics.

CHM APPEAL THIS WEEKEND

Committee on the Home Missions assists Diocese of Lake Charles

Whether it is Brownsville, Texas; or Biloxi, Mississippi, or Cheyenne, Wyoming; or Juneau, Alaska, or right here in the Diocese of Lake Charles, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Home Missions provides financial aid to a variety of programs and ministries. The Diocese of Lake Charles is one of more than 70 mission dioceses in the United States and its Caribbean and Pacific dependencies.

This year's Home Mission Appeal is this weekend, April 29-30 here in the Diocese of Lake Charles. Consider how much we are helped by the gifts of others when you are asked to make your own contribution on Saturday and Sunday.

In Southwest Louisiana, the annual grant from the Committee, this year totaling \$175,000, assists in five areas. Additionally, the Committee gave more than \$3 million to Gulf Coast Dioceses in the wakes of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Here in Lake Charles we received \$300,000 in response to our devastating situation.

The most extensive financial aid in our diocese is the support of parishes and mission chapels with financial needs greater than their parishioners' ability to fund. In all 10 parishes and mission chapels will receive the lion's share of the grant, more than \$126,000.

These churches are able to take care of some ordinary expenses with their portion of the grant thus enabling them to use more of the annual contributions of their parishioners. St. Joseph Parish in Welsh and its mission chapel in Iowa, St. Peter Claver and St. Charles Borromeo in Fenton are three of those churches who receive CHM funding.

Other programs and ministries aided by the Committee's annual grant are Evangelization, Lay Ministry Formation, Youth Ministry and Vocation Retreats.

The Office of Evangelization uses the \$23,000 it re-

ceives from CHM for programs like Re-Membering Church and the Evangelistic Outreach to Ministers and Preachers of Other Faiths. The latter provides subscriptions to *The Southwest Catholic* to leaders of other faiths giving them authentic information about the Catholic faith.

Lay Ministry formation is helped in its programs of Administration, Lay Ministry Programs, a stipend for Holy Cross College instructors, lay ministry development training, and the video taping of Catechist training programs.

Youth Ministry Education/Enrichment and Lay Ministry Development are two areas of youth ministry assisted with the grant from CHM. Annual vocation retreats, which invite single men considering a call to diocesan priesthood, have been held at Saint Charles Center and at Camp Maryhill in the Diocese of Alexandria. The programs have been through the joint auspices of the Diocese of Lake Charles,

Alexandria, and Baton Rouge.

Elsewhere in the United States grants from CHM provide "flying Fathers," like Fr. Richard Case, S.J. the opportunity to bring the Eucharist to out of the way villages like Galena, Alaska on the banks of the Yukon River.

Home mission grants are distributed nationwide from the Deep South to the Moun-

tain West, from the Southwest to Alaska, from Appalachia to U.S. territories in the Pacific. This weekend's Appeal collection here in Southwest Louisiana will provide us an opportunity to say thank you to the Committee as well as provide our own help to other dioceses in difficult financial situations. Please consider how much of a difference your gift will make throughout our

Catholic churches.

Even with the devastation wrought by the storms, we have so much for which to be thankful. Make your gift this weekend a thank you to God for the many blessings we have been given here in the Diocese of Lake Charles. Reach out to help others in need in the missions of the United States.

Mausoleums at two Cameron churches to be repaired soon

LAKE CHARLES – Work is set to begin soon on the repair of the mausoleums at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Creole and Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Cameron.

The wind and water from Hurricane Rita wrought havoc in both cemeteries. The two structures held a total of 220 crypts, 132 at Sacred

Heart and 88 at Our Lady Star of the Sea.

Charles Miller Construction Co. Inc. and Solari Marble and Granite Works will be jointly doing the work.

The job will include removing broken shutter hardware and installing new hardware to each crypt, installing new granite shutters and cleaning and re-in-

stalling granite pieces.

The salt water brought ashore by the storm damaged many of the door hangers, according to Jimmy Solari, of Solari Marble and Granite Works. "We may be able to reuse some of the doors but many have been broken and will have to be replaced," Solari said.



Damage was severe due to Hurricane Rita at the mausoleums of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Creole and Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Cameron. Broken pieces of granite as well as whole doors that may be reusable are shown here at Sacred Heart. Work will begin soon to repair the facilities.

Vatican seminar explores lessons of Chernobyl

ROME – The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has organized a seminar on the Chernobyl nuclear accident, marking the 20th anniversary of the disaster.

The April 21 seminar, organized in cooperation with the Ukrainian ambassador to the Holy See, was designed to examine the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, and the implica-

tions for the "complex and difficult" questions surrounding the peaceful use of atomic energy, said Cardinal Renato Martino, the chief Vatican organizer.

The cardinal told the meeting that deaths caused by the Chernobyl accidents, and the fears that were raised, should prompt national leaders to examine issues of security and the common good in connection with

atomic energy, and to ensure that "equity and intergenerational solidarity" are served by public policies.

On April 26, 1986, a series of human errors and technical malfunctions caused an explosion at the Chernobyl plant in Ukraine, releasing radioactive materials over an area of hundreds of square miles. Experts believe that the radiation was a factor in approximately 16,000 deaths.