

UUA Trustees' Response to New Orleans Area Congregations

Greetings to our three Greater New Orleans congregations from your UUA Trustees.

Over a year has passed since we had the transformative experience of working directly with you in Katrina relief projects, listening to your stories and your concerns, and immensely enjoying your superb hospitality! We have not forgotten our cherished experiences or our parting words.

During this past year we have sought to learn the many aspects of the situation that prevailed immediately after Katrina and sort out the statements and actions of local citizens, volunteers, UUA professional staff and other congregations that all lent so much assistance. Through this process we have again reaffirmed the loyalty, integrity and dedication of all involved in the heroic struggle to restore your community and the institutions necessary for its survival. We are still amazed at the tireless efforts of strangers coming together to engage fully and cooperatively in a monumental task that is still not completed.

Over seven and a half years have passed since Katrina made landfall on 29 August, 2005. The passage of time can cloud memories, and in some cases "urban myths" can replace documented eye-witness accounts of the past. Our goal has been to sort out statements and events with an eye to the actual impact of UUA actions on your congregations and your members. In a spirit of appreciative inquiry that leads to further healing, we did not seek to find fault or assign blame. We do hope that our inquiry will result in UUA policies that will lead to greater transparency, accountability and fairness in any future disaster response.

We acknowledge that two individuals acting alone, UUA President, Rev. Bill Sinkford, and UUSC President, Charles Clements, made the decision to allocate one third of the relief funds to the three congregations and two thirds to general community relief. This division of the \$3.36 million in Katrina relief funds raised by the joint UUA-UUSC appeal is perhaps a main source of consternation. At one point congregations were told by UUA that "they would be fully restored" and that did not happen, even with more than a million from the joint appeal and about an additional million in funds from sister congregations and other generous institutions and individuals. We anticipate establishing a policy to clearly deal with issues of proportioning funds and accounting to donors in any future relief campaign where UUA and UUSC jointly seek funds.

We also acknowledge that in some cases well intentioned UUA representatives acted in dictatorial ways and sought to impose preconceived "solutions" on the three congregations and may have even threatened to withdraw support if their recommendations were not accepted. This was a sad chapter; but, we can report that when the UUA went to Phoenix last June, the opposite approach was taken and UUA acted as a willing partner to help local institution and agencies effectively achieve the goals they had set. In the future we will strive to maintain a partnership with local entities

and avoid a paternalistic approach. We regret any unnecessary strife and hardship that past actions may have caused.

To your great credit, you persevered and survived in spite of great difficulties! We note that even with the drastic reduction in population throughout the metro area, your three congregations now have a combined membership of about 205 as compared to 258 prior to Katrina. We know that Katrina caused you to lose many key people, and we salute you for your determination and dedication in rebuilding your congregations and becoming ever more viable!

There is nothing that any of us can do at this point to undo the past. We can only make certain that when the next catastrophe occurs we will have policies in place to assure that both donors and recipients know where the funds will be used. For example, a policy that all funds raised by UUSC were to be used for community relief and those raised by UUA were to be used for congregational relief would provide complete transparency and accountability.

We regret any past misstatements or misunderstandings that may have added to your already considerable burdens and we pledge to be more watchful in the future. We wish you all continued success and a future filled with abundance!

In faith,