

March 3, 2008

An open letter of testimony to my Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

My name is Brother John Bowie, I am a member of Cookman UMC in Philadelphia, PA. I have just recently returned from a week of mission's service in New Orleans, in support of the UMCOR Katrina relief efforts. This trip turned out to be the most awesome and rewarding spiritual experience I have been associated with. From February 16 - 23, the United Methodist congregations of Cookman UMC, Philadelphia and St. Lukes, Bryn Mawr traveled from Pennsylvania to New Orleans to join others in Christian service.

During this trip, I felt the deep and intimate presence and power of the Holy Spirit like never before. John Wesley is quoted as saying "I came to America to convert the Indians, and discovered that I myself had not been converted". Likewise, I feel like I traveled to New Orleans to minister to and help the survivors of Katrina rebuild the broken pieces of their lives, and I myself was ministered to and helped in a profound spiritual manner!

First and foremost, I want to express how proud I am to be affiliated with The United Methodist Church. I saw first hand the tremendous organization, dedication and commitment of UMCOR. I believe every member of United Methodism should be equally proud and honored to know that United Methodist dollars are being spent wisely and in a spirit of Christian stewardship. United Methodist dollars are being invested in rebuilding existing housing with the goal of maintaining and rebuilding communities. I believe it is important to help the local residents return to their homes and neighborhoods and maintain a sense of community.

I also would like to acknowledge the warm, sincere and overwhelming spirit of Christian love and hospitality that was displayed by the pastor and congregation of Munholland UMC, Metairie, Louisiana. This is the church that provided the housing, hygiene and eating facilities for our entire weeks stay. Also, tremendous organization and leadership was displayed by the work site coordinators of Southeast Louisiana Disaster Recovery Ministry.

I left New Orleans a changed man with respect to my own spiritual journey. The degree of cooperation and interaction amongst the members of the various work teams was truly amazing. We all ministered to each other the entire week, not only concerning issues of Katrina relief, but openly sharing and discussing our own personal spiritual obstacles, struggles and celebrations in a way that I shall never forget.

It was also obvious to us that there is so much more that can still be done. I will never forget the almost 1,000 persons, including women and children, three years after Katrina, who are still living in tents under the I-10 Bridge in the 9th Ward.. I will never forget the eerie, empty silence that we experienced in the 9th ward as we got out of our vehicles and walked for block after block along the streets, lined with empty, abandoned vacant houses, businesses and churches.

I want to just simply say thank you to our church, because even in the midst of the silence, as people of GOD we were there - we could hear the birds chirping, we could feel the wind blow!

And I can say without a question of any doubt that GOD is still creating and the Spirit of GOD is still moving!

I hope we do not forget the work still to be done, the 1,000's of people still living under the bridge in tents, and the entire neighborhoods that still need to be rebuilt!

May GOD continue to bless the people of New Orleans, especially the people of the 9th Ward, the people of the United Methodist Church and everyone involved in being the arms and eyes and ears and hands and feet of GOD, here on earth!

Yours in Christ,

Brother John R. Bowie
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