

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN **CHURCHES** AND CLERGY IN COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE

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HEALTH POLICY INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON, DC**



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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES AND CLERGY IN COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE

PREFACE

“The African American Church is more prepared now, having had a rehearsal that none of us wanted.” {Quote from an African American Minister, in Katrina’s aftermath}

When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf coast on August 29, 2005, there were immediate and severe life-threatening consequences for the residents of New Orleans, especially African Americans who were living below the poverty line. The lack of emergency preparedness and responsiveness at all levels of government was staggering, leaving thousands of African Americans literally trapped on rooftops to escape rising flood waters or inside the Superdome, without adequate food and water or medical care.

In addition to their spiritual mission, Black clergy and churches have long stood ready to meet pressing human needs in the community, including food, clothing and shelter. They are fully aware that social conditions all too often mean the difference between good health outcomes or chronic illness among their parishioners. It thus comes as no surprise that within hours of Katrina’s landfall, African American ministers and other pastors in the Gulf region became the disaster’s de facto *first responders*. As front-line workers, they worked day and night to provide intensive relief and recovery services. They worked tirelessly to reunite family members widely scattered during evacuations. Their churches housed as many displaced residents as the American Red Cross. Moreover, they enlisted doctors and nurses from the community to provide critical health care for anyone who needed it.

This paper examines the Katrina-related experiences of Black clergy and churches to ensure that lessons learned help inform future disaster preparedness planning efforts and policy reforms. The research methodology starts with an extensive search of the literature on the role churches and clergy have played in responding to natural or man-made catastrophes in domestic or international contexts. The author conducted participant observations onsite in New Orleans and adjacent areas. This led to the selection of key informants, with whom the author held formal, one-on-one interviews. In the end, interviews were conducted with close to thirty African American ministers and survivors as well as clergy working with Hispanic and Vietnamese residents in New Orleans.

In support of this qualitative research project, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies – in partnership with Xavier University Library – sponsored a Focus Group comprised of Black clergy who had participated in Katrina response and relief efforts. This day-long session explored four areas of crisis response and relief related to Hurricane Katrina, including: *Planning and Response, Church Interaction with Non-Profit Agencies, Pastoral Care and*

Wellness Ministries, and Public Health Policy and Practices.

This study documents the failure of government and non-profit agencies to engage Black clergy and churches as a key resource in responding to the urgent needs of people of color in Katrina’s aftermath. As a result, only one of the Black churches studied was reimbursed for the costs of assisting Katrina victims and survivors. Some of the African American ministers serving as first responders had lost everything themselves, including the assurance of a pay check or a church building to return to. However, no special arrangements were made and one pastor reported he was moved seven times before ending up in a FEMA trailer. Likewise, a number of Black clergy were routinely ignored by mental health professionals on the scene, despite the fact that the emotional and spiritual support they can give congregational members is pivotal to the success of mental health treatment and interventions. Even more striking was the failure of government workers to use Black ministers as mediators or advisors in instances where Katrina survivors pointed out racial biases and discrimination on the part of American Red Cross personnel and others.

This paper outlines a comprehensive set of remedies, to ensure African American ministers and churches are key participants in any and all disaster preparedness planning, recovery and reconstruction efforts in the future. Having stood at the forefront of the fight for racial and social justice for many generations, Black churches and clergy are pivotal to ensuring that if and when disaster strikes again, neither the poor nor people of color will be left behind.

In closing, we appreciate to Dr. Karyn Trader-Leigh for her thorough research and this important paper. We thank Gina E. Wood, Deputy Director of the Health Policy Institute, for ensuring completion of the disaster mitigation project and wide dissemination of its findings. We also want to thank former Joint Center staff member Susanna Dilliplane, who served as general editor for this paper and our current consultant, Dr. Marsha Renwanz for completing the review and editing of this paper along with the five background submissions. We appreciate the efforts of two Joint Center staff members, Carla Gullatt, who served as project manager and Marco White, who contributed to the design and publication of this paper as well as all the background papers. Most of all, we are grateful for the generous financial support of The California Endowment, which made the entire project possible.

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The African American church has a long history of addressing the “worldly” needs of the African American community. The legacy of struggle against oppression, mistreatment, and neglect gives the church a role that is as important today as ever. Black church life, which starts with the community, continues to be shaped by the African American experiences and the encounters with two different Americas: (1) the “haves” and (2) the “have-nots.” Social and economic disparities require the African American church to remain vigilant in confronting the nature of inequality in this country. Hurricane Katrina was an unmitigated disaster that shook the African American community and citizens across the country. Visual images of the dire poverty of numerous African Americans in New Orleans stunned Americans and members of the international community. In the end, it was poverty caused extreme vulnerability to the storm’s ravages.

In *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in African American Churches*, Michael Dash refers to a survey of African American churches conducted by the Interdenominational Theological Center. This survey affirmed that African American churches are strongly involved in addressing social needs, such as food distribution to children, youth and families and other outreach services. Dash notes that African American congregations are primarily devoted to serving the community.¹

It is not surprising that so many African American ministers in the Gulf region and across the nation felt compelled to play a leadership role in meeting the needs caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the vital role these ministers played as first responders in the aftermath of these disasters. Also, there has been little acknowledgement of the uncompensated financial burden shouldered by many such churches because government responders had failed to plan for the special needs of poor and minority populations in the Gulf coast.

Current disaster and emergency response planning at the local, state and federal level illustrates how little understanding there is of the important role churches can play in responding to natural or man-made catastrophes, especially in communities of color and neighborhoods. This study underlines the importance of integrating the African American faith community in disaster and emergency planning and response efforts.

The study underscores the need for culturally informed responders to be a critical component of any public health and social safety net. It also makes clear that African American churches, as well as Hispanic and Asian churches, are tremendous untapped resources that can serve as “*field tested*”, knowledgeable, and culturally competent community-based partners in emergency response efforts. The disaster response community has an exciting opportunity to embrace, support and build the capacity of local churches as a community asset in meeting the needs of communities of color, especially in economically depressed areas.

The concept of community and “*rugged congregationalism*,”² in contrast to rugged individualism, is a hallmark of the role played by African American religious leaders in response to Katrina. This paper highlights the leadership role played by African American ministers in responding to a community crisis, using Katrina as a case study. It also provides greater understanding of ways that national disaster preparedness plans can ensure that existing African American, Hispanic and Asian churches are embraced as allies, cultural intermediaries, and full partners in times of crisis.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used to examine roles played by African American ministers and churches in response to community crisis. This ethnographic approach was used to highlight the responses of African American faith-based institutions and their religious leaders to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. While focusing primarily on the African American faith community, this case study also provides a snap-shot of the experience of two distinct immigrant communities in New Orleans, the emerging Hispanic community and longer-standing Vietnamese community.

This research explored four major areas of interest:

- The role of African American ministers and churches in disaster planning and response;
- The role of pastoral care and wellness ministries in preparedness planning and response;
- The interaction of churches with non-profit agencies during and after the crisis; and
- The public health policy and practice concerns of faith leaders.

¹ Bruce Murray, *Getting the Hard Facts about African American Churches. Rugged Congregationalism, Facsnet.Faith and Public Life* (2007). You may find this online at: <http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/dash.php>.

² Bruce Murray, *Getting the Hard Facts about African American Churches. Rugged Congregationalism, Facsnet.Faith and Public Life* (2007). You may find this online at: <http://www.facsnet.org/issues/faith/dash.php>.

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The qualitative study design included a literature search, interviews with selected informants and focus group proceedings. The literature search focused on exploring the role of African American religious leaders and faith-based organizations in disaster and crisis response. The literature search informed the development of questions that were administered in the interviews and the focus group. Interviews were conducted with ministers who were first responders and storm survivors, and with second line responders working in cities at “receiving” centers, including Baton Rouge, Houston, and Atlanta. A third tier of interview respondents included those concerned with restoration, recovery, advocacy, social justice and the future ability of African American faith-based organizations to respond to disasters and crises.

Twenty-six interviews were conducted with informants from Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Los Angeles, Chicago, Gulfport, Houston, Jackson, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C.³ In addition; a focus group sponsored by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies jointly with the Xavier University Library was convened on April 17, 2007. Nine different interdenominational pastors and religious leaders from New Orleans participated in this session.⁴

The process of selecting local and national respondents for one-on-one interviews as well as focus group participants included identification through a literature review, newspaper accounts, religious denominational directories, and theological seminaries. Further details on the selection process may be found below.⁵

The study also includes a selective look at the role of Latino and Vietnamese religious leaders in response to the community crisis in New Orleans. Interviews were conducted with two Hispanic community faith organization leaders: Dr. Luis Soto, Pastor of the Verbo Baptist Church in New Orleans and Mr. Martin Gutierrez, Director of the Hispanic Apostolate for Catholic Charities in New Orleans. Father Vein Thy Nguyen, Pastor of Mary Queen of Vietnam in New Orleans was also interviewed as a representative of the Vietnamese American community in Jefferson County.

In the spirit of ethnographic investigation and the need to acquire cultural understanding first-hand in order to appreciate the magnitude and the nuanced impact of the crisis, the researcher engaged in on-the-ground field observations. Participant observation activities

are outlined in greater detail below.⁶ This field level perspective provided an informed cultural context from which to view and understand the role of the minister and church community in crisis response. It underscored the effectiveness of churches in fostering resiliency, providing hope, and serving as a partner in helping congregations and community members recover after a major crisis.

Overall, this research substantiates the indisputable finding that the African American ministers and their denominational institutions played a multiplicity of roles as first responders in Katrina. This included the mobilization of resources, providing direct services to survivors, brokering relationships with the larger disaster-response community, and acting as moral agents and social justice advocates on behalf of Katrina and Rita evacuees. What stands out is how important the role of the African American minister has been, and how imperative it is for ministers to be seated at the disaster preparedness planning table. Black churches have been largely overlooked in public policy disaster management circles, even though they have long served as crucial community-based partners, caregivers and service providers to the most vulnerable.

There is a compelling need to provide:

- Training and skill-building assistance aimed at improving the ability of Black churches to serve as emergency responders and recovery agents;
- Funding to cover the overwhelming costs of emergency shelter, food and clothing, health and mental health care, and transportation expenses for disaster evacuees currently borne by many Black churches and other religious institutions;
- Acceptance of African American, Hispanic and Asian churches and clergy as full partners in emergency preparedness planning, response and recovery efforts; and
- Recognition that spiritual care can be an important component of assisting Americans who have been traumatized by natural or man-made disasters and religious leaders are best equipped to provide such care.

These basic recommendations will be discussed in greater detail in concluding remarks.

³ A complete list of all the faith-based leaders and others who were interviewed, as well as the rationale for their selection, is included in Appendix A.

⁴ A list of all the pastors who participated in the focus group is included in Appendix B. In addition, a synopsis of the focus group proceedings may be found on the Joint Center website at: <http://www.jointcetner.org>.

⁵ A more detailed summary of the process used to select interviewees and focus group participants is included in Appendix C.

⁶ A detailed outlined of participant observation activities is included in Appendix D.

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PART ONE: ROLE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES AND CLERGY IN CRISIS RESPONSE

Nationally and internationally, the faith-based community has played a vital role in meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of disaster victims for over 50 years. Such faith-based organizations currently provide a comprehensive range of domestic and international disaster services, as outlined in greater detail below.⁷ Many of the major denominations in America have formal disaster response “arms” that go into action when a disaster strikes, alongside state and local disaster relief efforts.⁸ Given the scale of their effort, there seems to be surprisingly little recognition of the important role of faith-based institutions among public policy advocates or within the emergency response community. The church is clearly a critical recovery organization. Ironically, this role is frequently unrecognized and unacknowledged by actors within the traditional emergency response system and is poorly integrated in disaster response planning frameworks. This is especially true in the case of Black churches.

Like many other faith-based institutions, the religious traditions of Black churches compel them to be responders, i.e., “most of these organizations are motivated by compassion and the desire to relieve human suffering”.⁹ Helping the “least of these”, the most vulnerable populations, is seen as a biblical mandate. Central to African American religious culture, the role of first responder is driven not only by biblical teachings but also by the longstanding history of racial discrimination and injustice in this country. This legacy of racial and economic inequality has meant that Black churches have had to play a central role in meeting the basic needs of parishioners. Moreover, Black churches played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement as well as continuing struggles against remaining racial injustice and inequality.

Religious leaders, especially African American religious leaders, understand that religion is a key resource for members of African American communities attempting to cope with stress and disaster. In writing on the characteristics of religious coping, Harold Koenig¹⁰ points to one study on the characteristics of persons most likely to use religion as a coping strategy during major crises. This study found that those most likely to rely on religion in stressful times tended to be older,

female, poorer, less educated, and primarily African American, Hispanic or immigrants from India and Arab, Africa, and Central and South American nations. In a study entitled: “Turning to Prayer: Social and Situational Antecedents of Religious Coping among African Americans,” Ellison and Jackson surveyed a sample of 1,344 African Americans. All were experiencing a major life crisis that caused great mental distress and significant personal problems. Among the coping mechanisms investigated by the researchers was the use of prayer. On the question, “Did you pray or get someone to pray for you?” nearly 80 percent answered “Yes.”¹¹

Cain and Barthelemey reviewed the religious community’s response in Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina and reported that race and class definitely influenced help-seeking behaviors.¹² A 2003 survey conducted in rural North Carolina by Floyd, Aderibigbe, Block, and Pandurangi, examined the socio-demographic characteristics and ethnic differences in types of professional assistance sought by those with somatic and emotional problems (N=1161). The study found that African Americans were most likely to select community support through the Baptist Church for physical and emotional symptoms suffered following Hurricane Floyd.¹³

Noted writer, social critic and Georgetown University Professor, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, points out that faith has long provided Black folks safe harbor in ugly storms and disasters, both natural and man-made. Dyson notes that throughout history, including the eras of slavery, Jim Crow, and the civil rights struggles, faith has provided a sanctuary for African Americans. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Black faith and spirituality offered believers three resources. First, it provided moral and theological understanding of natural disasters as well as an understanding that suffering is part of human existence. Black churches and teachings continue to provide comfort that “God does not forsake us.” Such teachings also stress that survivors have a responsibility to live more fully. Second, Black faith offers a “stirring prophetic criticism” of racial and economic inequality when viewed in the clarity of the Katrina aftermath, where the vast majority of victims most affected were Black and poor. This critique also applied in cases where the already marginalized faced racial hostility when large numbers of Blacks entered white enclaves. Third, Katrina challenges the Black church to social action to bring forceful attention to the social and economic inequities that still hinder progress

⁷ These services, broken down by specific denominations, are outlined in detail in Appendix E.

⁸ Further information on disaster-response resources of major denominations is outlined in Appendix F.

⁹ Dr. H.G. Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Dr. H.G. Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 32.

¹¹ Dr. H.G. Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 33.

¹² D.S. Cain and J. Barthelemy, *Tangible and Spiritual Relief after the Storm: The Religious Communities Response to Katrina* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Public Policy Research Laboratory, 2007).

¹³ Ibid.

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for millions of poor Blacks. In turn, Black churches and clergy continue to call attention to the disproportionate burden placed on faith-based institutions in shouldering the burden of social services shifted from the government.¹⁴

Writing for the Aspen Institute, Tony Pipa notes that non-profits and faith-based groups are vital to our nation's disaster response infrastructure because they know the people who need help and are often the only organizations capable of reaching them.¹⁵ Yet the role and contribution of Black faith-based institutions has been insufficiently recognized as a critical component of the disaster response system linked to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Lessons from the experiences, successes, and missed opportunities Black churches faced in response to Katrina must be integrated into the body of knowledge that contributes to shaping future public health and disaster management responses. The response capability of African American churches must be leveraged and integrated into planning frameworks. Black faith-based institutions must be made full-fledged partners in disaster management systems. Listening to and learning from faith-based institutions within the African American, Hispanic, and Asian communities yields vital insights. These insights can inform the development of culturally competent approaches to managing disaster mitigation from its onset through the end of the recovery cycle.

The scale of Katrina's disaster demonstrated that no single sector, government, charitable, private, or non-profit has the capacity to respond to a *Force Majeure*. A comprehensive approach to disaster response efforts is required, with leadership distributed across key sectors. In such a model, the knowledge and wisdom embedded in the Black church would be recognized and engaged. African American churches have a long history of engagement at the community level and have rendered invaluable services in empowering and building resilience in vulnerable communities that lack physical assets but may be rich in non-material resources. Such culturally informed, grassroots knowledge and organizational capacity must be integrated into disaster preparedness planning to improve responses and protection for vulnerable populations.

PART TWO: CASE STUDY OF BLACK CHURCHES AS FIRST RESPONDERS IN KATRINA

As a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, church

pastors suffered personal and congregational losses in Gulf Port, Mississippi and New Orleans. New Orleans pastors lost their churches and their congregations were dispersed. Still many pastors functioned as responders even when they needed spiritual and emotional support themselves. Several organizations were formed specifically to provide emotional support to pastors. The Reverend C.T. Vivian, a noted civil rights leader and colleague of Dr. Martin Luther King, recognized the vital role of the church in reestablishing resilient communities and bringing evacuees back, formed an organization to adopt churches, help rebuild them, and restore pastors' homes.

With few exceptions, the ministers or leaders of faith-based non-profits in the Gulf region did not have pre-existing emergency response plans in place. Most had not attended public health preparedness or crisis management training. Yet, even without a plan to guide them, African American religious leaders stepped up to the challenge of crisis leadership to provide the missing public health safety net for dislocated evacuees. What these ministers had to offer is that they were already skilled as leaders of organizations with a history of struggle and survival, and with culturally competent experience in dealing with vulnerable populations.

Pastors interviewed for this study expressed a strong conviction that many Katrina survivors "...needed spiritual and emotional support because their fundamental faith was shaken."¹⁶ According to these clergy, some Katrina survivors were so profoundly distraught that their mental and physical well being was deeply affected. Pastors and directors of some of the faith-based organizations working directly with Katrina evacuees expressed the view that many elderly victims who survived and got out of New Orleans, ended up dying from the stress of the situation they found themselves in. African American church leaders described being faced with officiating at many funeral services.

Pastors were called upon to perform extensive relief and recovery services. The leaders of African American faith institutions deeply understood the churches obligation to be early responders. They also recognized the federal government's response breach and recognized the need to mitigate further damage to African American survivors.

The churches' role differed depending on its size. All size churches were called into action, both rural and urban. Their mobilization depended upon ability, resources,

¹⁴ M.E. Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2006).

¹⁵ Tony Pipa, *Weathering the Storm: The Role of Local Nonprofits in the Hurricane Katrina Relief Effort* (Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2006).

¹⁶ A highly detailed synopsis of all the author's interviews with pastors and others may be found online on the Joint Center website at: <http://www.jointcenter.org>.

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and response capacity. Location also played a role. Cities like Baton Rouge, Houston, Dallas, Atlanta and Jackson were major displacement hubs for evacuees, so churches in these locations faced significant challenges and a steep learning curve. Many had never faced a crisis of this magnitude before. In communities where churches collaborated with other denominations in order to leverage capacity, “some could respond to some needs, others to a different set of needs.” Smaller churches in Baton Rouge, for example, reported that they often played support roles to larger churches by providing food, clothing and personnel to supplement those providing shelter and housing. In New Orleans, churches provided places for relief workers to stay. Population shelter reports captured by the Louisiana Department of Social Services indicated that churches and non-profits were housing as many people as the American Red Cross in the aftermath of the hurricanes.

Following the Katrina crisis, the Louisiana State University (LSU) Public Policy and Research Laboratory conducted a telephone survey of churches in the Baton Rouge metropolitan area. The results revealed that area churches were extensively involved in relief efforts immediately after the hurricanes and for a period thereafter.¹⁷ The most common resources provided by local churches were food, clothing and financial assistance. They note that 75% of the churches attempted to connect evacuees with outside state and federal resources, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross. Just under half worked to connect evacuees with family not relocated to Baton Rouge. Churches paid for evacuee care with congregational and private donations. Only one church received federal financial assistance. Churches reported that the greatest unmet needs included evacuee shelter and housing, and on-site computer and internet access.¹⁸

The Louisiana Interchurch Conference in Baton Rouge reported that they positioned congregational members to provide appropriate and timely material resources, work teams, and social support for survivors. The focus was on helping restore a sense of community, helping survivors and caregivers find a sense of meaning and purpose out of the disaster experience, and helping communities and families capture a sense of control over their own individual circumstances. These groups were also working to establish a long-term care system for the displaced and to monitor the recovery process for irregular actions and human rights violations.

Their efforts included: developing support recovery groups, supporting caregivers, monitoring pastoral care, training caregivers in spiritual and emotional care, and advocating for the marginalized whose voices were not heard. Such actions require an inter-faith conference be convened first to establish a communications network among different denominations and faith groups, and to act as a forum for the development of cooperative ministries.¹⁹

While many African American churches do international missionary work, few have had disaster experience in crisis environments in developing nations. The Lott Carey Foreign Mission founded in 1897, provides a notable exception. With its work in war-torn environments in Africa and other developing nations, the Lott Carey Foreign Mission is experienced in managing and operating faith-based disaster recovery operations. This gave them the ability to be effective early responders after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

PART THREE: LESSONS LEARNED IN NEW ORLEANS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Empirical research has confirmed what African Americans understand profoundly and all America observed: race was deeply implicated in the tragedy of Katrina.²⁰ Quite literally, survival and death in the Katrina disaster was structured by race and socioeconomic status.²¹ The New California Media and Bendixen & Associates conducted a telephone public opinion poll in Spanish, English, Korean, Vietnamese, Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese. Among the major findings of the study was that a majority of African Americans and Asians, and half of Hispanics feel they can no longer rely on the American system and its institutions to protect their family in a crisis.²²

Several national denominational councils and faith-based disaster response groups have evaluated the national response and continue to track the recovery progress. The Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference, an ecumenical social justice organization of African American religious leaders, convened the National Katrina Justice Commission to express their outrage and indignation that the Bush Administration allowed American citizens to experience displacement, despair and rejection for nearly two years after the hurricane ravaged the Gulf Coast. The Samuel Dewitt Proctor Justice Commission held hearings in Washington,

¹⁷ D.S. Cain and J. Barthelemy, *Tangible and Spiritual Relief after the Storm: The Religious Communities Response to Katrina* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Public Policy Research Laboratory, 2007).

¹⁸ D.S. Cain and J. Barthelemy, *Tangible and Spiritual Relief after the Storm: The Religious Communities Response to Katrina* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Public Policy Research Laboratory, 2007).

¹⁹ The Louisiana Interchurch Conference Proceedings (1 May 2007) may be found online at: <http://www.lainterchurch.org>.

²⁰ Patrick Sharkey, “Survival and Death in New Orleans: An Empirical Look at the Human Impact of Katrina,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37(4): 482.

²¹ Ibid.

²² New California Media, *Lessons of Katrina: Americans Major Racial and Ethnic Groups Find Common Ground After the Storm* (2005). This may be found online at: <http://www.ncmonline.com>.

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DC, New Orleans, and Houston. They issued their findings in a report called *The Breach: Bearing Witness* to document the trauma and demand restoration.²³

The commission was charged to make recommendations to government officials and non-profit disaster relief organizations, and to African American churches and community-based organizations concerning the Hurricane Katrina impact on poor and marginalized communities and propose responses in future disasters in African American communities.²⁴ Three fundamental and over-arching recommendations came out of *The Breach: Bearing Witness* report as follows: first, a Federal Hurricane Katrina Victims Assistance Fund must be established; second, African American churches and community-based organizations must be represented at each stage and on every level of any future national disaster relief planning process before disaster strikes and during the periods of intensive response and recovery; and third, an independent bipartisan Congressional Commission should be established to examine all these issues.

Additionally, *The Breach: Bearing Witness* report calls for future use of evacuation plans and protocols that give special attention to poor communities, communities of color, and the elderly and disabled who face the greatest transportation barriers. Moreover, the report urged the American Red Cross to redouble its efforts in future disasters to reach out to the African American community, particularly churches and community-based organizations. At the same time, the report underscored the need for the American Red Cross to establish contractual relationships with future shelter and feeding operators. The report also highlighted the need to ensure ethnic and racial diversity among American Red Cross staff at all levels nationwide, as well as requirements for staff and volunteers to participate in anti-racism training on an ongoing basis.

Further recommendations from *The Breach: Bearing Witness* report include guidelines for the treatment of displaced persons and model legislation related to accountability practices. The recommendations also called for special initiatives to engage and strengthen the capacity of African American churches and community-based organizations in emergency preparedness, in a manner that is culturally sensitive and based on models of community collaboration and accommodation of the diversity within communities.²⁵

A report card issued by the National Council of

Churches of Christ in the USA in the aftermath of Katrina rated the Federal government's work as an "F". Low grades were given for state and local governments as well: Louisiana "D", Mississippi "C", and New Orleans "F", on their actions in evaluating timely response and identifying the short comings and triumphs that occurred.²⁶ These failures were highly visible. Clearly faith organizations experienced an important role for themselves in providing relief to the lives of those affected. "Faith organizations proved to be the bright spot in an otherwise dismal chapter in American history," according to the report card.

The Association of Black Psychologists also made a series of recommendations in Katrina's aftermath. They strongly advocated that FEMA, the American Red Cross, and other serving agencies ensure that in the future, all crisis service providers will be sensitive to the reality of historically-conditioned mistrust.²⁷ Communications style, sociopolitical considerations and racial issues must be integrated into the application of expert trauma, crisis and stress management responses. Black psychologists suggested that African American victims may also prefer and require African American service providers. Most notably, Black psychologists understand that culturally responsive services for African American survivors of Hurricane Katrina require an acknowledgement and attention to an individual's level of religiosity. This means utilizing the religious and spiritual guidance of ministers or clergy in conjunction with Black mental health service providers.

Pastors, ministers, and other clergy have historically held a high status in the African American community. *They are critical "First Responders"* for the African American community. Black psychologists cited research that suggests that some African Americans may rely on clergy to address mental health problems. Ministers are critical cultural intermediaries, cultural brokers, service providers and even cultural case managers not only for individuals and families, but whole congregations experiencing the losses, trauma and re-traumatization as survivors and victims of Katrina.

Katrina was a harsh lesson for America as it demonstrated that "failure to be prepared to accommodate cultural needs can heighten the negative consequences of a crisis and can result in a death sentence for African Americans and the poor."²⁸ This is a "code red" issue. Cultural competence must be embedded in crisis planning, crisis response services and ongoing evaluations of national, state and

²³ Iva E. Carruthers and Jackson Bernice Powell, eds., *The Breach: Bearing Witness, The Report of the Katrina National Justice Commission* (Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc., 2006).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rev. Leslie Tune, Tronn Moller and Cassandra Carmichael, eds., *Report Card: The Triumphs and Struggles in the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast* (Washington, DC: National Council of Churches in Christ, USA, 2007).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mary Beth Klotz and Arlene Silva, *Culturally Competent Crisis Response*.

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local crisis management planning and preparedness organizations as well as faith-based disaster responders, non-governmental agencies and organizations, and public health or mental health service providers. Cultural competency must be promoted and assessed systemically.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More specific recommendations, gleaned from the interviews with African American pastors and others, are outlined below:

- Fund support for African American, Hispanic and Asian churches to strengthen their ability to serve as disaster response partners, particularly with respect to meeting the needs of vulnerable populations;
- Facilitate culturally competent disaster response planning as a standard of practice across all professions and disciplines;
- Include the Black church in public health policy dialogues on disaster response mitigation and recovery;
- Include African American faith-based institutions in government-sponsored stakeholder outreach initiatives that include non-profits, public policy think tanks, schools of public health, and charitable disaster response organizations concerned with vulnerable populations in disasters – whether natural or man-made;
- Require that the public health officials of the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO), National League of Cities, and U.S. Conference of Mayors work with churches, especially African American, Hispanic and Asian churches, in disaster planning;
- Strengthen mental and emotional health care services by expanding traditional community-based care and alternative care in partnership with churches;
- Recognize and integrate African American pastoral services in trauma response services for African American communities;
- Provide counseling and support services for displaced children attending schools in receiving cities;
- Assure the operating practices of charitable organizations entrusted with the distribution of Federal and donor resources do not create barriers in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable populations;
- Ensure that the American Red Cross develops a partnership strategy with African American churches and those serving Hispanics and Asians for community-based crisis and disaster responses at the local level;
- Include the mapping and marshalling of community assets for disaster response in church and community-based disaster response planning;
- Review public policy guidelines and regulations to assure reciprocal recognition of licensure for medical and emergency response professionals during a crisis;
- Deploy technology for maintaining the medical records of elderly citizens to ensure continuity of medical support in a disaster's aftermath;
- Urge medical professionals treating the poor and the elderly to take time to inform and educate them on the treatment and medication they are receiving;
- Provide access to medical care for uninsured populations in the aftermath of disasters; and
- Recognize the role of the African American church in providing a firm foundation for spiritual and psycho-social resilience in the lives of community members during times of crisis and disasters.

CONCLUSIONS

Race, class, and poverty played a powerful role in determining who received adequate relief and recovery assistance in Katrina's aftermath and who did not. Although main-line churches and charitable organizations across America marshaled resources in response to Katrina, members of the neediest and most vulnerable populations – primarily people of color – did not benefit. Instead, African American church leaders, true to their traditions, stepped in to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. With limited resources and only on-the-job training, Black clergy demonstrated remarkable leadership. As a result, African American, Hispanic and Vietnamese ministers shouldered a

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disproportionate burden in disaster relief.²⁹

For people of color, particularly those living below the poverty line, the church is an important intermediary and service provider with whom they are accustomed to dealing and whom they trust. Given that churches and clergy of color are culturally responsive to the spiritual and emotional needs of their congregations, they are best equipped to provide appropriate care and interventions for trauma for these populations.

This report, focused primarily on the role of African American churches and clergy, suggests several important opportunities for improvement, as follows:

- African American churches are positioned to play a vital role in community disaster planning. However, they require essential education, training and technical assistance, and adequate funding.
- The trickle down of meager resources to the Black church, many of which went into debt because of the lack of other resources, has heightened awareness of the need to build disaster endowments. This may result in donors redirecting contributions to assure that their funds reach intended communities of color.
- Black churches that went into deficit-spending to provide services to Katrina survivors in poverty should be reimbursed by the American Red Cross.
- Rebuilding churches damaged and destroyed by Katrina should be a priority in restoring resilience and stability in communities of color.
- Providing means of support for pastors is critical to the recovery work that they do and the service they provide to vulnerable populations.

There is much to learn about the role that religion and cultural resilience plays in facilitating disaster recovery, especially from those with limited resources. The social and spiritual resources of the African American church must be understood as a valuable asset. In Katrina's aftermath, Black clergy and churches provided a model for culturally competent responses, an essential safety net and a vision of hopefulness in otherwise dire and dismal circumstances.

APPENDIX A

Faith leaders who participated in interviews are listed below according to geographic location. They include:

Atlanta, GA: Dr. Michael Battle, President of Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC); Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley, Pastor of Providence Baptist Church; Rev. Timothy McDonald of First Iconimum Baptist; Dr. Miriam Burnett, Director of Health Ministry for the AME Denominations, ITC; LaTosha Brown, Lead Coordinator of Saving Ourselves

Baton Rouge, LA: Rev. Fred Jeff Smith, Pastor of Greater Mt. Carmel Baptist Church; Rev. Dr. Leo Cyrus, President of the 4th District National Baptist Convention in Baton Rouge

Chicago, IL: Dr. Iva Caruthers; Rev. Dr. Willie Davis of Progressive Baptist Church; General Secretary Samuel DeWitt of Proctor Conference

Gulfport, MS: Lillian Jenkins of First Missionary Baptist Church; Patricia Rayford of Jackson, MS; Goldia Reevis, Director of Constituent Services in the Mayors Office, City of Jackson

Houston, TX: Pastor Velosia Kibe of Windsor Village United Methodist Church; Rev. Dr. Willie R. Davis, Pastor of Progressive Baptist Church; Tanya Dubose, Director of Mission and Outreach for True Light Baptist Church; Rev. Robert Jefferson

Lake Charles, LA: Rev. Tolbert of Lott Carey Resurrection Center

Los Angeles, CA: Rev. Camelia Joseph of Loveland Church; Pastor Hugh Hairston of Loveland Church

New Orleans, LA: Rev. Luis Soto, MD, Pastor of Verbo Baptist Church; Mr. Martin Guitierrez, Director of the Hispanic Apostolate Immigration and Refugee Service of New Orleans; Elder Bernard Waters, Pastor of Imani Temple #28 African American Catholic Congregation Lafayette; Rev. Tron Moller of Marine Baptist Church; Father Vien Th'e Nguyen, Pastor of Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church; Dr. Kevin Stephens, Director of Public Health City of New Orleans

Washington, DC: Rev. Dr. David Goatley, Executive Director of Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention

²⁹ A complete bibliography of publications referenced in this paper may be found on the Joint Center website at: <http://www.jointcenter.org>.

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APPENDIX B

The New Orleans Pastors who participated in the sole focus group for this paper included:

- Rev. D.M. Haywood, Pastor New Israel Baptist Church;
- Rev. Malone, Pastor Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church;
- Fr. Jeffery Ott, O.P Xavier Campus Ministry, Catholic;
- Elder R.L. Palmer, Jr. St Paul A.M.E. Church, Methodist;
- Dr. Jamie Phelps, Catholic Religious Studies Xavier;
- Rev. Emmanuel Smith, Jr. Isrealite Baptist Church;
- Rev. Chant`e Sutton, God Who Cares, COGIC;
- Rev. Marshall Truehill, Jr., First United Baptist Church; and
- Rev. J.T. White, Greater King Solomon Baptist Church.

APPENDIX C

Names of interview subjects were also provided by ecumenical faith-based organizations and ministerial alliances, non-profit organizations, and immigrant-serving organizations, such as the Catholic Archdiocese and Honduran consulate, which opened a facility in New Orleans to respond to the needs of Honduran immigrants. Informants were asked to identify other informants who were representative of the community of small and large churches.

Focus group participants were identified through local New Orleans faith-based organizations, ministerial alliances, and knowledgeable informants. Initially a large solicitation was assembled from a mailing list of churches in New Orleans and sent out. This approach was not successful because of the inherent difficulty in contacting representatives of the many churches that had sustained significant damage and unknown whereabouts of large numbers of congregation members, whose facilities were closed or destroyed.

APPENDIX D

Participant Observation activities included:

1) Attending a Sunday church service of a modest size African American church where half of its New Orleans congregation was displaced to Baton Rouge, thereby

necessitating dual Sunday services in cities 90 miles apart, but still conducted by the pastor every Sunday;

2) Volunteering as a facilitator in a community congress (Unified New Orleans Plan or UNOP) simulcast to displaced residents, who were also able to have interactive participation in establishing public priorities for rebuilding and recovery;

3) Attending a Health Cabinet Symposium sponsored by the McFarland Institute's Congregational Wellness Division targeted for pastors, church nurse educators and lay health advocates; and

4) Attending a policy dialogue for New Orleans non-profit organizations sponsored by the Urban Institute.

APPENDIX E—DOMESTIC DISASTER-RELATED SERVICES OFFERED BY THE FOLLOWING DENOMINATIONS:

Adventist Community Services

Receiving, processing, distributing clothing, bedding, food, medical care, recovery services for individuals and families, temporary housing assistance for low income families, counseling programs for children and the elderly, and special counseling for disaster relief workers.

Catholic Charities

Disaster assessments, fixed/mobile feeding facilities, disaster relief supplies, donated goods through regional distribution centers, collaboration with American Red Cross, the Salvation Army Church, World Service Disaster Response and NOVAD in order to deploy volunteers for national disaster assignments.

Christian Disaster Response

Supporting local churches in disaster affected areas to respond to persons in local communities, housing repair, construction and other recovery services.

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee

Clean-up and debris removal, childcare center and support for children acting out anger, fears.

Church of the Brethren Disaster Response

Convening consultants with local churches and religious organizations to coordinate responses to unmet needs during the recovery phase.

The Church World Service Disaster Response

Providing relief grants for essentials such as food, water, medical assistance and financial aid within the first 90 days. Providing rehabilitation grants to rebuild and replant ruined crops, as well as counsel those in trauma.

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Episcopal Church Presiding Bishops Fund for World Relief

Assistance to agencies responding to community needs after a disaster strikes by mobilizing volunteer groups from universities, businesses, youth groups, women's organizations and religious groups.

International Relief Friendship Foundation

Respond to needs that out strip local resources; coordination of 6,000 volunteers; support groups for mental health assistance and pastoral care; assistance with volunteer personal to clean up and remove debris from damaged and destroyed homes; repair or rebuild homes with special emphasis on the elderly and handicapped.

Lutheran Disaster Response

Clean up and rebuilding with emphasis on the elderly, disabled widowed and least able to help themselves, and national crisis counseling services to support emotional needs of disaster victims.

Nazarene Disaster Response

Emergency assistance, counseling, shelter, missing person services, medical assistance, distribution of donated goods, referral to government, and private agencies for special services.

The Salvation Army

Immediate emergency assistance and long-term recovery help, food service, disaster relief operations, emergency shelter, cleanup and restoration donations management, a relief and disaster assistance organization, signatory by law under national disaster response plan. Southern Baptist Convention, along with others such as United Methodist Committee on Relief, World Vision, and the Society of St. Vincent DePaul are engaged in similar emergency response missions.

APPENDIX F— DENOMINATIONAL RELIEF REPORTS

The *Episcopal Relief and Development One Year Report* (2006) notes that they worked through Episcopal Churches across the Gulf Coast regions and provided assistance to dioceses of six states, in partnership with Episcopal migration ministers and the World Church Service and other local groups. They provided food, water, medical kits, shelter, and worked through its partners to rebuild housing and small businesses, provided case management services in creating infrastructure for medical and volunteer services and to support psychological counseling. During the first year they raised 15 million dollars from individual and church donations. Supported by \$3 million in United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)

with federal funds, their efforts helped 500,000 people through emergency and recovery programs.³⁰

The *Lutheran Disaster Response Progress Report*, a collaborative disaster response ministry, notes that through October 2005 they received \$33 million, 41% from individuals and 28% from congregations, 22% from Katrina Aid Today (a case management consortium administered by UMCOR) and the balance representing gifts from foundations, organizations, and businesses. The agility of their national network allowed them to provide support in their four core program components: spiritual and emotional care, emergency hardship grants, volunteer coordination, and case management. The progress report highlights an estimated \$11.8 million worth of in-kind service donated by their volunteers, and \$14.8 million distributed to their affiliates through October 2006. The report indicates 5,000 homes were worked on by their volunteers, and 158 homes by Katrina Aid Today.³¹

The *National Baptist Convention USA Relief Report* produced by the National Baptist Laymen's Movement and the Home Mission Board provides an account of first hand narratives, letters and diaries of volunteer efforts in the repair of churches and homes, providing resources, basic necessities, shelter, clothes and food through their churches.³²

Church World Service Emergency Response Programs provide guidelines to assist communities with the development of recovery organizations detailing organizational roles in response and recovery, to include how to function as a recovery committee. These documents include guidance for understanding the sequence of events in the time of a recovery organization, guidance for understanding the direct services a recovery organization can provide and information on what other critical players are involved in disasters.³³ While these wonderful tools, assets and potential partnerships may be available; they have limited utility if those that need them are not aware or do not have access to them.

³⁰ Episcopal Relief and Development, *Hurricane Katrina Response: One-Year Report* (New York, NY: The Episcopal Church, 2006). This may be found online at <http://www.er-d.org>.

³¹ *Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutherans Respond: A Progress Report on the Response to the 2005 Hurricane Season* (Chicago, IL: The Lutheran Church, 2006). This may be found online at <http://www.ldr.org>.

³² National Baptist Convention USA, *Katrina Relief Report* (22 September 2005 – 3 June 2006).

³³ Church World Service Emergency Response Office, *Managing and Operating The Faith-Based Disaster Recovery Organization: A Capacity Building Guidebook* (2000). This may be found online at: <http://www.cwserp.org>

ABOUT THE JOINT CENTER AND ITS HEALTH POLICY INSTITUTE

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is one of the nation's pre-eminent research and public policy institutions and the only one whose work focuses exclusively on issues of particular concern to African Americans and other people of color. For over three decades, our research and information programs have informed and influenced public opinion and national policy to benefit not only African Americans, but every American.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Karyn Trader is founder of Karyn Trader & Associates Global Partners (KTA), which was established in 1992 and has worked with multiple industries, firms in the private and non-profit sectors, and major foundations. Dr. Trader has a doctorate in Organization Change from Pepperdine University and a Masters in International Transactions from George Mason University. She is experienced in the design and implementation of complex change initiatives and the management of systems aimed at developing human capital. Dr. Trader has worked and studied in a wide range of multicultural and multinational settings, including the United Nations in Vienna, and the University of Tianjin in the Peoples Republic of China. She has also lived and worked in Africa.

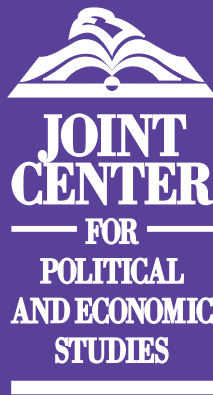
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