

OUTREACH

Winter 2006

God's presence a factor in decision to go on Gulf Coast Mission Trip

On their retreat last year, our Vestry members arrived at a statement of purpose which they called a "provocative proposition." It describes who we are at St. Thomas when we are doing what God calls us to do, and they issued a challenge to us to *Come* together as children of God, to *Grow* into our faith, to *Serve* God in others, and to *Make a Difference* for ourselves, for others, and for the world. It should be no surprise to the people of St. Thomas that we have answered the call and risen to the challenge.

In this Outreach supplement of THE APOSTLE, you will read about how our Outreach ministries continue to make a difference in the lives of so many people whether that be through the work of the INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK, the St. Paul's Food Pantry, or the Saturday breakfast program at St. Paul's, KCKS.

And we continue to do even more. In October, St. Thomas responded to the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina when seven parishioners volunteered to serve the victims. They left Overland Park in early November and drove to Camp Coast Care in Long Beach, MS, to join other volunteers determined to serve in whatever capacity they were needed.

Countless other St. Thomas parishioners donated goods, gift cards and cash for our volunteers to take with them.

Of the seven, only a few were officially "retired" from their careers; two other volunteers have young children; and a couple of them took leave from their jobs. But common to all of them was the passion they felt about why they chose to answer the call to serve the hurricane victims.

Mary Lynn Swafford searched her heart for what she

could do to help the victims of both hurricanes and had asked her daughter who lives in Baton Rouge about the possibility of going to New Orleans to help. Her daughter responded, "Mom, it is just too dangerous at this point." When Mary Lynn heard of the Mississippi mission trip, she said she felt God's presence in the decision. "I had no doubt this was what He meant for me to do," she said.

When she first heard of the possibility of going on a mission trip to the Gulf region, **Jan Summers** had two thoughts—"What a great idea!" and when she

thought of her possibly participating, "Well, maybe." Not really bold nor adventurous, Jan admits to being hesitant. She questioned her own physical endurance and strength to do the needed work.

Once she learned that there were many types of jobs that needed to be filled that did not require physical labor, she says she really started to give this trip some serious thought.



In the Diocese of Mississippi, seven Episcopal Churches were totally destroyed. This photo shows what was left of Christ Episcopal Church, Bay St. Louis. The stones (inscribed with deceased parishioners names) in the Memorial Garden lay haphazardly on the ground.

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With husband Gary's enthusiasm for the trip and her own feeling that "God was telling me to get out of my comfort zone and go help someone else," she gave a resounding YES! to the St. Thomas people planning the trip.

"I'd like to convince you that my going to Mississippi was simply the result of some altruistic urge that I just could not resist; that I saw the suffering and had to go there. The truth is that it was guilt," **Steve Rimmer** admits.



Kathy Kline "mucks out," or guts of debris, a house ravaged by the storm. Kathy described the stench as "awful!"

Grateful to have a very supportive wife, Steve feels enormously lucky to have the life he has; he felt he could not ignore the people whose lives had been washed away in an instant. "The truth is that we are all a breath away from catastrophe whether that be a violent act of nature, a car accident, or a health crisis. If we are able and don't help, how can we expect help when we need it?"

Knowing people who lost everything and almost lost their lives in the hurricane is what impelled **Linda** and **Ted Bemis** to make this trip.

Through her contacts in Mississippi, she learned of the **CAMP COAST CARE** relief effort and the need for volunteers.

Linda felt a strong call to go and help others and hopes there will be

more mission trips to the region, especially to help St. Patrick's, the Episcopal parish in Long Beach.

Gary Summers says that he has always wanted to go on a mission trip of some sort. When the idea of a trip to help the hurricane victims was proposed, Gary knew that now was the time to go.

Looking back on his experience he relates that he was not prepared for the overwhelming, unconditional love and gratitude all of the STA volunteers received from the folks whose lives had been literally washed and blown away by the storm.

The love and gratitude he received served as "fuel" for the trip and continues to be a source of energy and spiritual strength to him.

Another supportive spouse enabled volunteer **Kathy Kline** to heed the gut feeling she had that going to Mississippi was the right thing for her to do.

While she gives credit to divine intervention, she also says that she relied on her instincts and didn't do a whole lot of soul-searching.

"There was so much that **couldn't** be done—money couldn't be spent, things couldn't yet be rebuilt, people couldn't simply live on.

The only thing that could be done, *was* done, and that is— hands-on lugging and tugging, and lots and lots of hugging!...

At the time, they needed hands and bodies and the physical presence of God,



A defining moment for Linda Bemis came when she saw the open air post office in Long Beach. It consisted of three trailers and a 100-yard double row of post office boxes, one for each household. Since the post office had 14 feet of water, it will be razed. The open air post office may be a reality for residents for several years.

and we volunteers provided some of that."

As they rose to the vestry's challenge to "Come, Grow and Serve: Make a Difference," these seven people made a difference in the lives of hurricane victims by their physical presence.

The rest of our church community helped them make this trip a reality by "traveling" with them in spirit and prayer as well as by generously donating to their cause.

Our collective support helped volunteers purchase \$2400 worth of gift cards as well as \$400 worth of needed supplies to take to the hurricane relief area.

Together, we are all making a difference.



In many instances, there was nothing left of property except debris to clean up.

All photos taken Gary Summers, Ted Bemis, or Kathy Kline.

Christmas was warm, happy, and tender, because of the generosity of STA members!

January 1, 2006

To St. Thomas Parish,

Christmas looked different this year. The tree by the front door was decked out in silk poinsettias. The Narthex was filled with tables covered in red and green. Every room had a tree. The Assembly room was filled with piles of new clothes and toys provided by the 31 INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK congregations. Sunday School rooms were arranged for fun games and crafts. Classrooms were transformed with beautiful displays of special gifts for parents and teachers. The Nave became a huge cupboard with bags and boxes of food for graduate families.

Christmas not only looked different, it felt different. It felt warm and happy and tender. It was experienced in smiles, tears, hugs and laughter. It was our first ever **Christmas Store** for **Interfaith Hospitality Network** clients.

Throughout the year, our goal is to minister to families so they retain a sense of dignity while they overcome the causes of their homelessness. As we watched IHN families connect with one another at the Christmas Store and Christmas Cafe, it was more like a celebration or reunion. The shared experience was not one of shame. It was just a part of their lives. They were filled with joy to see one another and to see some of the volunteers they had met along the way.

Yes, we had a Christmas Store and your help made it possible. But it was much more than just a place to come get a bunch of gifts. The true spirit of Christmas filled St. Thomas and overflowed because people like you opened your hearts. Thank you for the gifts you gave and for sharing your time and energy in this special way.

As we begin 2006, we pray that you will continue to share the HOST ministry with us and ask that you continue to pray for our guests, the IHN staff, and all volunteers.

Sincerely,
Dola McNown & Peggy Salts
HOST Coordinators



Diane warmly greets shoppers to our Christmas Store!



Activities were available for children while parents shopped!



Dola and her favorite reinDEAR get ready to greet visitors!

The decorating crew consisted of Anne and Paige (right) and Bill and Gary (below).



A Christmas shopper looks over items she might purchase for family members.



The Christmas Cafe was a popular meeting place for clients of IHN.

Hunger Ministry Continues to Grow

Dola McNown, Donna Fye, and Rick Bush



Jim B. handled lots of donated food items!

During the past several months our outreach focus on feeding the hungry has grown as we increased support of two Episcopal Community Services programs.

This special supplement of *THE APOSTLE* highlights the background on those ministries. Feeding the hungry will continue to be a focus for our outreach at St. Thomas and all parishioners are invited to share in the call from Christ.

Episcopal Community Cupboard, previously known as St. Paul's Food Pantry, has long been a reliable source of food for people in need in Kansas City, Kansas.

Recently, the food pantry itself has fallen upon hard times. Neighboring churches of other denominations used to provide some of the food to St. Paul's ministry, but many of those congregations have closed their doors.

Now, **St. Paul's looks to us—St. Thomas.** We have been instrumental in increasing awareness of the importance of the ministry at St. Paul's. By working

with others in the Northeast Convocation, awareness has spread to other churches and support is increasing.

St. Thomas is leading an effort in providing non-perishable food items and personal care items. Each Sunday at 10:15, we see our red wagon overflowing with food as the children bring it to the altar to be blessed. We need the continued help of everyone in the parish to keep the wagon full and St. Paul's shelves stocked. We also need people who can find time to deliver the food to KCK, or help at St. Paul's as they distribute food on Wednesday afternoons.

For more information, or to volunteer, contact **Rick Bush** 913-338-0924.



Sunday School children deliver items for the Food Pantry at the Offertory each Sunday!



Breakfast at St. Paul's volunteers are ready to serve their clients.

St. Paul's Breakfast is a "hands on" ministry to feed the hungry. **Every Saturday**, approximately 150 people eat a hearty, nutritious breakfast at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 18th & Washington, KCKS.

Volunteers from several congregations cook and serve on a rotating basis. **St.**

Thomas staffs the kitchen whenever there is a 5th Saturday in the month.

The work is divided into shifts. The early shift cooks and sets tables. The late shift serves and cleans up. Just before breakfast is served—before the cooks leave and while the servers are arriving—all the volunteers gather to share Eucharist.

Following that spiritual feeding, the big doors open wide and guests arrive for a breakfast of ham, scrambled eggs, hash browns, biscuits and gravy, pancakes, rolls, fruit, coffee and O.J.

The next scheduled date for St. Thomas to staff is April 29th. However, breakfast is served every Saturday and volunteers are always welcome to help.

For more information about St. Paul's Breakfast Program, contact **Donna Fye** 913-851-9518.

Don't forget to keep our Food Pantry cupboard supplied with non-perishables! Thank you.



Donna F. and Shannon B. are two of the STA parishioners who frequently volunteer at St. Paul's Saturday breakfasts.