

From John Ford in DeLisle

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there is no doubt that it was a blessing that the storm hit us during daylight hours. Had it been at night, the parishioners who saw the rising waters from Bayou DeLisle and its tributaries would not have been able to rush to their cars and seek shelter — some came here to the church hall. Others would not have been able to jump out of second floor and attic windows and swim toward the live oak trees, clinging to the topmost branches for three to five hours. There are even reports of men in the town who went out in boats to rescue people holding onto the remnants of a roof — floating above what had been their home.

No one anticipated the enormity of this hurricane. The 1969 Hurricane Camille had always been the benchmark for severity. Hurricane Katrina has changed all that. We were prepared for a disaster - not a catastrophe.

The common wisdom is that it will take us anywhere from three to five years to rebuild and restore the fabric of life and culture in the region. In one area alone, nearly 200 homes vanished under the weight of the 15 to 20-foot storm water surge. Almost a dozen Catholic churches along the Gulf of Mexico were reduced to empty, muddied shells.

Our Catholic Church in DeLisle was more fortunate. Our largest of the three churches, St. Stephen, is five miles from the Gulf. The storm surge pushed the bayou waters to within ¼ mile of the church property. St. Ann Mission (further north) sustained minor roof damage. St. William Mission (northwest of St. Stephen rectory) lost the entire roof

Even the parish cemetery was not spared. Here a crew works at removing some downed trees. // Ni el cementerio de la parroquia se salvó. Aquí un equipo trabaja en retirar algunos árboles caídos.

and three-quarters of the interior ceiling: Mass is now held in the hall at St. William.

Providence and irony are part of the hurricane aftermath: St. Stephen has invited the parishioners of Our Mother of Mercy Church, in Pass Christian, to use St. Stephen for Sunday Mass. Our Mother of Mercy (staffed by the Josephites) was severely damaged in this hurricane. In 1969, after Hurricane Camille destroyed the Missionary Servant parish of Our Lady of Good Hope, it was the Josephites (who then staffed St. Stephen) who invited the parishioners of Our Lady of Good Hope to use St. Stephen for Mass.

The Holy Family Sisters (whose Mother Foundress traces her origins to our town of DeLisle) have as their motto "Providence will provide." I do believe that it is the providence of God, the generous provision on the part of our benefactors, and the

partnerships being established between our diocesan parishes and parishes around the country which help and sustain us during this numbing time. Jobs and income have been lost; homes have been replaced by FEMA trailers and tents; respiratory problems are affecting a significant number of people who have

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