

from Bob Goodyear in

Magee

Friday September 14, the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross, and it has been two weeks since Hurricane Katrina hit Mississippi leaving behind numbing destruction of biblical proportions. Though St. Stephen's is 96 miles from the Gulf Coast, 100 MPH winds screamed through the rain from morning till night on Monday, August 29. A television station in Jackson offered an assessment of the damage to Magee with the headline: "Magee Destroyed by Hurricane." We were not destroyed but the damage was like a 130-mile wide tornado as it hit all of Mississippi.

During the storm I watched as trees were pulled from the ground and thrown around like pickup sticks. The main street of Magee was almost untouched while the residential section was struck hard by age-old Oak trees thrown around by the hurricane winds. When it was over, four families of our parish had lost their homes, several lost their businesses, but no one lost their lives. There was no power, no water, no food, no gasoline, and no way to communicate. Even cell phones didn't work as Katrina tossed their towers aside as she headed north.

The morning after Katrina there was an eerie calm as the sun revealed the incredible damage she had done. Fallen trees and debris blocked every road in Magee and highway 49, which is the main highway to the Gulf Coast from Jackson. The damage was severe and the ordeal was just beginning.

The Sunday after Katrina we were able to celebrate Mass and have a small social. We had coffee and bottled water and I invited people to share their stories of how they survived the hurricane and how they were surviving without power or water or food. Over and over people mentioned how isolated they felt as there was no way to communicate, no way to find out what was going on around them.

There was no help in the four counties that make up the boundaries of Saint Stephen's Parish. There was no Red Cross, no FEMA, no help from outside. People watched as convoys of trucks headed

to the Gulf Coast, but none stopped here...and no one complained. People immediately began to help one another as best they could. A pickup truck was sent to find generators in Tennessee or Alabama. Another truck went to look for ice or food. People checked on their neighbors, shared food and water. A shelter was set up at the community center to help others fleeing from the storm from farther south.

The Missionary Servants through our mission in Holy Trinity sent us a truckload of water and food and even three 55-gallon drums of gasoline. That helped a lot of people. We worked with the Mississippi Home Health nurses to get food and water to the sick and elderly who were most vulnerable, gas for generators to keep medication cold. Things were very primitive the days after the storm but people were already beginning to clear trees from roads and yards so that when the power company trucks arrived they could hook up the power again.

In my homily that first Sunday after the storm I told people

that "while the destruction and deprivation forced on us by Hurricane Katrina were beyond words, we are still here. We may not smell very good. We are tired and hungry and frustrated, but we are here - because country folks know how to survive."

Our church building suffered some damage to the roof, and the cross on the steeple was actually turned around by the wind. Trees littered the grounds but thankfully did not fall on the buildings. Saint Paul's, our mission church in Raleigh, was not so lucky. Five huge trees were thrown against the church. One hit the corner of a wood frame house we use for religious education.

Most of the roads are cleared enough to be passable now and power has been restored to most communities. Now we have turned our attention to the children displaced by the hurricane who are living here now. Working with the school counselors and teachers, we are trying to get school supplies and clothes for them as they start school here. This is a very

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