



PENTECOST

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Masakane, the Church's Pentecost Response to Hurricane Katrina

I was driving down a Mississippi road to take food to one of our senior members. Before I got to her house, children shouted, "Are you bringing food to us?" (Although it was not my initial plan) I said, "Yes!" I stopped and opened the trunk, and one of the children screamed in the house "Momma, I told you there was a God."

Michelle Goodloe, AME. Presiding Elder,
Canton, Mississippi

People of faith have always responded with benevolence to those who are in crisis; the Holy Spirit causes us to do no less. Beyond denomination or ethnicity, the Church has a peculiar anointing and outpouring of love, generosity and intervention in times of need. The word "*Masakane*," used at the beginning of this cultural resource unit, is a South African word meaning people fighting together or working together for freedom. It was used as a rallying cry during the apartheid saga in South Africa to compel people to rise and fight in unity. It is used here as a celebration of the spirit of unity that prevailed in the hearts and actions of the people. It also represents the collective resolve of the nation, people of God, and especially the black church in response to Hurricane Katrina.

Black churches often respond to immediate needs of their environment and beyond, while also encouraging self-help and economic parity. To help persons in need, churches have raised money through self-help groups, mutual aid clubs, missionary and benevolence societies, Sunday morning giving and special activities. From Christmas and Thanksgiving baskets, to neighborhood

giveaways and assistance after fires and deaths, we have not separated ourselves from the care and support of others.

Since I was a child, I can remember the cry from the pulpit to help people who were in need. It always included those who were members of the church or lived in the community and sending money to Africa, the West Indies or some faraway place affected by a tornado, flood, hurricane, or drought. It was our primary mission and responsibility to assist those in need.

II. Our Responsibility

It is critical then that we understand our role in the Hurricane Katrina aftermath, both as an affirmation of who we are as Christians and for the peculiar anointing and outpouring we had for this particular crisis. Michael Eric Dyson, in his book Come Hell or High Water, cites three resources the church provided during this crisis that he says are representative of what we provide generally. The first is “moral and theological insight into natural disasters.” We refused to limit our activity to a discussion of who was responsible and God’s role in the Hurricane, although we did participate in the discussion. Second, while responding to the disaster, we offered a “stirring critique of the racial and class elements of the disaster.” And third, “Black churches recaptured their prophetic anger and transformed that passion into social action.”¹

Some preachers and church leaders claimed that the hurricane and the breaking of the levees in New Orleans were as a result of the historical sinfulness of New Orleans and, thereby, excused their lack of response. These discussions did not deter the true Church from helping those in need.² The crisis of Hurricane Katrina raised our outrage at the treatment and mishandling of God’s people. This Sunday (Pentecost Sunday) is a fitting time of reflection. When the Holy Spirit engaged the people with power in Acts 2, prophetic witness and social action were married. The same thing happened in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina and the breaking of the levees in New Orleans.

III. Historical Reflections

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina assaulted the Gulf Coast and pounded the states of Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana with the most damage occurring in Mississippi and Louisiana.³ While more than fifteen million people were affected, the center of Katrina’s impact was in New Orleans.⁴ The greater devastation to the New Orleans area was caused by the breaking of the levees, not the hurricane.

The world watched thousands of people trying to survive the loss of homes, food, water, and violence. The visual images were shocking. People were crying for help, drowning, hanging by a thread, and praying. Thousands were stranded in the Superdome, on roofs, in boats and along roadsides. The media depicted the circumstances of despair and hopelessness. It is hard to forget the sight of some broadcasters crying as they reported the conditions.

Race, class, poverty and the urban poor were all put on Front Street. Dyson states that while African Americans were the majority affected, nearly 40,000 undocumented Mexican laborers, thousands of Native Americans and almost 50,000 Vietnamese and Filipino fishermen were also impacted. Clearly, the poor of every ethnicity were not able to leave, and some were abandoned, particularly the residents of the lower Ninth Ward who lived near the levees.

The reported death toll now stands at 1,836, although many believe that number is too low due to the numbers of persons still missing and the number of continuing deaths directly related to Hurricane Katrina.⁵ People have buried relatives in the past three years who did not receive medicines or food for several days after the hurricane which exacerbated existing conditions and gave rise to others. Moreover, some still have not found relatives who may have left the state; they do not know if they are dead or alive.

There was a wanton lack of response by the U.S. Government, particularly the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its former director, Michael Brown, and then Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff. President George W. Bush never physically went to New Orleans choosing instead to fly over it, entrusting the leadership of the disaster to Brown. Brown's response appeared indifferent and unsympathetic. The nation demanded his firing because of his callous attitude and ineptness. He resigned amidst the outcry. Each level of government (federal state and local) accused the other of not responding properly. Some blamed the residents themselves for not evacuating.

We watched again the horror when we saw the Spike Lee's documentary, When the Levees Broke. People in New Orleans faced massive damage, not because of the hurricane, but because the levees broke. Lee extensively interviewed people to hear about their experiences during and long after the levees broke. He captured the plaguing problem of racism and poverty in New Orleans and brought national attention to the condition of the levee system in New Orleans. The government had failed to protect the region and did not properly repair the levees, and they failed again when Katrina hit. This documentary served as a major conduit for sustained response by the nation.⁶

IV. The Response of Communities of Faith

The response of the church was one of hope and benevolence with direct support to the affected families and communities. The power of this witness was manifested in several ways: (1) going to the affected areas and immediately bringing food, water, clothes and supplies; (2) opening shelters and receiving families and non families into their community; and (3) sending money and volunteering in the rebuilding in the Gulf Region. The church also led discussions and protests over the government's inactivity. We did more than pray for the people of the Gulf Coast; the Spirit made us act.

The National Council of Churches reports the following faith communities (in no order of preference) provided leadership, money and volunteers: African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, American Baptist Churches USA, Armenian Orthodox, Christian Methodist Episcopal, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the Reformed Church in America, and The United Church of Christ; as well as members of Roman Catholic and Full Gospel Baptist churches.⁷ The Jewish, Islamic, and the Unitarian Church also provided meaningful aid.

V. My Response and That of My Denomination

Like many, I had family in the region and frequently traveled to the area. I also knew many of the pastors who lived in the area and were themselves at the Superdome. My brother, C. Garnett Henning, was the Presiding Bishop of Louisiana and Mississippi. While he was not in New Orleans at the time, he, like so many others, lost everything, including years of memorabilia and pictures from his many years of work in ministry.

African Methodist Churches and members were hit in Louisiana, and Mississippi, the 8th District of the AME Church; Alabama, the 9th District of the AME Church; and Florida, the 11th District of the AME church. The Gulf Region, New Orleans and Mississippi were hardest hit of the three districts with 49 churches affected from minor damage to total destruction. The majority of their members, including their pastors, were displaced. The global AME church and the local AME churches worked diligently and 47 of the 49 churches have been restored. Of the remaining two, one has raised a million dollars toward its rebuilding efforts.⁸

The denomination, with a great deal of assistance from the 8th District of the AME church, raised more than two million dollars, primarily from local congregations. The 8th District raised over a million dollars alone. This amount does not reflect monies that people simply took out of their pockets to feed, clothe and support others, nor does it reflect the tons of new clothing, food and supplies that individual churches brought (not sent) to the area.

Never have we seen before or since such a rallying and cooperative spirit of the Church. Homes are still being built. Churches are restored and are still caring for families that were displaced. This is the spirit of Pentecost at its best. While thousands have not returned home, thousands have, with the help and strength of the Church and others are still being cared for in new locations. Today, we reflect and give thanks to God for such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

VI. They Tell Their Stories⁹

Heartbroken and Starting Over

My heart is so heavy; I don't know where to start. Hurricane Katrina was a big shock to everyone that lived in New Orleans. It caused a great deal of destruction to the city and homes. My family's home was destroyed and along with it were my childhood mementos: pictures, school achievements, and other important things that can never be replaced. The circumstances caused me and my family to have to start over from scratch. My family and I lost all of our clothes. Starting over has not been an easy process for us. We have had to find housing and jobs to survive in a new city. This is frustrating and sometimes we break down and just cry, because it is harder than others can realize when they are on the outside looking in on us. Things happen for reasons. You never question God's will. At times we have to go through adversity to receive our blessings and go in the direction that God has planned for us. I'm not sure of the plan God has for my family or me, but I know that through God's grace and our prayers, we will be okay.

Adrinnie Duchane: She and her mother were temporarily displaced by the hurricane and moved to Georgia.

Prepared to Respond

As we prepared for the arrival of the hurricane victims, we did not know what to expect. We certainly were not prepared for the look of utter despair that we saw on the faces of our brothers and sisters. We knew that we had to pull together and use our God-given talents and resources to improve the devastating conditions of our people and lift them up to a higher level. Only if we pulled together would we realize the greatness that God had in store for us. Everyone that we spoke with had lost everything but the clothes on their backs. We told them all was not lost, for they still had their lives and the love of God. We began the awesome task of getting food, shelter, and clothing. We were successful in doing this. Later parents were given school uniforms, PE uniforms, book bags, and school supplies. I know that God was with us every step of the way. The reward was HOPE in the place of despair and SMILES where there had been sadness. I thank all that were involved in helping our brothers and sisters in this time of need.

Mrs. Ethel Morrison: She received numerous national and local awards for her intervention and help.

What an Outpouring

I saw the outpouring of the church and community. I actually saw churches of all denominations come together to supply the needs of all at this moment of crisis, and this energized me to work harder and smarter to ease the pain of those most affected by Katrina. Those denominations that could not provide shelter delivered ice, milk, eggs, frozen food, monetary donations, and medical necessities to the churches providing shelter. Doctors gave medical attention to those in need without charge, and clergy ministered to the spiritual and emotional needs of the people. Hotels opened to all in need and housed evacuees for months in the aftermath of Katrina. Department stores provided clothing and bedding to shelters and to the Red Cross; they opened their stores for hurricane survivors to come in to get clothing at reduced rates. Colleges and Universities in Mississippi and elementary/secondary schools received and arranged for students and faculty from those affected areas in the LA and MS Gulf Coast to continue their education. The AMEC-WMS, led by Supervisor Yvonne Parks and me, built a network. We initiated a search via computer for displaced members, placed calls to cell phone owners and to AME Churches throughout the connection to get names and cell phone numbers and communicated with media to reconnect families. In addition to seeking housing for many who were crammed into hotel rooms, missionaries and lay persons used their homes as shelter for many hurricane survivors. Missionaries became certified through the Red Cross as first responders. Finally, God had brought us to the place of service where we should have been all along!

Shirley Hopkins Davis, Connectional 1st Vice President WMS AME Church, and then President of the 8th District WMS

Extractions from a Letter to the Christian Recorder¹⁰

As Bishop of the 8th District, it is important for me to let the AME Church leadership and membership know that the Eighth District is responding, and will continue to respond, to the crisis conditions created by Hurricane Katrina. We have centers of operation in the Jackson, Mississippi area, and in Baton Rouge and Shreveport, Louisiana, where many have lodged in their efforts to escape the rage of Katrina. I have received and continue to receive a large number of calls to support the victims and I hasten to say, many of these individuals are in

one way or another victims themselves. I hope people won't panic. I understand the desire of persons to send help and God knows we need it. However, I would also respectfully remind everyone that the response to this tragedy cannot be a mere emotional response. This is not a sprint or a long distance run, this is a marathon and the need for support will be on going for months and even years. Almost all, if not all, of the churches and homes of AME's membership are under water. The Episcopal Residence is also under water and it appears that all our material possessions are gone. God has blessed me greatly. I have my life and health and a mind to make whatever sacrifices necessary to help my people heal. I thank God for his mercy and I trust God for our deliverance. I stand in the testimony of Habakkuk 3:17-18.

C. Garnett Henning, Sr. Presiding Bishop, 8th District

VII. Songs That Speak to the Moment

“Here I am Lord,” the response of all who have had a Pentecost experience, is also the title of a song by Dan Schulte. In it, God calls and the people of God answer, whether after a hurricane or a community shooting; the Holy Spirit moves us to act. The final song for this Pentecost cultural resource unit is one that I penned. It uses for its title a word I introduced at the beginning of this unit, *Masakane*. On Pentecost Sunday, and each Sunday, we are to come together as the Body of Christ unified to serve.

Here I Am Lord

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

Chorus: Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them, they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them,
Whom shall I send? (Chorus)

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, my hand will save
Finest bread I will provide, til their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them,
Whom shall I send?
(Chorus)

Masakane

We greet you in the spirit of Masakane.

We come in the spirit of joy.

We are working together as one body in the spirit of unity.

Masakane. Masakane is a spirit of unity.

Masakane. Masakane is a spirit of unity.

We enter in the spirit of Masakane.

We come in a spirit of praise.

All God's people in the name of Christ, in the spirit of harmony

Masakane. Masakane is a spirit of unity.

Masakane. Masakane is a spirit of unity.¹¹

VIII. Ritual: Remembering

Use a moment to reflect on how you felt as you heard about Hurricane Katrina. Present stories or symbols of that experience. This may include: pictures, tree branches, a bottle of water, etc. A prayer may be offered or some act that represents new life may be implemented, planting a tree, starting an after school program for poor children, etc.

As a part of your celebration of the season of Pentecost, hold a viewing of When the Levees Broke during a Bible Study, Sunday School, Sabbath School or youth group meeting.

Notes

1. Dyson, Michael Eric. Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster. New York, NY: Basic Civitas, 2006.

2. Marsalis, Wynton. Hurricane Katrina: The Storm That Changed America. New York, NY: Time Books, 2005.

3. Moyer, Susan. Katrina, Stories of Rescue, Recovery, and Rebuilding in the Eye of the Storm. Champaign, IL: Spotlight Press, 2005.

4. See, Brian Kurpis' Hurricane Katrina Relief website for further information on getting assistance for losses sustained during the hurricane. Online location: <http://www.hurricanekatrinarelief.com/> accessed 2 February 2009

5. Ibid.

6. Lee, Spike, et al. When the Levees Broke, A Requiem in Four Acts. New York, NY: HBO Video, 2006.

7. National Council of Churches: The Special Commission Just for the Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast. Online location: <http://www.nccusa.org/justrebuilding/> accessed 2 February 2009

8. 2008 interview with Bishop C. Garnett Henning by Anne E. Henning Byfield

9. Smith, Anita and Shirley Hopkins Davis. They Tell Their Stories, Lessons of Survival through Hurricane Katrina. Jackson, MS: 8th Episcopal District Church Press, 2006. pp. 4, 5, 22

10. The Christian Recorder. Calvin Sydnor, Ed. Nashville, TN: AME Publishing House, 2005. Online location: <http://www.the-christian-recorder.org/tcr-online> accessed 2 February 2009

11. "Masakane" was arranged by Keith McCuthen and April Barnes.