

December 2006



## (SHEET) ROCK'IN NEW YEAR'S EVE

For New Year's Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery is sponsoring a *Southern Comfort* trip to Susquehanna Valley Presbytery to reclaim homes ravaged by flooding, where forty-five hundred families were affected last June. The work group will be staying at a Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) *Volunteer Village*. Want to sign up? Call Paul Dungey at 315-253-3796 before December 21. Donations are welcome any time.

Hundreds of people and dozens of congregations from across the Synod have been involved in recovery efforts following the 2005 hurricanes that devastated the Gulf Coast and following this summer's flooding here in the synod. Presbyterians in Susquehanna Valley and Hudson River Presbyteries, and to a lesser extent in Newton and New Brunswick Presbyteries in New Jersey, responded to the devastation of flooding that occurred right in their midst. PDA established volunteer villages in Bainbridge and Conklin, NY. An active ELCA ecumenist who knows the area praised the Presbyterian Church in Conklin for the outstanding job they have done, organizing to assist people in recovery, feeding hundreds of people three meals a day during the crisis, and sending out work crews. There is still work to do. Call 1-607-967-8012 or 1-800-511-0086 to volunteer. Ask for Doug Horn.

Cayuga-Syracuse's response to flood-ravaged lives began when Sandi Yingling approached the presbytery about putting to-

gether an M&M (Mission and Ministry) Team in order to make a difference on the Gulf Coast. When she returned following an exploratory work trip to D'Iberville, MS in October 2005, she wrote, "The best I can do is to call it sobering, painful, humbling, hopeful, and perhaps the most important work I've ever done. You know those CWS school kits we all put together? I handed them out in the rain. I removed soggy wallboard in a house, I cleaned the camp kitchen, and I worked in the office at the Volunteer Center. Others in the group handed out food, mucked out homes ...meaning you threw away everything in the house...and helped with an assortment of tasks. We all did 'spiritual accompaniment' which means that we listened to a lot of stories and gave a lot of hugs. None of these jobs was particularly difficult or important...but our combined efforts are helping the people of this town to survive...to find food, clothes, shelter. And to look beyond their losses to the possibility of a future. Without the volunteers, I fear there would be no future for many of these people."

Geneva Presbytery put together a team that went to Gautier, MS. The *Finger Lakes Times* reported that so many people wanted to sign on to the trip that the leaders had to limit it to 26 persons! A couple months earlier a group of 36 from Cayuga-Syracuse Presbytery, including volunteers from Geneva, Northern New York and Utica Presby-

teries took off for the Gulf Coast.

Other trips followed, including one that found The Rev. Ruth Kuo of Albany Presbytery reflecting on the apprehension that can grip a person who ventures for the first time into a disaster area, and the sense of call that gives courage. She wrote that the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life, and learn a new skill in the process, was too strong to deny.



Photo courtesy of Linda Badger Becker

In March and October 2006 Genesee Valley Presbytery sent teams to New Orleans. One trip was designed specifically for smaller congregations with a team of 35 representing 15 small congregations. Larger churches such as Rochester Third and Gates Presbyterian each sponsored trips to New Orleans, working through the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian's RHINO (Rebuilding Hope in New Orleans) Project. Irondequoit and Summerville Presbyterian Churches sent groups to Gulfport and are planning a joint trip for next spring.

The East Hampton congregation from Long Island Presbytery sent a team to Mississippi last February. They reported on the

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spirit of the people in the Presbyterian Church in Gautier, a small congregation that is augmented regularly by volunteers who come as part of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance response. The powerful sense of hope embodied in the people was a witness to their faith.

Palisades Presbytery reported a response from several congregations, enough that it was difficult to keep track of all they're doing! New Brunswick Presbytery reported that their Lawrenceville congregation has organized four work trips since early 2005, and several other congregations have organized work groups too, among them the Bound Brook Church that named its mission "Homes and Hope for Louisiana," and the Kirkpatrick Church that filled two semis with household goods and had them delivered to Mississippi.

What about the future? Presbyterians will be there. A group from Rome, NY, Utica Presbytery, is planning a trip in January as is a group of 40 from New York City. The *Southern Comfort* team from Cayuga-

Syracuse will be making its fourth trip to the Gulf Coast in March 2007, and another group is looking ahead to December 2007! Like the New Years (Sheet) Rocking event in the Susquehanna River Valley this winter, plans are in the works to sheet rock in the new year on the Gulf Coast in 2008. Check out recovery story links on the Synod's web site: ([www.synodne.org](http://www.synodne.org)). This generous work is a Presbyterian way of fulfilling God's call: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers." Romans 12: 11-12 NRSV.



Photo courtesy of Linda Badger Becker

Work groups are still needed in the Susquehanna Valley, close to home, as well as on the Gulf Coast. God is at work redeeming lives.



Photo courtesy of Linda Badger Becker



Conklin Presbyterian Church of Conklin, New York, began serving the community soon after the flooding disaster.

Photo by Jim and Katrine Anderson, PDA National Response Team members from the PC(USA) Website.

## A CHRISTMAS REFLECTION FROM CLINT

It seemed an honest but dismal way to start this year's annual Christmas letter to family and friends: *As the Iraq War approaches the completion of its 4<sup>th</sup> year without any sign of conclusion, we're reminded that it was into occupied Judea that God reached out in love to the world through the birth of Jesus: a light in the darkness, the Prince of Peace. The peace of Christ reaches from our home to yours with hopes for 2007.*

I've been lamenting that the church seems to have lost its voice in matters of peace and justice, unsure what to say in this age of terrorism, but not quite willing to speak with one voice when our troops have been an occupying force in a land which we hesitate to leave, for fear that what we have created is a wasteland in which civil war and ethnic strife will now lead to

such chaos that terrorism will be bred there, that terrorists will be harbored there or, worse for our government, that Iran will fill the vacuum created when we leave. That's the country whose leaders, by denying the Holocaust, make it seem incredible to think that those Wise Men of old might have come from Persia. But I suspect they did not originate in Washington either.

"Where is God in all of this?" I asked myself as I considered the war, the Iraq Study Group's report, and the President's petulant response to the report's recommendations. How will the power for good transform our simpleminded mistakes, and redeem us and our fragile world from our own misguided zeal?

It was in the frustration of pondering that question with some ecumenical colleagues that I became aware that one of them

had just been diagnosed, less than a week earlier, with breast cancer. The complete pathology report had not been received yet, so she was on pins and needles, unsure about what she was feeling, hard pressed to look too deeply inside, the future in front of her uncertain. It was her own body's little civil war that she was confronting and, from the sidelines, we were confronting with her: the healthy cells were being invaded, sometimes occupied, by unhealthy ones. The thought of it brought us to earth, even as our prayers were directed to heaven. Where is God in this?

"Christ is here, walking next to you in this uncertainty," I said to her, believing it. And then, my thoughts moving to Iraq and the enormous pain in that part of the world, I said to myself, "Christ is certainly there as well, walk-

ing with people in the mess we have made." We know Christ is there because God came into the world at Christmas, welcomed to second class accommodations in a place under occupation by a well run, professional army that would have been better appreciated had they left. Where else should we have looked for a Savior than where he was least expected?

Wrote Paul, "For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. 4: 6 (NRSV). The truth of that wonderful proclamation hits me this Christmas as never before. God's light shines out of darkness. Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Merry Christmas.