



Left, Kathy Williamson, Randy's wife, encourages Wendy Hall.



Pastor Randy Williamson of CC St. Bernard talks with a worshipper.

Many neighborhoods remain uninhabited in St. Bernard Parish in New Orleans, LA, three years after Hurricane Katrina. Randy and Kathy responded to the area's spiritual needs by planting a church.

Repairing the Breach

Story by Christmas M. Beele and Carol Fowler
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Three Calvary Chapel churches on the Louisiana Gulf Coast continue ministering to families who are still rebuilding three years after Hurricane Katrina.

Each of the churches is unique: CC St. Bernard, planted after Katrina, reaches survivors in an isolated, close-knit community; New Horizon Christian Fellowship was still a fairly new church in Slidell when it was hit by Katrina; Calvary New Orleans was battered in Katrina's epicenter and celebrated its 10-year anniversary this year. Each is growing stronger as they continue in God's Word and helping others in Jesus' name.

Calvary Chapel St. Bernard

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love ... rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints. Romans 12:10a, 12-13a

St. Bernard Parish

Serving as chaplains with the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team, Pastor Randy Williamson and his wife Kathy first visited St. Bernard Parish shortly after Hurricane Katrina sent a 25-foot storm surge through the area. With no utilities, dozens of empty

neighborhoods, and dangerous residue still left behind, the parish 18 miles southeast of New Orleans looked like a ghost town. Nearly three years later, parts of it still do.

During the Williamsons' monthly trips to St. Bernard, they encountered many people whose hearts were open to the love of God. Many were coming to Christ through the disaster ministry of dozens of Calvary Chapel churches on short-term trips as well as through Samaritan's Purse, a Franklin Graham ministry. Feeling God's call to disciple the new believers, Randy and Kathy held services there for three months at the end of 2006. More than 100

people came to the services, and dozens accepted Christ as Savior. With a strong religious background, many people knew God's name but did not know His Son as their personal Lord and Savior.

In January of 2007, the Williamsons moved to St. Bernard Parish. Randy turned over the pastorate of a Calvary Chapel in Michigan which he had planted. Kathy knew that her life would change dramatically—from being the pastor's wife at a mature fellowship to being the lone Sunday school teacher and worker alongside her husband. But she and Randy both knew God was calling them to the remote fishing community. "Most of the

people here, their dads and granddads were fishermen or trappers. It's all they know," Randy said. "Many had never left the parish before evacuating for Katrina. The Lord had us plant the church here because we had to be with the people, living where they live. They weren't going to leave the parish to come to us."

Randy and Kathy spent nearly a year living in a partly-rebuilt house, visiting people at their homes and inviting them to Bible study. "Most people are home during the day—either retired, on disability, unemployed, or out of work as shrimpers and fishermen because of losing their boats," Randy said. Slowly the tight-knit community accepted them. "Now we're part of the family."

Early on, Randy realized that many did not have a basic foundation in the Word of God. "They thought communion was how you get to heaven—that you could sin all week, but if you took the Eucharist, you were okay," he recalled. "They didn't know why or how to study the Bible." He decided to teach through the Book of John on Sunday mornings and offer a new believer's study during the week to learn about the Bible, salvation, grace, prayer, and other essentials of the Christian life.

As the group grew, they began looking for a new meeting place. "But every building we looked at was gutted out ... filled with mud and water," Randy said. "Imagine if you took

a house, turned it upside down, shook it a little bit, and then filled it with water and mud. This is how the houses and buildings look."

The owners of a deserted nursing home offered their facility for ministry. The building had been cleared of mud and debris but needed to be renovated. "The work that had to be done was beyond my comprehension. The task seemed insurmountable," admitted Randy. But Calvary Chapel churches and other ministries helped renovate the building into a church and also repaired homes of the believers—an ongoing work.

Entire families have been touched or restored through the ministry. A trapper named Warren Russell brought his grandsons, Michael and Nicky, to church. While Kathy was teaching through the Book of Acts, she asked who would like to be baptized. Nicky, 12, raised his hand. Kathy asked if he had already been baptized as a baby. "Yes, but I want to again because now I know what it means," Nicky replied enthusiastically. Nicky's mother Candy had gotten in some trouble and asked to do her community service at the church. After fulfilling her time at the church, she continued attending, committed her life to Christ, and asked to be baptized. This past summer, Candy, Nicky, and Michael were baptized on the same day—along with 12 other people. Kathy said, "We only have a few families, but we keep growing as more family members are coming."



Nicky Russell, left, and Jonathan Kalade, right, help each other locate Scripture verses. Nicky, 12, was baptized this summer along with his mom and brother.

Randy added, "At first, church attendance was very sporadic. Now we have a core group of people every Sunday who are growing and wanting to learn more."

Another family, headed by grandfather Henry "Teta" Martinez, 72, comes faithfully. Teta committed his life to Christ soon after Hurricane Katrina, and CC St. Bernard was the first church he attended in more than 40 years. "I taught on spiritual warfare, and he realized that he had experienced a lot of what I had been talking about," Randy said.

Teta's son, Junior, also has been coming to church and recently offered to play

guitar for worship on Sunday—an answer to prayer, since Randy now has Guillain-Barre Syndrome and can no longer play to lead worship. Diagnosed last summer, Randy has trouble walking and using his hands. "Through this, the Lord has raised people up. He is using it for His glory," Randy said.

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Before his debilitating illness, Randy and Kathy led believers in worship to God.



Henry and Lisa Martinez lock hands as they pray with fellow church members at CC St. Bernard. Lisa faithfully prayed for her husband to return to church. After 40-plus years of not going to church, Henry visited CC St. Bernard where he has been growing in his faith ever since.



Allison Campo, left, and her visiting friend, Chris Callac, worship with other believers at New Horizon Christian Fellowship in Slidell, LA, north of New Orleans.



John prays with a local woman after the service.



Renovated by believers at New Horizon, the new sanctuary can seat 350 people.



Pastor John Raymond teaches the Bible verse by verse at New Horizon Christian Fellowship in Slidell.

Singing a New Song

New Horizon Christian Fellowship

Originally from New Orleans, John Raymond sat under verse-by-verse teaching for nine years at CC churches in California before moving to Slidell, 30 miles north of New Orleans across Lake Pontchartrain. In 2004, John and his wife Liz started a nomadic Bible study, meeting in hotel rooms and restaurants. After finding a more permanent location, the Raymonds had to cancel their first meeting because of Hurricane Katrina. John remembered, "Instead of calling everybody to say 'We'll see you at the Vision

Meeting tomorrow night,' we were calling everybody to tell them to run for their lives." Returning home, they found their new church location destroyed. For eight months, their small fellowship rebuilt. Because the fellowship was so new, the CC relief teams did not know about them. But the Slidell believers helped each other and their community by clearing mud, debris, and old sheet rock from homes to rebuild. More than half of the congregation lost their homes completely or had significant damage.

Others lost jobs or had financial hardships. "They weathered that storm together, and it has created a deeper bond," John reflected.

New Horizon Christian Fellowship of Slidell, LA, launched their first service on Easter 2006, drawing more than 300 people to celebrate that "Jesus is alive, and all things are possible."

Trials

The members of the fellowship consistently show the love of Christ, John said. "Instead of focusing on what they've lost, they focus on what they can give," John said tearfully. "They are an inspiration to me—quick to help others and to be there for me and my family." A helping hand goes a long way in a community where entire neighborhoods have been rebuilding for three years. "We've

discovered that the quickest way to get your mind off your challenges is to help other people get through theirs."

Speaking of trials in ministry, John said, "One thing I've learned is that when a fellowship is resolved to be used by the Lord in a mighty way, the enemy will launch as many attacks as he can—whether it's health, finances, or relationships. But the apostle Paul said three times in Ephesians that, in spiritual battles, we are to stand firm in Christ." He added, "We can only stand by His grace. ... The important thing is that we don't lose heart. We can't yield to the attacks of discouragement, frustration, or self-pity—or even circumstances that seem to be overwhelming at times."

Hurricane Gustav hit the Gulf Coast in September. "Even though Gustav missed us, we still had to board up our houses and evacuate," John said. Many were shaken by flashbacks of Katrina. "Some people were given another emotional gut-punch and have not gotten back into church yet. A handful of people from our fellowship moved away."

He encouraged his flock from the Book of Joel: "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. ... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God" (Joel 2:25a, 26a).

Vision for the Future

Today their facility is 27,000 square feet—with children's classrooms, offices, and worship centers for adults and youth—and a

Staying on Course

Calvary New Orleans



Lisa Wippel, left, and Maggie Seago, center, enjoy fellowship in New Horizon's Internet cafe.

sanctuary for 350 people. A little café on site provides a place for outreach.

"We have a really cool 24-foot rock-climbing wall," exclaimed Pastor John, who enjoys physical challenges. He is a former *Survivor Thailand* contestant who gained his spot on

the reality TV show by wrestling an alligator in a swamp to get the producers' attention.

Though they currently have about 120 members, John said, "We have a pretty large vision of what God can do here: a Christian school, a radio station. I know the Lord

will bring the right people at the right time." They are praying for a full-powered FM station that they will call "The Bridge," emphasizing Christ as the bridge between God and sinful man. A station capable of reaching 1.1 million people in New Orleans—from North Shore of Lake Pontchartrain, west to Hammond, and east to Biloxi, MS—would be an enormous opportunity to encourage many who are searching for hope, John said. "Basically, the 1 million people most affected by Hurricane Katrina will be able to listen ... and see how God's Word directly applies to their lives. Right now, the Lord has their attention; they are listening." His hope is that, once they hear the Bible teaching, listeners will plug into one of several Calvary Chapel churches in the area. ☺

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After service, John, left, talks to Pat and Nan Touchard, long-term members of New Horizon. He said the body is servant-hearted and quick to help others.

Planted by Pastor Kevin Cox and his wife Christi in 1998, Calvary New Orleans not only weathered Katrina but helped rebuild their community with the assistance of other CC believers. In the past 10 years, many have come to Christ, and two other CCs were planted. In 2000, Kevin started CC Lafayette, where George Lewellyn has been the pastor for the past four years. Kevin also ordained Jeff Robinson, who pastors CC Houma, one of the Calvarys that was hit hardest by Hurricane Gustav in September.

"We had a CC relief team here at the time, so we sent them over to Houma to help out," Kevin said. Calvary Chapel churches continue to send teams to New Orleans to help rebuild homes and share the love of Christ. "Some of the teams have come back four and five times—they are very dear to our hearts, as we are to them."

Calvary New Orleans is a multicultural church filled with young adults and families. Visitors are often drawn through the ministry's weekday radio program called *The Truth Connection*, which transmits Bible studies citywide.

They started a long-term outreach ministry, Crescent City Compassion, with a vision to show the city Christ's compassion after Katrina. "New Orleans is so different from the rest of the U.S.—an ongoing mission field," Kevin stated. Acting as a conduit between volunteer workers and the needy takes discretion, he explained. "We focus on when the opportunity is legitimate—whether we are enabling irresponsibility or actually helping those in need." After teams leave, Kevin's church follows up. The pastor has seen hundreds come to salvation after being shown the love of Christ in a practical, personal way.

In October, Calvary New Orleans celebrated 10 years of ministry by hosting an outdoor festival complete with free food, bands, and a baptism. "It was a six-hour block party. Many people from the community

came," Kevin said. "After one of the bands played, I shared the Gospel." Believers from the church talked to people in the crowd. "Three people were baptized—two new believers from our church and one from the Houma church."

While many in New Orleans have a traditional church background but no relationship with Christ, Kevin said he has seen the Lord do a deep work of discipleship through the verse-by-verse teaching. "Over the past year and a half, there has grown a group of people who are deeply committed to discipleship—to growing in the Word and serving in the church." He sees their new sense of ownership as healthy for the whole

encounter with Jesus Christ," he said, citing John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (KJV).

Asked what he has learned about trials and ministry over the past decade, Kevin said, "If a pastor focuses on the people in front of him and how they are growing, the ministry is less of a toll and more of a joy." ☺

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

Titus 3:14



Matthew Tayloe, left, and Calvary New Orleans Pastor Kevin Cox, center, look at photos of Robert VonDullen's home renovations after Hurricane Katrina damage.

church body "rather than everybody simply following after one man."

With nearly 70 coming regularly, the work in New Orleans may be slow compared to other works, Kevin said, but he rests in the fact that God sees individuals, not numbers. "The focus is always the individual's

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