

## **Gulf Coast Volunteer Program Now a Joint UUA-UUSC Program**

The Gulf Coast volunteer program is changing! This program was founded through the dedicated efforts of the Hurricane Relief and Social Justice Project of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge under the direction of the Rev. Marilee Baccich. Due to the unprecedented response from UUs across the country, it has now become a joint UUA-UU Service Committee (UUSC) program, staffed by UUSC.

As of April 17, those seeking information about volunteering in New Orleans or Mississippi in the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast volunteer program should contact Peggy Powell, volunteer program associate at UUSC in Cambridge MA, at 617-301-4322 or by email at [uukatrina@uusc.org](mailto:uukatrina@uusc.org).

Visit the <http://www.uusc.org/gulfcoastvolunteerprogram> for more information.

New Orleans staff based at the volunteer center in First Unitarian Universalist Church New Orleans include:

Gulf Coast Response Coordinator: Quo Vadis Breaux  
Volunteer program assistants: Candice Rivera and Vanessa Gorsuch

Mississippi staff based in Gulfport MS include:

Jinnie Trabulsi, Mississippi Community Minister and volunteer coordinator.  
Jaimie Kroot, volunteer program assistant

Rev. Marilee Baccich is returning home to California (see her letter below) and Cheré Coen will continue working at the Hurricane Relief and Social Justice Project in Baton Rouge with long-term hurricane recovery and advocacy work for South Louisiana.

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*A farewell letter from UCBR HRSJP Director Marilee Baccich:*

At the end of August 2005, Hurricane Katrina changed our lives. People all over the country responded to the devastation of the Hurricane and resulting flood. The Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge became the focal point of the relief and recovery effort. People, goods and money started showing up the day after the storm and the congregation responded. A Hurricane Relief Steering Committee grew out of this response and they brought the Hurricane Relief and Social Justice Project to life. Cheré Coen and I were hired to run the Project, to continue to respond to the needs as they arose around us.

The Volunteer Program grew out of this Project, in a response to the constant calls from UU Congregations all over the country with one question: "How can we help?" To this question we added: "How can we support the UU congregations and the UU presence in New Orleans when both churches have been devastated?" and "How do we live our values in the face of what has happened?"

The answer to these three questions was the birth of the volunteer program and the Volunteer Center on the 2nd floor of First UU Church in New Orleans. Since the beginning of the HRSJP in February 2006 until April 2007, when the program goes national and will be run by the UUSC, we have organized and/or housed over 1,000 people representing over 150 churches.

This means that our UU Community has responded to the call and has made a significant difference in the recovery of the Gulf Coast affected by the Hurricane and the flood. Individuals and communities know we are here, not only to stand with them and assist them in their journey Home, but to address the conditions that keep them from easily returning.

It is important for each one of us who have participated in this effort, to take it in, be empowered by it and then use that power to continue to make a difference. In that way we grow and live our value of Justice for All. In that way we grow our spiritual lives by being stretched into greater and greater capacity to hold the suffering of life and transform it into joy.

This past year and a half has been filled with grief and filled with grace. It has been a privilege to work with my Volunteer Coordinator, Cheré Coen, and the congregation of the Baton Rouge church. It has been a privilege to meet volunteers from all over the country and to be constantly inspired by their (your) generosity and compassion. It has been a grace to be able to do some small thing in the face of the overwhelming devastation. It has been a joy to watch volunteers bring hope and caring to so many who have felt forgotten.

I tear myself away as I return to my family who have supported me in coming back home to my birthplace. Now I return back home to their loving arms.

Blessings,

Rev. Marilee Baccich