

**Presbytery of Western North Carolina
Mission Team Report for Gautier, Mississippi
February 2007**

In early February fifteen members representing 6 congregations from the PWNC headed off to Gautier to answer the call to assist in rebuilding homes in the hurricane Katrina ravaged area. For some it was their first mission trip which lended to the overall excitement and anticipation of the trip. Two others, Jerry and Elinor Truitt, Presbyterians from Tucson, Arizona, joined our team. Some of the team had asked them to meet us after previously meeting and becoming friends with them on a mission trip to D'Iberville, Mississippi.

Along the way to Gautier, we stopped for one night as guests of First Presbyterian Church in Auburn, Alabama. The connectedness of Presbyterians was highlighted by the delicious supper prepared for us there by Elizabeth Johnson, who had been born in Canton, North Carolina. Before going on to Gautier on Sunday morning, we worshiped and shared in communion at the early service in Auburn.

At the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance camp in Gautier, we joined 7 Canadians from Ontario. We all quickly connected and became "one" at the camp. It was a well-equipped camp with the typical "pod" tents, stocked tool tent, wonderful kitchen, and gathering tent. Taylor, the camp manager, and Michael, the construction manager, provided great guidance.

Stately homes had been destroyed or severely damaged and FEMA trailers still dotted the residential areas. Some houses were back to normal, while from the street some appeared normal, only upon closer examination, were found to be "gutted" of wall board and standing as a skeleton on the interior. The devastation was so great that recovery still seems to be a tremendous challenge. It helped to place our challenges in perspective.

Some teams worked together hanging sheetrock, mudding, sanding, and painting. While others did electrical work, tile work, and helped around the camp. Sue, one homeowner, shared that they had been to 10 different organizations asking for help and none were able to assist. Then she heard about the Presbyterians and the "long haul" effort and commitment they

expressed. After contacting the PDA on Saturday, Monday the help started. Her gratitude was obvious. Her son-in-law, nicknamed "Mudbug", showed us one of his skills. He prepared the most wonderful lunch for the team at Sue and Richard's house one day consisting of gumbo, the real deal.

Thomas, the home owner at another house prepared a different group a wonderful chicken lunch and later in the week a very large bag of Cajun boiled shrimp, which was quickly eaten. These folks who were being helped wanted to give back to others who helped. In their way of helping it seemed to make the tasks just a little more achievable.

At the home of Tabatha and Marcus and their 3 children, their delight was going to come at the end of the week when enough work could be completed that the children could sleep in the house for the first time since the hurricane. All five had been cramped inside a FEMA travel trailer since the storm.

Time is moving on and still so much needs to be done. Our team recognized one of the greatest gifts we could share was assisting in some way to help the people of Gautier see hope for future. PDA is helping to provide just that to the survivors. Several team members used the words "rewarding experience, fulfilling and could make a difference" to describe their feelings from the journey to Gautier.

Team members shared fellowship and commitment and probably achieved things that at first glance looked impossible. Homeowners and team members alike have seen that God is working and we just have to answer the call to join in. It can create lasting effects.

[Several team members contributed to this report]

The next Presbytery mission trip to the gulf region is scheduled for November 3-11, 2007. Contact Ginnie Stevens at Vestevens2@aol.com or (828) 258-8220 or Billy Wilson at few1@earthlink.net or 704-864-1205 for more details.