

Andrew's victims begin rebuilding



AP/Wide World Photos
This aerial view shows the damage caused to a subdivision in LaPlace, La. after Hurricane Andrew produced a tornado on Aug. 26.

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — As immediate needs for food, water and shelter were met and the larger task of rebuilding began, the initial shock began to wear off for victims of Hurricane Andrew in Florida and Louisiana.

A week after the nation's most costly natural disaster flattened southern Florida and flooded coastal Louisiana, the Catholic dioceses of Houma-Thibodaux and Lafayette in Louisiana and the Archdiocese of Miami took stock of damage and relief efforts.

"At first people were just in trauma," said one Louisiana diocesan spokeswoman. "But as of yesterday (Aug. 30) they seem to be coming alive."

"The numbness is beginning to wear off and we've moved to another level of needs," said a Miami archdiocesan representative. "We've gone from needing food and water to roofing materials and chain saws."

The toll of hurricane-related deaths in the two states and the Bahamas had climbed to 35 by Aug. 31.

Estimates of the number of people left homeless in Florida by the storm ran as high as 250,000; 63,000 homes were destroyed, and electricity was still off for more than 600,000 customers.

In Louisiana, where Andrew hit two

days later, 25,000 people were homeless, many because of flooding in houses that had little structural damage. An estimated 56,000 were without power Aug. 30. Damage costs are estimated in the tens of billions of dollars for the two states.

Throughout the country, congregations of all denominations took up special collections at weekend services and offered prayers for the hurricane victims.

Miami Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy and bishops of four other Florida dioceses asked for second collections to offset the costs of emergency services and helping with rebuilding.

Ceiling tiles from the gaping roof fell around Archbishop McCarthy at an Aug. 30 Mass at Christ the King Parish in Perrine, Agosta said. But the liturgy was "the most beautiful and uplifting Mass I've attended," she said.

While parishioners in grimy work clothes inside the church offered thanks for surviving and prayers for strength, visitors from San Lázaro Parish in Hialeah, where damage was less severe, were setting up a barbecue outside and preparing to spend the day cleaning up the area, Agosta said.

The outpouring of assistance was a scene repeated throughout southern Florida and areas of Louisiana.

People from other states showed up in southern Florida with truckloads of

supplies ranging from diapers to bottled water. One woman offered the Miami archdiocese the use of her credit card to purchase supplies.

A parish in Port Arthur, Texas, sent 30 volunteers with chain saws to help out in the Lafayette diocese, Hargrave said. So much food and clothing had been donated in the area that those needs had been met, she said. Money to buy building materials had moved to the top of the priority list.


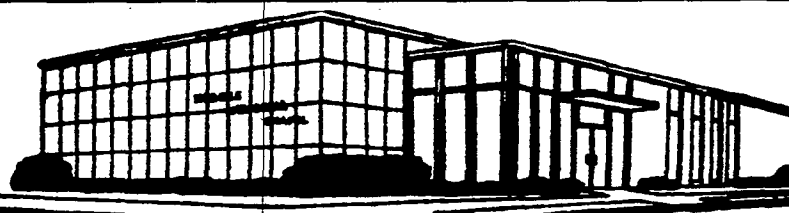
While the job of assessing damage and setting up emergency services took precedence in Florida for nearly a week, Agosta said the help of volunteers willing to start repairs and cleanup would soon be welcome.

"We're hoping to give all new meaning to the term 'weekend warrior,'" she said. "They can still put on their tennis shoes and head for Florida, but we want them to grab a chain saw now."

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