

'Katrina all over again:' New Orleans in solidarity with Houston

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Rain from the remnants of Hurricane Harvey falls in New Orleans, where people with vivid memories of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 are providing an outpouring of sympathy and donations for people in horribly flooded Texas

With memories and scars of Katrina still raw, New Orleans residents poured out love and donations Wednesday to victims of Hurricane Harvey in Texas, where devastation has reminded many of the epic 2005 storm.

"This is beautiful. It's been overwhelming," said Father Tim Hedrick as a steady stream of parishioners and other residents of New Orleans and Jefferson Parish drove to St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church, their cars and SUVs overflowing with food and other supplies.

Hedrick, the church's 35-year-old parochial vicar, whom everyone calls Father Tim, and an army of volunteers helped unload cartons of instant noodles, drinking water, crackers, blankets, shoes, cleaning materials, even a pair of red white and blue folding chairs.

They will be stuffed into an 18-wheel tractor trailer and hauled to the deluged city of Houston and other parts of Texas, where millions of people are reeling from the largest storm to batter the Gulf Coast since Katrina barreled ashore 12 years ago.

One of the volunteers, nanny Amy Runco, had come to the church to drop off donations of diapers and baby formula, but after mulling over how Texans and others helped her family so much when they were struck by Katrina, she stayed to help.

"I just wanted to give back after everything I went through," including living in a government-provided trailer for two years during high school while her family got back on its feet, Runco, 26, told AFP.

"Just seeing what they're going through (with storm Harvey) has brought back a lot of memories. It's rough," she said, her voice cracking.

"It just feels like it's Katrina all over again."

The scenes of giving and remembering were being repeated across New Orleans, which has found itself in sudden tragic kinship with a larger city in a neighboring state suffering similarly staggering pain and loss.

"It breaks my heart," restaurant waitress Debra Werner told AFP as she dropped off packages of rice, beans and sausage at the Second Harvest Food Bank in Elmwood.

"You bleed for those people, you know?"

Werner, 65, was forced to evacuate her inundated New Orleans home when a nearby levee failed. She struggled to hold back tears as she thought of neighboring communities and states now suffering similar fates.



Families evacuate their homes in Houston as Texas still grapples with the flooded aftermath of monster storm Harvey

Many in New Orleans of course know full well the horrors of such

disaster, and they have opened their hearts and wallets to help, even as they faced the remnants of Hurricane Harvey, which has drenched New Orleans with rain, but fortunately little flooding.

Two 'similar' storms

Brent McCrossen heads a loose-knit group of 45 chief executives in the region determined to do good, and they rallied around helping Houston.

"Those people did everything for New Orleans," including taking in Katrina refugees, said McCrossen, who co-founded tech firm Audiosocket.

"If we sat on our hands and just sent thoughts and prayers it would be an inadequate moral response."

Together McCrossen and friends have set up food banks in four locations around New Orleans.

Many rescuers and other emergency responders in Texas—and now in western Louisiana, where Harvey was hammering Lake Charles—suffered through the Katrina disaster.

The two storms appear "similar in a lot of ways," said Henry Cambre, a retired chief petty officer with the Coast Guard who was taking emergency calls at its Harvey command center in New Orleans.

Cambre noted the scope of both storms, and the damage that Mother Nature wrought a dozen years ago and now.

"You feel a connection to the folks who are out there," he said.

Father Tim concurred that the two cities are now intertwined in tragedy.

But he offered a message of hope to Houston: "We have your back."

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