



Nathaniel Dowl, 18, his mother Estelle and sister Cayla were looking for shelter after New Orleans was devastated by floods.

How do we help our fellow Americans? First, We Must Feed Them

By David Oliver Relin

THEY CAME FROM Biloxi, Bayou La Batre and Bellefontaine—low-lying communities in Mississippi and Alabama that live on in memory, if not in fact. The 87 people who have taken temporary refuge in Our Savior Lutheran Church in Mobile, sleeping on cots that crowd the solid brick building's sanctuary and Sun-

day-school classroom, are beginning to make plans for the future. But at first they were focused on something more elemental: survival.

Kathy Wright, 38, her husband J.R., 42, and their four daughters—Angel, 20, Shayna, 15, Bryanna, 14, and Marynda, 6—had evacuated their double-wide trailer in Grand Bay, Ala., carrying a cooler packed with enough meals for one day. When they returned to see what was left of their home, the Wrights found water pouring out from light fixtures and a torn section of the living-room roof admitting the midday sun. “The thing that

Right: Michael and Gaynell Addison and their kids were taken in by the Shiloh Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La. “Thank God for this place,” says Gaynell. “When we were most desperate they made sure my kids got three meals a day.” Below: Kathy Wright (r) of Grand Bay, Ala., found help for her family at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Mobile. “We’re OK,” says Kathy, grateful for the shelter and food provided by the church’s pastor, Bruce Hanson (c), his wife Pamela (l) and countless volunteers.



“When you’ve got food and water, you can start putting your life back together.”

tions, had rushed more than 32 million pounds of emergency food to people like Kathy Wright and her kids.

Perhaps no one in America knows better than Brian Greene how important—and difficult—it can be to feed people in the wake of a natural disaster. Greene was executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank that covered New Orleans and southern Louisiana, supplying 340 local emergency food outlets and children’s feeding programs. In the days after Katrina, Greene tried to get his network up and running. “It was a dead zone,” he says. “All 250 of our partner agencies in the metro New Orleans area were wiped out. Our infrastructure was completely gone.”

Finally, Second Harvest colleagues and local officials were able to help round up a convoy of National Guard trucks. In the first three days after the storm—before agencies like FEMA had established their relief efforts—Greene, the Guard and volunteers worked by flashlight in the food bank’s damaged 30,000-square-foot warehouse to get 650,000 pounds of food and water delivered to survivors. “I always knew our work was critical,” Greene says, “but for the first time, it was literally a matter of life and death.”

A week after the storm, Second Harvest staffers and volunteers transformed an abandoned Wal-Mart into a distribution center for trucks bringing shipments from all over America, a hub that is now delivering 500,000 pounds of food a day to displaced Louisianans. Shortly after, Greene moved on to his new job: running the Houston Food Bank, where he arrived just days ahead of Hurricane Rita.

“Katrina just blew apart our usual disaster plans and taught us all a lot of lessons,” Greene says. “The biggest one is to ask for help from people across the country as early as possible. Because so many Americans have donated their time and money, we’re able to respond with speed and flexibility to whatever nature throws at us.”

Ever since floodwaters forced them out of their Ninth Ward neighborhood in New Orleans, Gaynell and Michael Addison have taken shelter in Baton Rouge’s Shiloh Baptist Church, continued

We Must Feed Them | continued

along with their five children, Carlos, 18, Mickel, 12, Michael, 11, and 9-year-old twins Deon and Ariane.

“Thank God for this place,” Gaynell says. “They took us in and fed us when no one from the government was helping. You can fill out forms or call one of FEMA’s 1-800 numbers, you can wait forever, and nothing happens. But when we were most desperate, they made sure my kids got three meals a day.”

In addition to feeding the Addisons and 36 other evacuees, Shiloh depends on donations to continue its work as a day-care, after-school and summer-feeding site for 150 of Baton Rouge’s neediest children. Throughout the region, those organizations that feed and care for children year-round—charities that have been, and will continue to be, supported by The Great American Bake Sale™—now face their greatest challenge.

“All across the 21 countries that we serve, we’ve got families living in tents or under blue tarps,” says Shearie Archer of the Bay Area Food Bank. “In the places where the buildings are gone, we’re distributing food to the soup kitchens and pantries in parking lots where schools, churches and supermarkets once stood.”

At the same time, Archer and her colleagues refuse to abandon their ongoing mission to help all families in need.

“We aim to feed hungry children in all the nooks and crannies of Mississippi and Alabama,” Archer says—a goal that she believes is not beyond the capabilities of a prosperous country populated by generous people.

“These folks won’t be back on their feet in a few months,” Archer says. “They need homes, they need jobs, they need everything. And in the meantime, we need your help to feed them.”