

PURE RELIGION

The Mormons Are Here!

If there is a word that can define the devastation of a hurricane, it may be chaos. Winds gust 100 miles per hour and higher; the ocean surges beyond its bounds, spilling over and burying land; tornadoes spin off and wreak destruction. All these create pandemonium scarcely imaginable by those who have not witnessed this devastation themselves.

In the wake of chaos, numbers: Billions of dollars of damage; thousands homeless; dozens killed; millions without power, water, and phone service. In 2004, one hurricane after another slammed mercilessly into the Caribbean and southeastern United States, coming so close after each other that residents scarcely had time to cleanup from one before another came upon its heels.

As each hurricane approached, stake presidents, area welfare agents, and Church welfare specialists counseled with one another in daily conference calls to discuss forecasts, mobilize resources, and offer emotional and spiritual support.

From bishops' storehouses, thousands upon thousands of pounds of food and emergency supplies—generators, chainsaws, first aid supplies, tarps, and hygiene kits—were in place, ready to be distributed as soon as volunteer cleanup crews could get into the area to help. LDS Family Services sent in a team of specially trained trauma counselors. Bishops and stake presidents marshaled their members into crews of 10 that descended by the thousands to create order once again from chaos.

"My father was hit pretty bad by Hurricane Charley," one woman wrote. "On Saturday, there were a lot of men in my Dad's yard. At first I didn't know what was going on until I saw everyone had T-shirts with the name of your

Church on the back. All I could do was break down and cry."

Home owner Ron Brodzik of Port Charlotte was at a loss about how he would deal with the caved roof and flooded floors in his home. When he looked up, LDS Church volunteers in their "Mormon Helping Hands" T-shirts approached and offered to help. "They came from nowhere," he said, "like God sent them."



After witnessing the effective way Church members were working throughout the community, a group of 25 members of another faith asked if they could help. "You are the only ones who are this organized," they said.

The group was given three work orders and directions on how to get to them. They were eager to lend a hand but had one special request: they wanted to wear our T-shirts. And so these wonderful people worked side by side with members of the Church, helping those whose lives had been devastated by the chaos.

"I was trying to pick things up, and then I just broke down in tears," Tanya Foley of Punta Gorda, Florida, said, "and then two vans pulled up, and they said they were from the Church of Jesus Christ. And I said, 'You're here!' They got right to work, and it was truly unbelievable. And I was saying, 'Thank you, Lord!'"

Through all the chaos, the welfare program of the Church and its ever-faithful members provided service, strength, and a sympathetic ear. One woman who was in charge of a community center that was trying to restore order to chaos watched as members of the Church in their distinctive T-shirts piled out of vans ready to help.

"Everybody! Everybody!" she exclaimed, her cheeks wet with tears, "The Mormons are here!"