

## July 2013 Update

Community Church has had a very good year – visitors are frequent; we have some new members; and there is a lot of energy for beginning new initiatives.

We have an active worship team working with Jim; the choir has gained two new members and continues to improve under Bennett's expert direction; we have a few young families and are upgrading our RE program for the children; and Jim continues to offer adult RE opportunities which are well received.

Our new board is strong and has already held their planning retreat, and we have four active members who will attend the Dwight Brown Leadership School in August, something Jim has long hoped for. We have begun planning to establish small group ministry in the fall and have commitments from enough people to have co-facilitators for three or four groups, depending upon how many sign up. Jim plans to use the "Soul Matters" curriculum, which will provide materials for the small groups as well as themes for worship.

Our community outreach continues to expand; Jim was pleased to be invited to an Urban League national meeting last week, which was held in conjunction with the huge Essence Festival which was in town. We have, as I'm sure you know, a tremendously serious problem with gun violence, and churches are coming together to try to address that.

We continue to have a second Sunday collection for the groups we support – the 7<sup>th</sup>

Ward club that works with kids; Second Harvest food bank; Beacon of Hope; Unity for the Homeless; the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal.

We have a monthly craft group that meets to make things – for a while they made pillowcases for homeless people moving into apartments; now they're making things for the RE kids to use.

I don't sew, so I'm knitting hats for people taking chemo, which one of our crafters takes to her oncologist.

We put tags in everything which say "made for you by the members of Community Church Unitarian Universalist".

And we finally have new t-shirts with the church logo to wear when we're doing a service project – I'll wear mine Thursday when I go to do interviews for Second Harvest.

The building is also proving to be a major asset. We've had several excellent music programs, including one by a chamber group composed of Symphony musicians; all have been well attended.

We now have an acting class renting fellowship hall two evenings a week, and the Shepherd Center, the Lakeview program for the elderly, has renewed their lease at the Annex building.

Audubon Society meets at the church, and we hope to continue attracting similar groups to our space.

In the city at large, some interesting things are happening. When he took office, Mayor Landrieu invited the federal Justice Department in to develop a plan to reform the police department, which had a reputation for brutality.

A consent decree has been signed to bring about changes, and a monitor has been selected to ensure implementation.

Meanwhile a lawsuit has resulted in a federal consent decree to make badly needed reforms to our local prison, and the problem of how to pay for those changes has generated an enormous battle between the Mayor and the Sheriff who runs the prison.

Both consent decrees are badly needed, but funding them both will be an enormous challenge.

The Governor continues to refuse to accept the expansion of Medicaid which Obamacare offers, which I find extremely sad.

We have an enormous population of poor, underserved people who need it, and the Democrats tried to force Medicaid expansion during the legislative session, but they were unsuccessful.

It's summer in New Orleans – hot, humid, but with lots of gorgeous crape myrtle trees in bloom.

And, of course, the long months of hurricane season to endure.

The Corps of Engineers has begun work on the permanent gates and pumps which we hope will protect us, and we hope that significant marsh rebuilding can begin when the BP oil spill funds become available.

We need an enormous amount of help to restore the wetlands and marshes – both for lessening any storm surge and for maintaining the huge nurseries they provide for our fisheries.

Everyone who likes Louisiana shrimp, crab, oysters, and fish has a stake in protecting and rebuilding our wetlands; anything you can do to help us spread the word would be very much appreciated.

We hope your congregations have also had a good year; we would love to hear some news of your activities, especially those we might adapt for our church life. We remain, of course, deeply grateful for all that you did to make our survival possible and successful, and we look forward to welcoming visitors from your congregations when they are in New Orleans.

All the best to all of you from all of us.

### **August 2010 Update**

On Sunday, August 29th, 5 years to the day since the canal walls breached and our church flooded, CCUU will break ground for our new sanctuary! There are still issues to be addressed, of course, but the big decisions have been made, and as our president said in her e-mail - We Have Lift Off! Please let all of our friends and supporters among your congregations know this exciting news, and be with us in spirit next Sunday, 9 a.m. CDT, when we celebrate this huge milestone. We send our heartfelt thanks for all that you have done, with moral, financial, and on-the-ground help over these five years. You have been and are enormously important to our continuing recovery, and we are very grateful. Fondly, Suzy

### **July 2010 Update**

I'm pleased to report to our partners that things are going well for CCUU this summer. We have good new members on our Board and new people signing up to work with the children this fall. Our new music director brings a wealth of experience with choirs and a depth of musical talent which has transformed our Sunday morning music – despite reading ahead to see if we agree with the words, we find these UU's really CAN sing! Rev. Jim is at Meadville Lombard this week attending a course on sermons taught by Rev. Dr. Bill Schulz. He has also just moved into his newly purchased home – a big step forward for a man who lost everything just five years ago, when his apartment, as well as his church, took on 8 feet of water. He is very pleased.

Our summer services are being well attended, and the GNOUU tri-church poetry service, held at CCUU, was a particular pleasure. We go to Northshore in August for the "Hot Art in a Cool Space" service, which will also be a fine sharing among our congregations. As you recall, we had an intern serving all our GNOUU congregations this past church year, which was a good experience for us all.

Our fundraising for our new building got a major boost last month when a long-time member made the second most generous gift received so far and brought us much closer to our goal (Pacific Unitarian's generous three-year gift remains our largest one, for which we are so very grateful). The building committee and the finance committee are evaluating options and the building committee is performing their due diligence on the two contractors selected by the Board for further consideration.

Two of our members are receiving publicity for their contributions to the community. Howard Mielke, our president-elect, has just published research showing that lead content in the soil in New Orleans has decreased significantly since the flood, with the result that lead levels in children's blood has decreased. Apparently sediment deposited by floodwaters provided some mitigation. Howard, a Tulane research professor, is the lead researcher on the project and an expert on lead contamination in soil. So even K has had at least one good effect. Howard also serves on an EPA advisory panel; we value his input enormously.

Cindy Scott, our jazz singer, is organizing a major fundraiser on July 31st for Gulf Coast oil spill relief, bringing in colleagues from New York to join her in the effort. The web site for the beneficiary of the benefit is [www.gulfaid.org](http://www.gulfaid.org), in case members of your congregation wish to support her effort. If anyone plans to be in town at that time, the music should be wonderful – plan to attend. Details for this and other performances are on Cindy's web site, [www.cindyscott.us](http://www.cindyscott.us).

Our Lakeview neighborhood continues to rebuild – the newspaper reports that it is up to 60 – 70% of pre-storm population, with many young families moving in. There's a strong neighborhood association which turned out in force last week, in response to a plan by the School Board to sell the lovely park across the street from our church for development. It seems that the strong negative reaction will result in a change of plans – we certainly hope so.

The area at large, of course, is very much under siege, with the oil spill putting our fishers out of work and fouling our environment and the moratorium on deep water drilling eliminating more thousands of jobs. Whatever you feel the proper balance is between keeping the oil industry alive in the Gulf and protecting against another disaster, there is no denying that the effect of the moratorium is adding to the devastation of our local economy. And now there is news that the Navy's cutback on the type of ship built at our local Avondale Shipyard puts another 5000 jobs at risk.

If things come in three's, I'd say it's time for three good things to come our way, and perhaps they are. The first would definitely be our energetic new Mayor, who is addressing a host of problems with transparency and, it seems, with the support of a competent and dedicated staff and a strong City Council. We'll keep our eyes open for the other two.

I expect our City's recovery to move forward vigorously in the coming months, and I'm so pleased that Rev. Jim, Rev. Melanie, and our local UU congregations are here. We in New Orleans have an enormous opportunity to create a wonderful City, and thanks to your help, we UU's are here, strong, and prepared to play our part.

Everyone at CCUU joins with me in sending our good wishes for a restorative, enjoyable summer and our gratitude for your continuing interest and support. Do let us know how our partnership can enrich your lives, as you enrich ours.

## **CCUU is Finally Rebuilding!**

At this time of renewal, when Passover and Easter are celebrated and flowers brighten our world, we at CCUU send you our best wishes for a happy and meaningful celebration of new life. In New Orleans, spring has come in a rush - banks of azaleas which were only buds have bloomed seemingly overnight, and the magnificent live oak trees are yellow-green with new leaves. The sound of the lawn mower is heard in the land.

It is truly a time of hope here, for many reasons. We've had our soil borings done; we've authorized the test pile to be driven. On Monday, March 29, the process of clearing our lot and bringing in fill began - we are FINALLY REBUILDING! On Tuesday night, March 30, our Board and Building Committee held a joint meeting with our architect. Final plans for our new building were reviewed and approved, and the Board has authorized the architect to begin negotiations with a contractor he highly recommends. There was a long, careful and thoughtful discussion about whether to bid the project or negotiate, and I'm pleased to report that we disagreed without being disagreeable - a fine thing in any group. Architect Brian Gille explained in detail that the general contractor gets bids from two or more subs for each aspect of the work. In his opinion, if we negotiate with the contractor, more time will be spent soliciting bids from subs and they will be more carefully reviewed than if three contractors are spending time to submit bids without being sure they'll get the work. The general contractor's fee is negotiable, and the contractor he recommends sets a flat fee, rather than a percentage, so there's no incentive for higher costs. He also pointed out that if our negotiations are not successful in arriving at a good price, we can then go to bid. It was also pointed out that a successful negotiation would result in significant time saved, and Brian's sense was that the contractor he recommends would have been selected through the bidding process anyway. He wants to get into the small commercial market, while the other two potential bidders are already well established there, and he seems to be hungrier than the other two.

Following the discussion, three members of the building committee favored negotiation; one

avored bidding. The five board members were as follows: one strongly in favor of bidding; two favored negotiation; one abstained. President Cheryl Stevens did not have to vote but expressed support for negotiation. So the decision was taken.

Although we do not have a firm price for the building, we do know that we still need to raise funds - we do not want to assume long term debt because we do not yet have the financial capacity to service it. Every fund raising idea that seems practical is being developed: lovely paintings donated by the children of a deceased artist member are being made into sets of note cards; members are offering B&B in their homes for Jazz Fest; and we will approach our members and friends for additional pledges, especially those who have joined us since the original capital campaign in late 2006. We are also very lucky to have our jazz singer Cindy Scott (we sent you her CD for a holiday gift) fund raising on behalf of GNOUU. She will be driving up the east coast to New England in late spring and will headline fundraisers along the way. West Hartford church, which has partnered with us since the beginning, will hold a cabaret in late May to benefit our building fund, and we are hopeful that other congregations will plan events around her music to help all three of our churches.

GNOUU is also preparing a brief video to use for a national social messaging campaign, using facebook and other modern communications. It's an excellent piece - we look forward to sharing it with you and hope you will help us disseminate it. As you know, our three congregations share in gifts to GNOUU.

Our GNOUU ministerial intern is leading two Seder suppers for our congregations - one on the North Shore and one on the South Shore. He is also leading discussion groups which rotate among our three locations, encouraging spiritual growth among us. And on April 18th, we will hold our annual GNOUU earth day service in Audubon Park, followed by a pot luck picnic.

The Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal, the secular offshoot of GNOUU, continues to host volunteers who come here to help. They have obtained their 501c3 and are actively pursuing grants for additional activities.

At CCUU, we are honored that Erik David Carlson, our ministerial intern in 2007-2008, has asked that our congregation ordain him to the UU Ministry. We will hold his ordination service on Saturday afternoon, April 10th, and it will be a very special occasion for us all. It is also a nice New Orleans touch that the French Quarter Festival is that weekend, so good food and good music will be abundantly available to all who come into town for the service.

In the City at large, we are actually still savoring our football championship - I was amused the other day to pick up some cleaning and find a fleur-de-lis and "Saints - World Champions" printed on the cleaner's bag. Of more long-term significance, the Super Bowl victory was followed by a real landmark election. Mitch Landrieu won a landslide victory for Mayor, carrying all but one precinct in the City. Although incumbent Mayor Nagin tried to play the race card, voters crossed color lines in droves - in both directions. Citywide offices of Mayor and Councilmember were won by white candidates with strong black support, and important citywide offices were likewise won by black candidates with strong white support. Mayor-elect Landrieu has appointed task forces during his transition to advise him on myriad issues, from hiring a new police chief to better customer service in city hall. The display of energy and the citizen involvement across all neighborhoods has all of us feeling very hopeful that a new day is coming.

In an odd sort of way, the activities of the federal prosecutor have also inspired hope. Following confessions and/or convictions from several "political operatives", including Congressman Bill Jefferson, he has broken a police coverup of misconduct following Katrina, obtaining two confessions from police officers involved. There is tremendous determination here that corruption will not be tolerated in our public life, and having an active, effective pursuit of wrongdoers is very heartening. The new police chief will have a good basis to begin re-making the department. The new city inspector general is also very well focused and presenting reports that are relevant and influential. Feels like a new day - and it couldn't come at a better time.

We look forward to visits from members of our partner churches and to news of your activities.

Best wishes for a wonderful spring, and as always, thanks for your continuing interest and support. With your help, we continue to move forward toward full recovery and an ever more effective ministry.

## Rise Again with Us : After the Flood



*The following essay was written early in the recovery process. It is followed by an update, 2 ½ years later.*

Hello from the "new normal" here in New Orleans. After many months of saying that we could hardly wait for things to get back to normal again here, we are now mostly able to comprehend that this is it - the "new normal". We can and will improve our "new normal" over time but there is no path back to our "old normal" from here.

The preceding paragraph will seem to those who are not "from" here to be so obvious that it doesn't need saying. Obviously things got destroyed in the storm and floods, and lives were changed or even lost. Obviously we can't go back to the past, shouldn't even want to go back



to some of the parts of the past. Just get over it, get on with it, salvage what you can, rebuild what you can't salvage, and move on.

Its not so easy to absorb the new normal if you are from here, it feels so ... well, abnormal. Still today as we drive across town and see the blue roofs, the bland white trailers in the yards, the debris, the flooded cars under the expressway, the closed schools, and the reminders of missing friends and neighbors -- we want to think it is just a temporary aberration that will soon pass. "I can hardly wait for things to get back to normal!", we say to someone. They reply, "This IS normal now, welcome to the NEW normal!" and plant our feet gently on the ground. This social exchange, about the "new normal", still happens several times a week to most of us. It has become for New Orleanians a conversation starter, like talking about the weather or the game last night. We need to keep reminding ourselves somehow that this really is the new normal.

For the members of Community Church UU, our church was the seat of what normal was. Not just the building, rather the whole church experience, the community of it, the spiritual sanctuary it offered us. We miss that normal so much. There was a time, a normal time, when no matter what kind of week we'd had we knew that come Sunday morning we could gather together, minister to each other, hear a good sermon, sing some songs, and that some time during coffee hour we would realize we felt better about life. There were other facets of the church experience too, the social events, the committee work, the growing together and feeling we were making the world a little better place.

We still have many blessings, in fact many of them come from you - our fellow UUs who have supported us in our time of need so generously. But the "new normal" here just isn't that great yet so far as Community Church UU goes. We meet in borrowed spaces on Sundays, space we are thankful for, but, it isn't home ground. We have shared services with First UU Church who are another wonderful UU congregation here in town, but, well, for both congregations it's like the first time you spend Christmas at your in-laws instead of at your own parents. It's all nice, it's all the best we can do, and we are thankful, but, it doesn't feel the same.

Hope springs eternal, and it informs us of possibilities to make our new normal better than it ever was before. We at CCUU are certain that New Orleans needs us on the scene here, and we are anxious to again be working on developing our own identity and our own place in the community. The journey will be long, longer than any but the wisest thought. The New Orleans part of our interdependent web of existence turns out to be a pretty complex thing to rebuild. CCUU needs more members to bring their gifts to its ministries, but its members and the community need CCUU to have those ministries first to attract and sustain them. Our members and our community need housing rebuilt, jobs and schools for their children - so many have needed to leave us. For those who remain, the "new normal" means life is really quite a struggle on a daily basis, just as CCUU needs its members to be even more generous than before with time and volunteer skills, as there are fewer hands and much more work to be done. The answer is growth and attracting new members, ministering to others in the community who need us. Back we go to needing the gifts of members and the community, to do the work that stimulates the growth and new ministries. Everything depends on something else to function first, and every repair or effort to a part of the web seems only to lead to another. No quick fix

here.

Our challenge is not just to rebuild a building, and not just to furnish it. We are rebuilding a church, a congregation, a whole interdependent web of members. All the pieces must be strong and healthy for the CCUU community to be strong and healthy. There is no quick fix for all of this. Money is needed, lots of money, but even that is not enough. Time is also needed, time for the future to unfold as well as gifts of time and energy and skill. Communities and ministries are supported by money, but it is not what they are made from.

CCUU's "new normal" will get steadily and incrementally better and better if we keep up our efforts, but it will take years of steady efforts for us to rise again.

If hope inspires us to start, then faith keeps us going. Time and again we hear those who have come through a tight spot, a tough time or a long struggle say they never lost hope and their faith kept them going. What shall give us, the members of CCUU, that faith? Shall we look up to the sky for faith? Shall we place our faith in the government that built our levees? It can't hurt, but, most of us need even more assurances, and so we turn to you.

We are placing our faith in you. We must. With all the members of CCUU doing everything we can to help ourselves, it will not be enough without you helping us too. We must have faith that you, our fellow UUs, our Partner Churches, our communities of supporters, will be there for us over the long term, for the whole journey, as you have been when Katrina was news on your front pages. We do not wish to "mooch" off your largess and generosity, rather we hope you will find in us a good investment. The UUA and the USA need a strong CCUU and a strong New Orleans we think, and we are eager to get back on our feet and deliver on the promises of our missions.

Please help stand us back up, and rise again with us.

### **Post-Katrina lessons continue**

There's not much news from CCUU on this gorgeous spring day, and it's all good - Easter was Jim's first Sunday back after his brief sabbatical, and that was a most welcome event! 11 members of the Fox Valley Fellowship were at our service; they're here for a week or more, depending on the person, helping with our recovery, and we were delighted to see them. We have others staying at the Annex this week too - with this being spring break for a lot of people, the Volunteer Center is full to overflowing. It's wonderful that folks realize what a long road we are walking and continue to come to help.

Jim suggested our partners might be interested in the attached ["Times Picayune" column](#) and the related information on the web site

<http://www.levees.org/news>

. LSU has fired Ivor Van Heerden, who has led the investigations into what went wrong with the Corps of Engineers work that permitted the awful post-Katrina flooding to happen. Although LSU has not commented publicly, the widely held supposition is that he was fired because he was aggressively critical of the Corps and LSU feared for its federal funding. It is also widely believed that without Van Heerden's insistence on investigating, everyone might still believe the original explanation that the floodwalls were overtopped and there were no flaws in the construction of the floodwalls. Given the huge number of communities who depend for their safety on Corps installations, and the troubling idea that federal research funds are at risk when federal agencies are criticized, we felt this story would be of interest.

As mentioned above, it's beautiful here - the fragrance of jasmine and gardenias permeates the air; St. Joseph's lilies and other amaryllis bloom; and the magnolia trees are showing their first blossoms. French Quarter Fest this weekend, followed by two weekends of Jazz Fest, and by then it will be hot and we'll be inside in the air conditioning envying the northerners their beautiful spring. Take care, everyone, and keep in touch - anybody coming down for the music?

### **March News from CCUU**

On the official first day of spring, the azaleas are in bloom, and I believe our mockingbird has mastered the art of circular breathing – he seems to sing without pause for long periods of time. It makes a wonderful way to wake up in the morning, with the windows open to the music!

Since my last update, we've made enormous strides toward our rebuilding. After we learned that the property in Faubourg St. John had been sold, the board and building ministry met for a long and careful discussion, to develop the process by which we would keep the congregation informed of building plans and gather their input. It was a good meeting and we all left feeling that we had successfully balanced the goals of giving the ministry the authority to move ahead efficiently and effectively while keeping the congregation involved. The following Sunday, we had a congregational meeting at which we presented the architect's preliminary plans and received authorization to move forward with an application for an increase in our existing SBA loan.

As you can imagine, the SBA loan application process is onerous at best, and it will be very much to our advantage to extend and increase our existing loan, rather than paying it off and starting over with a new application. We borrowed \$10,000 initially, in 2006, partially because back in those days interest earned on our investments was higher than the interest cost from SBA, and we wanted to have access to larger amounts when we needed them to rebuild. That loan is almost repaid, so a timely application for extension is important. We plan to borrow only against the pledges we're received from our members and through the GNOUU campaign and to pay off the loan as the pledge payments come in, so that we don't incur long term debt.

The architect has developed plans which will provide a sanctuary now, which we badly need, with adjacent restrooms and a crying room. The shell of the rest of the building will remain unfinished until funds can be raised for finishing those rooms, and we'll continue to use the kitchen, office, and RE spaces in our little Annex in the meantime. Pilings will be driven to support an extension of the sanctuary, which we hope to grow enough to need in the next few years. We're applying to the City Council for a parking waiver, so that we don't have to use precious dollars to provide improved parking spaces on-site. We hope to be able to continue to park on grass-covered shells and on the street, as we have always done. We've canvassed the neighbors and they have all indicated that they have no objection to the waiver, so we're hopeful that it will be approved.

We continue our active involvement in the larger community. From the donations collected at our Second Sunday plate collection in February, we were able to purchase two brand new trumpets and one trombone, complete with cases, oil, gloves and tuners, for The Porch, a Seventh Ward community center which provides after school services for at-risk and underprivileged youth. A group from CCUU will go to The Porch on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup> to present the instruments and visit the center; our chair Elizabeth showed the congregation one of the trumpets during our service yesterday.

On March 18th, as part of the lecture series held at CCUU called "Ethical Living in NOLA," sponsored by the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal, the non-profit organization created by GNOUU since Katrina, we had the privilege of hearing New Orleans Councilmember Shelley Midura speak to us on ethics in local government. She was our tenth speaker since the series began.

Throughout the month of March, CCUU is collecting Mardi Gras beads to donate to STRIVE, Inc., a non-profit organization that offers opportunities for work and development to the mentally handicapped. Finally, we continue to collect recyclables at the church once a month to take to our city's only monthly recycle drop off location.

Our members have filled the pulpit on Sundays in recent weeks. Our president, Mary An, spoke on moral hazard and the distinction between morals and ethics last Sunday – a thought provoking and informative message. Our Sunday School continues to have only one child,

unfortunately, but two new people have signed on to teach, replacing two who have accepted other responsibilities, so the program continues to be offered. It won't take much to double the size of the class, which we hope will happen soon.

CCUU and GNOUU have had some lovely contacts with our partner churches recently. I spent a lovely afternoon with Ruth Hagan from Pacific Unitarian, and we received a warm letter and gift from Montclair. Members from Fox Valley are expected for a work trip over Easter. GNOUU received a generous gift from White Bear congregation in Minnesota, from their Mardi Gras fundraiser in February and another gift, a "down payment on a partnership" from West Shore UU in Rocky River, Ohio. Rev. Jim preached at Williamsburg UU this month, and GNOUU will receive a nice gift from their collection as well. We hope other UUs will come to visit and keep in touch as summer approaches.

We received encouraging news for the City last week, when a population of over 300,000 was affirmed for New Orleans. People are still returning steadily, and we were pleased to see that the slab next door to our annex has been removed in preparation for rebuilding. Our little street is slowly repopulating. It also sounds as if some funds are being made available for affordable rental housing, which remains a critical concern, and work has begun on closing the infamous Miss. River Gulf Outlet, known here as Mr. GO, which has been so destructive to our wetlands.

We've also enjoyed several rather acid articles in our local press about Mr. Liddy, the head of AIG, who is so concerned with fulfilling the terms of their contracts. He was head of Allstate Insurance after Katrina, and they became notorious for using every possible ruse to avoid paying claims and to attribute damage to flooding, so Allstate wouldn't have to pay. No interest in honoring the terms of THOSE contracts, say our columnists – an example of the old saying "Where You Stand Often Depends Upon Where You Sit". We're also very hopeful that the Stafford Act will be extensively reviewed and revised and FEMA will be improved – it would be wonderful if our experiences with them can become the catalyst for changes that will make it

easier for others when disaster strikes.

Rev. Jim returns from his sabbatical on Easter Sunday, and it will be good to have him back among us. Our little congregation has fared well in his absence, but there's no substitute for good professional leadership.

All the best to all of you in our partner congregations – keep in touch and come see us when you can. With French Quarter Fest and two weekends of Jazz Fest on our calendars, not to mention our glorious weather and blooming gardens, it's a good time to "Be a New Orleanian, wherever you are".

### **February News from CCUU**

We've had a busy six weeks since New Years, immeasurably enriched by our relationships with other UU's. Jim began his sabbatical in mid-January, and for our first two services after his departure, we were blessed with the ministry of Rev. Charles Ortman from our partner congregation in Montclair, NJ. Then last weekend, Sunday February 15, a group of youth and adults from the Westport, CT, congregation led our service. Having over 20 young folks with their leaders among us gave us a wonderful infusion of energy and enthusiasm and must have lowered the average age of attendees by about 30 years. Unfortunately our CCUU numbers were reduced because of its being the first weekend of Mardi Gras, but the warmth of our welcome was unimpaired. We've loved having everyone and look forward to more visits from UU congregations in coming weeks.

With Darwin's 200th birthday in February, and living as we do in the land of intelligent design, we planned a birthday party for old Charles, complete with a carrot cake with his picture on top, for our coffee hour on February 8th. As luck would have it, the evolutionary evangelists Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd were here to present our church service on February 1st and his "Thank God for Evolution" program on February 2nd, and on February 8th I gave a talk on Darwin's life, based on a biography I'd read. The "Times Picayune" ran our press release about our week-long celebration of Darwin and we did attract some visitors and gain some visibility.

On another track, we're moving ahead with plans for worship space, since our little house is almost full every Sunday and we must have room to grow. Planning took an unexpected turn when several members learned of a pretty little Lutheran church listed for sale in the Faubourg St. John neighborhood on the other side of City Park. Several people toured it and felt it was worth evaluating because it would offer a location in a well populated neighborhood and an existing building which could be used right away. Others were very much concerned about its age (over 100 years), the lack of parking, and the fact that the sanctuary was a free-standing structure; all other facilities are in a second building which did not appear to be in good condition, and there are no restrooms, just two privies.

The Board responded by structuring a congregational conversation intended to identify the criteria by which we would evaluate the two options presented – staying and building at our current site or buying an existing building – and any other options which might be identified in the near future. We distributed a survey listing all of the criteria the Board could think of, asking members to rank the criteria by importance to them, and held small group conversations after service to discuss questions carefully formulated to be positive rather than critical: what advantages does each site have; what challenges does it present. 23 surveys were returned and we had excellent attendance and participation in the conversation. I was very pleased by the tone of the conversations which was respectful and constructive and also by the clear consensus among us about what criteria are most important – good accessibility from all parts of the area; a safe neighborhood; maintenance costs of the building; suitability of the space; and the most effective use of our limited funds.



Having completed that preparation, we recruited three men with good backgrounds in construction to visit the buildings for sale to evaluate their condition and what would be required to adapt them for our use...only to learn upon contacting the realtor that the property was under contract for sale.

Meanwhile, the building committee continues working with the architect to develop plans for our vacant site. A preliminary proposal will be ready for presentation to the congregation on March 8th. It envisions a raised sanctuary with restrooms and a crying room to be built in phase one, with all other functions housed in our current building. We want to make it as green a building as possible, and we will need to negotiate with the city about the number of improved parking spaces they will require, since parking spaces are amazingly expensive to build, especially with an environmentally sensitive permeable surface. After the need to regroup caused by having to demolish the building, it feels good to see tangible evidence of progress.

Despite the generosity of our own members and the wonderful lead gift from Pacific Unitarian, we do not yet have sufficient funds pledged to support phase 1. However we are very hopeful that the efforts of our partner congregations and the national GNOUU campaign will result in a building fund adequate to the dream of a sanctuary which will allow us to continue to grow and to provide a space for community gatherings in our recovering Lakeview. We are also exploring whether there is some potential to receive grants for using green technology or to partner with other groups to create a prototype green structure which could be used to educate others about green construction. Some residential prototypes have been built here but no commercial or public buildings. If anyone in our partner congregations could give us some suggestions about how to proceed with grant applications or contacts with groups who might partner with us, we would be most grateful.

In the larger community, it's Mardi Gras season – so we check the parade routes before leaving home, lest we get stuck in traffic. There were parades last weekend, including the Krewe of Barkus (dogs in costume) and they begin again Wednesday, February 18, and run through Mardi Gras, February 24th. Joel and I will go out Thursday night – three parades, one behind the other. One old line krewe, with flambeaux (burning torches carried by strutting men); one krewe of professional women who throw high heeled shoes and also sponsor a lot of good community projects all year long; and one reorganized old line krewe famous for its political satire. All will have floats, bands, and throws, and the crowd will be all ages, all races, and virtually all friendly and having a good time. Once you get over the astonishment of seeing otherwise sane adults desperately trying to catch cheap strings of beads and plastic go-cups, which afflicted me at my very first parade 40+ years ago, it really is an amazing and wonderful experience. So next Tuesday, wear a string of beads in our honor and holler “Throw me something, Mister/Missus” at least once to celebrate our partnership – we are “throwing” you our thanks and our hope that some of the joy of life here can enrich your congregational life as you enrich ours.

### **News from New Orleans, New Years' 2009**

On the "Lehrer News Hour" last week, they previewed a documentary film about New Orleans now, which is to be shown on "Front Line" on PBS on Tuesday night, January 6th. Based on their interview with the filmmaker, I am very much interested in watching - she seemed very well informed and to have a balanced view of our situation. I wanted our many friends and supporters in our partner churches to know about the program, so that you could watch if you choose.

I wanted to attach two excerpts from our January newsletter - from Rev. Jim's column and from the article by Elizabeth Trotter, our community outreach chair. They summarize some of the results of 2008 at CCUU. However, my e-mail won't take the attachment so here they are:

### **From Rev. Jim's column in our CCUU January newsletter:**

But, some may ask, what has happened to CCUU during 2008? Here are a few highlights:

- □ Seventeen (17) new members signed our membership book.
- Our rebuilding reserves have neared a half a million dollars (\$500,000.00).
- The interest from our savings will be at (or above) \$22,195.00.
- Our members and friends have pledged \$300,000.00 to our capital campaign—to be collected over 3 years.
- We have already received \$109,000 for the capital campaign—some from our members and friends, some from GNOUU or Partner Churches or memorial funds.

*When we moved into our annex, on July 15th, 2007, we were the first completed home on the 24 lots of this block. Eight others are now occupied. A ninth is nearly ready.*

**From the January newsletter article by our community outreach chair Elizabeth Trotter:**

January -/- Donation to Unity for the Homeless from funds remaining in CCUU's Gulf Coast Relief Fund -/- \$1,000.00

February -/- Strive, Inc. (also donated Mardi Gras beads) -/- \$158.00

March -/- Unity of Greater New Orleans -/- \$335.00

April -/- Hope Haven School -/- \$396.00

May -/- Jefferson Presbyterian Church -/- \$516.00-/- Cyclone Nargis Relief Fund (special collection) -/- \$348.00

June -/- All Congregations Together -/- \$120.00

July -/- UUA District of Prairie Star (for flood relief) -/- \$120.00

August -/- Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana -/- \$396.00

September -/- All Congregations Together -/- \$200.00

October -/- The Tipitina's Foundation -/- \$277.00

November -/- Youth Rescue Initiative -/- \$177.00

December -/- Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge -/- \$418.00 -/-

Total Donated: -/- \$4,461.00

Thanks to all of you who have contributed over the year for your generosity of spirit and resources. You have enabled us to carry out our ministry's mission to work for social justice and to reach out to help our larger community, especially in this post-Katrina era when the need is so great.

### **Adopt-A-Family at Christmas**

Every year it is a joy to think of the happy faces of our adopted families when they open their

Christmas presents. Once again, CCUU was very generous, and we were able to brighten up the holiday for George and Tabatha, and their 3 sons: Dante (10), Evan (6), and Vincent (22 months). We donated approximately \$800 in toys, sports equipment, clothes, shoes, cleaning supplies, toiletries, food, and gift cards. Thank you so much to all of you who gave from the heart and participated in the true meaning of giving at Christmas.

Yesterday (January 4th) I was back at church after a couple of weeks with our daughter and her family in western Mass. Our visit there included two services at their church, the UU Society of Greater Springfield, the wonderful, welcoming congregation who took care of Joel and me while we were in our post-Katrina exile there. It felt good to be part of a healthy larger congregation - it's what I dream of and work for CCUU - and it felt good to be home again and feel the energy and commitment that are creating our beloved community. We had music, a good sermon, someone new (to me) attending, and an RE class for our 7 year old. Afterward, a well-attended meeting of our RE volunteers to plan for the children for the next three months where we shared good ideas and planned some improvements in the program we've been offering. Perhaps by our next meeting in late March we'll have two children coming regularly and double the size of the program!

We hope all of you have had a wonderful, restorative holiday season and we wish you everything good in 2009. Mardi Gras is at a good time this year - Feb. 24th should offer lovely weather and a festive mood. If anyone from our partner congregations is coming this way, for Mardi Gras or other reasons, don't forget to let us know and come pay us a visit. Meanwhile, as always, thank you for your continuing interest and support for our recovery.

### **Thanksgiving 2008 update**

Happy Thanksgiving to all of our friends at our partner churches. It's been three years last week since Joel and I returned from our Katrina exile and Jim Vanderweele offered me the opportunity to be the CCUU liaison with our partners.

What a pleasure it is to be in touch with you and to know that you continue to support us on the long road to rebuilding.

CCUU is blessed by your interest and help, and we hope that we are and will be a blessing to you in return.

Our little religious community has a lot to be thankful for in this season of reflection and giving thanks. First, our ever-energetic minister, who is providing wonderful, sensitive and compassionate leadership. He creates an atmosphere of welcome which enfolds newcomers and entices them back – we welcomed six new members at our new member service in November. He and Rev. Melanie from 1st UU led a GNOUU book discussion group earlier this fall on Tom Piazza's "City of Refuge" which was the "One book, one New Orleans" selection this year.

It's an excellent novel about Katrina and its aftermath.

Now we're reading Van Jones "The Green Collar Economy"; the group watched a DVD of his Ware lecture last week.

Very inspiring and thought provoking.

Next on our list of thankfulness – our long time, loyal members who continue to be there, month after month, doing what it takes, giving generously of time and treasure to keep us moving forward. From lay led programs, which will be especially important during Jim's January 15 through April 15 sabbatical, to Sunday School provided every Sunday for children, to community outreach, for which we are gathering gifts for our Christmas family, we continue to be able to offer a full church program because we all keep hangin' in there. We have also been the beneficiaries of some generous financial gifts, which enable us to supplement our annual income with small amounts from operating reserves while we grow into financial viability.

We long-timers are delighted to welcome the energy and enthusiasm of our new members and friends, who are already participating in choir, Sunday school, community outreach, and other activities. For me, one of the most important aspects of our ministry is offering a warm, supportive liberal religious community for the many people who are moving here to participate in our rebuilding. We had three first time visitors last Sunday, one newly arrived from Massachusetts, one from Florida, and one from Turkey. We hope they'll all return and will find what they're looking for among us.

We have a new choir director/pianist – a senior from Loyola University. She'll be with us three Sundays a month, and she's doing a nice job.

We also have a new, very part time office administrator working six hours per week assisting Jim in keeping things together.

We are completing our annual stewardship campaign and the congregation will meet on the first Sunday in December to adopt our 2009 budget.

And our GNOUU stewardship consultant will be here for a meeting with GNOUU leadership on December 2nd, assessing our rebuilding campaign.

In the larger community, this time of year is always filled with concerts, lectures, and theater. In addition, this year we have "Prospect 1 New Orleans" an international art biennial which includes major installations of contemporary art throughout the city.

If there are art lovers in your congregations, I encourage them to visit the web site – [www.prospectneworleans.org](http://www.prospectneworleans.org) – and consider making a trip here between now and January 18th.

We have several members who offer bed and breakfast and would love to have them visit.

Joel and I began to explore the exhibits last Saturday, visiting the African American museum and the Old US Mint.

There are other large exhibits at the Museum of Art and the Contemporary Art Center, as well as smaller works at Tulane, in the Lower Ninth Ward, and elsewhere.

I've seen photos of a three story ark someone has built in the Lower 9 – that's on our must-see list in the near future, along with a sailboat which has been placed on top of a warehouse near the Mississippi River bridge.

It's intended to evoke memories of all the post-K chaos – cars on roofs, barges in the street – and I'm sure it does.

Affordable housing and crime continue to be our most important problems, in my opinion. HA NO and HUD are now demolishing scattered site units, which seems sad – construction of replacement units is beginning, I think, but it will take time.

We have a new District Attorney as of last week, so we hope that will help the crime problem.

Plans to develop a new medical center around an LSU/Veterans Administration teaching hospital are moving forward amid controversy about siting it in an old residential area near downtown.

The hope is that it plus the nearby Tulane hospital will generate a lot of medical-related economic development in the central business district.

Our local newspaper has run two excellent, thought-provoking articles this week on how other shrinking cities have coped with their smaller size. Given that our population seems to have stabilized at about 325,000 and many neighborhoods remain very sparsely populated, we need to begin to have those conversations, and they will be difficult ones.

It's beautiful here now, with blue skies and cool breezes. The sasanquas and mums are blooming and the earliest camellias have provided just a couple of blossoms.

The new petunias in our front flower bed seem to be thriving, and the hanging basket of bougainvillea is just covered with red blossoms (I guess technically they're not blossoms, but they are gorgeous).

And I can't resist mentioning the hundreds of black bellied whistling ducks wintering in Audubon Park again this year – they are such fun!

We wish all of you a happy Thanksgiving and some moments of calm during the on-coming holiday rush. Thank you again from all of us for being our faithful, steadfast partners.

### **October 8<sup>th</sup> update**

Our new church year at CCUU is off to a very good start. We have several people who've begun attending over the summer and are coming regularly, and our little worship space is well filled for the 11 a.m. service. We've organized volunteers to teach Sunday school, for which we've had one or two children each week, and we've hired a new choir director/pianist who will start next Sunday.



We've received a very special and heartwarming gift from Verna Arroyo, an older member who is sight impaired and uses a walker. She asked all the members of her extended family to make a gift to CCUU's rebuilding – what a morale boost, as well as a financial one!

The adult discussion group on "The Four Spiritualities" finished their book last Wednesday evening, and a new discussion group, to be held jointly with First UU, will begin on Wednesday, October 15<sup>th</sup>. Afternoon and evening sessions will be offered for four consecutive weeks, discussing "City of Refuge" by Tom Piazza, the book selected for the citywide "One Book, One New Orleans" program this fall.

Our stewardship campaign will kick off on Saturday evening the 18<sup>th</sup> with music by our jazz singer Cindy Scott and entertainment by the "Not Ready for Prime Time CCUU Players".

We anticipate a fun evening, despite the potential impact of the current financial crisis on people's capacity to give.

Another type of storm to weather, which I'm sure will affect all of us.

Leigh Henderson, our volunteer leadership training consultant from Community Church New York was in town a couple of weekends ago. She led two workshops for GNOUU, one on worship and the other on community outreach.

Those who attended found them inspirational and helpful, and concrete plans were made to move forward with joint, mutually supportive activities for our congregations.

Our CCUU Community Outreach ministry will canvass the Lakeview neighborhood this coming Saturday, distributing information about CCUU and circulating a petition to City Government to

restart the citywide recycling program.

Meanwhile, we continue to collect recyclables once a month at CCUU, which our wonderful volunteer Clint Kauffman takes to the drop-off center.

The Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal (CEL) now has a Board and a mission statement, and grant applications are being written by a UU minister who is spending her sabbatical here helping with our rebuilding. The Rebirth Volunteer Center continues to welcome volunteers, now under the auspices of the CEL.

However, they report that the number of volunteers is significantly lower than in previous years.

Under the auspices of the CEL, CCUU has hosted a series of monthly lectures on “Ethical Living in NOLA”. The fall series will begin on Tuesday, Oct. 14, with a lecture by Rev. Jim on “Ethics, the Markets, and the Polls”. Jim was a political activist in a previous life and I’m very much looking forward to his thought.

I think you are all already aware that our church building was demolished last month – the slab is gone too and the lot filled and graded – a big area of river sand where grass and our building once stood. An opportunity for a new, beautiful church one day, with WINDOWS!

Our GNOUU national capital campaign is getting up to speed again, after our summer hiatus.

Rev. Kim Crawford-Harvie, Rev. John Buehrens, and Rev. Mike McGee are serving as clergy co-chairs, with Jerri Moulder from Santa Barbara as our lay co-chair. They are working with us to solicit support from the largest UU churches who are not yet partnering with us, and we would be so pleased if our existing partners would also help us by making initial contacts with congregations we have not yet approached.

We have some very encouraging commitments for fundraisers and indications that some of the large congregations are considering a fund drive for us.

We have a list of churches with over 500 members that we still need to be introduced to; if you would be willing to help us with that, please let me know, and I'll send you that list.

Or if you could help us contact somewhat smaller churches which might have the capacity to help, that would be wonderful too.

Everyone here is working very hard to rebuild our churches and our ministry to the larger community, and we are moving forward.

With help from UU's elsewhere, we can create something wonderful here.

I think there was a general sense of relief when the evacuation for Gustav went smoothly and all the gates at the ends of the canals worked well. Lakeview seems to be more populated with each passing month, though there are still rows of three or four abandoned houses in many areas. Our opera, chamber music, and orchestra seasons are beginning – I had tears in my eyes when the symphony played the “Star Spangled Banner” at their first concert.

One of the effects of our experience is that I don't take such wonderful things for granted any more.

We're still here, three years later,

and although we still have a long way to go, we've come a long way too, and for me the glass is definitely half full – maybe even a little more than that now.

We've had some tantalizing bits of cooler weather, replaced today by hot and muggy, but we know fall will come. The leaves were blown off most of the trees in Jean Lafitte National Park when Gustav came through. There weren't many birds when I was there with Leigh Henderson last week, but the alligators were definitely out – one four-foot one right across our path dissuaded us from walking all the way to the end.

We have seen a few migrants in the arboretum at City Park and the advance party of black bellied whistling ducks arrived in Audubon Park yesterday.

So the seasons are changing.

Have a wonderful autumn, and all best wishes to all of our wonderful partners.

If some of your members will be in New Orleans for conventions or other travel reasons, do come pay us a visit.

### **September 8th update--post-Gustav**

We held services at CCUU on Sunday morning, Sept. 7, with 40 people present. It is SO important to be able to return to that loving, supportive community after the anxiety and stress of evacuation. We are very much indebted to Rev. Jim, who had evacuated to Baton Rouge and had been without power there for several days, for leading a meaningful and joyful service.

My priority this year is the children, so I spent the hour with adorable Luke, age 2. The congregation heard his merry laughter (it's a small place, the Annex) as he played peek-a-boo with the door to the RE room. I heard several bursts of laughter and applause during the adult service, and the atmosphere at coffee hour was warm and welcoming to all. I noticed, after about 6 weeks away, that our congregation bears less resemblance to a mushroom patch (a member's 2005 description of all the white hair) as younger people become involved and active. We did postpone our jazz funeral, originally scheduled for Sept. 6th to commemorate the demolition of our building; it will be rescheduled.

There has been a fair amount of dissatisfaction expressed here with the national coverage of our Gustav situation. Having read the newspapers, which were printed every day during the storm and delivered in a bunch on Thursday, I can report that the gates at the 17<sup>th</sup> St. and London Avenue Canals worked well and did not cause rainwater flooding. The evacuation of those who needed assistance, including medical patients, went smoothly and was completed ahead of the bad weather, and I think all of them have now returned to the City. Power is restored here, although not in the rest of the state, and the broken tree limbs are piled at curbsides throughout the city waiting for pickup We do need Ike to go somewhere else so we

have time to clean up – we don't need clogged storm drains for the next heavy rain. We've known all along that we wouldn't really be safe from a 100 year storm until 2011 – the repairs needed will take that long – so we are very grateful that Gustav's force diminished before he arrived here. We are also very grateful that every level of government – FEMA, Gov. Jindal, and Mayor Nagin – were well prepared and handled the situation efficiently.

The representatives of our three GNOUU congregations will be back to work on our national capital campaign in the near future and we look forward to hearing from those congregations who are now considering their involvement with us. Meanwhile, thanks to all for your good wishes during our recent upheaval – they mean a lot.

**From Rev. Jim VanderWeele:** It is almost exciting to look at the empty lot where our church used to be. Fortunately, most of our members feel the same way as we continue to move toward the rebuilding of a new sanctuary. This is especially true now that our services are being better attended for we will soon be moving to a place where we will have to consider holding two Sunday services.

I am finishing a commentary on the Gustav-Katrina relationship. It should be available within a day or two, and we will send a connection to this statement as soon as it appears on the CCUU website.

### **May 28<sup>th</sup> Update**

We've had a lovely month of May at CCUU – we should have some photos added to our web site in the near future. Meanwhile, I am delighted to report that we've had two celebrations – our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on May 18<sup>th</sup> and a farewell party for intern minister Erik David Carlson on May 25<sup>th</sup>. It will surely be an anticlimax when our Sunday afternoon event on June 1<sup>st</sup> is our annual congregational meeting, rather than an elegant social occasion.

We are blessed to have a number of long time members of our congregation who were involved in the formative events of our first 50 years. For our worship service on the 18<sup>th</sup>, they shared reminiscences of those events: the initial establishment of Community Church in 1958; the formation of the West Bank Fellowship and the merger of the two groups; the selection of the site and construction of the building; the calling of the first minister; and a reading of the names of our called ministers. We then had a period of brief remembrances of those no longer with us.

The service concluded with Rev. Jim's look forward to the next 50 years. Anne Saunders, one of our artists, solicited pages of individual memories from members and compiled a memory book, covered in gold foil, which is perfectly beautiful. We had a full house for the service, and some of our newer members and friends have expressed real gratitude for the opportunity to hear about our past. As I considered our collective memories, it occurred to me that the original Community Church bought a house in the early 1960's and worshiped there until the merger caused them to need a larger space. Now, 50 years later, we've bought a house and are worshiping there until we can rebuild our church – we already need a larger space! A strange kind of "history repeats itself" experience, I suppose.

Following the service, we had a wonderful party on the lawn, with beautiful weather, the Cindy Scott jazz quartet, champagne, elegant hors d'oeuvres, cake and punch. We had publicized the party and invited the neighbors and several of them came. We're still the only occupied house on our block face, and it's important for those who are moving back to Lakeview to know that we're there and to get to see their neighbors.

The UUA provided the funds for an intern minister this year. Erik was located at CCUU and supervised by Rev. Jim, and he worked with all three congregations and with GNOUU as we planned for our capital campaign. Among his many activities, he led a monthly worship service at CCUU; his last service was May 25<sup>th</sup>. He is a man of many talents and we benefitted enormously from his time with us. Following his final service, we had a party in a member's home to wish him godspeed – we will watch his career develop with interest and affection.

Our membership is increasing – from a post-storm low of 53, we have grown to 68, and Jim expects more people to sign the book in the near future. We have completed the cottage meetings at which we solicited pledges for our GNOUU capital campaign, and our members and friends have given MOST generously. Larry Wheeler, our stewardship consultant, had said that a capital gift should be three times the operating pledge, payable over three years, and we are proud to report that our congregation has met that goal.

We also continue our monthly offerings for other causes. In May, we held two. The first was for Jefferson Presbyterian Church, which hosted our combined worship services after the storm; they had an electrical fire in early April which destroyed their sanctuary. The second, held on May 25<sup>th</sup>, was for the UUSC's response to the cyclone in Myanmar.

We also continue to develop the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal. Each of our three congregations has designated board members for the Center, and an initial meeting of the new board will be held this Saturday, May 31<sup>st</sup>. It is our hope that through the Center our three churches can offer a combined, effective ministry to our recovering community.

Rev. Jane Dwinell, a UU small church consultant, is volunteering here and has offered to lead our June 1<sup>st</sup> worship service with Jim, sharing ideas with us about how to move forward using our time and energy most effectively. Rev. Dr. Marie de Young, a UU community minister, is also an active participant in our congregational life and led a service for us in April. Long as the road to recovery is and will be, we are certainly experiencing support from many sources. We are grateful.

As our several congregations move into our summer schedules, we will be continuing to talk with our partners about how you can participate with us in our GNOUU national capital campaign. We'll be in touch. Have a good summer, everyone, and as always, thanks for everything.

### **UPDATE – MAY, 2008**

Much has happened at CCUU since that essay was written. Although we still have a long road to travel to be self sufficient and fully restored, with the ongoing support and help of our partners, the Southwest Conference, and the UUA, we have made good progress - you will find a brief history of our progress since Katrina on the history page of this web site. At this partner church site, we will focus on all that our partners have done for us.

Perhaps the most important aspect of having partner churches has been the moral support provided – knowing that others still cared about us, paid attention to us, and wished us well has countered the frequent feeling that our plight has disappeared from public consciousness. The moral support has come in many forms. At Christmas, 2005, Fox Valley UU Fellowship sent \$25 Target gift cards for each of our members and friends – a wonderful gift with a value far beyond the monetary. They also sent a beautiful poster, which is joined on our Annex wall by pictures of Pacific Unitarian members at their Mardi Gras fundraiser (they've had two) and of Fox Valley members at their mask-making party. "We're here for you" is a powerful message, however it comes.

In April of 2006, each of our partners sent one or more representatives to our partner church weekend – we toured the City, ate good food, held planning sessions, and got acquainted. Since then, individual members of the congregations have contributed many talents – among them, designing our door knob hanger for a publicity campaign in our neighborhood; leading planning sessions for both CCUU and GNOUU (our three-church New Orleans area cluster); helping our volunteer librarian to organize our library; sorting out the legal documents so we could get our paid mortgages cancelled. Montclair and West Hartford members have come to volunteer.

We've also had generous financial help from fundraisers and special collections from all of our partners, which has assisted greatly in our being able to sustain a full program of ministry.



Now, working through GNOUU (Greater New Orleans Unitarian Universalists – a cluster of First UU, North Shore, and CCUU), we are entering the next phase of our recovery. We have



launched a national capital campaign to rebuild facilities for First UU and CCUU and to pay off the mortgage for North Shore. Again, our partners made a critical difference when Pacific Unitarian stepped forward with our lead gift – a pledge of \$75,000, to be paid over the three years of the campaign. We are now soliciting UU churches throughout the country to become partner churches with GNOUU to support our campaign. For more information, please visit [www.gnouu.org](http://www.gnouu.org).

We hope that the partnerships formed as a result of our disaster will remain strong and will provide a model through which other churches in crisis can be assisted. Equally important, we look forward to finding ways in which we can enrich the congregational lives of our partner churches as you have enriched ours, making this relationship a meaningful and reciprocal one throughout the years to come.