

NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

VISION

HURRICANE KATRINA SPECIAL EDITION

**"We know New Orleans carries
some risks, but New Orleans
Baptist Theological Seminary has
never been a seminary for the
faint of heart. We are
comfortable with a future
in the hands of God."**

- Dr. Chuck Kelley

PURPOSE
AFTER THE STORM



Charles S. Kelley
NOBTS President

Thank You! NOBTS Is Back!

As I began to write this column my mind and heart were filled with so many words and emotions, but the two most important things for you to know are in the headline. Our entire seminary family is profoundly grateful to you and to all Southern Baptists for what you have done for us in the midst of this unspeakable tragedy. And because of what you have done, NOBTS is back, teaching students on campus every week this spring. In this issue of *The Vision* you will have an overview of the whole story. Pictures, drawings, and personal testimonies will give you an idea of what happened. A full understanding of the immensity of the destruction Katrina wrought from New Orleans to Mobile, Ala. is not possible without seeing it yourself, but this will show you some of what happened to this School of Providence and Prayer. As you look through these pages, keep in mind that we have never had better illustrations of the Providence of God protecting us, and we have never experienced more benefit from prayers offered for us. This story has a tragic beginning, but the more it unfolds, the more God's glory is revealed.

What Happened?

On August 29 Hurricane Katrina moved into New Orleans and pounded the city with wind and rain. It was not until the morning of the 30th, however, that it became clear the levees protecting New Orleans broke in several places, and the certainty of an unprecedented disaster was confirmed. By the end of the day 80 percent of the land mass of New Orleans was underwater. Only 20 percent of the city remained dry. Nearly every neighborhood in New Orleans was affected. Much of the flood water remained for more than a week. Although located on one of the highest spots in New Orleans, much of the seminary campus was underwater as well, including nearly all of its housing. The entire population of the city was scattered across the country. Seminary students fled to 29 different states. The faculty was scattered across nine states. A massive evacuation prior to the storm's landing kept the loss of life far lower than it otherwise would have been, but in all other ways what Katrina did to New

Orleans has been called the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States. The aftermath of the hurricane spun out of control of the civil authorities, and emergency response systems were overwhelmed. Some openly wondered if New Orleans would survive to live again. As I sat on the edge of the bed in a hotel room in Birmingham, Ala., however, God gave me a profound sense of peace almost immediately. God was going to use this event to demonstrate His power to redeem.

The damage to the seminary was catastrophic, but it was not nearly as bad as it could have been. Our recreational facilities and equipment were rendered unusable. Forty-five percent of all student housing was flooded and those precious families lost nearly all that they had. One hundred percent of our faculty homes were flooded. Those sweet families lost nearly all that they had. We were relieved to learn that the flood water in our neighborhood was not toxic, but it was salty, and as a result it killed much of our grass and nearly all of our landscaping. A window next to our organ in Leavell Chapel was blown out by the winds and did a vast amount of damage to the historic instrument, one of only two or three of its type in the nation. Yet with all this and more, the damage was not nearly as bad as it could have been. The library and all of our academic buildings in the front quadrangle did not flood! Two universities within blocks of NOBTS each sustained hundreds of millions of dollars of damages because virtually all of their buildings flooded. It appears our basic repair bill will be approximately 36 million dollars. That is a lot of money, but much less than it could have been. In fact it is less damage than that announced by any other college or university in the city, including those in the one part of town that did not flood extensively.

God sealed the campus up to protect us from looters. One campus entrance has no gate, but it was totally sealed when two of our biggest trees fell across it. The campus entrance with a gate was also covered up as two other very large trees fell behind the gate. When a group of looters finally started looking for a way in, the National Guard showed up and arrested them. After making the arrest, the Guard unit of 400 soldiers decided to make our campus their base camp for the next several weeks. When they were sent home, the New York highway patrol brought nearly 100 patrolmen to stay in our facilities. God continually protected our campus. Wow! These are just two illustrations of so many things God has done to indicate He is not yet through with New Orleans Baptist Seminary.

Southern Baptists Responded Immediately

When I gathered our administrative team and faculty leadership in Atlanta three days after the storm, I assured them that Southern Baptists were going to stand with us, and they have in an unforgettable way. John Sullivan of the Florida Baptist Convention was the first to get us cash and gift cards to distribute to families who left New Orleans with little more than the clothes on their backs. In addition to critical donations of cash and gift cards, Robert White and the Georgia Convention placed at least three hundred families in housing within two weeks. Danny Watters and the team who organized this project gave a whole new meaning to efficiency. As the extent of both our loss of revenue and the cost of restoring our campus became clear, Southern Baptist aid began flowing in every day. We learned in these circumstances the availability of cash is the difference in life and death. Many state conventions followed the lead of Florida and Georgia and sent significant donations to help us, including the Mississippi and Alabama conventions who had so much damage of their own to address.

First Baptist Church, Dallas under the leadership of Dr. Mac Brunson was the first church to give us an offering. Many churches followed. It was amazing how often those gifts arrived at a crucial moment. Dr. Charles Stanley and First Baptist Church Atlanta adopted our seminary. A number of our staff went there on the Sunday after the storm. Dr. Stanley fed them and clothed them before they left the building that day. He made classroom space available for us throughout our sojourn in Atlanta, and gave us a dramatic offering as well. Churches from overseas and Southern Baptists facing difficult circumstances themselves made sacrificial gifts to help us. The 13-year-old daughter of one of our Trustees used her birthday to raise money for seminary families instead of receiving presents for herself. The other seminaries took up offerings in chapel for our students and faculties, and many of the entities took money from their reserve funds to give significant gifts. Southwestern hosted our faculty on their campus less than two weeks after the storm, giving us a place to pray, grieve our losses and plan for the future. A Sunday School class at FBC Euless, Texas set up a virtual department store on the Southwestern campus for faculty members with little more than the clothes on their back to begin to recover some of what they had lost. Never have so many people done so much to keep a seminary afloat in difficult times. Receiving such grace and sacrifice has been a deeply moving experience for me and our whole seminary family. I wish I could tell you all of the stories.

The Cooperative Program's Finest Hour

There are those who have suggested the Cooperative Program may have outlived its usefulness. The role of the Cooperative Program in the Southern Baptist response to the devastation wrought by Katrina should forever put such suggestions away. This was in many ways the Cooperative Program's finest hour, demonstrating the genius of what began in 1925.

Before the winds of Katrina died down, disaster response teams from all over the Southern Baptist Convention were rolling into the area. For many years the Cooperative Program funds allocated to state conventions have been used to purchase equipment and train workers for disaster relief. Churches of all sizes and types became involved, creating a huge labor pool and a very large equipment base with everything from field kitchens to field shower units to chainsaws. Cooperative Program funds allocated to the SBC for the North American Mission Board were systematically used to build the communication and coordination infrastructure necessary to harness a labor and equipment pool spread out from coast to coast. Year by year the number of workers and the amount of equipment and the level of coordination and communication got bigger and bigger. By the time Katrina hit Southern Baptists were ready for the worst disaster in the history of the United States. They could get kitchens where kitchens were needed, showers where showers were needed, and work crews where work crews were needed. They could rotate teams from all over the country in and out, so that people were always there working and helping, but no one team had to stay forever. To quote an ancient Hebrew expression: Wow!

SBC disaster relief crews have been in New Orleans continuously since the storm hit. They have made an enormous impact on the whole city, and for the first time in my 31 years in New Orleans, the word on the street about Baptists is both very positive and very frequent. Our whole image in the city is changing dramatically. If we had waited until this storm to mobilize disaster relief, we could never have done as much as we have done. Years of faithful giving to the Cooperative Program put us in position to be one of the top disaster relief providers in the world, and the provision of disaster relief is proving to be an extremely effective way for us to get opportunities to tell people about Jesus.

On our campus alone Southern Baptist volunteers have provided thousands and thousands of meals. They have done at least two million dollars worth of labor in restoring our campus, and they are still at work! The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention under the leadership of Jim Richards has sent both volunteers and professional workers to get some of our major housing back on line. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary has sent three groups with more than a hundred students in each group to clean, paint, plant grass, build fences and so much more. Volunteers have come from all over the nation and made dramatic contributions to our efforts to get the campus up and running again. Without the volunteers from the disaster relief network built by the Cooperative Program, repairing all of the damage done to the campus would have been much more expensive and difficult.

In addition to volunteer labor and disaster relief, the Cooperative Program kept our seminary from a fiscal crisis. We received donations from individuals, churches, SBC entities and various state conventions, but the largest single contribution came from the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention. At the suggestion of Dr. Morris Chapman and with the encouragement of all SBC entities, the Executive Committee decided to give NOBTS a special donation. This donation came from the amount given the Cooperative Program over the amount budgeted for the year. All year long Southern Baptists had been giving faithfully to CP, creating a surplus at year's end in September. This surplus would normally have been divided among all SBC entities. In light of the needs along the Gulf Coast, however, the decision was made to give the surplus to the seminary and the states which had been so deeply affected by the destruction of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The amount given to NOBTS was 6.2 million dollars. This money made a huge impact on our financial stability in

light of lost revenues and the costs of continuing to teach without access to our campus. Had Southern Baptists not supported the Cooperative Program all year long, that money would not have been there in the time of disaster. This gift from the Executive Committee included sending the families who were flooded gift cards from the Cooperative Program in December, helping those who lost so much with Christmas expenses.

I could not begin to describe the profound gratitude of our seminary family for this kind and gracious assistance in such a difficult time. The basic strategy of the Cooperative Program, each church setting aside week by week funds for the state, national and international ministries of Southern Baptists prepared Southern Baptists to face this unspeakable tragedy. At New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary we have learned how critical the Cooperative Program is for Southern Baptists in the 21st century.

Where are we now?

Immediately after the storm we tracked down all students, staff, and faculty as quickly as possible. We did all that we could to make sure all of our families were safe and had shelter. The faculty did an incredible job of reinventing our entire curriculum and continued to teach every class we started before Katrina. Approximately 77 percent of our students continued their studies. Even more did so in the spring semester. We held December graduation for more than 100 students in Birmingham, Ala. at The Church of Brook Hills. We began classes for commuters from the area around New Orleans in January, and in May we will hold graduation in Leavell Chapel on the NOBTS campus. That will be a great day indeed!

The first five days of October we had to move the entire seminary family off the campus. Those were difficult and heartbreaking days as students, faculty and staff discovered what they had lost and how badly the city and campus were damaged. Rhonda and I were able to return to our campus home in early January with a skeleton crew of staff. In April we hope to begin moving more faculty and staff back home, and by May we should be bringing students back to live in campus facilities. All housing should be fully restored by end of July and in August the new New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary will be ready for its future.

We still need your help. Although in the providence of God we quadrupled our insurance coverage just a few months before the storm, all the expenses of restoring the campus will not be covered. Most grass, many trees and nearly all landscaping were destroyed and must be replaced. We need to upgrade the electrical systems and heating and cooling systems of our dorms. Although the storm did not make the upgrades essential, it will never be easier or less expensive to do this work than when the buildings are already stripped to the studs. Recreational facilities are in dire need of repair. Franklin Graham and Samaritan's Purse gave us a new playground for Farnsworth Apartments, but much still needs to be done. Tennis courts have been completely ruined, and so forth. In addition to these physical needs to restore the campus, we also want to help faculty, staff, and students who lost so much in the flood with the expenses of moving back to New Orleans. We would also like to provide more scholarship assistance for students than we have ever done before when new students come this fall. The road ahead is long and hard, but already we see God at work performing a miracle in bringing our seminary through these difficult times. If you would like to participate in that miracle, let us know. We can show you how to do so. Most of all keep us in your prayers. Pray for our courage and strength. Pray for the things we cannot control like the complete restoration of utilities in our city. Pray for the harvest that is to come. We have the greatest opportunity ever given to a seminary to make an impact on a major city. Pray that we will be faithful in doing so while the world is watching to see what happens in New Orleans next. The last chapter of this story is going to be about redemption. It will be a story of what God did to turn a tragedy into a triumph! As you read this edition of The Vision you will see that redemption begin to unfold.

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Special Thanks

We are grateful to those who contributed photographs and information for use in this Hurricane Katrina special issue. Without your help, this issue would not be possible.

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Flood-damaged homes fill the Lakeside neighborhood of New Orleans. A levee failure only blocks from this house inundated the area with water.

Photo by Jeffrey G. Audirsch



DEVASTATION, HOPE & RENEWAL

A Hurricane Katrina Portfolio

Before the Levee Breaks



Barry Busby/NOBTS



Barry Busby/NOBTS



Barry Busby/NOBTS



Barry Busby/NOBTS

TOP LEFT: Downed trees rest in front of Leavell Chapel after the hurricane passed. TOP RIGHT: The Pecan Orchard at the front of campus sustained heavy tree damage. BOTTOM LEFT: Even before the levee failures the campus experienced street flooding as seen in this photo of the President's home. BOTTOM RIGHT: Broken limbs cover the ground near Lipsey Street and Sunshine Park.

After the Levee Breaks



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



U.S. Coast Guard



U.S. Coast Guard



Endel Lee/NOBTS

TOP LEFT: NOBTS employees Chet Menefee, front, and David Dowdy patrol campus in a small fishing boat following the levee failure. TOP RIGHT: The seminary's newest housing units, the Manor Apartments, Staff Village and the Courtyard Apartments received significant flood damage. ABOVE: Flood waters inundated up to 70 percent of New Orleans, especially hard hit was the Lower Ninth Ward pictured here. MIDDLE RIGHT: Flood waters rise near a faculty home along Seminary Place. RIGHT: Members of the U.S. Coast Guard rescue stranded residents from a roof in New Orleans.



Baptist Press

After the Levee Breaks



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



Endel Lee/NOBTS



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



U.S. Coast Guard



Barry Busby/NOBTS



Baptist Press

TOP LEFT: Water rises on a street sign at Seminary Place and Mirabeau. TOP RIGHT: Flood waters rise near faculty homes. MIDDLE LEFT: Water covers DeMent Street near Leavell Chapel. MIDDLE RIGHT: Water surrounds campus buildings. ABOVE: A member of the Coast Guard searches for flood victims. LEFT: Water nears the window ledge of an NOBTS apartment.

After the Levee Breaks



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



Barry Busby/NOBTS



Barry Busby/NOBTS



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS



Chris Friedmann/NOBTS

TOP LEFT: Flooding along Providence Place swamps student vehicles. TOP RIGHT: Waters surround the Leavell Chapel. MIDDLE LEFT: Flooding begins at Barry Busby's campus townhouse. SECOND FROM TOP RIGHT: Water stands on DeMent Street behind Leavell Chapel. ABOVE: A lone, flooded vehicle sets in front of the Nelson Price Center. SECOND FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: Waters rise near the States Apartments shortly after the levee failures. RIGHT: A boat is required to navigate Seminary Place near the faculty homes.

Seminary Move-Out



Sherri Brown/BP



Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS



Gary D. Myers/NOBTS



Gary D. Myers/NOBTS



Gary D. Myers/NOBTS

TOP LEFT: Dr. Chuck Kelley comforts students who returned to claim belongings from damaged campus housing. TOP RIGHT: Mold grows on the walls of a flooded student States Apartment. MIDDLE LEFT: Dr. Endel Lee, a professor in Leavell College, leads a devotional from the steps of Leavell Chapel during the campus move-out. ABOVE: Gina Alvaro, a faculty wife, sorts through her family's damaged belongings. LEFT: Members of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's Rapid Response Team pray with a seminary family Oct. 5. Volunteers from the organization spent five days on campus ministering to hurting students, staff members and professors.

Restoration & Support



Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS



Keith Manuel/BP



Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS



James Byrd/NOBTS




Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS

TOP LEFT: Workers repair roof damage on Leavell Chapel. TOP RIGHT: Baptist volunteers from Mississippi stack debris and damaged furniture near the Manor Apartments. MIDDLE LEFT: Flooded apartments and houses were gutted to the framework to allow for cleaning and mold treatments. MIDDLE RIGHT: All of the States Apartment buildings, severely damaged by flooding, were demolished. RIGHT: A ladder on the River City Cafeteria illustrates the on-going roof and gutter repairs on campus.



Dr. Chuck Kelley welcomes over 200 commuter students back to the main campus Jan. 23.

Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS



We NEED YOUR HELP
to restore the campus
and bring the family home!

Campus Recovery Fund
helps offset the cost of repairs
and restoration that exceed our
insurance coverage.

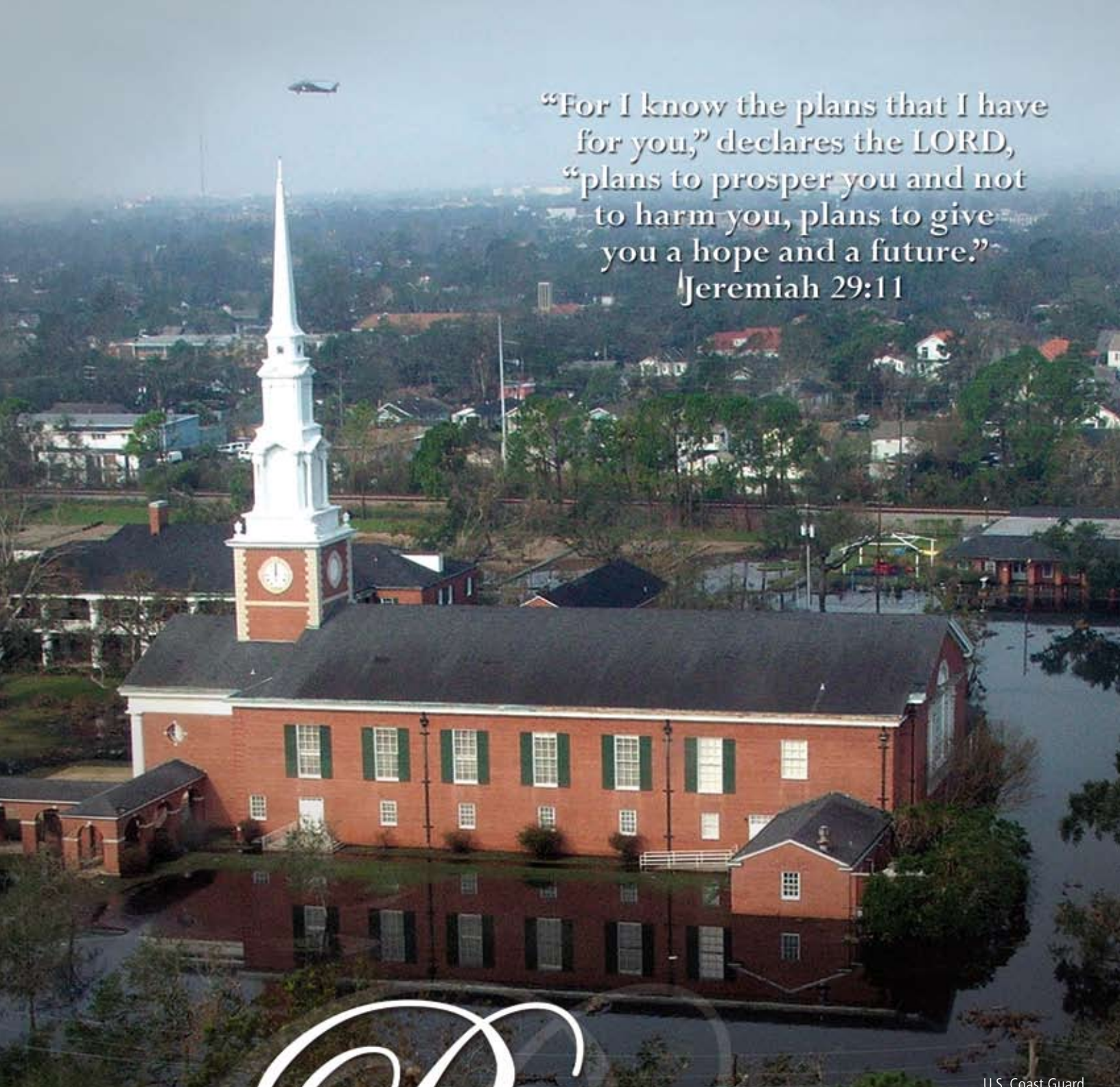
Bring the Family Home Fund
helps our students, faculty, and staff
replace their personal losses and
facilitate their return to campus.

To donate you can visit our website
www.nobtsfoundation.com and
click "Donate Now" or mail your
check or money-order to:

**New Orleans Baptist
Theological Seminary
Development Office
3939 Gentilly Blvd.
New Orleans, LA 70126**

For information about transferring
common stock, securities, or personal
property to NOBTS, contact Jim Lee,
Director of Planned Giving by phone
504-452-4029 or email jlee@nobts.edu.

“For I know the plans that I have
for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not
to harm you, plans to give
you a hope and a future.”
Jeremiah 29:11



U.S. Coast Guard

*P*URPOSE
AFTER THE STORM



Matt Miller/SWBTS



Barry Busby/NOBTS

It seemed that New Orleans had escaped the worst when Hurricane Katrina tore across Louisiana and Mississippi. The city and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary were spared a direct hit.

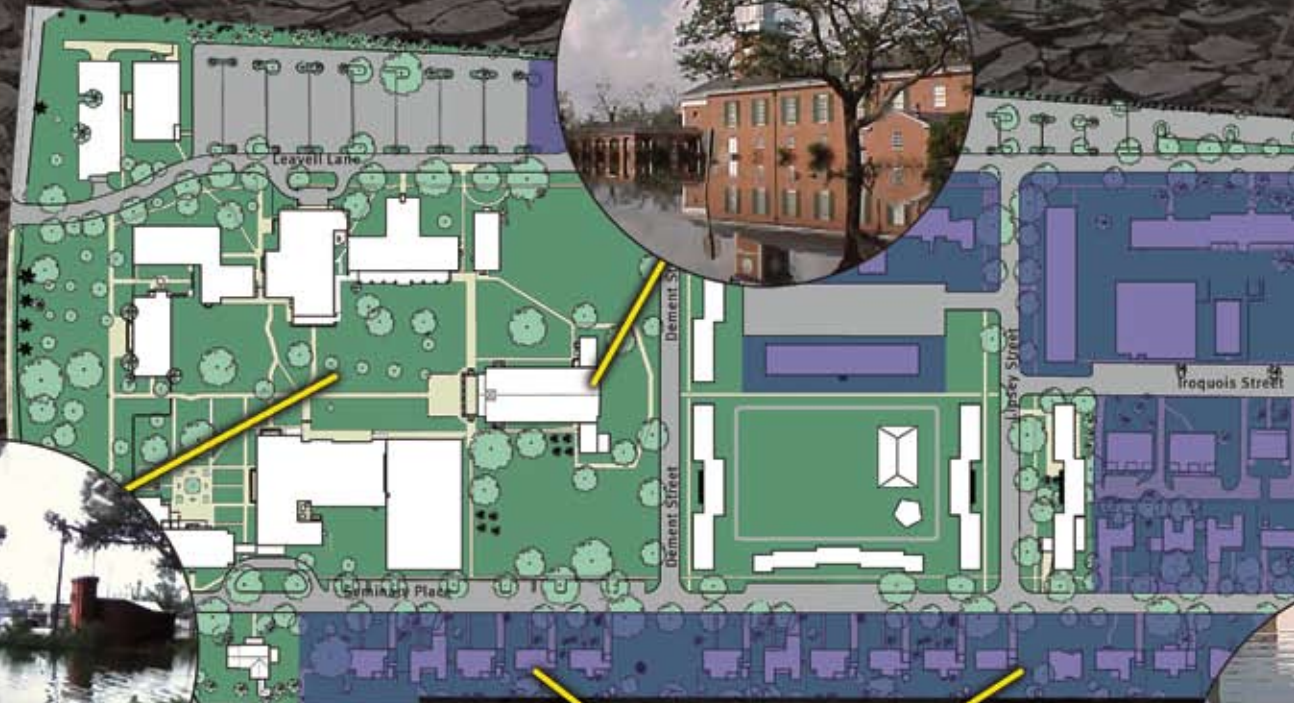
The NOBTS campus received significant roof damage and many trees were destroyed, but it seemed the seminary would have a quick recovery. Everything changed after the levees failed. Flooding damaged half of student housing and all of faculty housing.

Hurricane Katrina changed New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary forever. The storm displaced over 1,000 campus residents and put a new semester on hold. Almost immediately, God began a work of redemption in the life of the Seminary.

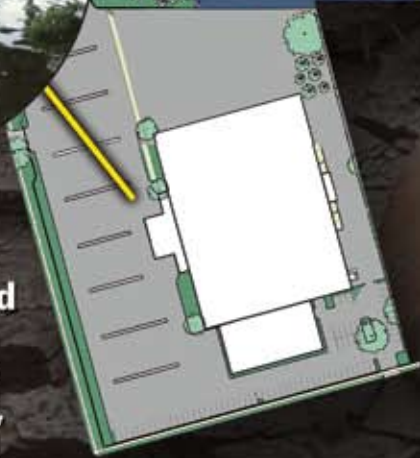
Seminary officials quickly formed a plan to provide relief for Seminary families and began preparing a way to continue the school's God-given mission to train ministers. The following pages offer a brief history of New Orleans Seminary's "Purpose after the Storm."

FACING PAGE: Leavell Chapel surrounded by water. TOP RIGHT: Dr. Chuck Kelley prays during services at First Baptist Church Dallas, Texas on Sept. 11. BOTTOM RIGHT: Water floods a covered walkway near Leavell Chapel.

Leavell Chapel was surrounded by water, but did not receive damage from flooding.

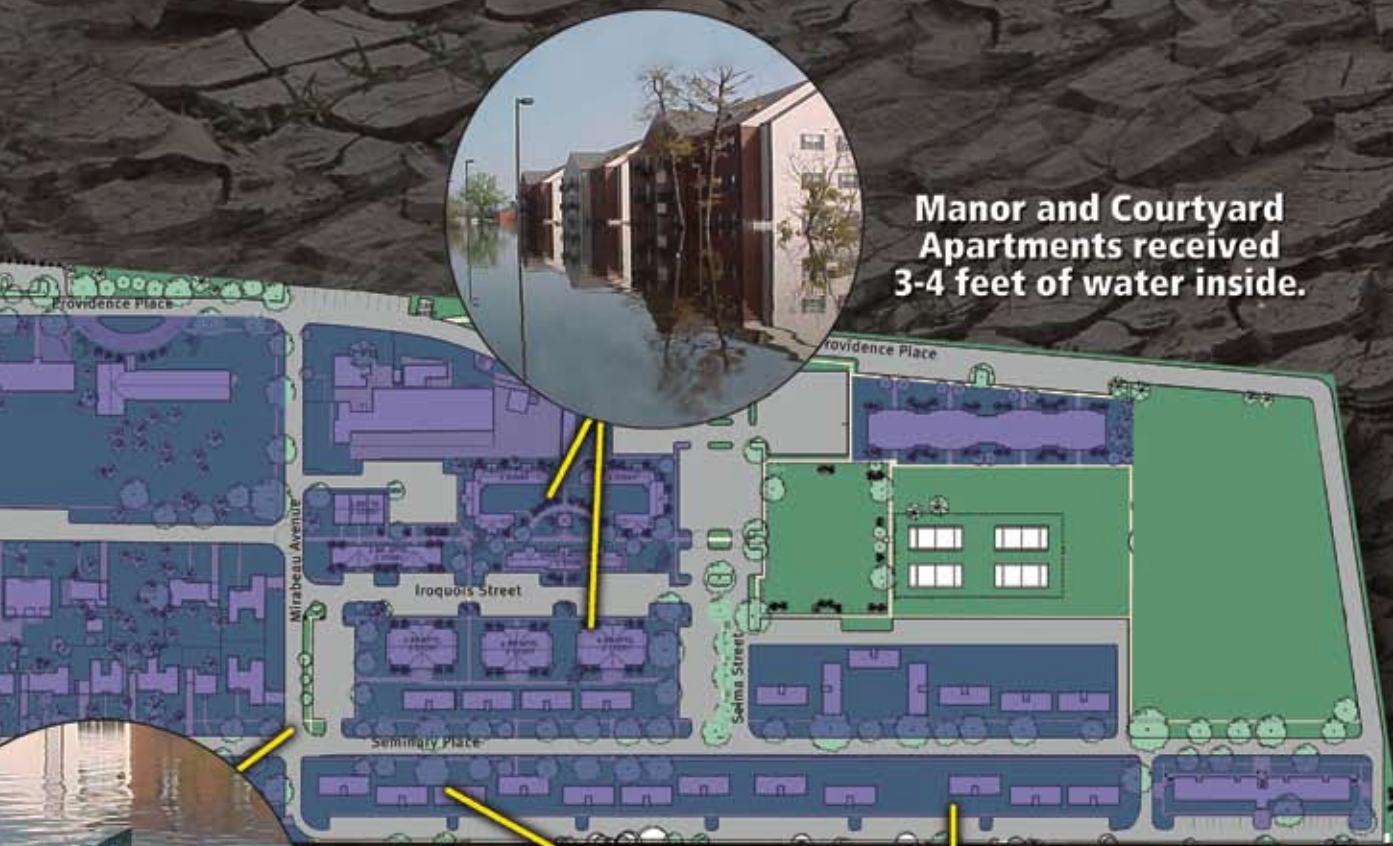


The front of campus, including the "Quad," received 1.5 feet of water. The administrative buildings, however, were not damaged by flood waters.



All faculty homes received flood damage ranging from 2-5 feet inside.

Hurricane Damage Map



Manor and Courtyard Apartments received 3-4 feet of water inside.



The corner of Mirabeau Avenue and Seminary Place received nearly 8 feet of water.



Flooding inside the "States" Apartments varied from 5-7 feet.

Hurricane Damage Key

- Wind and rain damage
- First floor flood damage
Wind and rain damage

Through Deep Waters

Twenty-four stranded Seminary employees launch a daring escape from New Orleans

By Gary D. Myers

NEW ORLEANS – When Hurricane Katrina passed Monday, Aug. 29, Chris Friedmann breathed a sigh of relief. As associate vice president for operations at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Friedmann stayed to secure the campus during and after the storm.

Then floodwaters began to engulf New Orleans and the city descended into chaos. In the midst of the unfolding tragedy, Friedmann and essential security and maintenance employees watched over the seminary. With much of the campus under water,

Friedmann and Busby each returned to their own homes to sleep. Before going to bed, Friedmann noticed water slowly rising near his house. He did not know why. The rain was over and media outlets had not announced the levee failures. Friedmann tried to sleep. It was hot and still. The city was quiet except for thousands of chirping frogs.



the seminary was completely cut off from the city.

“Tuesday morning I began to be concerned about our ability to stay,” Friedmann said. “We had become an island. Deep water prevented anyone from getting to us.”

The 24 people who remained were in good hands with Friedmann and NOBTS police chief Barry Busby. Both are certified police officers and both have extensive military experience.

Following the storm, Friedmann and Busby assessed the campus and found it in relatively good condition. There was extensive tree damage and the roof of Leavell Chapel had been damaged but, they believed the campus would be up and running soon.

Friedmann called NOBTS President Chuck Kelley with the good news and recovery plans kicked into high gear. That night,



At midnight, Friedmann checked the water again. Water now touched his front door sill. He called Busby with the news. Busby’s townhouse was already flooding.

The men moved to the president’s home on higher ground. It was apparent that the flooding would continue. Live fish and shrimp were swimming in the water. They knew the water must be coming in from Lake Pontchartrain, three miles from campus. In fact the lake water was flowing through a levee breach a few miles West of the seminary.

Looting started throughout the city soon after the storm passed. Looters moved through the stores in the Gentilly Woods shopping center across Press Drive from NOBTS.

“They were carrying out cartloads of stuff,” Friedmann said. “Some of it I can understand, food and water for the kids, no problem. But they were carrying out buggy loads of sneakers and hair supplies.”

Tuesday morning the water was higher and looting continued. Looters broke into the pawn shop across from the seminary.

“The pawn shop was the tipping point for me,” Friedmann said. “The pawn shop was filled with weapons and they were carrying them out.”

Friedmann’s team shifted into survival mode. Campus police stood guard – flashing their emergency lights at anyone approaching campus. The team also moved supplies to the back of campus. If they needed to move to a more secure location at some point, Friedmann wanted to be ready.

“Every step of this process was ordained by God,” Friedmann said. “These were all God’s decisions, we just followed. I’ve never been through an experience where it was so obvious that He was leading us step by step.”

Tuesday ended on a down note. Everything had been looted around them and people had been approaching the seminary fence throughout the day. None had gained access but, Friedmann knew he had a crisis on his hands.

Friedmann heard radio reports that caused him concern. Governor Kathleen Blanco had issued a mandatory evacuation order. He also learned that armed gangs were ruling the streets. These reports left him determined to evacuate.

Wednesday morning, Friedmann gathered his senior staff for a planning meeting. The group was determined to evacuate to safety.

Friedmann’s group hatched a daring plan. They would drive out of the city in a convoy. Only one question remained in his mind, “How do we get past the deep water?”

– CONTINUED on page 18



Melinda Langford/NOBTS



Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS

The news was not all bad. One escape route remained – the Crescent City Connection (a bridge near the Superdome).

Friedmann noticed that the fish and shrimp that were swimming on campus the day before had died. Gasoline, oil and sewage filled the rising water – yet another sign that the team needed to leave.

With gangs roaming the streets, a governor’s call to evacuate and contaminated water rising around him, Friedmann knew he had to get his crew out of the city.

“Every step of this process was ordained by God. These were all God’s decisions, we just followed.”

– Chris Friedmann

FACING PAGE – TOP LEFT: Satellite imagery shows Katrina striking the Gulf Coast. TOP RIGHT: A view of the New Orleans skyline taken shortly after the hurricane passed through the city. BOTTOM: High waters flood Mirabeau Avenue on campus. **THIS PAGE** – ABOVE: NOBTS Campus Police Chief Barry “Hoot” Busby was instrumental in protecting the Seminary during the hurricane. LEFT: The breach of the London Street Canal levee sent water rushing into the Gentilly neighborhood and the NOBTS campus.

Through Deep Waters

CONTINUED from page 17

Twenty-four people remained on the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary after city levees broke in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. With water rising, Chris Friedmann, associate vice president of operations at the seminary, and Barry Busby, campus police chief, knew they had to evacuate campus. But just getting off the campus would pose significant challenges. How would they get through the deep water?

The vehicles needed for their escape were parked at the cafeteria on Providence Place. Large trees fell over Providence Place during the storm, completely blocking the seminary gate. The Seminary Place gate also was blocked by large trees.



Barry Busby/NOBTS

The Hardin Student Center gate was not blocked. However, two deep water areas separated the convoy of eight vehicles from the gate.

David Dowdy spoke up with an incredible idea for escape. He believed they could push water aside with the bucket of a front-end loader and drive the vehicles through. The idea, sounding more like a movie plot than a viable plan, called for moving just enough water to keep the cars from stalling. They believed each vehicle that passed through would keep the water pushed away for the next.

Friedmann wanted a trial run. He sent Chris Joyner, who would drive the loader, and Dowdy out to test the idea. It worked.

The group immediately began moving vehicles from the cafeteria to the Hardin Student Center parking lot, where they would regroup and re-supply before leaving campus. Joyner

led the group on the front-end loader slowly to DeMent Street. The convoy included two seminary vans, two campus police trucks and four private vehicles. The vehicles carried 24 precious lives.

“He pushed a foot of water out of the way,” Friedmann said. “The rest of us, following behind him bumper-to-bumper, kept the channel low.”

As the vehicles navigated their way down Seminary Place they encountered a serious problem. Friedmann, following directly behind Joyner, struck a sunken boat the crew had used following the storm.

Caught between a large pecan tree and a hedge near the library, his truck would not move. A brief moment of defeat began to set in as the remaining seven vehicles waited in deep water behind Friedmann. But, quick thinking saved the day.

Joyner used the back-hoe arm to knock the boat loose. Steve Eichelberger jumped in the water and attached a tow rope to the boat. The toxic water burned his legs. Using the rope and his Jeep, Eichelberger pulled the boat out of the convoy’s way. The group quickly pushed through the water to the student center.

Friedmann knew gasoline would be a major concern during their trek to safety. The team siphoned fuel from the dry vehicles on campus. They were able to fill most of the vehicles and carry out 50 additional gallons of fuel.

Four major obstacles remained – three deep water spots and growing unrest downtown would challenge their escape. The team had heard reports of carjackings near the Superdome.

At 1 p.m. Aug. 31, the convoy lined up in the Hardin Student Center parking lot to evacuate. Friedmann agonized over leaving, fearing that the campus would be looted. But it was simply unsafe for his team to stay.

The convoy drove out onto the Gentilly Boulevard median and waited as campus police locked the gate. With campus police trucks in front and in back, they drove east for several blocks and turned right on water-covered Louisa Street. Joyner pushed the water aside and all the vehicles made it through. They turned into the McDonald’s parking lot built high above Louisa.

Leaving the McDonald’s was tricky. A very low area separated the convoy from the I-10 ramp. As each car passed through, it pushed just enough water aside for the next. They made it.

Halfway up the I-10 ramp they faced their last water hazard – a dip filled with water. They pushed through.

High above the ground on I-10, the team got their first look at the flooded city. The city was a huge lake. They saw groups of people standing on islands of interstate along I-610. Joyner ditched the loader, jumped into a vehicle and the convoy headed downtown.

“Downtown was the scariest thing for me. I didn’t want to run over anybody, but I didn’t want to stop,” Friedmann said. “We went through town with lights and sirens blaring. There were literally thousands of people. It was hard.”

Friedmann knew they needed to get off the interstate to find gasoline and a place to stay.

“The Lord just put it in my mind to go to Ruston [La.],” he said. “All these decisions were God-led, every one of them. We’re here today because we followed God’s direction.”

The team finally got a cell phone signal on I-55. Friedmann immediately called NOBTS President Chuck Kelley with a report of the escape. Then he called his wife, Peggy.



Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS

FACING PAGE – Flood waters and downed trees block the Seminary Place entrance to the NOBTS campus.

THIS PAGE – LEFT: Chris Friedmann stands beside the Chevrolet Suburban that carried part of an NOBTS crew out of New Orleans after the levees failed. A sunken boat on campus almost thwarted the escape; scrapes and dents mark the spot where the van and boat tangled. BOTTOM: Gasoline cans, on view at the seminary’s North Georgia Campus, served as a lifeline for an NOBTS crew’s escape from New Orleans.

The desperate crowd leaned in as the vehicles passed the Superdome at 35 mph. Some yelled angrily, others cried for help. The seminary team agonized as they passed the helpless people. They wanted to help, but they could not stop. It was too dangerous and there was no room to spare.

With the Crescent City Connection and safety in sight, one of the vehicles developed a problem – water caused the engine to fail. It was too dangerous to stop. Eichelberger pushed the vehicle across the bridge to safety. They left the broken vehicle by the road and continued their escape.

The team breathed a sigh of relief. Friedmann made a last minute decision to travel Interstate 55 toward Jackson, Miss. He had not heard that most of Mississippi had lost power during the storm.

“We began to discover that all the communities had closed their exits,” Friedmann said.



Gary D. Myers/NOBTS

“I was very emotional at this point, I could hardly speak,” Friedmann said. “The stress had been too much. It wasn’t anything with the storm or the flooding. It was the out-of-control, total chaos in the city.”

In Vidalia, La., the group found several gas stations open, but each line had 60 to 70 cars waiting. Friedmann knew they would run out of gas waiting. At the last station in town, a sheriff’s deputy was directing traffic. There were only six cars in each line.

“We pulled in and we all gassed up,” Friedmann said. “When our last campus police truck was gassed up, the station ran out of gas – just another miracle.”

In Ruston, the weary travelers found a friendly face – James Davison Jr., a seminary trustee and foundation board member. Davison and Temple Baptist Church took care of the exhausted group. They had reached safety.



Townsend Family

At N.O. hospital, seminary family sees God’s provision unfold

By **Scott Barkley**

HOUSTON (BP) – For more than three days, Byron Townsend and his wife, Cynthia – and Ethan, their newborn – had been holed up with Cynthia’s parents at Lakeside Tulane Hospital in New Orleans.

It was Tuesday, Aug. 30, and the last 38 hours had gone by with no power, air conditioning or running water. Floodwater was being collected in buckets and used to flush toilets. The bottled water supply was gone and hospital staffers were preparing to distribute saline packets as an alternative.

“In the days leading up to Hurricane Katrina, Cynthia and I were focused on the anticipation of Ethan’s birth – thoughts of this being not only our first child but the first grandchild on either side of the family,” said Byron, a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where Cynthia graduated in May with a degree in psychology and counseling.

Recounting the ordeal of getting out of New Orleans, Townsend said Cynthia was 11 days past her due date on Friday, Aug. 26, and was told by doctors she would be induced soon. At 2 a.m. she began feeling contractions. By 5 a.m. she was at the hospital and at 7:30 Ethan Byron Townsend was born.

Doctors told the Townsends they would have to stay for 48 hours for observation. Although initially anxious about the approach of Hurricane Katrina, Townsend said he grew more at ease as doctors’ families began to come to the hospital to wait out the storm.

Although the family made it through Katrina, Townsend grew uneasy at the dwindling supplies and the dehydration his wife and son were now experiencing in their second-floor hospital room. Unaware that levees had broken that would send the city into chaos, Cynthia and Ethan Townsend loaded up in Cynthia’s parents’ suburban and prepared to leave the hospital. Permission was granted from hospital personnel and a National Guard representative. A nurse from the hospital looking to hitch a ride home joined them as well.

With Byron walking ahead to guide them, Cynthia’s father drove through the knee-high floodwater onto a nearby ramp to Interstate 10. After safely making it onto the highway, the group began the trip back to Cynthia’s parent’s home in Houston.

With his family gone, Townsend began helping unload supplies from helicopters at the hospital, while waiting out the floodwater until he could drive his own car through. However,



Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS



Townsend Family



Townsend Family

rumors began to swirl about floodwater 12 feet deep in nearby Metairie.

“I decided to give it a shot in my Camry,” he said. “I figured if I don’t get across, the car sits in water for a few days and I just chill at Lakeside.”

Before attempting the crossing, Townsend witnessed an elderly lady drive through the same stretch of water he was eyeing in a car similar to his own. She got stuck and Townsend, barefoot, helped push her car out of the way.

Recalling later the strength that comes from prayer and a desire to reunite with his wife and son, Townsend got into his car and gunned it into the same area. With water rolling over the hood, the Camry didn’t flood out; the car jumped a hidden curb and made it onto dry land.

Townsend’s story doesn’t end there. Driving through New Orleans, he gave a lift to a couple of hitchhikers. It turned out the two men lived next to the ill-fated 17th Street Canal. They were surveying damage to their home when the levee broke. Both men had to swim out of their neighborhood with nothing but a backpack of essentials. Dropping them off at a hotel, Townsend continued to Houston.

“We didn’t know how bad things were until we were in the

car and began listening to the radio,” Cynthia said. “We passed a number of buses coming from Texas that we found out later were on their way to evacuate people from the Superdome.

“The entire experience reminds me of the providence of God,” she said. “The outpouring of love we’ve received from families and churches has reminded us of how He takes care of His children.”

Scott Barkley is the production editor at The Christian Index.

FACING PAGE – Byron, Cynthia and Ethan Townsend began their initial hours as a family riding out Hurricane Katrina in a New Orleans hospital where deteriorating conditions soon prompted their exit from the city.

THIS PAGE – TOP LEFT: Located near the hospital, the Galleria Mall, in Metairie’s CBD, suffered extensive damage. MIDDLE LEFT: Byron and Cynthia Townsend, after the birth of their son, Ethan, wait in their hospital room along with Cynthia’s parents for clearance to leave following Hurricane Katrina’s fury and flooding. TOP RIGHT: From their second-floor room, new parents Byron and Cynthia could see floodwater from Hurricane Katrina rising around Lakeside Tulane Hospital in New Orleans.

“God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!
The LORD of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our refuge.”

Psalm 46:1, 10-11



New Orleans
Baptist
Theological
Seminary
North Georgia Campus
862 COLUMBIA DRIVE

Jeffrey G. Audirsch/NOBTS

NOBTS relief efforts begin Sept. 1 in Atlanta

By Gary D. Myers

ATLANTA — New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary officials met in Atlanta Sept. 1, just three days after Hurricane Katrina struck, to begin the long process of healing. Providing for the immediate needs of seminary families was their top priority.

“The seminary family has been deeply affected,” said NOBTS President Chuck Kelley. “Our greatest concern is taking care of the people side of this tragedy. We’re going to work on the campus and the buildings ... most of all we want to take care of these precious families.”

Kelley started the meeting by reading from Psalm 46. The group prayed and wept. They prayed for the students, faculty and staff members. They prayed for the city and rescue efforts. The group also prayed for the many poor citizens who lost everything.

Thirty members of the faculty, staff and administration, homeless themselves, began asking the same questions that students and employees were asking. The group split into two task forces. One to address relief efforts; the other focused on academic issues.

Offers of help poured in from churches, state conventions and individuals. The offers included housing (some near NOBTS extension sites), clothing and other items. The relief task force focused on developing a system of matching the needs of seminary families with relief and continued working to find additional relief resources.

“We already have floods of relief coming in from different people who want to help. We are going to match the needs with the resources that are being offered.”

— Dr. Craig Price

The task force developed online information update forms for students, faculty and staff members. The forms were used to assess needs of the seminary family. The staff asked anyone who lived on the main NOBTS campus at the time of the hurricane to provide updated contact information. Systematically, the dean of students staff contacted each main campus student.

The task force also developed a way to match volunteers and resources with the needs of seminary families.

“We already have floods of relief coming in from different people who want to help,” Craig Price, dean of students, said at the time. “We are going to match the needs with the resources that are being offered.”

The relief task force also worked diligently to provide the seminary family with information about FEMA and Red Cross relief programs.