

**Here's a fun report from the latest mission trip to New Orleans. It was addressed to Michele Smith, Director of Outreach and Mission, from Paul Curren and dated July 9, 2008**

The New Orleans trip went very well. Carter, Anne, and I were in Chalstrom House with three people from Iowa, so the arrangements were quite comfortable...Carter and Anne had their own bedroom and bathroom!

The youth group invited us to dinner at St. Paul's Homecoming Center, and they seemed to be having a great time. They were also well organized...with teams taking turns cooking, serving, and cleaning up.

Carter, Anne, and I joined up with three EDOLA interns and then, on the second and third workdays, with the three people from Iowa. We "mudded" (i.e., taped and spackled wallboard/sheetrock) in the Ninth Ward that I believe the youth group came and sanded the next day.

But our first project probably was the most meaningful...joining with the three EDOLA interns, we helped to move an 80 year old woman (Mrs. Fox) from her FEMA trailer into her completed house in Metairie.

EDOLA had been trying to get her to move for some time, but her house was jammed with clothes, furniture, and other household goods (all in good condition) that her relatives and other churches had given her. The task was simply overwhelming for her. She didn't know where to begin and didn't want to leave her trailer. However, it's no longer legal to live in FEMA trailers in New Orleans, so the clock was ticking.

Carter and I decided to start at one end of the house to make it livable and eventually worked our way through the entire house. Anne spent hours putting stuff away in the kitchen. The EDOLA interns helped move stuff and cleaned and polished china and furniture. Toward the end of the morning the lady's house looked terrific, and Josie (the EDOLA intern in charge of the group) started talking to her about moving some items out of her trailer. She agreed, and ultimately we moved everything out of the trailer and into the house.

Mrs. Fox was delighted.

Then the funniest part of our trip occurred. Mrs. Fox's 80-year-old brother-in-law, who is an attorney, called. Here's how the conversation went:

**Brother-in-Law:** You know, you have a subpoena from the city government to attend a hearing to describe why you can't leave your FEMA trailer. You simply have to move into the house.

**Mrs. Fox:** I've moved! I'm now completely in the house!

**Brother-in-Law:** Huh? You're kidding! How did that happen?

**Mrs. Fox:** The Episcopalians came and moved me! And, two men fixed my bed frame that the Lutherans said couldn't be repaired! You can call FEMA and tell them to pick up the trailer!

**Brother-in-Law:** The Baptists came and moved you? Or, were they Catholics?

**Mrs. Fox:** No, they weren't Baptists. They weren't Catholics. They were Episcopalians!

**Mrs. Fox:** God moves in mysterious ways!

**Brother-in-Law:** His wonders to perform!

EDOLA has clearly taken steps to improve security for volunteers. They no longer put much information on their website about housing for volunteers, and Chalstrom House is locked at all times. They no longer send one or two people into dangerous areas. The groups going to those places have a minimum of 4-5 people; and, when they're in a house they bring radios and make a lot of noise. EDOLA now cautions people not to "take tours" alone in dangerous areas; never to walk alone in those areas; and to go out in groups of two or three or more when visiting restaurants and other public places.

Five of us walked several blocks from the house we were mudding in the 9th Ward to a small store, where we used the bathroom and bought sodas. We were led by an intern who was about 6' 3", built like a football player, and who looked like a contractor. One of the locals, who was driving a Lincoln, yielded to us in a crosswalk and said, "I always stop for a workin' man!"

All said, I felt reasonably safe...given also that my situational awareness is much greater than it used to be.

Best,

-- Paul