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As churches in the Baton Rouge area identify families who need to rebuild, MNA Disaster Response comes alongside them to help.



## THE BYFAITH INTERVIEW

**p. 32 Every Gift Christ Gives Flows Out of What is First and Primary: Our Union with Christ.** Our conversation with Rankin Wilbourne, author of “Union with Christ: The Way to Know and Enjoy God.” A diminished view of union with Christ, Rankin Wilbourne believes, brings a diminished view of salvation. To recapture this key concept, we need a revitalized sense of imagination, he says. How else can we relate to the true God “whom no one has ever seen or can see”?

*Interviewed by Richard Doster*

## IN THE WORLD

**p. 38 Choosing a President While Worshipping a King** As believers, we are not metals in a melting pot’s alloy, but branches connected to the True Vine. His inauguration will be celebrated not with a dress ball, but with a wedding feast. *By Phil Mobley*

## IN THE CHURCH (PHOTO ESSAY)

**p. 44 For MNA Disaster Response, a Flood Opens Doors** As pastors from the six PCA churches in the Baton Rouge area inform Disaster Response about the needs around them, site manager Keith Perry dispatches volunteers to help. *By Megan Fowler*

## EVERYDAY LIFE

**p. 56 Be of Good Courage** To see God’s kingdom come requires us to go into the world — this world of disturbing, sometimes terrifying, headlines. And this is why we live in our fallen world — to be part of God’s plan to advance the kingdom. To go is to say “yes” to God. *By Ann Kroeker*



The Rev. Don Hulsey of Grace Presbyterian Church in Baton Rouge stands in front of the gutted home of Michael Futch, a member of his congregation.

DENHAM SPRINGS, LA.  
8.31.2016



## FOR MNA DISASTER RESPONSE, A FLOOD OPENS DOORS

As pastors from the six PCA churches in the Baton Rouge area inform Disaster Response about the needs around them, site manager Keith Perry dispatches volunteers to help.

BY MEGAN FOWLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
WILLIAM WIDMER

# A

series of deadly shootings rocked Baton Rouge in July, reflecting growing tension over race-related violence. On July 5, Baton Rouge police officers shot and killed Alton Sterling — an African-American man — outside a convenience store. Less than two weeks later, an African-American man retaliated by ambushing six Baton Rouge police officers, killing three of them. The events left residents deeply unsettled and exposed fractures in the community.

Jason Corkern works in road construction, and his office is around the corner from where the officers were shot. “There was a lot of tension,” he said. “I have to work in some of the sketchier parts of town, and it makes you more hesitant to drive through there because you don’t know what others are thinking.”

But the city’s animosity ebbed just one month later when the rivers rose to historic levels and flooded the area. A community in crisis pivoted to face a catastrophe of Katrina-like proportions, and Mission to North America (MNA) Disaster Response

Jill Corkern plays with her daughter, Mia, and son, Beau, in the top floor of her mother-in-law’s house. Jill’s family was forced to leave their home as floodwaters crept in, and are now staying at her mother-in-law’s house while working to repair the flood damage.

BAKER, L.A.  
8.31.2016





moved in to help many families, including the Corkerns, clean up, rebuild, and heal.

### A Flood that Opens Doors

On Thursday, Aug. 11, torrential rains began pummeling the Corkerns' home in Central, Louisiana, a town about 10 miles northeast of Baton Rouge. The rain worsened on Friday, and by Saturday homes were taking on water.

Corkern was awakened at 6 a.m. on Aug. 13 by neighbors warning him that the Amite River behind his house was rising rapidly. Corkern and his wife, Jill, packed some belongings and by the time they loaded their children and dog into their car at 8 a.m., the water in the house was ankle deep.

The Corkerns spent the day at the highest spot in the neighborhood, Bellingrath Hills Elementary School. They watched helplessly as the waters kept rising and hoped the school would stay dry since all the thoroughfares out of Central were now impassable. That evening the Cajun Navy rescued them by boat, with the water level at rooftops.

For Corkern, the flooding brought back memories of the devastation he had seen when he helped his New Orleans family during Hurricane Katrina. But even through his fears, Corkern noticed that his neighbors were looking out for each other.

"Compared to Katrina horror stories, [Baton Rouge] was very well organized," he said. "Everyone was helping everyone."

In fact, the flooding in Baton Rouge eventually exceeded the flood damage of Katrina. The rain dumped more than 7 trillion gallons of water in the area, with more than 110,000 homes taking on water, from a few inches to complete submersion. More than 20 percent of businesses also sustained damage. Some 30,000 people were rescued from their homes, but the storm claimed 13 lives, too.

And when the flood waters began to recede, MNA Disaster Response moved in. Sherry Lanier, facilitator

**TOP:**  
Sherry Lanier discusses inventory with Keith Perry, the site manager at Grace Presbyterian Church in Baton Rouge, where Mission to North America is headquartered for flood relief in southern Louisiana.

BATON ROUGE, LA.  
8.31.2016

**RIGHT:**  
Homeowner Michael Futch stands in the living room of his house, which was hit hard by flooding.

BATON ROUGE, LA.  
8.31.2016



**There are neighborhoods in Baton Rouge where every house is damaged. Columns of debris crowd into the streets from both sides, turning two-way streets into one-way obstacle courses.**

of MNA Disaster Response, said there are neighborhoods in Baton Rouge where every house is damaged. Columns of debris crowd into the streets from both sides, turning two-way streets into one-way obstacle courses.

### Grace Upon Grace

Don Hulsey pastors Grace Presbyterian Church in Central. About 20 percent of the families at Grace sustained major damage to their homes, including the Corkerns. While that number is serious, Hulsey said it pales in comparison to other churches in Central where 50 to 90 percent of families had damage.

Grace's facility also fared better than most. The church building was within one inch of taking on water, but the waters receded before damaging the church. When he saw that his church building would be spared, Hulsey knew God had plans for Grace.

"Houses across the street [from the church] were getting wiped out by the water, and we didn't. Businesses around us were damaged," Hulsey said. "God is giving us an opportunity that we should not waste."

The church moved forward with purpose. Grace has a multi-purpose







Jill Corkern with  
her daughter Mia,  
son Beau, and  
mother-in-law  
Sandy Corkern.

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8.31.2016





Tim Holliday, a Mission to North America volunteer, works to gut a house that was affected by the recent floods that swept through the area.

BATON ROUGE, LA.  
8.31.2015

**The devastation is traumatic. Seeing all of one's earthly possessions carted away in a garbage truck is gut-wrenching. Adults and children alike are struggling to cope with the scope of the loss.**

activities building with classrooms and bathrooms that include showers, and the activities building has become the hub for Disaster Response relief crews. Lanier said Grace is located in the bulls-eye of the devastation, so from this location crews head out to help families from Grace and five other PCA churches in the flood-ravaged region.

Volunteers sleep in classrooms in Grace's activities building, and local volunteers use the kitchen to prepare hot dinners for work crews and drop off lunch materials for crews to take to work sites. Since August, an average of 15 volunteers has come into town each week, and on the weekends 45 to 60 volunteers come in for flood relief work.

Grace also uses its activities building as a distribution center for handing out supplies to the community. Grace members continue to distribute cleaning supplies the church receives from PCA churches all over the country. Though the first shipments of supplies went to PCA families who needed them, the larger community has turned to Grace for supplies too, and many are lingering to talk and pray with volunteers.

### **Tragedy and Trauma**

The Corkerns eventually found shelter with Corkern's mother, and they have cleaned out their home with the help of family and Disaster Response volunteers.

As pastors from the six PCA churches in the Baton Rouge area inform Disaster Response about the needs around them, site manager Keith Perry dispatches volunteers to help. Throughout the fall and winter, the primary need is for assistance in cleaning out damaged houses. To date, PCA volunteers have worked on 55 houses of PCA church members and then worked outward into the communities.

"There are no words," Lanier said. "The devastation is catastrophic."

The devastation is also traumatic. Seeing all of one's earthly possessions carted away in a garbage truck is gut-wrenching. Adults and children alike are struggling to cope with the scope of the loss.

Corkern saw the trauma that the experience inflicted on his 6-year-old son, Beau. Beau seemed to understand what had happened as the family hauled all of its belongings to the curb. But when Beau saw a beloved teddy bear sitting in the garbage pile, he broke down. For the next several weeks he refused to enter his own house.

Beau's story is not unusual. Barb Martin, a counseling professor at Reformed Theological Seminary – Jackson, went to Grace to provide training to PCA volunteers on how to minister to people affected by trauma. Hulsey



said the training helped volunteers think through what types of questions to ask, what not to say, and how to communicate empathy and compassion.

### Relief for the Long Haul

The financial devastation in Louisiana is immense. Since Baton Rouge is not in a flood zone, most homeowners had insufficient or no insurance to cover the damage to their homes. One way people can help the relief work is by sending donations to the Disaster Response Flood Relief Fund. All funds will go toward helping families rebuild.

Disaster Response plans to continue working in the Baton Rouge area long-term. As churches identify families who need to rebuild, Disaster Response comes alongside them to help.

Lanier said that Disaster Response has many opportunities for churches to help in addition to financial assistance. One ongoing need is for donations of cleaning supplies packaged in “flood buckets.” The Disaster Response website offers instructions on how to assemble these cleanup packs and send them to the Disaster Response warehouse in Rome, Georgia. Disaster Response aims to have 5,000 flood buckets on hand to send as needs arise.

Groups can also register at the Disaster Response website to travel to Baton Rouge for a weekend or weeklong trip. Anyone who can help with general construction projects, yard work, and painting is needed. Disaster Response is also looking for people who can assist with emotional and spiritual care to help residents heal from devastating losses.

“The most important thing people can do is pray for people affected and for the people who are responding,” Lanier said.

For Corkern, the kindness and love he experienced from volunteers overwhelmed him. “The church people help everyone, no questions asked. I knew that before, but I’ve never experienced it. It was pretty overwhelming at times, the generosity and selflessness.”

He said that in the future, he will look for opportunities to help people in need as he has been helped. Losing one’s house in a flood is devastating beyond measure, but when the body of Christ helps a community in crisis focus on wholeness, it brings healing.

For more information on how your church can help Disaster Response, visit [pcamna.org/disaster-response/storms/](http://pcamna.org/disaster-response/storms/).

**TOP:**  
Gutted homes in Denham Springs, a small town near Baton Rouge that was hit hard by flooding.

DENHAM SPRINGS, LA.  
8.31.2016

**RIGHT:**  
Volunteers Rick Lenz (L) and John Browne assemble a storage shed in the parking lot of Grace Presbyterian Church in Baton Rouge.

BATON ROUGE, LA.  
8.31.2016

