Called back to New Orleans
Life in New Orleans After Katrina

By Hannah Brummer

Last August, the world watched as levees failed and hurricane waters filled parts of the city. Harrowing scenes flashed across our TV screens: families stranded on roofs, children’s toys drowning in floodwaters, masses of people sweltering inside the Superdome. Now seven months have passed since Katrina, but the hurricane’s effects are still a top story. What is life like for our brothers and sisters who live in and around the city?

Suppose like me, you were in New Orleans for the February 4 wedding of John Timler and Eileen Conney, the branch’s second wedding since the hurricane. (Mike Murray and Karen Dunn were married on November 19.) If you arrived early enough to get a look around town, or stayed late enough to sit with brothers and sisters, absorbing their candid comments over heaping plates of crawfish etouffee, you would learn about changes to nearly every aspect of daily life.

Here are some snapshots:

As you arrive at Mike and Linda Conney’s home in Metairie, a New Orleans suburb, the first thing you notice is that enthusiastic Southern hospitality, a branch hallmark, is alive and well. Glance down Ridgeway Avenue and you’ll see how well this block is doing. Palm trees, grand live oaks and crepe myrtles still stand proudly. The five houses on this block owned by community members are bustling with activity as they provide hospitality for wedding guests from branches near and far. All the branch members on this block are living in their homes.

But take a left at the end of that block and you’ll see a FEMA trailer parked in front of John and Chris Barnitz’s home. Stand on the Conneys’ balcony and you’ll spot blue tarps on roofs across the neighborhood. Talk to any of the branch members and they’ll date every event before or after Katrina. They’ll ask you whether people elsewhere still talk about the recovery New Orleans still needs to experience. Traces of the storm, if not blatant stains, appear on the fabric of everyday life.

Not every branch member lives here in “the bubble,” as Marlena Doherty calls the relatively undamaged area surrounding Ridgeway Avenue. A few miles away, 77-year-old Grace Butts looks at the heaps of garbage surrounding her new apartment. “It’s like it’s been bombed,” she says. Yet this apartment is a far better place than Grace’s old house on the other side of the interstate, flooded, roofless and condemned.

Nick and Elaine Chetta stand inside their FEMA trailer and joke about how it’s a good thing they don’t have any high-school-aged children at home. FEMA provides bunk beds for older kids and lying in them would be “like lying in an MRI machine,” Nick quips. It’s hard to imagine adding a set of bunk beds to the Chetta’s crowded trailer, yet many larger New Orleans families need to do exactly that.

Tom and Diane Evans are now staying just down the block from the house they bought when they got married, which was awash in two feet of water after the storm. The Evenses are trying to determine whether they can win the war against the mold that has taken over their home of 38 years.

Around the city, driving poses many problems. Traffic times have nearly doubled. “It’s very congested,” Phil Slattery says. He points to especially heavy traffic along the interstate where reconstruction workers gather. “That’s where the food is, the restaurants,” he says. On the weekends, most of these workers will return to Baton Rouge, an hour away, or even several hundred miles to Texas.

Workers aren’t the only ones driving in and out of New Orleans. Three generations of the Argus family spend a lot of time driving from their temporary home across the lake in Hammond into the city for work and community gatherings. Bill and Tucky Argus lost two houses (one in New Orleans East and another inherited family home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi). Their daughter Liz Meehan, her husband John and young daughter Tessie lost their home of
Hurricane Katrina: August 29, 2005

NEW ORLEANS BRANCH FACTS
Compiled by Jill A. Boughton

BEFORE KATRINA:
Adults: 44
Children: 18
Households: 27
Home Parishes (counties): Orleans, Jefferson
Principal Branch Coordinator: Mike Coney
Branch Coordinators: Nick Chetta, Lloyd Mehaffey
Handmaids: Tucky Argus, Linda Coney, Liz Slattery

AFTER KATRINA:
Adults: 46
Children: 18
Households: 26
Injuries/Fatalities to Members: 0
Homes Totally Destroyed: 1
Homes Totally Spared: 1
Places Where Members Evacuated: To Baton Rouge, Franklinton, Hammond, Lake Charles, Lafayette, Luling and Shreveport, Louisiana. To Houston, Texas. To Jackson, Mississippi. To Minneapolis, Minnesota. To India.
Most Dramatic Evacuation: Joanne Bologna and her 88-year-old mother left the hospital where Joanne works by boat, transferred into two other types of boats, and wound up at an outdoor triage center for hours before leaving the city by ambulance.
Most Distant Evacuation: India (Basil and Shyla Davis family)
Most Moves by a Branch Member Since the Hurricane: 6 (Nick and Elaine Chetta)
Time Away from Home: People were allowed into Jefferson Parish after a week but couldn’t move back for two more weeks.
Still in Temporary Shelters (apartments, trailers, with friends): 4 families (Meehan, Chetta, Barnitz, Wiltz)
Cars Lost: 4; most others are still having problems with nails in tires.
Members Who Lost Jobs: 4
Have Found New Jobs: 3
Had to Change Schooling Arrangements: all children

Even if you could beat the traffic and keep your tires from popping, there are some places in New Orleans that you might still want to avoid. Carmen Glaeser describes her route from Metairie to her job at Tulane University. On the way, she sees mounds of trash and a tiny, beleaguered city sanitation crew struggling to keep up with the piles of junk—insulation, mattresses, flooring material shoved out of gutted houses. Carmen avoids driving into the Lakeview neighborhood and the Ninth Ward, where a barge sat on top of a house for months, where numbers spray-painted on houses still indicate the number of dead bodies found inside, and where other spray-painted signs warn that looters will be shot. “My life has gotten smaller,” she observes.

Fifteen-year-old Ceile Valerio attends Mt. Carmel High School, blocks away from Lake Ponchartrain, in the heart of the devastated Lakeview neighborhood, hit hard again in January by a string of tornadoes. “When you drive down the street,” she explains, “doors are open, houses are gutted.” Signs with the questions “Got mold?” and “Tired of cleaning?” tempt returning residents to sell their...
The New Orleans Branch Is Back

By Jill A. Boughton

Seven months after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, 100% of the branch, all 44 adult members and their children, are back living in the city and its surrounding areas, including Hammond, LA, about an hour away. As of February, 2006, the overall return rate for the seven parishes (counties) comprising greater New Orleans was 67%. Why have our brothers and sisters returned in such numbers?

The reasons, of course, vary from person to person, but talk to them and you’ll discover a common theme: God has called them back.

For branch members returning, rebuilding and reorganizing their lives amid the devastation, Scripture passages and prophetic words have served as inspiration. Tucky Argus has always loved Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.” She adds, “God doesn’t throw lemons at us, but he’s the world’s best lemon-ade-maker.”

Grace Butts, 77, clings to her late husband’s favorite Scripture passage, Habakkuk 2:1-3, “I will keep watch to see what he will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me: There is still a vision for the appointed time. If it seems to tarry, wait for it.”

While living temporarily in Shreveport, Diane Evans received an image in prayer that has stayed with her. She and Jesus were in a large boat with other branch members. On the shoreline, everything seemed verdant and prosperous. Diane asked the Lord if she could get out and settle there. Perhaps life would be easier somewhere else, away from her brothers and sisters in a worry-free part of the country. Instead, Jesus told her to stay in the boat, because he had many blessings and gifts in store for the branch.

As Lloyd and Kathy Mehaffey prayed, they grew in the same conviction, that the Lord has new opportunities for the branch.

Before Katrina, Lloyd says, “The Lord had put it on many hearts that he wanted us to share more life together.” After months of searching, Steve finally got a position at another hospital. “Hospitals are gradually realizing that staff will not be returning,” he explains.

Residents and evacuees alike wait on pins and needles for June 1, the beginning of the next hurricane season. Can the city assure them that the levees will hold back floods? Will the new houses and recent repairs be safe? These and many other questions remain unanswered. Yet, back in Metairie, where brothers and sisters and many guests gather to celebrate a wedding, the start of a new family in New Orleans, you can’t help but feel a surge of optimism. This group of people, filled with the Spirit of God and returning in full force to a broken city, is the hope New Orleans needs.
The New Orleans Branch Is Back

Mehaffeys and other New Orleans families moved in with brothers and sisters in Shreveport. Later, during the first wave of the return to New Orleans, many branch members moved in together in undamaged homes until damaged ones were fixed up. These experiences of intense common life have made them hungry for more.

Their more vigorous common life has even spilled out onto the streets. Neighbors have seen branch members working together with people from other branches as far away as northern Virginia. They have seen members living in one another’s homes. The Coneys hosted a barbecue for 30 people on their front lawn and invited neighbors who came by walking their dogs. John Barnitz says, “Post-Katrina we’ve had more community gatherings such as dinners and barbecues.” As Lloyd summarizes it, “We’ve gone public.”

Diane says, “People seem so much more open to the Lord now. Perhaps I’m also more bold. I don’t ask; I just say, ‘Let’s pray,’ and people are grateful.”

Because the Lord and the People of Praise are an essential part of each branch member’s life, telling hurricane stories is a natural opportunity to introduce the community into the conversation. Some opening lines:

- “Our house had to be gutted, but three other People of Praise families opened their homes to us, one even before they returned themselves” (Nick and Elaine Chetta).
- “My medical needs and my eighth-grader’s educational needs were provided for through a single phone call to a city 1,000 miles away. Within two days of our call, my son had everything he needed to attend school” (Beth Weber).
- “The day Katrina hit, I was scheduled to begin radiation treatments at Tulane Hospital, which was destroyed, along with all its medical records. Within two days of arriving in Shreveport, a doctor in the branch (Bill Parker) connected me with an oncologist who took over my care” (Diane Evans).
- “I have experienced so much love in the last eight months, in the form of prayers, cards, e-mails, shawls, gift certificates and other gifts that my life in the People of Praise is more bountiful than ever. Praise him!” (Tucky Argus).

Branch members are talking and praying about seizing this moment in the history of the city. Should more people live in households or neighborhood clusters? Should those clusters expand into new areas? As they struggle with these questions, one thing is clear: The Lord is echoing a call he issued over 20 years ago: to be a branch of the People of Praise in New Orleans. It is a call whose echoes are reaching beyond the State of Louisiana. When you read this article, Mike and Angela Pingel (South Bend) will be living on assignment in the city and beginning to make a home there. The Pingels have purchased a hurricane-damaged house near Tom and Diane Evans and they’ll be living with the Evanses until they finish renovating it.

“It’s an encouragement and an affirmation,” Principal Branch Coordinator Mike Coney says of the Pingel move, “a sign of renewed and hopeful growth for the branch.”

In early April, South Bend branch members Mike and Angela Pingel loaded up to move to the New Orleans branch.
Tampa and Shreveport donate their savings.

**Branches Provide Seed Money for City-Building**

*By Bill Crimmins*

“. . . You put it where your mouth is, And it talks . . . ”

Dana Gioia, “Money”

What would you do with more than $350,000 sitting around like 10 talents buried in the ground, and the kingdom of God calling? You might put it at the disposal of your brothers and sisters working to build new cities in Allendale and Dinkytown.

That’s just what members of the Tampa and Shreveport branches have done by turning over their surplus assets that had been accumulating over the years with no project or mission to absorb them. The results: an infusion of capital for city-building work at a time when fundraising is the name of the game for Action divisions and teams from Washington, DC, to Oahu. The branches’ generosity is also a tangible witness to the fact that, though we are divided by geography, a profound common life unites us.

Tom Brophy, head of the Tampa branch, explains that he and his fellow branch leaders began discussing how to achieve greater unity as they were traveling back from last year’s Leaders’ Conference for Men. Over the years their branch had saved up close to $200,000 due to their low overhead costs. Jim Ganther remembers thinking, “We have no immediate use for the funds, so why don’t we put them in common? It was a no-brainer.”

The idea caught on and soon Tom was presenting it to the branch at a Sunday meeting. This conversation produced general agreement and, ultimately, a transfer of assets. Meanwhile, Tampa leaders were also discussing with headquarters the corporate-structure issues that have come to the fore as the People of Praise has mobilized for city-building work nationally. “We needed a nonprofit corporation to handle our work in Allendale,” says Kevin Ranaghan, a member of the board of governors. Organizing Allendale work under a separate corporation would, among other things, legally protect the People of Praise from insurance liability arising from construction activities, he says.

Clem Walters adds that, under normal circumstances, it might have taken a full year to create this kind of nonprofit corporation from scratch, but in this case the Tampa branch already had one established in Florida. “Why don’t you let us have it?,” Clem asked, recalling a long history of generosity from Tampa. It took a bit of time and considerable paperwork to convince a skeptical Florida State Board of Corporations to transfer control of a Florida corporation to a group in Indiana, but the deal was done. The Tampa branch is now legally a part of the People of Praise Indiana corporation, and the Tampa nonprofit corporation, rechristened Partners in Service (see facing page), can fund city-building projects across the country.

Meanwhile, brothers and sisters in Shreveport had been thinking about what to do with roughly $180,000 in their building fund that would not be needed anytime soon. Shreveport members are already the unsung heroes of the success in Allendale, tirelessly providing hospitality to scores of volunteers for weeks on end throughout the summer every year since the project began. They also discuss with headquarters the corporate-structure issues that have come to the fore as the People of Praise has mobilized for city-building work nationally. “We needed a nonprofit corporation to handle our work in Allendale,” says Kevin Ranaghan, a member of the board of governors. Organizing Allendale work under a separate corporation would, among other things, legally protect the People of Praise from insurance liability arising from construction activities, he says.

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Branch leader Cliff Vaughan calls the decision “obvious, easy . . . wonderful decision.” He notes that the branch donated its savings knowing that, when it needs money to build in the future, “our brothers and sisters throughout the community will be there to support us.”
Action fundraising and the action it funds.

Chasing the Money (and Catching It)

By Joe Gleason

Mike Zusi, Action’s program coordinator, says Shreveport’s money was instrumental in getting construction in Allendale off the ground. “It’s hard to overstate how important the money was and continues to be,” he says. Construction costs have to be paid up front, and the money can’t be recouped until the houses are sold. Nevertheless, he adds, the Shreveport money has by no means “alleviated the need for continued fundraising.” Current Action operating expenses run about $100,000 annually, and only stand to increase as our work expands.

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Money—you put it where your mouth is, and it talks, and if you ask Kevin Ranaghan he’ll tell you that the money from Shreveport and Tampa is saying, “We are not a federation of groups with similar lives,” but we have “just one life.” The money may be tucked away in bank accounts in cities spread out across the Western Hemisphere, but, because of our single life, we can move it easily from one place to the next and put it to work building cities in new places everywhere the Lord calls us.

What Is Partners in Service?

The name Partners in Service is familiar to many of us. Years ago, the People of Praise established Partners in Service, Inc., as a means by which people both inside and outside the community could make tax-deductible donations to community outreaches (to support our work in the Caribbean, for example). It was a DBA (doing business as) arm of the People of Praise, Inc., and was legally part of the community.

Now, Partners in Service has changed. It has been reestablished as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporate entity that is legally separate from the People of Praise, Inc. This legal separation has benefits such as allowing the People of Praise to receive the lowest possible insurance premiums for all of our insurance needs. The recent change also gives the People of Praise a more direct way to receive and process donations to Action. All donations to Partners in Service go directly to Action work.

The Action program coordinator, Mike Zusi, is chairman of the board for Partners in Service. Bud Rose is president and Gretchen Rolland serves as administrator.

Partners in Service publishes a quarterly newsletter to update donors and other interested parties on the progress of our work in Allendale. If you know people who might benefit from receiving this newsletter and would like to add their names to the mailing list, contact Gretchen Rolland at grolland@peopleofpraise.org.

Action division members are perhaps best known for driving nails and flinging up walls during two-week stints in Allendale. But the reality is that division members spend the vast majority of their time hawking tickets, washing cars and writing letters—in a word, fundraising. This article is about how the other 50 weeks of the year fit in with our city-building work.

I’m currently a freshman at the University of Notre Dame and a member of the South Bend branch’s campus division. For three years before that, though, I was a member of Servant Branch’s Action division. Like fellow members of Action, I had a personal goal of raising $1,000 each year, and I spent hundreds of hours getting that money into the bank. Everybody knew that fundraising was helping Allendale, but I was never sure what, exactly, my $1,000 bought.

This year I decided to find out. I chased the money, pursuing it from the moment it exits a wallet at one of our fundraisers to the moment it enters the State of Louisiana and turns into 2x4s. Who’s handling it? Who decides how it gets spent? What kinds of things does it purchase?

I have the answers to these questions. Before I get specific, though, let’s tour the People of Praise to check out how all this money comes into existence in the first place:

• Did you know that the NoVa branch’s Action division has hosted two professional art auctions? In spring, 2003, their Action coordinator, Jim Mysliwiec, made a connection with an art dealer who helps organizations like Action host their own auctions. The dealer provides all the paintings; Action lines up bidders and takes care of the programs and hors d’oeuvres. From ticket sales,
donations and commissions, the division raised nearly $17,500. A second auction a year later pulled in $25,000.

- Have you heard about the South Bend division’s annual Big Band dance? Every February, the division hosts one of the classiest events in the area, complete with a 900-square-foot dance floor and a 15-piece brass band from Chicago. Three successive dances have brought in a total of $23,500 in net profits.

- Servant Branch struck it big with their annual variety show. “The idea of doing a show was the word of the Lord for us,” Anne Varevice says, “a great way of raising money for us,” Anne Varevice says, “a great way of raising money that showcases our gifts.” By featuring upbeat acts and well-loved classics performed by division members, their families and friends, the show keeps audiences coming back for more. Because the show is available on DVD, people can relive the evening for just a few bucks more. The variety show has raked in $14,000 in the last two years.

- This year, Servant Branch’s Action division accepted the janitorial contract for the River Ridge building. Every day after school, Action students are responsible for vacuuming, cleaning the chalkboards, and dusting in all the classrooms. This commitment is worth $12,000.

- Action has put on major fundraisers and taken on big responsibilities, but its members are also fond of scraping up cash the old-fashioned way, by working odd jobs and stringing together small events. The Saskatoon Action team has hosted several coffeehouses after public meetings. Some Action students in Muncie, NoVa and South Bend have developed lawn aeration businesses. Some members in Servant Branch organized Christmas tree sales, door-to-door donation drives and every high school student’s favorite kind of fundraiser, car washes.

Where does all this money go? When the auction ends, the band stops playing and the janitors get paid, what happens to all the dough?

Here’s the story. The division coordinator or team leader collects the money, documents our earnings after expenses, then delivers the net profits to the branch accountant. The branch accountant deposits the money in the branch’s general account, and twice a year sends a check for the total to headquarters in South Bend. Ralph Whittenburg, the treasurer for the People of Praise, then deposits the funds into the general account for Partners in Service.

When the board of governors makes a decision about which step to take next in Allendale, Dinkytown or anywhere else Action is working, the money in this Partners in Service account pays for it.

So far in Allendale, this has included lumber and nails from Home Depot, laminate flooring for the newest house on Yale Avenue, and hundreds of pounds of chicken and Creole seasoning for biweekly barbeques.

So what did my $1,000 pay for? Well, it doesn’t exactly work that way. “Each member raising $1,000 dollars is a great goal,” says Gretchen Rolland (Shreveport), an administrator for the Action program office, “but it isn’t helpful to think of it as an individual payment. Division members aren’t paying their own expenses to travel to Allendale; they’re raising money to make all the work in Allendale possible. They’re raising money for nails, paint, even salaries.”

In the 2004-05 fiscal year, Action workers raised a grand total of $91,064. Here are some of the things this money bought:

- A newly sheetrocked and repainted living room for Diane Burks.
- Repaired flooring, a rebuilt outside wall, two functioning faucets and a new outside door for Rosie Battle.
- A new roof over Julia Powell’s caved-in carport.
- A ceiling replacement, tile installation and construction of a handicapped ramp on the exterior of Charlene Stewart’s house.
- Fresh paint, new vinyl flooring, a new front door and the installation of a header beam to fix a collapsed wall in Ocie Stadler’s house.
- A larger kitchen in the men’s house on Yale Avenue, including a new range, refrigerator, countertop island and dishwasher. The kitchen is a long-term investment and will allow us to feed the hundreds of Action volunteers who come through Allendale each summer.

Now I know the real stuff that our fundraising has purchased. This is the concrete material we’re paying for, including the concrete. With real work come real cities, and after Allendale and Dinkytown we have 198 left to build. So we’re going to keep on hosting art auctions, coffee houses, shows and dances, and carry on cleaning chalkboards and vacuuming floors, washing cars and drywalling garages. Onward!
imagininge a tiny school getting started in classrooms crammed so full of tables, chairs and students that everybody has to get up and push the tables to one side before they can shut the door. Then that tiny school grows up to become a national leader in academic excellence.

It’s the stuff of legend, and in this case the legend is true.

Twenty-five years ago, the South Bend branch launched Trinity School in a rented fellowship hall in St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. The year began with 47 students, nine teachers and a radical vision for education. Today, Trinity School has three campuses, more than 750 students, 100 teachers and a host of achievements backing up the same vision.

Looking back through four U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School of Excellence awards (three at Greenlawn, one at River Ridge), SAT scores which consistently beat the national average, and scores of alumni who credit the school with a decisive influence in their lives, it’s easy to see God’s call confirmed as Trinity School celebrates its silver anniversary.

For those who put God’s call into action in those early days, it was anything but easy.

“We were thinking big thoughts and constructing big dreams. We had an enormous amount of freedom and were able to think way, way outside the box.”

board chairman Paul DeCelles told the community’s Resource newspaper in July, 1982, soon after the end of the first year. “Everyone has worked very hard and contributed a great deal to its success.”

Those were exciting times,” said Kerry Koller, who currently serves as the president of Trinity Schools, Inc. “We were thinking big thoughts and constructing big dreams. We had an enormous amount of freedom and were able to think way, way outside the box. All that freedom brought with it loads of challenges.”
Running a school in a rented facility, too small even for the small number of students and faculty, was one of the challenges.

“We had one little room for the faculty office,” recalls Jeannette DeCelles-Zwerneman, who served on the faculty during year one and still teaches at the Meadow View campus. “A lot of us had card tables for desks. There were no screens on any of the windows, so bees used to come in during the fall and spring—bees everywhere. It was just amazing. We had seven periods, with no periods off. I worked every period.”

Because of the church’s schedule of services, the school had to use the branch’s downtown LaSalle Building on Wednesdays during Lent. Classes met in the lobby, on the mezzanine, in the basement and under the stairs.

Implementing and refining the curriculum was another exciting challenge.

“I really didn’t know what to expect,” recalls Jeannette, who applied to teach music and wound up teaching geography, modern history, medieval history, pre-algebra and Latin as well. “It was soon clear to me that we were doing something different, and it was very exciting. We had a lot of discussions about what we were going to look like. There was a tremendous amount of discussion of policy. How were we going to teach the courses? How did we want to teach Latin?

It was very collegial from the get-go—a lot of discussions, a lot of responsibility.”

The principle of excellence in academics guided the conversations.

“We decided early on that what we could do was teach academic subjects,” Tom Finke says. “We wanted to educate students to know how to think. We were asking, ‘What should an educated person know?’ In a sense, we haven’t changed that at all in the past 25 years.”

The experiment was also a challenge for the students, recalls Anne Linczer, a member of Trinity School’s first graduating class.

“Amid the challenges, hopes and fears, it was the solid backing of the community that gave us an overwhelming sense of confidence in the mission.”
“The first year at Trinity was by far the roughest,” she says. “We had all thought we would be attending St. Joseph’s High School, and starting this new venture was not our idea of fun. The focus of the first years was on developing a good curriculum and academics, so each year my class was the first to try out the new coursework. Latin was not in vogue, as it is now in the many classically based schools that have cropped up around the country. Neither were uniforms, and neither were schools that taught boys and girls separately. I guess Trinity School was a bit ahead of its time, especially for the Midwest.”

For Trinity School, finding a permanent location gave the fledgling enterprise staying power and energized everyone. The community bought the Greenlawn property before the end of the second semester. It included a mansion and a three-story school building. Resource reported: “No longer will school administrators have to negotiate the location on a monthly basis, switch locations on the Wednesdays in Lent, or contemplate moving into the Roma,” a downtown restaurant building that the branch owned.

“Purchasing Greenlawn was a big deal,” said Jeannette, recalling one outdoor drama presentation with long tables of cakes and pies on the grassy lawn and faculty and students chatting under the blue sky. “It was such a romantic property. It was like something out of the Elysian Fields. We used to walk the campus with the students a lot and just talk.”

Beth Couch, who remembers the Wednesday classes at the LaSalle Building and the campus walks with Jeannette to discuss a book or paper, is now seeing Trinity School from a parent’s perspective. Her son Michael is a freshman, and her daughter Calla is an eighth-grader.

“I think one of the greatest differences now is the sense of pride that my children have for their school. “When I was there,” she says, “it was so small and so new that when you said you went to Trinity School no one knew what it was. If people had heard of it, they seemed to feel sorry for you. They thought of it as a school for really bright kids with no social skills or athletic ability.

“Today, when my children say they go to Trinity School, most people know where it is and have a favorable response. Trinity has come a long way in the areas of athletics and social life, in addition to the recognition they have received for their academics.”

Kerry says that the support of the People of Praise was a key to Trinity School’s early success. “It took a consultation with the whole community before we went ahead. Amid the challenges, hopes and fears, it was the solid backing of the community that gave us an overwhelming sense of confidence in the mission.”
Thelma Hample

By Anne Miller

Thelma Hample was a uniquely gifted woman, broad-minded and cultivated, a woman of the world. She made friends—and kept them—in every situation she was in. She was a delightful conversationalist, inspiring others with pleasant wit, direct talk and constant faith. She always had a generous attitude and a cheerful heart, with a profound reverence for the Lord.

Thelma Hamilton was born in Denver in 1908. She had an independent, can-do personality, even when she was young. When Thelma was 10, she went to visit her Aunt Amanda and they attended a week-long tent revival. Pretty raucous for an Episcopalian, but on the last night Thelma gave herself to the Lord at the altar call. Later, reflecting on her life, she’d say, “The Lord has had his arms around me all the way.”

Thelma moved to the Twin Cities in 1938 and started work as a medical social worker. She fell for Forest Hample “hook, line and sinker” and they married in 1942. Their son Charlie was born in 1943. She volunteered for wartime work with the Red Cross and was a social worker and the director of Traveler’s Aid, a charitable organization, for many years. Thelma was the first woman on the board of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, and she loved the opera, theater and all things cultural. Thelma had a rich life, yet she knew that something was missing.

After Forest died, Kati Ritchie (Colorado Springs) asked Thelma to go along to several charismatic prayer meetings. Another “raucous” experience, and Thelma, somewhat cautious, checked at the Episcopal bookstore to see whether members of her church were mixed up in that “charismatic stuff.” The clerk referred her to some charismatic books by Episcopalians, so Thelma went back to the prayer meetings and signed up for everything.

In 1971, Servants of the Light community was developing out of the prayer group. “I kept hoping they would invite me in, but they didn’t. I thought maybe I was too old or something.” A bit frustrated, she complained to one of the leaders, “How do you get in?” “All you have to do is ask,” was the reply. She didn’t hesitate. Once in, she was sold on community forever. She became a tireless servant in Servants of the Light, which became Servants of the Lord, and later joined the People of Praise. Thelma made the covenant on January 27, 1985. She generously shared all the skills she knew best, in finance and counseling, entertaining and cooking. Thelma, Pat Walsh and Penny Arndt formed our branch’s first all-women’s household in 1972, and later Thelma was part of several other households. She lived with Kati for 14 years.

Jackie Berg, who worked with Thelma on Servant Branch’s finance committee, says that she was humming and praying all the time as she worked. She loved how God answered her prayers throughout the day. Thelma knew Scripture and had memorized much of it. She was still going to Bible study a few months before she died.

Thelma loved to cook and entertain others. She cooked for many years at Gethsemane Episcopal Church, and for the coordinators’ weekly meetings during the 1970s and 1980s, and on many other special occasions for 25 to 30 people at a time. When Servant Branch needed a site to begin a Trinity School, Thelma was instrumental in working out the details so the first classes of Trinity School students could use the facilities at Gethsemane.

Thelma loved to play bridge two or three times a week and, lucky for her friends, dinner often went with it. As Thelma’s sight and hearing declined, her entertaining did too, yet, with a little bit of help, she always fixed lunch for her women’s group. Though her body was tiring, her mind was still sharp. Ask her “What are you reading?” and you’d always get an interesting commentary on a recent audio book.

Thelma’s respect for God and others and her passion for justice and right were strong and admirable. Thelma was a woman of integrity and great courage. Jackie Berg described Thelma as always looking outward from herself and staying interested in others’ lives. A wise woman, Thelma respected the dignity of all the diverse friends she had made in life. She learned from others and was a good listener. Thelma rarely complained, enduring her hardships cheerfully.

On several nights, a month or so before she died, she became aware of a presence in her apartment. She began to understand that this was her angel, there to reassure her of God’s presence in her failing hours. She then prayed fervently to the Lord: “Come quickly, Lord Jesus!” Thelma Hample went to be with her Lord in a new way a few days after her 97th birthday. She found him at last in fullness, the friend she had known for so long.
Jackie Zierhut

By Anne Miller, Servant

“I t is not so much that you chose me, but very much that I chose you for myself. I love you and I’ve chosen you.”

These words from the song “The Invitation” touched Jackie Zierhut deeply. Jackie began going to prayer meetings with her husband, Dick, at St. Albert the Great in Minneapolis in 1971. There she met Jim Rolland, who wrote “The Invitation” with Dick Peters. The song was a call from the Lord for Jackie and for many others in the 1970s, and it still resonates in our hearts.

Jackie, with her sweet light soprano voice, joined Jim’s music ministry at St. Albert and she always loved worshiping God and singing his praises. She later made the first covenant with the small group which named itself Servants of the Light. This community included 15 married couples and 20 single men and women. They met weekly for prayer meetings, interspersed with potluck suppers on the weekends. Jackie set aside everything to follow the Lord in community, including ballroom dancing, in which she and Dick had won many trophies. She became a firm foundation stone in Servants of the Light community (which later became Servants of the Lord community). Jackie made the covenant of the People of Praise on January 27, 1985.

“Put on the faith I gave you; leave all your things behind, you won’t need them anymore where you’re going; we’re going on a journey.”

Jackie loved Jesus and wanted to do his will, even when that meant giving up her home and buying another in a cluster, changing her life by living in a household with a bunch of people who were also on fire for the Lord. Often, it wasn’t easy. Stan and Marilyn Kummer also lived in a household in those days, and Marilyn tells of heart-to-hearts in Jackie’s kitchen while Jackie encouraged her during hard times.

October 12, 1927 — March 5, 2005
Servant Branch
Tom Schmitt Honored
For 18 Years of Service

Editor’s Note: Tom Schmitt left office last October after serving 18 years as principal branch coordinator of the Muncie branch. On February 4, brothers and sisters in Muncie threw a party in his honor. Barb Mixell offers these reflections in a letter to Tom, who has a new job as Muncie branch administrator. Jim Schenkel is the new principal branch coordinator for Muncie.

February 6, 2006

Dear Tom,

After leaving the party we threw for you, I thought that a written record of the event might help you savor the memory a bit in the days to come.

My memories begin as we trooped through the cold and a little snow into the Community Center. Lousy weather didn’t dampen our enthusiasm a bit. We just kept our thoughts on the evening’s theme, “Tom Schmitt, a Man with a Servant’s Heart.” Our center had the appearance of a festive dining room, complete with bright white tablecloths and decorations expressing the theme of service. The Lord’s Day meal featured apricot chicken with all the trimmings—you know our cooks are some of the best in the community—and, of course, your favorite dessert, coconut cream pie.

For over an hour, Jim Schenkel, emcee for the evening, coordinated the old and new branch members who stepped up to the lecturn to offer their tributes. Karl Benkeser, an original member of our branch, noted how you always held out the vision of community. You made him a better man in his faith, he said. Larry Spangler echoed a common experience, saying that he could always count on your listening ear. Mary Collins told a terrific story from the day before, when she went to pick up the programs for your party from the print shop. Apparently, one of the print shop staff had read the program and remembered you from your involvement in Delaware County’s Committee on Integrity. “Mr. Integrity,” she called you.

“If you know Tom Schmitt, then you’re okay,” Alan Habansky said, referring to your legendary abilities as a resolver of crises. Michelle Walker said that when her son Ben was injured in a car-bike accident you were at the emergency room before she was. Tom, in your years as our PBC, we always felt confident that you would arrive first.

Newly underway members Jerry and Linda Wright credited you with helping to answer their prayer for Christian fellowship. You saw to it that their underway process stayed smooth, they recalled. Patti Sorg said that whenever she drove by the Community Center she took comfort in seeing your car outside, since she knew you were inside praying for all of us.

We all reflected on your leadership: how you piloted us into the People of Praise after life as a stand-alone community; how, after many years as nomads without a home, you made us the proud owners of the Community Center. You were there when we formed youth groups (our Boy Scout troop is now one of the best!), and when we sent out a large percentage of our members to form the Indianapolis branch. You guided us in our experience of more of the Lord, and led us into Action and growth. “Your deep love for our community and for all of us has brought us security and fostered a great respect for you,” Beth Walters said.

Clem Walters and Kevin Ranaghan sent in written tributes. Clem wrote, “Tom took on a difficult assignment, following the branch founders, which was no easy task. He was willing to learn not only from the founding brothers, but also from us in the Branch Relations Office, and mostly from God himself . . . Tom also had the full support of his talented and loving wife Cheryl.”

Kevin added, “Tom’s lifetime of service to the community, and especially the past 18 years as principal branch coordinator in Muncie, certainly stirs us all to emotions of gratitude, joy and deep respect. Every bit of thanks goes also to Cheryl, who has shared not only his work but his life, with support, love, affection, understanding and, I am sure, an occasional dose of endurance.”

The evening was much enriched by Cheryl’s presence and the presence of your four daughters, two sons-in-law and four young grandchildren.
LifeNotes

- Congratulations to John Timler and Eileen Coney (both New Orleans), who were married at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Metairie, LA, on February 4.
- Mike and Angela Pingel have been assigned to the New Orleans branch, effective in the spring when they arrive there from South Bend.
- Pat and Kara Hrbacek (Colorado Springs) are rejoicing in the Lord’s gift of Jane Marguerite Ivy, born January 31 and weighing six pounds, four ounces.
- Congratulations to Kathy Gleason (South Bend), who graduated from the University of Notre Dame in December with a B.A. in economics and mathematics.

It was fun sharing about you, but then it was time to party. Remembering that you are a Notre Dame graduate (you’ve never let us forget!), Brook Sorg led some of our little girls in a rousing cheer, set to the music of the ND Fight Song. This happened when you donned an Ohio State shirt to pay off a wager with your Ohio sons-in-law!

Bill and Nancy Bolka offered a hilarious video rap honoring you, and John Walker led us in one of your favorite songs, “I Will Give Thanks to You.” The evening concluded with one of my favorite readings, from Robert Bolt’s play A Man For All Seasons. Tom, there are so many similarities between England’s Sir Thomas More and you, Muncie’s Tom. For example, you are clearly “a man set like metal . . . overtaken by an absolutely primitive rigor,” who “could no more be budged than a cliff.” Like Sir Thomas, you “could not be accused of any incapacity for life.” You’re “a scholar and, by popular repute, a saint.”

I know you will face challenges in your years as our branch administrator, just as you faced them for 18 years as our PBC, but we aren’t worried. We know what you’ll say—just like Sir Thomas More—“I can’t give in. You might as well just as you faced them for 18 years as our PBC, but we aren’t worried. We know

- Janey and Sandi Ware (Rockford) are pleased to announce with joy the arrival of Gabriel Alexander on November 21, weighing nine pounds, one ounce.
- C.J. and Amy Newburn (Rockford) are thanking God for the wonderful gift of Catherine Alexandria, born on November 25, weighing eight pounds, ten ounces.
- John and Patty Whelpley (Vienna, VA) are delighted to announce that they have a new daughter, Annette Elizabeth, born March 23. At birth Annette weighed eight pounds, four ounces.
- Luke and Maria-Elena Glover (Washington, DC) are announcing the glad tidings of the birth of Jonas Paul on February 18. Jonas weighed six pounds, three ounces.
- Ron and Anne Linczer (South Bend) are spreading the happy news of the arrival of Genevieve Anne, who was born February 24 and weighed nine pounds, eight ounces.

From the Executive Office

Servant Branch:
David and Shirley Doffing were released from the covenant of the People of Praise on February 2, 2006.

Mary Holmes is no longer covenanted, effective February 18, 2006.

Mary Lauer was released from the covenant of the People of Praise on January 23, 2006.

Don and Britta Showalter were released from the covenant of the People of Praise on February 2, 2006.

South Bend:
Tom and Mary Warren were released from the covenant of the People of Praise on March 10, 2006.

Rich White is no longer covenanted, effective March 4, 2006.
Seven months after Katrina, 100% of the New Orleans branch has returned.