

Bethel Lutheran Church Free Medical Clinic

Our ministry developed at Bethel Lutheran Church within days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005. Initially, the needs were very basic as residents were in search of food and water. Services were added to meet the needs of the residents. When the needs kept presenting, a distribution center arose at Bethel. We began operating a free clinic, treating injuries from the storm and bronchial infections. The need progressed to medical care for injuries residents received as they tried to demolish moldy walls and salvage what little Katrina may have left. Medical care evolved to treat a variety of ailments, some induced by the unsanitary and unsafe living conditions as well as to treat "routine" ailments because family doctors were either no longer in our area or medical care could not be paid for by those who had already lost so much. Mental health and pastoral care became an important element of care as stressors continued to rise. The ministry did not just operate out of Bethel's church building. In the early days post hurricane landfall, our teams of volunteer medical and counseling professionals traveled throughout coastal communities to deliver needed supplies and care to those unable to present to the clinic.

Our ministry has remained fluid, evolving to respond to the changing needs of the victims of this hurricane. Currently, medical services provided include: nursing and physician assessments/screenings; triage; diagnoses and medication in the clinic; immunizations; follow-up care; distribution of durable medical equipment and daily health care supplies as available; physical therapy; assistance in accessing community resources; spiritual guidance; mental health and psychological counseling; case management for home repairs and rebuilding; some prescription assistance for necessary medications not available in the clinic dispensary; referral for long-term medical care and follow-up; and health care and self care education. Medications in the dispensary are by donations only. Subsequently what we have available often does not meet patient needs. There is not ample funding for purchasing medications prescribed for our patient population.

The clinic has been awarded grants from Direct Relief International and the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson. The Medical Clinic Coordinator's salary is being funded by Lutheran Social Services of the South until April 2007. The clinic is supported by donations (in the form of medications, supplies, gift cards, monies, and volunteers) from individuals and congregations from across the country. The clinic is staffed by volunteer physicians and nurses who come to Bethel for a week at a time, many coming for multiple weeks.

Hurricane Katrina not only greatly exacerbated the financial strain on residents already living below the poverty line, but also created a new south Mississippi "poor" – the low income working class, using income to rebuild their homes and lives. Seventeen percent of Mississippians carried no health insurance prior to Katrina. According to the Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights, Coastal Mississippi lost 25% of its physician manpower due to the storm. Our clinic has treated close to seven thousand patients since January 2006 (records were not kept from August 30, 2005-December 31, 2005), averaging over thirty patients each day when we have a volunteer physician. Without free medical services, hurricane victims, couples, single parents, children, the elderly would have no recourse for their health care needs, including acute and chronic conditions.

The needs of the clinic change as medications are used and as volunteers make donations. At present needs include: Quick Strep Tests; Advair 250/50; Valtrex 500 mg; Mavik; Rid-X (scabies; lice treatment); Skin Creams & Antibiotics; Carbamazepine; Tegretol (generic); Elbow splints, braces, wraps; Ziplock bags (sandwich, pint, quart & gallon); volunteer physicians; volunteer nurses; volunteers to perform data entry who have knowledge of Excel and medical terminology; volunteers to register patients and complete forms and paperwork. Wal-Mart, Walgreen, or Debit cards which we use to purchase medications and supplies for patients are always needed.

If you are willing to volunteer, please contact:

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