



September 22, 2005 - Message from Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of New Orleans to Evacuees

Greetings in the Lord Jesus to all of you.

It has been nearly a month since we have had the comfort of our own homes and the familiarity of our own archdiocese. As the Archbishop of New Orleans, and a fellow evacuee, I share in your sufferings, hold you in prayer, and want to serve you in your needs. We who are evacuees from the Archdiocese of New Orleans owe great gratitude to the host dioceses who have welcomed and assisted us. I am particularly grateful to Bishop Muench and the Diocese of Baton Rouge for the extraordinary way in which they have received more than 200,000 New Orleanians and facilitated the development of a central administration in exile for the archdiocese.

Hurricane Katrina has caused enormous suffering in the overwhelming loss of life, loss of homes, churches, schools and way of life. Our first concern has been for people: their rescue, their basic physical needs, medical care, and communications with loved ones. I rejoice in the extraordinary work that Catholic Charities of New Orleans is accomplishing in conjunction with Catholic Community Services of Baton Rouge and other relief agencies. We've also worked to return as many parishes and schools as possible to service.

At the present time, all of the churches and schools in St. Charles, St. John, Washington and almost all of St. Tammany have resumed activity. This marks a move toward bringing Catholic life in those areas to some degree of normalcy. By early October, I expect most portions of Jefferson Parish also to resume activity. I am grateful to the pastors, the school officials and principals and all those who have helped with the efforts to resume pastoral and educational service. It is also reassuring to know that a significant number of our Catholic school students are either back to school or about to return to school either in their original communities or in the communities in which they are now residing.

Obviously, the challenges facing significant portions of Orleans, St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes will require a much longer recovery process. I will be meeting soon with the deans of these areas to address this. It is my hope that pastors in these most affected areas will continue to seek out their dispersed parishioners and serve them in their needs. I am grateful to our priests who have aided in search and rescue and have accepted special ministries consoling the bereaved, serving evacuees in cities where there is a large concentration of New Orleanians and helping personnel in our own archdiocese.

One of the significant difficulties, I, together with pastors and archdiocesan personnel, face is finding the best way to communicate with so many evacuees scattered throughout the United States. To help facilitate communications, I invite you to access our internet Web site for continually updated information (www.archdiocese-no.org). Even if you do not have the capability of direct access, perhaps this will be possible through someone that you know.

It is my hope that we will soon be able to celebrate Mass in St. Louis Cathedral. This will then be a sign of the resurrection of the Church in New Orleans.

Although it is necessary for the immediate future to continue to guide the Church from Baton Rouge, we are seeking every possible way to be pastorally present in those communities that have resumed some normal activity as well as those communities that are displaced.

Being exiled from our homes and workplaces is not easy. Even as we express appreciation for the provision of a home away from home, I share with you the challenges of exile. Like the Jews of old, we long for a return to our holy city. I pray for you. I ask you to pray for me. I believe that God calls us to move from being victims to victors in Christ Jesus.

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