

Hurricane Katrina Project



Mediators Beyond Borders
Partnering for Peace & Reconciliation

Hurricane Katrina Project Overview

MBB is deeply committed to building conflict resolution capacity not only overseas, but in the US as well. In response to Hurricane Katrina, MBB has formed a project to work in the Gulf area. We are partnering with the Mississippi Mediation Project founded by Laurel Kaufer of Los Angeles, CA; and the Family Mediation Council of Louisiana, based in New Orleans and directed by Susan C. Norwood.

In March, 2008, MBB sent its first Project Team to Mississippi and New Orleans to work with local community based mediators to improve their skills in a variety of areas. The Project Team consists of the following MBB Founding Members:

Project Leader:

Thomas Valenti, Chicago, Illinois, USA

Board Liaison:

Nan Waller Burnett, Director, Golden, Colorado, USA

Project Team Members:

Ken Cloke, MBB President, Santa Monica, California, USA

Robin Doyle, Naples, Florida, USA

Joan Goldsmith, Santa Monica, California, USA

Marvin Johnson, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Susan Norwood, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

Laura E. Perrault, San Francisco, California, USA

Louise Phipps Senft, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Patricia Porter, San Antonio, Texas, USA

Lois Tilley, Aurora, Colorado, USA

We are asking all MBB members who are interested in joining this project team and either traveling to Mississippi and/or New Orleans to continue our work or supporting our efforts in other ways to contact the National Office by e-mail. No funds are available for travel, but local mediators have volunteered to put people up in their homes.

We believe that the true purpose of mediation is not merely to settle or resolve conflicts, but prevent them by building the capacity of people and communities to transform their suffering into learning, development, and change. Through the work of Laurel Kaufer and Susan Norwood, the Mississippi Mediation Project, and Family Mediation Council of Louisiana are doing precisely that, and deserve our full support. They are turning hopes and dreams into action. Join us.



Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.



Laurel Kaufer, Mississippi Mediation Project, Biloxi, Louisiana, USA.

This report can also be found at http://www.mbbmembers.org/initiatives/hurricane_katrina.shtml.

Hurricane Katrina Project Has a New Project Manager



MBB's Hurricane Katrina Project has a new leader *FM Thomas Valenti, Chicago, Illinois, USA.*

Thomas has been an arbitrator since 1990 and a mediator since 2000. His experience includes preparation and trial of personal injury, property damage and commercial/business dispute cases. He has served as a mediator in medical malpractice, personal injury and other cases at the request of members of the bar.

He joined MBB in February 2008. To see his profile at the MBB Member Profile Database visit: http://www.mbbmembers.org/member_profiles/tvalenti.shtml

This report was excerpted from the Peace & Reconciliation Report - Aug. 12, 2008, Mediators Beyond Borders' Membership Newsletter.

Hurricane Katrina Project Assessment Trip, Biloxi & New Orleans

By FM by **Laura Perreault & Pattie Porter**

San Francisco, California, USA & San Antonio, Texas, USA

On Thursday morning before departing for New Orleans, Rob-in Doyle, Lois Tilley, Nan Waller Burnett, Sue Prince, Louise Phipps Senft met with Biloxi City Councilman Bill Stallworth, who represents the community of East Biloxi.

He took us through a destroyed block inhabited mainly by the working families of the fishing industry. The neighborhood is being rebuilt, one house at a time all with private funding. These homes are built on piers and designed to withstand hurricane force winds. The homes on these blocks were completely destroyed down to the foundations.

What began as the East Biloxi Relief, Recovery and Revitalization Center, in the front office of a church, has now grown into the Hope Foundation, providing not only jobs, but in collaboration with Architects for Humanity and architectural students from Mississippi State University and University of Virginia, state of the art housing in the community. Through this work alone East Biloxi has seen the building and renovation of over 40 homes.

On Thursday, over a dozen MBB members congregated in New Orleans. We piled into vans to tour the lower Ninth Ward, formerly a working-class neighborhood located at the lower end of the city, just east of the Industrial Canal. Lou Furman, of Turning Point Partners, led the tour.

On our way, MMB members noticed Mardi Gras beads hanging from resilient oak trees lining St. Charles Avenue, reflecting a small hint of revival and optimism in certain parts of the Crescent City. As the tour continued into the Lower Ninth Ward, such signs of revitalization nearly vanished.

Members witnessed that the Lower Ninth remains little populated and in despaired condition, with only a small handful of newly constructed homes sprouting up between stumps of former concrete foundations and vacant and gutted homes begging to be demolished. Lou identified where the levees on the canal were breached, and a large barge entered the Lower Ninth neighborhood. The resultant flooding and barge collectively destroyed hundreds of homes and thousands of residents were displaced. Lou also recounted a persistent and disturbing rumor that the Lower Ninth Ward levee was deliberately dynamited so as to reduce the flooding in more affluent parts of the city.

We then visited the House of Dance & Feathers, a self-described “cultural education center,” which documents the impact of Katrina on the Lower Ninth as well as the community’s historical involvement in Mardi Gras. Ronald Lewis, director and local resident, and King of the Krewe de Vieux for the Mardi Gras parade this year, explained how his community feels abandoned by every level of government, yet he is determined to slowly but surely rebuild his community, literally and figuratively from the ground up.

On Friday, MBB members and an assembly of nearly 40 local community leaders, mediators, teachers, lawyers and concerned residents, met at Tulane University Law School Diboll



Rob-in Doyle, Lois Tilley, Nan Waller Burnett, Sue Prince, Louise Phipps Senft met with Biloxi City Councilman Bill Stallworth.



MBB President Ken Cloke, Founding Member Louise Phipps Senft and Roger Wilder, President of the Gulf Coast Foundation.



Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.

Conference Center for the New Orleans MBB inaugural.

Susan Norwood, local resident/mediator and President of the Family Mediation Council of New Orleans, introduced the group. Nan Waller Burnett and Louise Phipps Senft provided participants with a quick sketch of MBB, and each individual in the room voiced their hopes and expectations for the day. Participants were generally concerned with the following areas: building and enhancing community mediation and systemic change; cultivating restorative justice and mediation, particularly in the school system; and enhancing mediation in the context of family law.

Nan Waller Burnett offered an engaging presentation on developing Spiritual Intelligence in the work of conflict. She explained that while ego gives us the courage to practice, in order to be truly effective mediators we must consistently return to that still place within that is the source of our connection to - and, therefore, bring presence and compassion with - each other. Conflict practitioners can make this return through daily meditation, which can be performed at any time and for any length of time in the midst of our everyday lives.

Louise Phipps Senft skillfully placed the noble ideas presented by Nan into a working structure. She described the primary means of resolving conflict, and then explained the benefits of the “transformative” model, which emphasizes our fundamental connectedness to each other and assumes that the transformation of the interaction between the parties is most important to the parties in conflict - even more than actual resolution. Interspersed with the two presentations were various experiential exercises.

After a break, Laurel Greenspan Kaufer, founder and director of the Mississippi Mediation Project, discussed its development over the last two years. She explained that her involvement in the project has led her to conclude that a “brick and mortar” mediation facility in post-Katrina Biloxi would be less fruitful than the “training of local trainers” who will plant the seeds of mediation throughout the impacted state. She has already trained a dozen locals to be mediators in Biloxi.

During the working lunch, Patricia “Pattie” Porter then gave a presentation on “change management,” with particular emphasis in the workplace. This primer would build a bridge to the group work they would do in the afternoon regarding systemic change and growth in their communities. She addressed the dynamics of change and the transitions people move through to the other side of change with the importance and need for leadership, communication, conflict management, and coordination. Participants then identified challenges and the strategies to address the transitions individuals and groups experience.

Preceding the change management presentation, a natural transition was to introduce Laurel Greenspan Kaufer, founder and director of the Mississippi Mediation Project and how her project has made significant strides since its inception over the last two years. She explained that her involvement in the project has led her to conclude that a “brick and mortar” mediation facility in post-Katrina Biloxi would be less fruitful than the “training of local trainers” who will plant the seeds



Laurel Kaufer, Mississippi Mediation Project, Biloxi and Rodger Wilder, Mississippi State Bar Association.



Ronald Lewis with MBB Members in the House of Dance & Feathers.

of mediation throughout the impacted state. She has already trained a dozen locals to be mediators in Biloxi.

The participants then collected into smaller groups to discuss their primary concerns and various strategies for meeting these concerns. MBB facilitators worked with each group. A representative of each group then relayed the highlights of each group discussion and noted possible strategies. For example, some strategies for encouraging mediation in New Orleans as a non-violent alternative to conflict resolution included: making public service announcements, meeting with judicial officers and community leaders, conversing with church leaders and pastors, advertising on park benches and other public places, and writing articles for local papers.

On a final hopeful note, Erania E. Martin, a Judge with the EEOC who was moved to Houston after the storm, and was formerly of the Ninth Ward in New Orleans volunteered to be the team leader for the MBB New Orleans project. It is Erania’s plan to create the Louisiana Mediation Project, using the Mississippi Mediation Project model.

Hurricane Katrina Project Assessment Trip Reflection

By **Robin Doyle**
Naples, Florida, USA

The Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast was pounded by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Sadly, much of the damage still remains. The local language has adopted two new acronyms. Every event is put into context by whether it occurred: BTS or ATS.

Before the storm, or after the storm. Memories of the storm have not faded, and the MBB Katrina Team now knows why. We drove into Biloxi along the beach highway that once was home to a large collection of magnificent ante-bellum houses and more modest homes overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. We saw home sites now overgrown with weeds, showing little sign of the houses that once stood there except for a few foundations and chimneys.

A few blocks inland, homes in various states of repair share their lots with FEMA trailers and Mississippi Cottages. The wounds and scars of the storm are everywhere and the people of the Gulf Coast are increasingly frustrated that the healing is happening so slowly, if at all.

The MBB Team partnered with Laurel Kaufer's Mississippi Mediation Project to present A Day of Dialogue: A New Road To Resiliency, attended by approximately 75 people from Mississippi communities affected by the storm. The day combined a short MMP Essential Problem Solving Skills presentation, facilitated discussions and speeches by Ken Cloke and Rodger Wilder, President of the Mississippi Bar Association, and President of the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

The discussions revealed many continuing problems. Insufficient housing makes life difficult for residents and hampers economic development. Poor communication causes great frustration and difficulty in coordinating relief and recovery efforts among governments (local, state and federal), insurance companies and private agencies. The character of communities is changing as locations that have been affordable beach-front housing are being eyed for possible high-rise residential or business uses.

Possible solutions explored by the participants left them with ideas to pursue and gave the MBB Katrina Team possibilities to consider for future work that can be done to help alleviate suffering resulting from a major natural disaster.

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