

To: Our Partner Churches From: Suzy Mague, Partner church liaison, Community Church
Unitarian Universalist, New Orleans Re: 10 year commemoration
of Katrina It is May, 2015,
and we are preparing for the 10th

anniversary of Hurricane Katrina - remembering the collapse of the floodwalls and terrible flooding which followed; the dreadful experience of loss; the wondering whether we had a home to come back to; and then the long, often uncertain recovery. When we sing "Wo Ya Ya" – "...it will be hard we know, and the road will be muddy and rough, but we'll get there...heaven knows how we will get there..." I always feel drawn back to that time – that's exactly how we felt. But Rev. Jim stayed with us, providing unfailing leadership and vision in spite of his own terrible losses, and we who returned were determined - "we know we will" was our mantra.

But now we know how we "got there", and it was with Jim's leadership, some strong lay leaders, the faithful help of our members and friends, and the enormous support we received from our partner churches. A very partial list of our memories includes receiving a gift toward rebuilding from Community Church New York that arrived even before many of us had been able to return home; Target gift cards from Fox Valley for everyone in the congregation at Christmas, 2005; a big gift of fun stuff for a party, also from Fox Valley; guidance from consultant Leigh Henderson, who was available by phone and also made several trips to NOLA; a fund raiser by the Universalist Church of West Hartford that featured our own Cindy Scott; and an enormous financial boost from Pacific Unitarian, who gave us our lead gift. We had visitors too – from the UU church in Montclair; from Fox Valley and Pacific Unitarian; from the UU Society of Greater Springfield, MA; from West Hartford, CT, and Williamsburg, VA and from other places too numerous to count. You helped us develop strategies; you helped rebuild houses; you kept us in your thoughts and let us know we were not alone; you made our survival possible. And some of you are still there for us, particularly Dave Banks from Williamsburg, who continues as our web master, providing an invaluable service.

We are happy to report that all of your efforts were not in vain. We are thriving, with a beautiful new solar church, and, of course, regular, meaningful Sunday worship. Our congregation includes about 17 children on many Sundays, so we are growing in the right direction. We participate in four GNOUU church services each year with our two sister churches, and we support the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal, GNOUU's secular nonprofit that works in the larger community toward justice and compassion. We have a community outreach collection monthly, which is given to a nonprofit with which we partner; we have an excellent music program, with an experienced and talented music director, a choir, and jazz on a regular basis. We have a small group ministry with three groups meeting monthly, exploring spiritual topics and forging strong personal friendships, a women's book group that meets monthly, and other occasional sessions on UU history, immigration, and other topics we need to know more about.

We hope members of our partner congregations will continue to visit New Orleans in the coming years and will come worship with us while you're here. Do notice our partner church wall, with posters, pictures, and other reminders of you. We particularly hope someone from your congregation will be with us for the weekend of August 28 – 30, when we will hold our

commemoration of Katrina. Rev. Marta Valentin will return to New Orleans to hold a service at First Church on Sunday, August 30th. Marta was the newly called minister at First Church when Katrina hit. She currently serves as minister in Littleton, Massachusetts, which happens to be one of the 5 churches that partnered with NSUUS after the storm. Although still in the planning stages, we are in conversation with Marta about also presenting a workshop on Saturday, August 29th, for all three congregations. And plans are underway to hold a GNOUU Katrina Seder on the evening of the 29th. We would love to have you join us for this weekend. And do come to GA in 2017 in New Orleans – what a wonderful time that will be!

As we move through this 10th year, hoping we don't have another storm, we are very aware of how much we have to be grateful for and how much opportunity we have now, to make a difference both to those in our congregation and to the larger community. Thank you from all of us – long-timers who lived through it and all the new folks who are glad we're still here. You made an enormous difference, and we remember with deep appreciation.

Best wishes to you all from all of us at CCUU.