

Second Sunday in Lent

March 4, 2007

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

These People Have Never Said, 'This is too Big for Us.'

Our UCC folks are generous people, so when they hear about a disaster, they respond," says Susan Sanders, minister for the global sharing of resources in the United Church of Christ. Everyone heard about Katrina, the deadly hurricane that struck coastal Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama at the end of August in 2005, and UCC congregations responded generously and compassionately. Here is only one among the many stories of our local churches and how they reached out to people in need after that fateful storm:

When Hurricane Katrina barreled into the Gulf Coast, St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Lamar, Indiana, was hardly in a position to be a "first-responder." Members of the congregation were busy organizing a church supper to raise funds for their well-digging and famine relief mission in the West African nation of Niger, a project that could not wait. But the Katrina victims couldn't be ignored, either—not by a local church where the budget priorities can be summarized in the words of one leader: "We'll put in air-conditioning when all the hungry people in the world are fed."

As soon as news of Katrina reached the small rural congregation, a member who owns a construction company announced, "We'll donate a 'semi' if the church will fill it with food and water." That would cost twenty thousand dollars, so the pastor of St. Peter's, Paul "Chip" Jahn, quickly contacted other UCC churches in the Lincolnland Association, inviting them to join in the drive. Three days later, the original goal had been surpassed, and not one but two eighteen-wheel trucks, plus a van, were on their way to Thibodaux, Louisiana — the first emergency relief shipment to arrive in the devastated city.

After distributing the supplies, Rev. Jahn and his companions were on their way back from the Gulf when they received a telephone call from St. Peter's. The church supper had just raised six thousand dollars for Niger! Chip Jahn was delighted with the news, but not surprised. As he says, "These people have never said, 'This is too big for us.'"

Neither have many other UCC congregations during the past fifty years, and we thank God for all of them!