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# David Fowler Remembers Hurricane Katrina Refugees

NOVEMBER 06TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Reflections of 10 Years Ago

by David Fowler

I woke up early this morning because my heart is full. This is not my typical preacher's Monday ritual, but today, I'm grateful for my congregation in ways I hadn't known I should be. Now I know that these are even greater folks than I thought they were.

Ten years ago a family drove into the Sadler Chapel parking lot to welcoming cheers and banners and a big meal. Three generations of a family of sisters: McCoy, Miller and Ott, were refugees from Hurricane Katrina.

It all started when LeAnn Kelly was watching the news and saw the devastation and was sure there was something the church could (or must) do. She called then pastor Andy Lambel saying, "They need water and shelter and we can offer that." Pastor Andy caught her vision. Soon a church meeting was called and after talking it through they said, "Go." Their hearts were ready, the door stood potentially open. Well, now what? No one knew. LeAnn started calling Red Cross and others with the offer of shelter.

Gail Walker's sister living in Jackson Mississippi, had invited a displaced family sheltered at a nearby church to her home to use their swimming pool. Walker's sister was so impressed with the family that she told Gail, "if you want to help someone these folks are great!" And the wheels started turning. The invitation was extended. And a New Orleans family had to decide: "Will we move that far North to live in a community with less than 1% black population?"

At the refugee shelter Linnette and Henry McCoy spent a sleepless night. Henry was a contractor and had been offered tools, and contracts and whatever he needed to stay and rebuild. He prayed. He said, "When

God troubles you at night you need to listen.” Well, God troubled. Henry listened. By morning the message to him was, “Go north, and don’t come back.” They agreed to come. He told us this past Sunday, “It felt like the message to Lot in the Old Testament: Don’t look back.”

At Sadler Chapel, another group of people were suddenly mobilized and not looking back. The reality of what they’d agreed to do settled in, and wheels began to turn. The Sunday school rooms were turned into bedrooms and the fellowship hall became a big living room. A shower was constructed. Furniture arrived from all over the region as people began to hear what this little church was doing. And on that September day as the cars drove into the lot there were beds, there were clothes in every size, there was food, there was a living room with the TV hooked up. But most importantly there was love.

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The extended family lived in the church building for approximately 4 months. And there were many challenges. We learned that we cook the “wrong color” of beans to have with cornbread. (They should be red) There were challenges for our guests to access their own bank accounts in the aftermath of Katrina.

Prescriptions that had to be found, and filled, or started anew.

There were jobs to be found, and school to settle into.

Yesterday, the families that lived in our little church building those years ago came back. They took the morning service and a good part of the Sunday School hour, and then lunch and a time in the sanctuary after lunch to express their gratitude. They gave testimony that they felt unconditional love, from Sadler Chapel.

They said they did not experience racism here and they were deeply and truly grateful for what God did to make us into an unlikely family during a horrific time in their lives. And they gave us an offering...’seed money’ they said...to help someone else.

Together we lit candles for some who had died in their family and ours since they were lived in our building. They remembered two of ours, Wanda Martin, and Tom Stevens, (who they called the little

Quaker man because he reminded them of the guy on the oatmeal box.) We remembered Linnette’s twin sister, her mother, her father and step-father. We stood together in silence loving our families...no... loving our one family.

There were many firsts. Perhaps the ones that impressed me most were these two. Sadler Chapel hosted the first M.L.K. Day and Black History Month celebration in Dexter. The next year the school began to honor this day.

This fall, one of our family, Daniel McCoy was hired at the Dexter Public School, the first African American hired there as teacher and assistant coach. (He is shown in the photo above in his classroom.)

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There were many testimonies of thanks and praise. And this is just the tip of the iceberg of what it meant to us have them return, and remember, and love on us for a day. But it’s

fantastic to see, and recall, and celebrate whenever the church of Jesus pushes out into the deep and finds a way to get love right. This weekend we were given a gift to celebrate one of those seasons of getting love right for Sadler Chapel thanks to the McCoy, Ott, and Miller families who came and reminded us of who we are in Christ.

We’re family and as they sang to us, we’re all so very grateful.

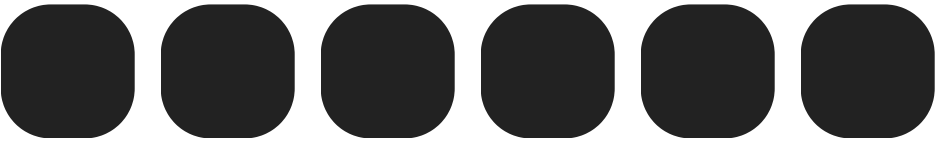
—David Fowler

Sadler Chapel

LAST UPDATED ON NOVEMBER 06TH 2015 BY DEE LOFLIN

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