



PICO National Network

Unlocking the Power of People™

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (9/6/05)

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PICO National Network churches in Louisiana call for Family Relief legislation

Louisiana clergy from PICO National Network, including pastors from the hardest hit neighborhoods of New Orleans, will travel to Washington next Monday to demand a comprehensive federal response to protect displaced families and stabilize communities that are bearing the brunt of sheltering victims.

They will be joined by religious and civic leaders from across the country in condemning the catastrophic failure by the federal government to protect lives before and after Katrina struck. PICO clergy are urging Congress to turn away from plans to cut Medicaid and other safety net programs to respond to the public health disaster facing the nation.

The failure of FEMA to respond early and massively to the devastation has placed an overwhelming burden on churches and agencies. "People are being left to fend for themselves. Families are roaming the streets, sleeping where they can. All we are getting is promises," said Rev. Jennifer Bridgett-Jones of Working Interfaith Network the PICO affiliate in Baton Rouge. Communities that are taking in families are overwhelmed. They need much greater federal support before they themselves collapse.

Saying that voluntary and faith-based groups are doing everything they can, PICO congregations are demanding Family Relief legislation that focuses on critical needs:

- Temporary housing and transferable for displaced families being shuttled from shelter to shelter or living on the streets
- Financial aid, job assistance, extended unemployment benefits for families
- Suspension of mortgage and other debt;
- Access to federal health insurance programs so traumatized people can get the physical and mental health care they need
- Education and counseling for children;
- Direct federal aid to states and communities whose health care, education, housing and social services systems are overwhelmed by sheltering victims;
- Crack down on price gouging, including gas prices above \$6 and landlords evicting families to jack up prices;
- Rebuilding New Orleans for all its citizens;
- A thorough Congressional investigation of the catastrophic failure of the federal government to prevent and respond to this disaster; and
- A profound rethinking of our priorities as a nation to refocus on domestic American needs and real hometown security.

Families and communities that have been devastated and those who are sheltering victims need the relief this time and they need a voice in the debate over how best to respond.

PICO clergy will meet with members of Congress on September 12 the day congressional committees were scheduled to begin marking up cuts in the Medicaid budget that would result in large numbers of low-income children and families losing health insurance.

At this time of national mourning PICO calls on Congress to focus its attention on comprehensive disaster response rather than undermining the safety net on which all Americans depend. "Now is not the time to cut low-income children and families from health care," said Paula Arceneaux, chair of All Congregations Together, PICO affiliate in New Orleans.

PICO is a national network of faith-based organizations with one thousand congregations working since 1972 to strengthen families and communities in 150 cities and 18 states.

Louisiana Interfaiths Together is a statewide umbrella organization for PICO federations in New Orleans (All Congregations Together), Baton Rouge (Working Interfaith Network), Houma-Thibodaux (Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing), Lafayette (Congregations Organizing People for Equality) and Lake Providence (East Carroll Interfaith Sponsoring Committee).

BIOS

Father Michael Jaques is Pastor of St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church - with 9,000 families St. Peter Claver is one of the largest African-American Catholic churches in the country. He is a founding pastor of All Congregations Together, a member of the PICO National Network.

Deacon Allen Stevens is administrator of St. Phillip the Apostle Catholic Church, a congregation serving the poorest communities in New Orleans in the 9th Ward.

Joe Givens is on the PICO National Network staff and a life-long resident of New Orleans.

Rev. Jones-Bridgett is Director of PICO's Louisiana Interfaiths Together and Working Interfaith Network in Baton Rouge.

Paula Arceneaux is chair of the New Orleans All Congregations Together

For more information visit www.piconetwork.org/katrina.asp