



This is a printer friendly version of an article from
www.DailyComet.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Jun 2, 2006
Jun 2, 2006

BISCO plan helps families after they leave for hurricanes

Katina A. Gaudet

Staff Writer

New Orleans native Paula Thompson says she heard the pleas for New Orleanians to evacuate before Hurricane Katrina hit last fall.

"To be honest, I had no official plan to evacuate until the very last minute," said Thompson, an evacuee who has chosen to relocate to Thibodaux in the storm's wake told church leaders, parish officials and others Thursday evening.

She spent a week inside the Superdome under conditions so horrid she chose not to speak about them Thursday during the Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizing's family emergency plan coalition meeting.

"My plea to you is to have a plan to lead you to safety rather than consequences," Thompson said.

Dozens Thursday attended BISCO's meeting to pass along copies of a family emergency plan the organization – an interfaith, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-issue organization in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes – developed as its members saw a need for it in the aftermath of the storm.

Working shelters, they noticed that once the feeding, clothing and sheltering of hurricane victims was accomplished, the overriding concern of evacuees was the uncertainty regarding lost loved ones.

Testimonials like Thompson's were intended to "help us realize how important it is to have a family emergency plan," said Lorene Watkins, a BISCO leader and member of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Thibodaux, where Thursday's meeting was held.

A parishioner of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church at Nicholls State University, Carol Boudreaux worked the university's shelter and emphasized also that the one ongoing "monumental problem" for storm victims was the unknown whereabouts of family members.

For some, they had not received word from family members for several weeks.

"They were absolutely traumatized to the point that we could not even get from them the information we needed to help them," Boudreaux said. "We had to call local mental health people just to calm these people."

BISCO leaders said one way to better ensure that more people do not suffer such trauma in future disasters is to plan ahead.

They emphasized that point to the dozens of church leaders, congregation members, public officials and others who gathered Thursday.

They handed out multiple copies of the organization's emergency family plan, which offers tips for planning and a form in which members and others can keep track of medical information; emergency contact names, addresses and phone numbers; insurance information and other important information.

The plan also calls for designating out-of-area evacuation sites for family members to reunite after being separated and out-of-area contacts with whom family members can check in.

The organization also encourages family members to distribute copies of their plan to children's school or day-

care centers, workplaces, pastors, nursing homes of elderly family members and others selected by family members as needed.

"This is not a law. This is a good idea, and families can fill out the forms to the extent that they're comfortable with," said Patty Whitney of BISCO.

On Thursday, those who attended committed to distributing the forms to whoever could benefit.

Sharon Gauthe, BISCO executive director, noted that 41 church congregations were represented at Thursday's meeting.

Many were called upon publicly Thursday to support the plan and articulate how they would use it to help people in their communities.

Some had known about the plan for some time and had already passed it along.

Jo Ann Matthews, superintendent of Lafourche Parish public schools, said the school system, for example, has already sent home with students 14,000 copies of the plan and another 3,000 with school system employees. Many church leaders say their congregations already have copies of the plan as well.

Others, however, attended Thursday's meeting not knowing much about it, but walked away as supporters.

"I didn't know what I was coming to," said the Rev. Leroy Hebert, pastor of Shadow of the Almighty Ministry of Houma. But Hebert committed Thursday to spreading the word among other Houma ministries. "It is a very good cause."

With the help of Louisiana Spirit, a crisis counseling and outreach service, BISCO was able to distribute many copies of the plan, but leaders noted that the information it contained is not copyrighted and that they want it further duplicated.

"We want it passed around. That's our purpose," Whitney said.

For more information about BISCO's family emergency plan, call 446-5364.

Katina A. Gaudet can be reached at 693-6319, 448-7614 or by e-mail at katina.gaudet@dailycomet.com.

• •