



Everything New Orleans

## The Times-Picayune

### **Clergy promise to stay vigilant** **Visitors vow to keep pushing for recovery**

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**By Michelle Krupa**  
**Staff writer**

A day after touring New Orleans' most devastated neighborhoods, clergy from more than 100 cities gathered Saturday to discuss what they will tell their home congregations and to warn officials at all levels of government that people across the nation will monitor the ongoing disaster response.

From the sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church on North Rampart Street in Tremé, the clergy, representing 30 denominations, vowed to stress New Orleanians' need for temporary housing, affordable permanent housing, coastal restoration and a neighborhood planning process that leaves no one out of the conversation.

"This weekend I went from hope to rage," evangelist Gloria Cooper of the San Diego Organizing Project told the crowd. "We as clergy will and must return and tell our members of Congress: Don't you dare forget about New Orleans. If you do forget about New Orleans, you will not be forgotten in the next election."

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., praised the work of All Congregations Together, dubbed ACT, and People Improving Communities Through Organizing, or PICO, which sponsored the two-day summit on recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The groups' work on behalf of storm victims began when ministers traveled to Washington two weeks after Katrina to press federal officials for improvements in the immediate disaster response, Landrieu said. Their visit to New Orleans nearly seven months after the storm gave them a close look at storm damage.

"It is important to be a witness to the tragedy," Landrieu said. "Jesus himself needed witnesses, and we need witnesses. I hope the ministers will go home and act as witnesses to the destruction."

Ministers detailed what will be their specific requests to federal, state and local officials in coming months. They want the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide temporary housing to displaced families, Congress to pass the proposed \$4.2 billion for housing recovery plans in Louisiana, and the state to set aside 20 percent of new or renovated affordable housing for low-income families, among other requests.

They also want Mayor Ray Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back Commission to commit to including in its urban planning teams representatives from ACT congregations, which have formed six clusters throughout the city to discuss rebuilding plans.

Ray Manning, an architect who is leading Nagin's planning effort, which is built on 13 city planning districts, said he would consider the request. But Manning warned it didn't seem to fit easily into the current model.

"We are far from being organized in a way that honors that commitment," he said.

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