

## **Local clergy join trip to view Katrina damage, plead for aid**

By: GARY WARTH - Staff Writer

Two clergy members from North County are part of a coalition of 150 church leaders traveling to Louisiana this weekend to focus attention on the hurricane-ravaged area and pressure the federal government to bring relief faster.

"I hope to learn and to just experience first-hand everything we've been seeing on the news and media," said the Rev. Mike Ratajczak of the Church of St. Thomas More in Oceanside.

"I'm very much looking forward to it, especially in light of all that's taken place in that region," said the Rev. Michael Henderson of Shiloh Church of God in Christ in Oceanside.

The men were scheduled to arrive Thursday and leave Sunday. The clergymen are members of the Escondido-based Congregations for Civic Action, a nonprofit organization representing 10 area churches and 14,000 North County families.

Congregations for Civic Action is affiliated with PICO National Network, formerly the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations, founded in 1972 to help support neighborhood organizations in California.

The national group organized the trip for church leaders from around the country to view the region devastated by Hurricane Katrina last year.

"With recovery stalled and dead bodies still rotting on the streets, we call our brothers and sisters from across the country to witness the devastation," the Rev. Donald Robinson of PICO said in a prepared statement released Tuesday. "Their overwhelming response shows that while Louisiana may lack political clout in Washington, we have the moral conscience of the nation on our side."

A press conference is scheduled in a devastated Ninth Ward church today, and church leaders are expected to plead for greater federal aid to the region.

"It's to refocus attention there on national leadership, to encourage that support," Ratajczak said.

"It seems that with all things, eventually the media kind of turns its attention elsewhere while those who have been impacted in whatever situation have to continue living through it and working through the devastation," Henderson said.

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