

The Spire

Noroton Presbyterian Church ■ www.norotonchurch.org
2011 Post Road, Darien, CT 06820 ■ 203-655-1451

Special Edition



Craig Howe, Pastor John Seiders, Sue Bielstein, Stella Clarke, Marta Phillips, Jim Charling, Mindy Houck, Mark Bielstein (not pictured: Carol Charling)

From October 25 through November 1, a team of nine people from NPC traveled to Texas to serve and care for people whose lives were "turned upside down" from Hurricane Harvey. The work included cleaning up debris in yards, homes, and condominiums; encouraging people and listening to their stories; and, praying with them.

Why would people pay money and give up time to do this? It was a chance to live out the gospel serving and caring for the people of Port Aransas, TX. As Jesus' followers we are called to serve as he served us (Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17, 34-35).

It was a great privilege to be a part of this team and to watch how NPC was able to make a positive impact in the midst of the destruction that happened on the South Texas coast. This special issue of The Spire captures just some of the stories.

Peace,
John



A Texas-Sized Lesson

by Craig L. Howe

It was 4 p.m., the end of our first day in Port Aransas, Texas.

I was tired; I was sore; my back was barking. Many of my sore muscles I knew existed, but it had been a long time since they complained.

The day before, John Seiders, Stella Clarke, Mindy Houck, Marta Phillips and I flew to Corpus Christi to spend the week helping residents of Port Aransas recover from the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. Sue and Mark Bielstein, Carol and Jim Charling, having driven, met us there.

The devastation we witnessed driving into Port Aransas that morning was shocking. Cynthia and Dave's home of 20 years lay in shambles. The four hours of sustained winds of 135 miles an hour blew out their windows. The house suffered extensive interior water damage. An 11-foot storm surge deposited three cisterns, two telephone poles and an unbelievable amount of debris in their yard.

"It amazes me," Dave, the homeowner, said to me. "When my wife Cynthia and I try to thank all of the volunteers who arrive to help us rebuild, they thank us."

I understood. I felt that way. I was grateful for the

opportunity to help Cynthia and Dave. I stood three miles from where the eye of Hurricane Harvey reached landfall two months ago surrounded by eight NPC members. When the trip was proposed, I knew I wanted to go. Why I could not articulate. Other team members said they experienced a similar draw.

As Pastor John led us through a devotion based on John 13 that evening, our sense of call became clearer.

Chapter 13 describes the Last Supper between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus is about to ascend to the heights by descending to the depths.

While not mentioned in John's gospel, Luke tells that a fight had broken out between the disciples over who should sit to the right of Jesus. They believed Jesus Christ was ready to take over from the Roman oppressors.

But Jesus was about to soar to the heights by plunging to the depths. He would be captured, tortured, oppressed and murdered. His understanding of power and success contradicted everything the disciples wanted to believe.

Jesus' and our team's lesson was the way up is down. The way to power is service.

First Steps to a Fresh Start

by Mindy Houck

Dave walked our team around the outside perimeter of his home. He was showing us the job that we were to do that day. I could feel the sorrow in his voice as he looked down at the ground and told us that everything needed to be tossed. I could see fishing reels everywhere, all of them caked with mud and sea grass, completely worthless.

Dave had been a charter boat fishing captain. Hurricane Harvey had taken not only his boat, but also all of the equipment he had collected over a lifetime of fishing. I had the feeling he was relieved that we were there to throw out things that emotionally he just could not bring himself to do.

Our team worked hard all day clearing out branches, wood from broken up docks, personal items, like tools, clothing, sheets, towels, even unopened packages. All of these were buried under layers of dead sea grass, dirt and lots of sand burrs. Some of these things had belonged to Dave and Cynthia and a lot did not.

At the end of the day the pile of debris (something that is now a familiar site in Port Aransas) in front of their home had more than doubled and the yard was no longer littered with brush and bold reminders of all that had been lost. It had taken 8 of us all day but we did it!



Dave commented to someone on our team that if he worked for the rest of his entire lifetime he didn't think he could have finished that job! There is still a daunting amount of work that needs to be completed before Dave and Cynthia will be able to live in their home again. I feel that the most important work we did for them was to help remove precious items that had once meant so much to them, allowing them space to visualize a new beginning with a bright future.

An Antidote for Disaster News

by Marta Phillips

Not too long ago, Pastor John announced that he would be taking a mission trip to Texas to help with the recovery after Hurricane Harvey.

He planted a seed. When I returned home, I informed my husband I could not just sit on our couch night after night watching on the news these natural disasters unfold and not DO SOMETHING.

And there I was with an extraordinary group of people from NPC filling up wheelbarrows full of branches and debris, carrying misplaced couches off of front lawns, unscrewing screws from stacks of docks so that the wood could be re-used, and having conversations with homeowners who had lost everything, everything.....in just 4 hours.

It was a glorious eight days for each of us. We are all thankful to John for leading us all in such a meaningful, life-changing ministry.





A New Normal

by Jim Charling

"The New Normal." If we heard this phrase once, we heard it many times from the victims of Hurricane Harvey. The concept seems to communicate that the folks are moving forward and looking for "normal," but also recognize that "normal" will be different after Hurricane Harvey hit.

It was encouraging to hear the ways this "New Normal" was expressed. One woman who had lived in her Port Aransas house for 48 years was quick to quip that this hurricane will lead to everyone in town cleaning up their property at the same time!

Dave and Cynthia's "New Normal" is without their charter fishing boat, but with their home rebuilt, and their yard restored after being covered with many feet of water.

Finally, Charlie, a sailor and boat builder, was focused on cleaning out the hold in his boat; a boat that he and his wife built in the 80's; a boat they haven't been able to work or sail for five years due to family illnesses and deaths. Even after the hurricane, Charlie's "New Normal" is to pick up where his family left off five years ago---repair his boat and return to the water.

All of these folks were amazing, but Charlie's desire to resume his "Old Normal" reminded me that our status quo creates grounding and comfort. Also, it highlights the challenges facing those who have no avenue back to their "Old Normal." Hopefully, our service took each person we met a small step toward their "New Normal."





Tired but Inspired

by Sue and Mark Bielstein

The mission trip to Texas was special for us because we were able to help with relief efforts close to home working side-by-side with good friends from Noroton.

We didn't know what to expect despite living only a few hours away. It was life as usual in Corpus Christi, where we stayed just a few blocks from the park-lined gulf shore. Forty-five minutes away, in Port Aransas, the scene couldn't have been more different. Curbsides were piled high with discarded furniture, appliances, and building debris. Home after home that looked (relatively) normal on the outside but stripped to the studs inside. Further north in Rockport, building after building was ripped apart by tornadoes.

And the people we helped reacted quite differently to the storm's effects. Dave and Dave seemed to be in a state of shock, having difficulty making decisions.

Seventyish and sassy Bobbi-Jo was excited because the storm meant all of Port Aransas would be 'cleaning up their yards and cleaning out their closets' at the same time.

Harvey left Margaret feeling "raped" (her words); she directed us to toss the remaining contents of her condo because she couldn't bear to see or touch any of it. Charley asked us to bring topside the below-deck boat furnishings so he could pick through and decide item by item what to keep or throw away.

Despite those differing responses, everyone we helped shared a quiet resilience and determination to restore their lives. We left exhausted by the work but inspired by their hope for the future.



The Snellings Express their Appreciation

Pastor John Seiders received this handwritten note:

Dear Friends,

Many heartfelt thanks to: Mindy Houck, Stella Clarke, Marta Phillips, Mark and Sue Bielstein, John Seiders, Jim Charling and Craig Howe. Eight angels from Heaven sent that were an immense help cleaning (our) yard of all the debris from Hurricane Harvey.

It is impossible to express adequate appreciation for all they did. Especially the joining them in the heartfelt prayer when they were preparing to depart.

My wife and I pray that they will each be rewarded by God for their efforts and they have a safe trip back home. We pray they are protected on their life journey.

*God Bless,
Aline and George Snell*





Cinnamon Nut Bars

by Carol Charling

As I reflect on our week in Texas, I think how blessed our group was with all the interactions with the people we helped. Although I had little direct contact with the hurricane survivors, I did get to serve my way.

As I prepared meals each day, my goal was to serve tasty food, without a lot of left-overs, yet enough for everyone to have what they wanted. This included making sure there was a new dessert practically every night.

One dessert especially sticks out. It is called Cinnamon Nut Bars. This recipe especially has a story with it. It calls for one and a half cups of sugar, divided. The significant word here is divided. I initially forgot to separate the sugar. At first, I thought it would not be a problem; I would just add more and not worry about it. But the more I thought about it, the less convinced I was that I wouldn't ruin the whole recipe. To make a long story short, I eventually almost tripled the recipe for it to taste the way it should.

In the end, it was a blessing in disguise, since that allowed our group to bring treats to the field one of the days they worked.

The following is the recipe for Cinnamon Nut Bars:

Ingredients

2¼ cups all-purpose flour
1½ cups granulated sugar – divided use
1 cup butter, chilled
3 large eggs
2½ cups finely chopped nuts
1 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup powdered sugar

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix flour with ½ cup sugar. Cut in butter until mixture resembles small peas. Add and stir one beaten egg until well blended. With lightly floured hands, press and flatten dough into bottom of ungreased jelly roll pan 10x15 or smaller. Bake 12-15 minutes or until center is set. Meanwhile beat remaining 2 eggs and stir in remaining cup of sugar along with nuts, cinnamon and salt until well blended. Using a small, wet spatula spread mixture evenly over the crust. Return to oven and bake 20 minutes or until golden brown. Cool slightly before cutting into bars. (Use a plastic knife to cut to prevent crumbling.) Allow to cool in pan, then dust with powdered sugar (using a flour sifter). Store in sealed container at room temperature.

♪♪ Caroling by Candlelight ♪♪

ALL ARE INVITED!

Friday, December 1 at 6:30 pm in the Chapel.

Join us for a night of Christmas caroling and Advent discovery. Bring your favorite Christmas dessert to share. (Drop off in Skylight Lobby, then come to Chapel).

Questions? Contact Liz or Mickie.



Angel Tree and Dove Programs

You can find out more about how to sign-up to help spread the love of Christ through these local mission programs after services.

Volunteers Needed! We need help delivering:

Angel Tree Gifts on Saturday, Dec. 16, and

Dove Program on Sunday, Dec. 17.

Please contact Stella.

Advent Choral Vespers

December 17, 2017

4:00* and 6:00 pm in the Chapel

*Featuring
The NPC Chamber Singers and
The Fontenay Chamber Players*

NPC's historic, beautifully decorated
& candlelit chapel will reverberate
with the music of the season.



*There will be childcare provided for ages 3 and under only at 4:00 pm

Contact NPCC at 203-309-5605 for childcare reservations.

Advent Worship Schedule

Sermon Series: In the Waiting Room

12/3 - 1st Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9

Pastor Dialogue: John, Brandi and Jimmy

12/10 - 2nd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11 Pastor John

12/17 - 3rd Sunday of Advent

8:30 am & 10:00 am

Children's Christmas Pageant

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Pastor Brandi

4:00 pm and 6:00 pm

Advent Choral Vespers

Child care at the 4 pm service only.

There will not be a 5 pm service today.

12/24- 4th Sunday of Advent

10:00 am Service in the Sanctuary

Isaiah 9:2-7 Pastor Jimmy

Child care 3 months – 3 years

older children worship with family

Christmas Eve Services

2:00 & 4:00 pm

Lessons and Carols for Families

Child care 3 months – 3 years

older children worship with family

7:00 & 9:00 pm

Lessons and Carols

with Choir and Orchestra

12/31 One Service Only

10 am in the Sanctuary - Pastor Jimmy

Child care 3 months – 3 years

older children worship with family