

*The following is an excerpt from parishioner Bill Schaedel who volunteered for the Red Cross in Texas.*

I was assigned to a group of 30 individuals who were sent from Houston, TX. to the town of Longview, Tx, a distance of about 250 miles, near the Texas/Louisiana border. Longview was the location of one of the larger shelter locations for the evacuees of the towns along both of the state's border. The 30 of us were told to set up our bedding in two rooms at the rear of the shelter. One room held 18 while the other had some equipment in it and could only hold 12 (see **"our temp home"**).

We were to assist the client/evacuees in completing registration for Red Cross issued debit cards. The cards were designed to help meet the immediate needs for food, clothing and other miscellaneous expenses they incurred as a result of both Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. One of the group estimated that we were responsible for registering these people for over 1 million dollars of assistance in the 2 1/2 days at this location (see **"Where are they", "Registering the peeps" and "The cards are in"**).

As an aside, two conversations during these two days made everything else worth the trip and worth all the inconveniences I had. At the registration table next to mine was a young couple with 2 children. They came up to this area for shelter from the town of Port Arthur, a gulf port town, the day before. When they arrived, they went to see about filing a request for assistance with FEMA. They were told to also contact the Red Cross for immediate funds for clothing, but they received \$1000.00 in food stamps. They tried to explain that they couldn't use that amount of food stamps for the entire month. His family didn't eat that much during a normal month. They were told that that was their allotment for one month. They had to take that amount or nothing. They left with their food stamps, went shopping at a local food store, brought what they considered beyond their need, and donated the food to a local church shelter. The second conversation was with a young woman who just left another registration table across the room. As she approached me, tears streaming down her face, I asked if she was alright. She told me how thankful and happy she was that she was able to register for this debit card from the Red Cross. She explained that she had lost everything she owned, including her car, and all she had left were the clothes on her back. Now, here we were offering her some assistance, with just some simple questions and seemed to care for her plight. She thanked God, thanked me, gave me a hug and left the building.

Our group was broken up and 10 of us were sent next to the town of Jefferson, about 1 hour northeast of Longview and along the Highway 59 corridor. When we arrived, we were greeted like we were the ghost busters by the people at the center where registrations were taking place. Later that day, another 8 volunteers arrived to assist. We completed registering the people left and closed up for the night. The next morning, we were sent to Baytown, Tx, another gulf port city, about 275 mile south of Jefferson and

back down near Houston. When we arrived, it was about 6:30 PM, so we were assigned to rooms in a closed hospital that was being run as a FEMA center and new Red Cross headquarters. The next day we were sent to San Antonio to meet several people to move some trucks (see "**Our trucks**") from San Antonio up to Austin, a total of about 350 miles. We arrived in Austin just in time to check in to our hotel for the evening. From Austin we were to transport supplies to various locations back along the Highway 59 corridor that we had just left. Two days later we moved the distribution center from Austin to Lufkin, Tx. on Highway 59. I spent the remainder of my time in Lufkin distributing supplies up and down the 59 corridor. In the town of Livingston, Tx., I helped man the distribution line with a couple of the team members (see "**The start of the line**", "**The distribution line**", and "**Prisoners on the line**").

I'm very glad that I went and saw things first hand. I'm also glad to be home.

Bill