

## **Testimony from Ivette Valori**

For me, New Orleans is just a very, very special place. A place where I truly feel God's presence and come to know Him better through those we come down with and through those we encounter and help along the way. I've been down to New Orleans two times before and I can honestly say that I have experienced God and His merciful love and goodness each time.

In my first two visits I found it very difficult to hang on to the slightest hope since we saw so much destruction and all of our work involved disposing of ruined personal belongings and gutting out damaged homes. The neighborhoods were mostly deserted and the deafening silence due to the displacement of families as we worked was felt down to the core of my already saddened heart. It pretty much left me questioning whether or not we were even making a dent in this colossal mess and if this unique and beautiful city and its people will ever get back on its feet.

As we worked, I was pretty much amazed at how much we accomplished in so little time and I just knew that the Supernatural was the only explanation. It was an exhilarating feeling to experience our awesome God sustaining us with His strength and energy day after day but the doubts and questions after we returned home still plagued me. (Oh, ye of little faith!) I continued my prayers for New Orleans and I knew that no matter what God had in store for the families we helped, we showed them that we cared about them, we wanted to help them return to their homes and that we haven't forgotten them in their suffering and hardships.

This trip in May 2008 was most rewarding for me. My doubts and questions were put to rest as I was able to revisit a home owner and her refurbished home. It was one of the greatest feelings in the world to know that a house we previously gutted is now fully and beautifully restored and the family living quite comfortably under its roof. It was even more rewarding to just talk to her about her ordeals during and after the hurricane and to also come to learn the deep love, faith and trust she has in our God and our Blessed Mother. She prayed St. Jude's prayer every day, and while she was displaced in Florida for close to two years, she made it a point to adore Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament daily. The same three foot statue of our Blessed Mother she had displayed in her home before the hurricane was once again proudly displayed in her entrance foyer. This statue survived the hurricane without a scratch and was found still standing on its table after the waters receded amidst overturned furniture and appliances. This was a clear message to me to never give up our faith and our hope and to never underestimate the power of prayer!

On this trip we became very close to the Jackson family as we worked on their home throughout the week. Their story of trying to get back on their feet after countless obstacles and hardships was heart wrenching. What amazes me the

most about them is their family unity and love for each other and their persistence to not give in or give up. After everything they've been through they still manage to hold their heads up high with a smile and they count their blessings day after day with full trust that God has better days in store for them. Every trip to New Orleans has increased and enlivened my faith and trust in a most merciful God.

I've learned through these people and their hardships that there is nothing God can't do and won't do for love of us as long as we keep the faith and trust in Him. His power and glory is all encompassing and is very evident to me in New Orleans. Although many have suffered and are still suffering, I am thankful and grateful for the opportunity to experience God in such a prevailing and profound way. The experience has enriched my life to the point of never taking for granted the value of my faith, my family and my friends, including the new friends I've made down to NOLA!