

HARVEY HIT HARD

Some dates, due to the impact and experiences associated with them, become etched in your memory. August 25, 2017, will now be one of those dates, at least it will be for the members and friends of Holy Cross in Rockport.

Harvey, one of the most destructive hurricanes to ever hit the Gulf Coast, barreled into Rockport with a vengeance. Most hurricanes hit and quickly move through. Not so with Harvey, it lingered for hours with sustained wind of 130 miles per hour. There were gusts above that and there were numerous spinoff tornadoes. The destruction to Rockport was devastating. The same is true in regards to members of Holy Cross and to the parsonage, the church, and church property.

There were no members of Holy Cross who did not sustain damage, most had significant damage, and several had their homes destroyed. Damage to the parsonage requires a new roof, new fence and repair of minor water damage. The oak trees at the parsonage, like those throughout Rockport, and there are thousands, literally had no leaves left on them. It was surreal. The trees were simply trunks, limbs and branches. Well over 20 large black contractor bags were filled with leaves and debris. It's difficult to describe the damage to the trees. In one area where the golf course is located it was reported that 1,200 trees were blown down, most were oak.

The church did not escape Harvey's wrath. The steeple blew off and has never been found! This of course left a gaping hole in the roof allowing wind and rain to penetrate. The roof was also compromised in places, again allowing for damage. Probably due to the force of the wind into the building, the interior roof collapsed, as well as some walls. I could go on and on, but perhaps what the Windstorm Adjuster said describes it: "This place looks totaled." On the outside, the sign by the street is severely damaged, the fence is mostly down. Brick siding is pulled loose from the building in places and cracked in others. And, of course trees on the property were down or damaged, including in The Prayer Garden. Unbelievably, the force of the wind was so high that it actually blew over the granite columbarium.

If the scope of destruction is overwhelming, and it is, so too has been the support. This too will be etched into our memory. Support provided to Holy Cross, and to its members, has truly been amazing. And, we are so grateful.

Almost immediately we were offered the use of a small, old, empty, concrete block building as a temporary place for worship and it was offered for free. Members cleaned, replaced ceiling tiles, etc. and brought folding chairs, a few tables, hymnals, worship folders and a few other items. All had to be retrieved from the damaged church and wiped with Clorox for mold. Members and volunteer help did the job joyfully. We were thankful for the support.

Volunteers from churches in our Conference and Synod immediately started reaching out with support. They sent volunteers to help clean debris at the church and at some of the members' badly damaged homes and at the parsonage. It seemed each week a new group would come to help and others offered to come if needed. Bishop Tiemann came twice. He came first early on to see the damage and meet with Pastor Haynes and others. Soon after he came again bringing representatives from Lutheran Disaster Relief.

Support in terms of volunteer help and financial assistance has come from every direction. It's been truly humbling. It has come from large congregations in cities like Austin and San Antonio and from small country churches like in Ander and Bishop. Some volunteers came for a day and some stayed days. Pastor Brad Fuerst brought a group of 10 students from UT Austin

Lutheran Campus Ministry. A group from the Synod's Task Force On Poverty and Justice came. They stayed 3 days!

The volume of supplies received is hard to describe. Just boxes and boxes of cleaning supplies, household items, food, blankets and so much more. It was distributed to thankful members of Holy Cross as well as to many others in need in the community. The same is true for the \$3,000 in Walmart gift cards sent by churches in the San Antonio area. How blessed we have been!

Almost daily when Pastor Haynes picks up mail, there are checks of financial support. They come from churches, friends of Holy Cross and from some we do not know. To date we have received \$29,998.82 designated REBUILD. Additionally there have been other general contributions. Again, what wonderful support!

In the midst of even a time like this there are blessings if we can but see them, and we do. The support received has been sustaining. Pastor Haynes continues to provide strong, positive, spiritual leadership. There is worship and joyful fellowship. On October 29th we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. And, yes, we sang "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." So true!