

***Responding in Good Faith:
A Report to the Ash Institute on the
Response to Hurricane Katrina***

Daniel J. Hopkins*
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Government
Harvard University

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1. INTRODUCTION

Arkansas has no coastline, and it wasn't hit directly by Hurricane Katrina. Yet it was, in the words of Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, an "unaffected affected state": in the days following the storm, Arkansas took in 75,000 evacuees, including 8,000 to 9,000 evacuees who lacked transportation and had been evacuated from the Superdome, the New Orleans Convention Center, bridges, and other places within New Orleans.¹ For a state with just 2.7 million people in 2000, this massive influx represented an overnight increase in population of 2.8%. It also represented an acute public policy challenge, as those evacuees arriving from the Superdome often stepped off of buses traumatized, ailing, and with only a garbage bag to their names.

This report details the improvised but intensive *church-state cooperation that Arkansas used to shelter and rehabilitate the poorest of the evacuees, those 8,000 to 9,000 people who came by bus or plane from the Superdome and other New Orleans sites*. Given the magnitude of the challenge, Governor Huckabee chose to bypass the state's emergency management plan and create a network of churches and church camps to shelter the evacuees until they could begin transitioning back to a more normal life. He created a new umbrella organization, the Katrina Assistance and Relief Effort (KARE), and charged John Brackin and other members of his staff with managing the effort. Much of their work was done from a makeshift command center in the reception area of the Governor's Office, and out of a call center that was created on short notice by the agency

¹ These figures were repeated by many state officials, and appeared in press reports as well (e.g. Malan 2005). In September of 2005, the total number of Katrina-related applications for Food Stamps, Medicaid, or other public assistance in Arkansas was 9,513, with another 2,654 in October, although some of those applications undoubtedly came from self-evacuees who were not housed in churches or church camps.

that oversees state property. As we will see, one key element of the Arkansas story was the extent to which traditional roles and procedures were cast aside.

The hard work of creating a stable and safe transition for the evacuees was accomplished by local leaders in church camps spread throughout the state. A few of their stories are detailed below, but there are countless other stories of local heroism that are recorded only in people's memories. In Arkansas and throughout the country, the days and months following Katrina were filled with acts of extraordinary selflessness. One volunteer we met had taken weeks of personal vacation to become a full-time staffer at a camp southeast of Little Rock. Many of the numbers presented below look like the numbers from any survey, but it is critical to remember that behind those numbers are often life-changing acts of generosity. The goal of this report is to understand how Arkansans put that generosity to work in the weeks after the hurricane.

Although disasters on the scope of Hurricane Katrina are mercifully rare, there is much to learn from Arkansas's efforts about the advantages and disadvantages of close church-state collaboration in the provision of basic needs to a displaced population. Throughout, this report will highlight *several key advantages of the close church-state collaboration in Arkansas, including: 1) the flexibility of religious networks in leveraging community resources and providing personalized care; 2) the capacity of religious networks to greatly expand the personnel, energy, and resources available for emergency relief work; and 3) their capacity to create nurturing environments at a moment's notice. 4) Supportive political leadership willing to be flexible about typical procedures was also*

key. At the same time, this report will also identify some central challenges that emerged from the church-state collaboration, including *1) the difficulty of supervising church networks and collecting reliable and consistent information; 2) the difficulty in sustaining volunteer networks after the initial crisis recedes; 3) the tensions and challenges that stem from sidelining existing government agencies; and 4) the potential difficulties in ensuring that evacuees' political voices are heard.* The report will also highlight some of the key conditions that allowed this approach to work so effectively in Arkansas, including a *small, flexible state bureaucracy, interpersonal networks that connected many of the key actors across church-state lines, and strong religious organizations.* To be sure, KARE and the church-state collaboration in Arkansas were the result of a very specific confluence of events, including a Governor with strong ties to religious communities—Huckabee was formerly the President of the Arkansas State Baptist Convention—and a disaster of such unprecedented scope it was dubbed “this region’s 9/11” by one informant. Even so, many of the lessons that emerge offer more general insights about the promise and pitfalls of enlisting communities of faith in state-led efforts.

1.1 Beyond Arkansas

When people think of the post-Katrina public policy challenges, they tend think first of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, the states that continue to deal with Katrina’s aftermath most visibly. Today, those three states receive much of the post-Katrina media attention. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, however, Arkansas did play a substantial role: as of September 16th, 2005, its shelter population of 11,626 evacuees was

third only to Louisiana and Texas (*New York Times* 2005). More to the point, Arkansas met the challenges of Hurricane Katrina with unusual innovation, and its church-state collaboration merits in-depth study. But since the post-Katrina challenges subsided more quickly in Arkansas than elsewhere, it is vital that this study not ignore the experiences of other cities and states. It was only when Houston officials realized that the Reliant Center had reached capacity that they posted signs outside the city redirecting buses to Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Arkansas's experience differs from those of Texas and Louisiana in part because of its brevity. As evacuees resettled in the months after the storm, many left parts of Arkansas for communities that were more familiar, more urban, more accessible to the poor, and closer to home. According to the U.S. Postal Service, as of December 31st, 2005, a total of 2,010 individuals had filed change-of-address forms from the affected areas to the four Arkansas ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTA) under study here. By contrast, 44,299 people had filed change-of-address forms indicating a move into the two ZCTAs surrounding Baton Rouge, and 38,733 filed change-of-address forms indicating a move to Houston. Thus this report employs Houston and Baton Rouge as "shadow cases" that help bring the accomplishments and limitations of Arkansas's efforts into sharper focus.

1.2 Methodology

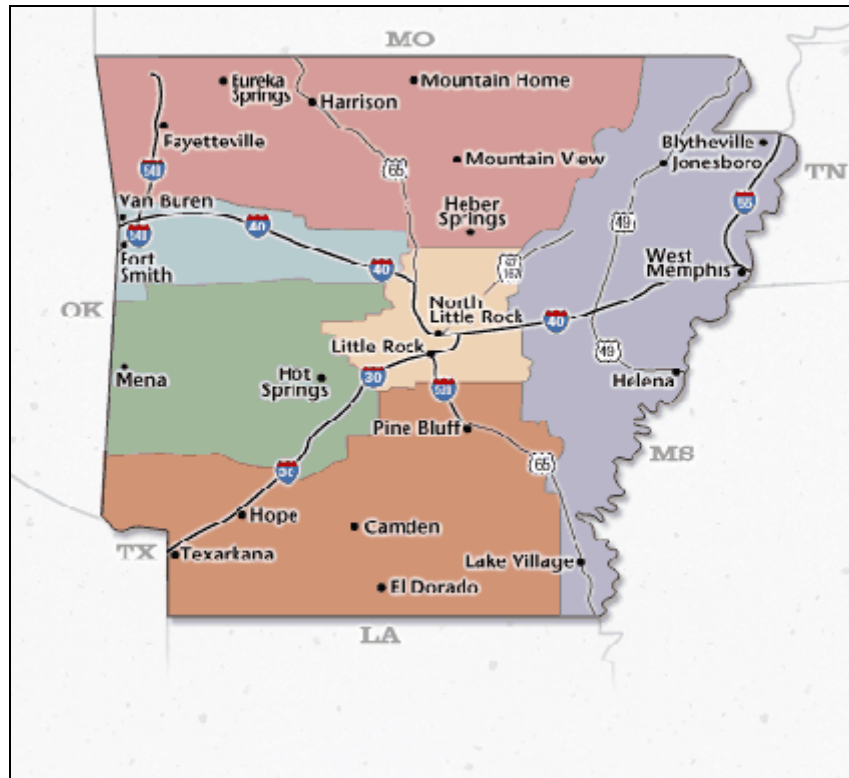
This report is based on interviews with 59 informants in various positions of leadership throughout Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, the vast majority of which were conducted on-site. Several key informants were interviewed twice. The interviews included twelve

church leaders as well as twenty-five government officials and a variety of other local leaders. They were semi-structured, and in many cases were recorded by the written notes of two or more researchers. The report also draws on a survey of 1,200 Arkansans, Texans, and Louisianans conducted by phone from January 12th to April 9th, 2006, as well as government documents and newspaper reports from *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, *The New York Times*, *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge), the *Houston Chronicle*, and other sources. Quotations are directly attributed only to public officials or individuals quoted in newspapers; for other informants, I refer generically to their position as a “church leader” or “community leader” as per our approval from the Harvard University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects.² As a source of further anonymity, gender pronouns are used arbitrarily. The report focuses chiefly on the first several months following the hurricane, when Arkansas played host to thousands of evacuees.

The phone survey is part of a larger survey of communities and social capital conducted by the Saguaro Seminar at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. In Baton Rouge, Houston, and Arkansas, it included a special module on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The nearest significant city to New Orleans, Baton Rouge had 228,000 people as of the 2000 Census, and “hit its twenty-five year growth projections in a single day” after Hurricane Katrina, according to one local official. So many people evacuated to Baton Rouge that 50% of its residents had evacuees staying in their homes (Weil 2005)—and long-time residents noticed a marked drop in water pressure. Home to Louisiana State University and the state capital, Baton Rouge nonetheless had a poverty rate of

² Approval for the study of community leaders was granted by the Harvard University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research on January 7th, 2006 in application F13271-101.

24%, which is double the national average. The city is 50% African American. Houston, Texas is 348 miles west of New Orleans, and became the home to hundreds of thousands of evacuees after an early-morning decision by Texas Governor Rick Perry two days after the storm hit. A low-density city, Houston had 1.95 million residents in 2000, 25% of whom were African American and 37% of whom were Latino. The evacuees settled throughout the city, but with particular concentrations in its southwestern neighborhoods.



Graphic 1: *Map of Arkansas*, courtesy of www.united-states.usa.com

Four Arkansas communities were targeted by the survey as well. At 183,000 as of the 2000 Census, Little Rock is the largest city in the Arkansas sample, and is also quite racially diverse, with 41% of its residents self-identifying as Black.³ Pine Bluff has

³ A small number of respondents come from North Little Rock ZIP codes that overlap with those for Little Rock itself.

55,000 residents, 66% of whom are Black, and is economically depressed. Jonesboro is also a town of 55,000, 86% of whom are white, and is economically thriving. Finally, Siloam Springs was an unlikely destination for poor, predominantly African American evacuees from New Orleans: it is a small town of 11,000 on the Oklahoma border that is 85% white. The four surveyed communities within Arkansas were chosen to be as distinctive as possible, and should provide a valuable window on the differing community responses to the crisis of Katrina. Even so, all four received significant numbers of evacuees. According to the Postal Service data, the number of evacuees who had moved to these four communities ranged from 334 to 780 as of December 31st, 2005.

One important group that was *not* surveyed was the evacuees themselves. Clearly, the evacuees' viewpoints are an important part of the evaluation of Arkansas's church-based strategy, and yet in the report that follows, the evacuees' voices are heard only through the church leaders and local and state officials whom we interviewed. Understandably, church leaders recounted tales of evacuees who were incredibly grateful, and did not report much evacuee dissatisfaction.⁴ Again and again, we heard of evacuees who were initially wary or even petrified of their new surroundings, but who came to feel comfortable and appreciate the camps' efforts on their behalf. One camp coordinator explained it by saying that "a lot [of evacuees] were dead-set on going back to New Orleans... but they came to like it [here]." A business leader involved in the relief effort noted that "[we] didn't have anybody that was terribly unhappy being here." During our

⁴ Still, it is clear that some evacuees were quite dissatisfied: an evacuee at the Arkansas State Baptist Convention's campground outside of Siloam Springs told *Newsweek*, "this is like a prison.... They don't feed us right here. And yesterday my daughter was washing her baby's only clothes, and they stole them from the washer... I'm so confused, so frustrated. We don't know where we're going to go next. They're going to ship us out like little bitty puppies all over again"(Ordonez 2005).

initial research trip in October 2005, many of these issues were simply too sensitive to assess in a respectful way through direct interviews with evacuees. Those evacuees we did speak with simply wanted to tell their story. And by the time of our January and October visits in 2006, many of the evacuees had moved on. As of this writing, there are now a wide variety of other sources on the evacuees' attitudes and outcomes, including the oral histories of evacuees taken by the Hurricane Katrina Advisory Group.⁵

1.3 Organization of the Report

The next section of this report provides a chronology of key events so that readers can understand the decision-making context. Focusing on Arkansas but drawing on examples from elsewhere, the third section details the use of religious networks to help shelter and re-settle the evacuees. The fourth section considers another provider of post-Katrina assistance, the American Red Cross. It discusses the tremendous efforts of the Red Cross, but also suggests that the inability of local leaders to waive national requirements contributed to its unpopularity in some circles. In the fifth section, the report focuses on governmental agencies, and the roles that they played in disaster relief. *The flexibility and responsiveness of church-based networks are key advantages that reappear in section after section.* Those government entities that were able to show a similar

⁵ The Hurricane Katrina Advisory Group is interviewing a panel of 2,000 survivors from New Orleans and the surrounding areas, and is posting the oral histories and other information about the panel at <http://hurricanekatrina.med.harvard.edu/index.php>. Those interested in evacuees' economic outcomes should also consult the Gallup poll conducted for the State of Texas which surveyed 6,415 evacuee households in May and June of 2006 and found a 59 percent unemployment rate among respondents. John Zogby conducted a three-part poll on behalf of the City of Houston in the spring of 2006 which found that 53 percent of evacuees were actively looking for work—and that 66% planned to stay in the Houston area. Finally, a consortium of aid organizations produced “Voices from the Gulf Coast,” a report on evacuee focus groups conducted in 8 cities including Houston and Baton Rouge.

flexibility—including the State of Arkansas, the City of Houston, and Harris County—enjoyed the most universal acclaim.

2. BACKGROUND

Before turning to specific examples from the Arkansas case, it is important to have a general understanding of how Arkansas’s evacuees wound up in the care of church camps scattered around the state. On Monday, August 29th, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall and struck Louisiana and Mississippi, driving hundreds of thousands from their homes. An initial wave of self-evacuees began arriving in Arkansas even before the storm hit, as people drove north until they found hotel space. This report, however, focuses on the group of people that were unable to self-evacuate, and that were evacuated by bus or plane from the Superdome and other sites in the days following the hurricane.⁶ As was clear from the television coverage in the days following the storm, this group was overwhelmingly Black and disproportionately (though not always) poor.⁷

After their ordeals in the flooded streets of New Orleans, the evacuees at the Superdome were initially sent to Houston, Texas after a decision made early that Wednesday morning by Texas Governor Rick Perry. The county-owned Astrodome stood vacant in

⁶ According to a *Washington Post*/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health survey of evacuees in Houston shelters that took place from September 10th to 12th 2005, 35% of those evacuees spent time inside the Superdome, 7% spent time inside the Convention Center, 40% spent at least a day on an overpass or living outside, and 34% were trapped in their home and had to be rescued (*Washington Post* et al. 2005). These figures are likely to be similar to those for the population whose buses took them to Arkansas rather than Texas.

⁷ The *Washington Post* survey of Texas evacuees that had been bused by government authorities found that 93% were Black (*Washington Post* et al. 2005). In a survey of evacuees based on Red Cross lists conducted in February and March of 2006, *The New York Times* found that “Those with household incomes over \$30,000 a year were more likely to have evacuated before the hurricane than those who made less”(Dewan et al. 2006).

Houston and was capable of housing thousands, making it a logical short-term shelter. But as Houston's facilities reached capacity, buses were then sent to Fort Smith, Arkansas, a town on the Oklahoma border. There was even a traffic sign outside Houston redirecting buses. The days just after the storm were described by various officials as very chaotic: at one point, Arkansas officials believed an initial bus convoy was en route, only to learn later that that was not true.⁸ Indeed, for a period of time Arkansas state troopers were stationed on the border to identify buses and direct them to Fort Smith. However, when the buses did begin to arrive late in the week of the hurricane, they descended in droves in a period of 12 to 15 hours, creating a mile-long back-up of buses outside of Fort Chaffee, the military installation that was their initial stopping point.⁹ In the words of one official, they "fed us with a fire hose"—at least until Governor Huckabee called the White House and said that the state could harbor no more evacuees.¹⁰

2.1 The Church Camp Solution

According to various reports, Governor Huckabee was insistent that the evacuees not be housed at Fort Chaffee for long, and that they instead be dispersed throughout the state. Some said that this was a reaction to seeing Houston's centralized approach, an approach that Houston officials themselves began to rethink when they opened the George R. Brown Convention Center to the evacuees in the second week. Arkansas's emergency

⁸ Indeed, in a sign of just how bad the initial channels of information were following the Hurricane, Arkansas officials were in contact with Arkansas National Guard troops sent to Louisiana in search of credible information.

⁹ Fort Chaffee had served as a temporary shelter before, both for Vietnamese refugees after the end of the Vietnam War and then for some of the Cubans who left Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift.

¹⁰ According to his own retelling, Huckabee said "Let me put it to you real simply. These people are not getting off the plane. I'm not going to let them stand outside for seven hours at Fort Chaffee just to get a sandwich"(Blomeley 2005).

management plan typically gives authority to an emergency management coordinator in each of the 75 counties, but that system was bypassed because it was seen as inadequate for the specific challenge of housing thousands of people. Traditional jurisdictions had to give way given the scope of the crisis, a point reinforced by a leader for the Red Cross in Arkansas: “Red Cross can’t deal with all of this and the county governments can’t deal with this, they don’t have the people.” One option for housing the evacuees was to use public schools, some of which had been shuttered by a recent school consolidation plan and were available. But as early as Wednesday, August 31st, Huckabee staffer Chris Pyle—a speechwriter, policy advisor, and liaison to Arkansas’s communities of faith—proposed the state’s church camps as an alternative solution. In an email to the Governor, he noted:

Several denominations have nice campgrounds and the summer camp season is over. These would make great refugee camps. If there was some way of knowing what is actually needed, I feel confident I could get this going. I know people are running out of money in hotels.

Even before being contacted by the Governor’s Office, some church camps—including Budd Creek in Greer’s Ferry and Springlake in Lonsdale—had opened their doors to evacuees. But on Friday, September 2nd, Governor Huckabee convened a meeting at the Governor’s Mansion with representatives of Arkansas’s larger church communities—mostly Southern Baptist and Pentecostal communities—to ask them to open their facilities to the incoming evacuees. The churches were very receptive to the idea, perhaps in part because some knew Huckabee personally from his days as a minister. By Tuesday of the following week, eight days after Katrina, buses had brought evacuees to 16 church camps and churches throughout the state, with large clusters of evacuees

placed in the northwestern corner of the state, the Little Rock area, Pine Bluff, Fort Smith, and Jonesboro. Additional camps were located in more remote areas, including in Mena in southern Arkansas and Greers Ferry in the northern part of the state.

To start, the evacuees were scattered throughout the state, although as time passed, the smaller and more rural camps closed as evacuees left the state or gravitated toward Little Rock and other diverse, urban areas. For instance, at a church in Van Buren, Arkansas, 63 of the 210 evacuees chose to leave in the first week, with many of the others opting for housing somewhere in the area. That same church was among the first to close after eight days, sending its evacuees elsewhere or into the community. Many of the camps remained open longer, closing in mid-October or later. By then, most evacuees had left or had found more permanent shelter, assisted by a year-long housing grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). That grant covered evacuees' rent up to a certain threshold, and was widely utilized by the small number of evacuees who chose to stay in Arkansas. Still, there were powerful factors pulling the evacuees away from Arkansas once the storm passed. While many had family in Baton Rouge, Houston, and Atlanta, fewer had connections in Arkansas. And with a few exceptions, Arkansas's towns lack the transportation needed by evacuees who typically did not have cars and were used to New Orleans' public transit system.¹¹ Having explained how the evacuees found themselves at rural church camps, this report now explores how those camps worked as shelters.

¹¹ In addition, Houston officials speculated that the generosity of their FEMA-funded housing program helped draw evacuees who had originally wound up elsewhere.

3. RELIGIOUS NETWORKS IN ACTION

When compared to other states, Arkansas stands out for the religiosity of its residents. Of the 2.67 million residents in 2000, 1.96 million were “adherents to specific religious traditions”(Lindsey and Silk 2005:41). Arkansas also has the highest rate of evangelical adherents in the nation, with 431 per 1,000 residents (Association of Religion Data Archives 2006). Baptism is the single largest denomination, although other evangelical denominations—including branches of Pentecostalism—are growing quickly. The Governor himself is a former minister and President of the Arkansas State Baptist Convention. In short, as far as faith-based disaster response is concerned, Arkansas is most fertile ground. *As this section illustrates, religious networks played two central roles in Arkansas’s Katrina relief efforts. First, religious networks made church-state collaboration possible, because they made church leaders and government officials trustworthy partners for one another. Second, networks within communities helped ensure that the churches had swift access to the resources needed by the evacuees.*

3.1 Connecting Pastors and Officials

Throughout our research, we saw the reach of these religious networks. Consider one Assembly of God congregation located near Fort Chaffee in western Arkansas. When Huckabee staffer Chris Pyle needed extra shelter for the evacuees, he turned to that church, having visited it before to discuss the Governor’s initiative on covenant marriage. He knew that it had a gym with considerable space, and he enlisted the church once the church camps began to fill. The church’s immediate ascent didn’t surprise Chris Pyle at all. Himself the son of a pastor, Pyle explained that “[we] all grew up going to church

camp” and that “each camp has a built-in constituency and a supply of volunteers.” That same church in western Arkansas raised money for rent from its congregants and community, and provided those evacuees who stayed with two months’ rent—and in some cases, with cars to drive to jobs that the church had helped locate. In part because of the church’s support and generosity, as of late October 2005, 31 families with 45 adults had opted to stay in the area. Nine families had continued to attend the church.

Or consider another church in the northeastern corner of the state, where the pastor explained that he and the Governor had been friends for many years. When that pastor needed anything, he simply called the Governor. In other words, church-based networks that predated the crisis seem to have facilitated Arkansas’s Katrina relief efforts, as they ensured that state officials and church leaders trusted one another. That is in contrast to Houston, where some African American churches were quite unhappy that they could not act as official shelters because they hadn’t been previously designated as such by the Red Cross.

3.2 Church-Community Networks

Perhaps more important, though, were the networks that interlaced church leaders with their communities. As one pastor explained, faced with the task of providing food and shelter to between 100 and 700 evacuees, it was natural to divide up the work among the participating churches—it was “just faster to ask pastors, ‘can you do X, Y, and Z?’” One good example came from the Springlake Baptist Assembly, located in Lonsdale, Arkansas, a bit more than an hour to the west of Little Rock. Some years before, in the

wake of a tornado, the camp's board decided that it would serve as a shelter in the event of an emergency, and it had begun to act as a shelter for Katrina evacuees even before the Governor's office called. On the Friday after the storm, the director drove to Little Rock to attend the Governor's meeting of church camp directors. After agreeing that the camp would host evacuees—they wound up with 378—the camp director then made a single phone call to a church leader asking him to enlist volunteers and help prepare the camp. The beds had clean linens, and spotlights were brought in. By the time the director returned to the grounds, the camp had more than 300 volunteers turning the summer camp into a home for the evacuees. At 10:30 PM a few days later, when the evacuees initially arrived, there were some 400 volunteers there to help, roughly one per evacuee. It is important to put this in perspective: in the entire town of Lonsdale, there are 110 people according to the sign at the border of town. In a few days' time, the church networks based in that area were able to flood the community and the camp with more food, clothing, and volunteers than everything that had existed for miles around.

Not only did the church's local networks provide volunteers, they also ensured that the camp had stockpiles of everything that it might need. The Springlake Baptist Assembly was so overrun with donations that it had to post a sign at its entrance saying "Stop giving us food." When camp leaders learned that ten of the evacuees on-site needed wheelchairs, they put out the call—and had 20 wheelchairs dropped off by local residents. A local businessman learned about the camp, and installed washers and dryers on his own dime. And despite all their expenses, expenses which must have totaled in the thousands of dollars, the camp took no state reimbursement at all: "[we] didn't take

money from anyone other than God's people" the director explained. Church camps elsewhere made the same choice. Another church camp director explained that "we were amazed with the amount of financial assistance [we received]...it was just amazing how our community rallied to support this process."

Camps overwhelmed by donations were common sights on our research trips. In a church camp southeast of Little Rock, our research team toured a cabin filled with an enormous variety of unused goods, from diapers to hair-care products to purses. For the City of Fayetteville, managing all of the donations was a central challenge, and the city relied heavily on members of Wal-Mart's logistics team sent in as volunteers. Even Harris County (home to Houston) was overwhelmed by the logistical task of coordinating all of the donated items, and wound up throwing away large quantities of used clothing. This suggests another challenge of responding to disasters: it is difficult to match donations and need. At the same time, though, we also saw clear evidence of the responsiveness of church networks to the evacuees' needs. In the overwhelmingly white community of Siloam Springs, volunteers realized that the African American evacuees were in need of various hair-care products, and scoured local stores to find them. At a camp in the southern part of Arkansas, the local sheriff stocked a pond with catfish and then bought every fishing pole at the local Wal-Mart, giving the evacuees a chance to fish and get their minds off the disaster.

3.3 The Role of Churches in Mobilizing Volunteers

The survey data strongly support the idea that the churches and church camps were a critical pathway through which volunteers were mobilized. Consider Table 1 below, which illustrates that 47% of those who volunteered in Arkansas were mobilized exclusively by a religious organization. By contrast, 22% were mobilized only by the Red Cross, and just 9% by state and local government. One strength of church-based disaster response is that churches are closely interconnected with their communities, and so are easily able to mobilize volunteers. When we compare Arkansas with Houston, we can see the relative strength of the state and local governments' direct capacity to raise volunteers in a large city. In Houston, state and local government organized the volunteer work for 14% of volunteers—and sent out the initial calls for volunteers that led to 1 AM traffic jams as volunteers tried to get to the Reliant Center to help. In Arkansas, by contrast, the state and local government acted primarily by catalyzing and supporting church-based action.

Still, to fully understand Table 1, it is important to know the differences in how churches were mobilized in the three states. In Arkansas, the mobilization was initiated by the state, with Governor Huckabee convening a meeting of church leaders. In Baton Rouge and also in Houston, the key role of local congregations emerged more organically, as church leaders sensed needs, sought out roles, and mobilized their congregations absent direct instructions from officials. In Baton Rouge, for example, local church leaders asked for a meeting with the Red Cross that turned into a weekly briefing session at a local church. Some of the evangelical churches in Baton Rouge were strongly supported

by their own national networks, and had so many resources that they became “their own Red Cross,” in the words of one observer. In Houston, some churches had pre-existing agreements with the Red Cross to become shelters, and others became spontaneous shelters without Red Cross backing. Yet in both Houston and Baton Rouge, the main responsibility for providing shelter did not rest with the churches—and the church-state cooperation was less formal than in Arkansas.

In light of those differences, consider the close correspondence between the figures for Arkansas and Baton Rouge in Table 1. Arkansas very consciously followed a strategy of religious mobilization, and not surprisingly, just shy of 47% of its volunteers were organized by religious groups. But in Baton Rouge, which followed a strategy best summed up as “all hands on deck,” the percentage mobilized by religious groups was also 47%. Both samples appear nearly identical in their religiosity, since 51% of Baton Rouge residents and 52% of surveyed Arkansans report going to church weekly—whereas just 38% of Houston residents do. It seems, then, that what mattered was not so much the state’s explicit strategy as the simple presence of dense religious networks. Even in Baton Rouge, where there was no explicit strategy to mobilize church networks, the networks did mobilize powerfully, with many responding to what they saw as a Christian duty or a calling from God. Given a disaster of this scope, with evacuees flooding into town, *Baton Rouge churches took responsibility for mobilizing their congregations even without any institutionalized role.* This suggests that the Arkansas approach didn’t ensure *that* religious networks responded but instead shaped *how* they responded.

TABLE 1

Was the volunteer work organized by a religious group, the state or local government, the Red Cross, or another group?								
	Religious Group	State or local gov't	Red Cross	Another group	All of the above	None of the above	Don't know	Ref.
Siloam Springs	59.5	5.4	10.8	10.8	8.1	2.7	2.7	0
Jonesboro	50.0	7.5	35.0	5.0	2.5	0.0	0	0
Little Rock	34.2	10.5	23.7	21.1	5.3	5.3	0	0
Pine Bluff	43.8	10.4	18.8	12.5	4.2	8.3	0	2.1
Arkansas Overall	46.6	8.6	22.1	12.3	4.9	4.3	0.6	0.6
Baton Rouge	47.3	7.3	10.2	23.4	2.0	9.3	0.5	0
Houston	38.7	14.1	17.6	19.7	1.4	7.7	0.7	0

Asked only of the 157 Arkansas respondents, 142 Houston respondents, and 205 Baton Rouge respondents who reported having done volunteer work. The table above presents the first response.

Table 2 illustrates in another fashion the central role of church networks in mobilizing resources for the evacuees. As is evident, those Arkansans who regularly attend religious services constitute a majority of respondents, and a significant majority of those who made donations to assist Katrina evacuees. 82% of all respondents made a donation to assist the evacuees, but that number drops to 73% for those who only attend services a few times a year, and to 53% for those who attend even less frequently. In other words, those who are most closely tied to their church were also those most likely to make donations to help the evacuees.

TABLE 2: ARKANSAS

Did you donate money, clothing, food or other items?				
Attend Services...	Yes	No	Don't know	Count
Every week (or more often)	87.3	12.3	0.5	204
Almost every week	85.7	14.3	0.0	28
Once or twice a month	88.1	11.9	0.0	59
A few times per year	72.7	27.3	0.0	44
Less often than that	52.6	47.4	0.0	38
Refused	50.0	50.0	0.0	2
Total	81.9	17.9	0.3	375

Tables 3, 4, and 5 present information on volunteer activity by attendance at religious services for each of the three communities. Respondents were first told, “Some people got involved with evacuees, some didn’t.” They were then asked: “Which, if any, of the following things did you do for Katrina evacuees? Volunteer?” These tables present the results by the frequency of the respondent’s attendance at religious services. For Arkansas, we see again that those closely connected to their churches—those attending religious services almost every week or more often—volunteered over 50% of the time. For less observant groups, that number drops to between 32% and 18%.

TABLE 3: ARKANSAS

How often do you attend religious services?	Volunteer?			Count
	Yes	No		
Every week (or more often)	51.0	49.0		204
Almost every week	50.0	50.0		28
Once or twice a month	28.8	71.2		59
A few times per year	31.8	68.2		44
Less often than that	18.4	81.6		38
Refused	50.0	50.0		2
Total	41.9	58.1		375

What about the other host communities? In a separate Baton Rouge post-hurricane survey, 60% of people reported having volunteered in that city (Weil et al. 2005), although the figure from our survey is a somewhat lower 52%. Here, too, we see that those who attended services weekly were at least 15 percentage points more likely to volunteer. Houston is a much bigger city with proportionately fewer evacuees, but even there, 36% of respondents volunteered, an extraordinary percentage that helps explain why the roughly 17,000 evacuees at the Reliant Center were outnumbered by volunteers who were “willing to do anything.”¹² As with the other surveyed communities, in

¹² The 2006 Houston Area Study reported that 55% of respondents had “personal interaction with any of the evacuees”(Klineberg 2006).

Houston, weekly church attendance led to an increase of at least 15 percentage points in the probability of having volunteered. Irrespective of the specific strategies chosen by the state, *frequent churchgoers were a key source of volunteers in assisting the evacuees.*

TABLE 4: BATON ROUGE

	Volunteer?			Count
	Yes	No		
How often do you attend religious services?	Every week (or more often)	61	39	204
	Almost every week	44	56	32
	Once or twice a month	42	58	59
	A few times per year	37	63	42
	Less often than that	40	60	60
	Total	52	48	397

TABLE 5: HOUSTON

	Volunteer?			Count
	Yes	No		
How often do you attend religious services?	Every week (or more often)	49	51	150
	Almost every week	29	71	35
	Once or twice a month	34	66	59
	A few times per year	33	67	69
	Less often than that	24	76	79
	Total	36	64	398

3.4 Looking Across the Aisle: Attitudes on the Partnership

From the standpoint of the Huckabee Administration, the church-state partnership was tremendously successful, allowing the state to expand its capacity dramatically at a time of crisis. Many community and civic leaders agreed, including one who told us, “Thank God for the Governor, he was great.” This view is reflected in some of the quotations above, and also in remarks by White House Director of Faith-Based Initiatives Jim Towey, who told Southern Baptist volunteers about the relief effort more generally: “The [P]resident knows the efforts taken during the disaster relief phase were extraordinary in scope and compassion because government can’t love the way your people

did.”(Ledbetter 2006).¹³ As we will see below, not everyone in Arkansas agreed with that assessment, but from the point of view of the White House and the Huckabee Administration, the collaboration with churches and other communities of faith exceeded expectations. But did the church groups see it in the same way?

Under certain conditions, religious groups can shun direct involvement with the state as distracting and potentially corrupting. As mentioned earlier, the presence of trusted contacts with the state government undoubtedly helped ease concerns about working in partnership with the state. To a person, the church leaders were complimentary of the Governor and his staff, insisting that Governor’s office provided everything the church could have requested. The sheer magnitude of the crisis helped initiate a church-state partnership as well. In fact, two camps felt compelled to open their doors to evacuees even before the Governor asked. In the words of one camp director, “I didn’t have any option, because of my Christian beliefs.” In Baton Rouge, the mobilization of church leaders was even more spontaneous, which one leader explained by saying, “the faith community just simply responded... the government was so ill-equipped to deal with this.”

Still, many church leaders also harbored some distrust of the state’s capacities in general, which could lead observers to wonder about the durability of the partnership after the crisis recedes. In the words of one Arkansas pastor, “[we] did not wait on the

¹³ A survey of Louisianans after Katrina found that this view was widely held among the Louisiana public as well: when asked to rate the effectiveness of various groups in relief and recovery efforts on a scale from one to ten, Louisianans rated their state government a 4.6, the federal government a 5.1, and churches at 8.1 (Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs 2005).

government to tell us what to do. [We] saw that the government was overloaded... [and that we] needed to figure out the answers to our own questions.” That was true in Baton Rouge as well, where the church leaders forged their own connections with the Red Cross and FEMA. The reliance by some churches and camps on community donations—instead of state and federal funds—also demonstrates some churches’ desire to remain at a distance from the state. Some clergy were cautioned by other religious leaders to “watch who you work with, what kind of values they have” and some took the view that churches should “trust God” rather than seeking federal reimbursement. In part to avoid entanglements with the government, many churches did use their own funding, and did not seek reimbursement.

3.5 Differing Values and the Potential for Proselytizing

Another tough question that comes up in close church-state collaborations is that of the values being propagated by the church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious institution. Some of the churches taking in evacuees had leaders who talked about “God sending the hurricane to clean out the homosexuals” and the “abortion clinics in New Orleans”—though not in front of the evacuees, so far as we are aware. Other church leaders saw an opportunity for conversion, or were quick to notice that the word “Katrina” has roots linked to “purification.” Such sentiments were captured in a September 9th, 2005 letter to the editor of the *Charlotte Observer*: “this biblical-style flood carries the hope that thousands of those with no moral leader have been delivered by God into the hands of committed Christians in new promised lands such as Houston and Charlotte.”¹⁴ In some cases, churches also avoided seeking federal funds such as rental assistance for the

¹⁴ Bauroth, Nan. 2005. *Charlotte Observer*. Letter to the Editor. September 9th.

evacuees in their care, although whether that was on principle or because of the conflicting and often-changing information on available benefits is not clear. As with any church-state collaboration, there is a potentially serious issue if aid to those in dire need comes with religious strings or messages attached. This also speaks to the issue of supervision: when the state relinquishes direct control over the spaces that house the evacuees, it also gives up some of its control over the information and benefits made available to them.

Yet most of these anecdotes did not come from Arkansas, where we did our most intensive research. That might not be a coincidence: explicit church-state relationships could have actually *reduced* potential conflicts over values by making the terms of the collaboration clear. In fact, during our research trips within Arkansas, we were struck by the extent to which the churches separated their general mission and evangelism from the specific task of sheltering the evacuees. State officials shared this sense. By reputation, Pentecostal camps are quite strict, but on our trip to a Pentecostal church camp, evacuees' stereos were blasting and the main television had become a home to a tournament of violent videogames. The camps did ban alcohol, and the evacuees were always welcome to join in church services, but there were no reports of proselytizing activity. So while the potential clash of values is a key issue in any intensive church-state cooperation, formal cooperation may be preferable to unsupervised or ad hoc divisions of labor.

3.6 Sustaining the Volunteer Base

The churches relied heavily on volunteer labor. In the initial period just after the storm, such labor was readily available, as people across the state watched the events unfolding via television and heard the calls of the Governor and their local leaders. But as the immediate crisis passed, so too did the state's ability to sustain its army of volunteers. One church had a membership of 1,800 and initially took in 70 evacuees. By the end, they had about 35 evacuees—and just eight volunteers left. Certainly, every single person we spoke to who had direct contact with the evacuees emphasized that it was an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime experience. In the words of one pastor, “why does it take a tragedy” to bring people together like this? “If every day was lived like these six weeks, the world would be different.” Still, volunteers suffered from fatigue, and for every volunteer who took extra vacation time to extend her availability, many returned to work and to their day-to-day lives after the initial outburst. For instance, one community leader explained that his wife vacillated from thinking of the evacuees as “a lazy group of jerks” to a group that she “felt really sorry for.” He also pointed out the downside of relying on volunteers to provide shelter to so many for so long: “if it had been centralized, the volunteers wouldn't have gone. With a centralized approach, it becomes a job.” In the words of an interim camp leader in another corner of the state, within the larger community, “the popularity of the camp waned down pretty quick.” Thus the central advantage of turning to church networks can become a disadvantage as the networks of volunteers tire.

When we visited one church camp in Arkansas in late October 2005, it still housed 100 evacuees, and those volunteers who didn't have to go back to work spent much of each day driving the evacuees to see potential apartments. Some evacuees were taken to see dozens of apartments, day after day, and required hours of driving. Once a suitable apartment was identified, the volunteers helped the evacuees go back and forth between prospective landlords and the local housing authorities who would issue the initial rent and furniture vouchers. The local housing authorities, in turn, were reimbursed for the evacuees' rent through the Arkansas Development Finance Authority, an economic development agency that does not typically work on housing. Here is yet more evidence of the flexible, personalized nature of Arkansas's response—and of the central role played by a dwindling number of volunteers.

Again, Houston's more centralized, government-directed approach provides a valuable comparison. In Houston, the relief effort was overseen more directly by the City and the County, and the initial shelters were on publicly-owned property. It was thus local officials who worked with FEMA to design a coordinated housing program there, and who played a coordinating role in moving the evacuees from the large-scale shelters into vacant apartments. In Houston, evacuees were given short lists of apartments to choose from, and the terms of their lease had often been negotiated beforehand by local officials. One downside to this approach was that it sometimes led to spatial mismatches, as a Houston community leader explained, with evacuees separated from family, far from public transit, or in neighborhoods whose language they did not speak. But local officials played a more direct role in the placement of evacuees in Houston than in Arkansas—and

were less reliant on volunteer labor to do so. With an estimated 111,000 evacuees in East Texas even as late as June 2006 (Texas Health and Human Services Commission 2006), the volunteer-based Arkansas approach would not have been workable or sustainable. More efficient per person served, the Texas approach was undoubtedly less personalized as well.

4. ALTERNATIVE NETWORKS: THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

With local chapters and its own volunteer base, the Red Cross represented an alternative to the church-based relief provided in Arkansas—at least in theory.¹⁵ The organization boasted a strong relationship with the Governor, and spoke directly to the Governor a few days into the crisis. Yet in practice, the Arkansas Red Cross lacked the volunteers to be able to manage an entire shelter system for thousands, a fact that both the Governor’s staff and the Red Cross itself acknowledged. Indeed, because of the way that the crisis evolved, four of the five emergency vehicles belonging to the Arkansas Red Cross were out of the state when the levees broke. Still, *by understanding some of the challenges faced by the Red Cross, we can better understand the advantages and disadvantages of church-based disaster relief.*

4.1 Qualified Popularity

The American Red Cross is a private, chapter-based organization with a Congressional charter and a central role in responding to American disasters. Its efforts after Katrina were many and varied, having mobilized between 10% and 23% of all volunteers in the surveyed communities. In Pine Bluff, for instance, the Red Cross took a central role in

¹⁵ Although I do not have figures on the available Red Cross volunteers in Arkansas before Katrina, in Houston, there were some 6,000.

assisting the evacuees, leading the Mayor to ask how he could help. There, everything was run through the Red Cross, and 19% of volunteers were mobilized directly through the Red Cross. In Jonesboro and Little Rock, the figures for Red Cross mobilization were even higher, at 35% and 24% respectively, as shown in Table 1. The Greater Houston Chapter of the American Red Cross gave out 31,000 checks to the hurricane's victims. The Red Cross's post-Katrina performance was widely recognized. In November of 2005, more than 70% of Houston evacuees gave the Red Cross a favorable evaluation (Wilson and Stein 2006), and that number remained in the mid-60s during a second wave in July of 2006. Louisiana residents gave the Red Cross a 7.4 on a 1 to 10 scale measuring effectiveness, below faith-based organizations (8.1) but well above FEMA (5.3) and all levels of government (Reilly Center 2005).

Among local leaders, however, assessments were more mixed. One pastor turned to the local Red Cross in the days after the storm looking for answers about what to do, and found them to be very effective: “[the Red Cross representative] had succinct answers... she was so helpful.” Yet other local leaders, both in government and in the churches, were more critical. For example, one Arkansas church leader had offered the Red Cross a gymnasium as a shelter before the Governor's plan was formalized. As this leader understood it, to then join the Governor's network of churches and church camps would have led the American Red Cross to remove their volunteers. Yet in the leader's words, the Red Cross was “completely and totally unprepared.” This minister told of a Red Cross volunteer who was so overwhelmed that she simply broke down crying. “They were completely unprepared... I felt empathy for her.” Elsewhere, local officials

described how the Red Cross circumvented their procedures and countermanded their instructions while trying to help administer a large shelter. “We had issues” in dealing with the Red Cross, one local official said. When confronted about those issues, “one Red Cross official said ‘we are chartered by Congress, we don’t listen to local officials.’” Such statements contributed to a sense that the Red Cross was unresponsive to local needs. Yet another Arkansas shelter leader distinguished between the Red Cross employees who “had good information” and the “volunteers who had poor information.”

As a researcher, I was quite perplexed by the negative responses that several local leaders had when talking about the Red Cross. The Red Cross officials we interviewed were universally experienced—all had been with the organization for decades—and highly professional. In Pine Bluff, for example, the Red Cross was well-prepared, having drilled for potential emergencies at the Pine Bluff arsenal. But three things seem to have contributed decisively to the Red Cross’s mixed reviews among local leaders. First, as the quotation just above captures succinctly, *the Red Cross in some places was perceived to be run from a distance, and not responsive to local needs*. One Red Cross leader acknowledged as much. The Red Cross is “a fairly regulation-bound organization. It doesn’t change with the nimbleness of a small organization. We have lines of command, and they are to be respected.” That same leader cited her own frustration at being unable to give evacuees the small amounts of gas money that many needed. “We had the money, but it didn’t fit our regulations.” Compare that to the leaders of Arkansas church camps, who had state-backed credit cards and were told to spend what they needed to take care of the evacuees.

The second complaint was *that the American Red Cross's recent decentralization left the organization without a point-person*. In the words of one Arkansas official, “now, they are decentralized, and there are no longer one or two people to talk to.” The frustration with the Red Cross also seems to have stemmed from *the gap between expectations and capacities*. The Red Cross is expected to respond to disasters, and so was faulted for having been overwhelmed by Hurricane Katrina. One church leader explained that the Red Cross representatives were so late in reaching his shelter that they couldn't really help. Leaders like Governor Huckabee, Houston Mayor Bill White, Harris County Judge Robert Eckels, and Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden are *not* typically responsible for assisting those displaced by a hurricane, and so it was perhaps easier for their actions to surpass expectations throughout the crisis. In fact, Harris County Judge Eckels was awarded “County Leader of the Year” by *American City and County*. And among Houston evacuees, Mayor White's approval rating actually rose to the mid 70s by July 2006 (Wilson and Stein 2006). From an October 2006 public meeting with Mayor White attended by our research team, it was clear that he remained a beloved figure among the evacuees. Whenever he spoke, the 50 evacuees in attendance would nod and murmur “amen” and “that's right” in agreement. No other speaker received such treatment. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina demanded extraordinary efforts from many agencies and organizations, but it was those people and organizations that were new to disaster relief that often received the most extensive praise. The next section looks, then, at two governmental agencies that *do* have considerable roles in times of emergency: FEMA and the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM).

4. DIRECT GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES

4.1 FEMA

If the reviews of the Red Cross among local leaders were mixed, attitudes toward FEMA were best described as mutinous. One local leader pointed out that when a disaster strikes, “you are going to be on your own for the first 10 to 15 days.” Another said of FEMA: “I guess it takes them seven days to recognize a problem.” Still another, a church camp leader, told of how two FEMA representatives took so long to reach the shelter that by the time they arrived, “they were brave to wear those [FEMA] hats around the evacuees. They might as well have worn bull’s-eyes.” That sentiment was echoed by a second shelter leader, who explained to an arriving FEMA representative: “I hope you are a nice guy, because you are going to need to convince people.” One Arkansas church camp found FEMA so hard to reach by phone that if any evacuee got through, that evacuee then passed the phone around to get as many others assisted as possible. FEMA representatives did make a visit to that camp, but only weeks later, after all the evacuees had left. One of FEMA’s major liabilities was that it lacked the personnel to be everywhere at once, and so came to be seen as neglectful in the early weeks after the storm.

A local official explained the trajectory of evacuee aid by noting that “the churches jumped in before FEMA did, then when FEMA funding came in, the evacuees went that way.” That is, the initial spontaneous outpouring of aid provided through churches was then replaced by the standardized but regulation-bound assistance available from FEMA.

Even in spending hundreds of millions of dollars in affected areas, FEMA is not popular among local leaders who have worked with it. When asked about FEMA, one community leader said she would “try to stay calm” and a local official said that his hair had gone grey from a year of wrestling with the agency.

Some of our informants, including FEMA representatives, were quick to point out that people’s expectations of FEMA are often unfair: it is, after all, simply a reimbursement agency, and one that relies to a significant extent on temporary workers. But unfair or not, those expectations exist, and led to scathing criticism on the part of many. One Arkansas state official said that teaming up with FEMA “worked out really well,” and others lauded the joint field office that FEMA set up in west Little Rock as an important vehicle of federal-state collaboration. But such statements tended to be the exceptions, not the rules.

To a greater extent than the Red Cross, FEMA suffered from being seen as rule-bound and unresponsive. For instance, FEMA declared that all evacuees who had been receiving rental assistance would have to be recertified one year after the beginning of assistance, and set up a process for recertification that was described by a local leader as “terribly managed.” That same official went on to say of FEMA, “they don’t perform, their communications are unclear.” To deal with the challenge of recertifying tens of thousands of evacuees, the City of Houston then set up recertification fairs to try to guide as many evacuees as possible through the process. After several such fairs drawing thousands of evacuees, FEMA then dropped the recertification requirement with days

before the deadline. Landlords had already begun to evict evacuees by that point. Although FEMA claimed the last-minute change was because too few people had recertified, several Houston officials thought the opposite: that FEMA had back-tracked because it was overwhelmed by the task of processing the recertification forms. Houston officials were understandably unhappy with “all the wasted time we spent on the recertification stuff,” to use Mayor White’s words, and many saw the episode as emblematic of a distant, unresponsive, and ineffective agency.

Church and community leaders who worked directly with the evacuees echoed this. One Houston civic leader contrasted FEMA’s institutional inertia with other governmental agencies’ capacity to transform themselves, saying, “I am encouraged by the changes being made by the City, by the County, and by the State. I am deeply troubled by FEMA... I don’t see that FEMA has rewritten their book.” Another local leader pointed out that the constantly-shifting deadlines were making it impossible for evacuees to plan for the long-term. FEMA’s unpopularity helps underscore some of the virtues of the initial church-based response, including its flexibility and its responsiveness to evacuee needs. The evacuees recognized this as well. One Arkansas evacuee gave FEMA an “F” for its performance, and then said with some bitterness, “we are Americans, taxpaying Americans... they embarrass us.”

4.2 The Plan Passed Over

In Arkansas, the combination of the Governor’s authority and resources and the church camps’ networks and flexibility together ensured that the evacuees’ basic needs were

met. Yet this approach also meant bypassing the traditional emergency management plan, which gave primary responsibility to the 75 County Judges as overseen by ADEM. Explaining the approach adopted, one state official explained that “it was too massive to be handled by the counties.” To the extent that there was vocal criticism of the Governor’s approach, though, it came from county officials who felt by-passed and unaware of events in their own jurisdictions.

Certainly, some county officials recognized the need for extraordinary procedures and for the breach of protocol. In the words of one emergency management official, “it took a little while to become accustomed to how they wanted to do things... [but] they did a great job as to how things meshed.” Officials from other counties were more critical. In the words of another, “as County Judge, I was looking at the traditional way. We were looking to ADEM for information... [they] were not going through ADEM but through the faith-based side, which is not necessarily bad. But I didn’t even know the scope of the problem as County Judge.” Pulaski County Judge Buddy Villines told a post-Katrina panel that “the governor’s use of an office other than the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management ‘created some problems’”(Demillo 2005), especially with respect to communication. Indeed, unhappiness over their lack of information led the County Judges to complain to the Governor in early October 2005, and those complaints in turn led to the ouster of the head of ADEM, Wayne Ruthven. Sonny Cox, the County Judge for Arkansas County, explained to a reporter that “we had some concerns about the future of ADEM and the direction it was going... we didn’t feel like we were getting the

correct information from Mr. Ruthven”(Bleed 2005). Ruthven’s interim replacement was John Brackin, the Huckabee advisor who had overseen KARE.

The creation of an alternative governing network led to grumbling among some local leaders, and meant that county officials and resources would not be central players in sheltering the evacuees. Still, that does not mean they sat on the sidelines. In Craighead County, for instance, county officials played a key role in creating an evacuee service center that included everything from the Jonesboro Housing Authority to the Social Security Office and local healthcare providers. As another example, the Jefferson County emergency management officials were closely involved in local efforts on behalf of evacuees as well.

One other point is worth underscoring. Governor Huckabee set up a make-shift command center in the antechamber of his office in the State Capital in Little Rock. ADEM, with its 75 employees, was located in an underground bunker in Conway, some 32 miles distant. That distance was valuable if the central threat was a nuclear strike on Little Rock. But it helped sideline ADEM during the response to Katrina, and thus might have played a role in the poor communication cited by some County Judges. In highly uncertain times, physical proximity can be a key resource.

5. CONCLUSION

On arriving in Arkansas, the evacuees were scared: few had ever been to the state, and many had never left New Orleans. In fact, many evacuees didn’t know what state they

were in. One evacuee later told the church leaders that when he first arrived, “I was literally afraid to get off the bus.” Another “had heard we were going to lock them up,” as a church camp director explained. Those fears were reinforced by the confusion and unfamiliarity of the situation. The evacuees had seen their homes flooded, and many had spent days outside with no shelter and little or no food. Even once they arrived in Arkansas, simply trying to sleep in a rural environment, with its ever-present crickets and frogs, proved hard for some. “All of our guests were from the Ninth Ward,” one camp’s director of Christian education told us. “Coming to rural Arkansas was a big switch.”

The initial mistrust was mutual. One church camp leader was asked by a neighbor, “have you lost your mind, bringing these people to a small town and exposing our community?” A second camp leader in a different part of the state explained frankly that “the majority of the people here... were very angry with us.” But the story did not end with those original suspicions. “Once these people go to know them,” the church leader added, “everyone’s outlook totally changed.” An evacuee echoed that sentiment: “Arkansas gave us a choice... there are a lot of grateful families.. I haven’t heard a single complaint. I would give it A+.” Again and again during our research, those who worked with the evacuees talked about it as a life-changing experience, and as something they would do again without question. By drawing on a local network of church camps, Governor Huckabee and his staff mobilized communities throughout Arkansas to take on the hard work of caring for a group that had been abandoned in a flooding New Orleans. They provided the personalized care that was in sharp contrast to the neglect by government officials in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane.

As this report has detailed, the contrast between FEMA’s rule-bound approach and Governor Huckabee’s approach couldn’t be clearer, and is highly instructive. While FEMA was struggling to set and enforce regulations, Governor Huckabee instructed his staff “not to break but to bend the rules if necessary” to ensure that the evacuees were taken care of. One veteran Arkansas bureaucrat described the environment after Katrina as “social work heaven” because the state apparatus was focused not on enforcing rules but on caring for people, an environment that slowly gave way to more normalized bureaucratic channels as the crisis receded. Officials in Harris County, Texas, described a similar environment of flexibility and empowerment: one said that the County Judge had told her, “I might not have done it that way, but you got it done.” In both cases, government officials combined flexibility, authority, and a focus on outcomes. In the eyes of its detractors, FEMA was the opposite. It was inflexible and rule-bound, and its local representatives often lacked the authority to act without consultation with Washington DC. To a much lesser extent, the Red Cross suffered from some of the same criticisms.

Regaining a Voice

This report has emphasized several aspects of the Arkansas approach, including its flexibility, its heavy use of networks, and the accessibility of key decision-makers. All of these led Arkansas to respond to the influx of evacuees in a compassionate and personalized manner. This report has also pointed out some limitations. Volunteer networks can provide tremendous resources, but only for a limited time, and with fewer

formal guarantees of equal treatment or information. For instance, some evacuees stayed at the church camps for months; others were encouraged to leave after several days. Some evacuees left the camps connected to FEMA's ongoing resources, while others did not.

Still, there is another factor that becomes increasingly important once the evacuees' initial needs are met: the protection of their political voice. In the weeks after the storm, the evacuees were focused on the most basic of needs, including food, shelter, housing, and reconnecting with loved ones. Arkansas excelled at meeting those needs. But as the weeks became months, and as the evacuees began to leave Arkansas for more permanent homes, creating channels for the evacuees to express themselves politically has proven vital as well. Houston Mayor Bill White emerged as a highly popular figure among the evacuees in part because of his weekly public accountability sessions in which evacuees can speak to the Mayor about the challenges they continue to face.

This suggests one upside of the centralized, government-directed approach taken by Houston that has become more visible with time. Since the Houston evacuees were initially concentrated in the Astrodome, organizers from the Metropolitan Organization and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) were able to begin constructing political organizations among the evacuees just days after the storm. In fact, the Metropolitan Organization convened a group of local leaders after having made an announcement over the Astrodome's loudspeaker—and the group is still working with some of those leaders more than a year later. Such impromptu political

organization has proven key: when FEMA proposed moving the evacuees onto cruise ships in the days after their arrival in Houston, the Metropolitan Organization was among those arguing firmly against the idea. The last thing many evacuees wanted was to be near water. And later, when local officials then talked of moving the Houston evacuees to Arkansas to get them out of Hurricane Rita's path, it was again local advocacy groups that argued that the evacuees be placed in permanent Houston housing instead.

This report has focused on the role of networks in providing for the evacuees in the short-term. But after the initial crisis recedes, decision makers need to evaluate their strategies not just by how they assist displaced people, but also by how they ensure that those citizens remain represented politically even far from New Orleans. Decentralized strategies made the initial caring easier, but could also make long-term political organizing harder. Looking forward, this remains a powerful challenge as the Katrina diaspora enters a second uncertain year. In the words of one Little Rock Catholic Charities staffer, "We've taken them in, which is great. They needed a place to go. Now, we need to reach out and do something about it and not just think the problem has finished, because it's just begun, really"(Associated Press 2005). Those words were spoken in December of 2005, but with an estimated 251,000 evacuees in Texas alone (Texas Health and Human Services Commission 2006), and with a majority of those evacuees still jobless and alienated (Leadership 18 2006; Wilson and Stein 2006), they ring true in November of 2006.

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