

CRIBB<S>NOTE – July 19, 2009

Driving through the State of Michigan a few weeks ago, our family observed what could easily be described as an “economic Katrina” or “financial tsunami” that has slammed parts of the country. We toured neighborhoods with boarded up homes and businesses. We saw faces of people who had known better times. The extent of damage was pervasive and long lasting. Whole communities were underwater in a red sea of debt.

As a news reporter, I covered disasters. I learned the different impact caused by the types of event that can sweep an area.

For example, fire rages with a devastating heat that can burn away objects in its path. When the last smoldering embers have been completely extinguished and the danger of flare ups have been doused and removed, the affected area is ready to be cleaned up for new growth and rebuilding.

Wind can blow strong gusts toppling trees and wiping away roofs from structures. Wind kicks up dust, sand, and dirt in a blinding storm so thick it is impossible to see or pass. When the wind dies down, clearing paths and removing debris may be all that is required to return to normalcy.

Earthquakes can shake the ground so violently that buildings, freeways, bridges, and tunnels can be destroyed. The collapse of structures can bring an end to landmarks and redefine areas. Once the shaking has ceased, life continues with the necessary retrofitting and rebuilding.

In most major catastrophes and natural disasters, there is recovery within a reasonable time period based on available financial resources and materials. However, when water is the primary source of the event, there is an extensive period in the aftermath that triggers a series of subsequent disasters that are not easily or immediately resolved.

Water is an element that continues to create additional problems such as disease, mold, rot, and various contaminants that can set off even more undesirable conditions. Floods and hurricanes leave a wake of trauma that last long after the event has ended.

Across the United States, we are witnessing emergency water-like events crashing into the lives of individuals and families. Once stellar institutions are not exempt; formidable corporations are eroding under the rising tide of economic calamities. It is happening behind the beautiful tree-lined thoroughfares that connect cities around the country. People are receiving news of lost jobs and foreclosed homes in first-class stamped envelopes. And like water-involved disasters, we are seeing the chain of negative events unleashed.

What can we do?

This is an extraordinary moment to re-form community and, in the words of the late Reverend Dr. Cleo Malone of San Diego, “Put neighbor back in neighborhood.” We have an opportunity to take inventory of our resources and match them with where they are needed. Every critical situation requires a commitment to cooperate. People have to work together and come up with creative responses to the crisis. Now is the time for the Church to be the church.

As a gathered community of faithful people, we are living through a special period in which our traditions inform how we can bring hope and healing to those who are struggling and suffering. We cannot provide adequate attention by ourselves. We must forge a united front across denominations, ethnicities, and borders to assist in the recovery.

As believers in God’s love and mercy, we are confident everything is available to help people who are underwater. Now is the time for sacred conversations to begin the work that must be done to save God’s people from falling deeper into despair. We can organize and join efforts to make people in need our highest priority.