

Watching ... and waiting

Most areas of the United States experience four seasons, but in the Greater New Orleans area, there's only one season that counts: June 1-Nov. 30.

During those six months of what every kindergartner knows as "hurricane season," all bets are off. Meteorologists (see WWL-TV's Chris Franklin below) might call for an "average" number of named storms, but they recognize the stark reality that it takes only one hurricane in topographically challenged New Orleans to change lives forever.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans considers itself an "early responder" and a "forever responder" in times of peril, providing long-term support to persons in need. Here are some tips and reflections on how to best prepare yourselves and your family during the hurricane season as well as steps the archdiocese takes to respond to the victims of disasters.

Can we predict the path? Yes Can we predict the intensity? No

Chris Franklin
WWL-TV meteorologist
St. Catherine of Siena Parish
Metairie

What's the long-range forecast for the 2019 hurricane season?

Everything is pointing to a near-average season. The big prediction everyone talks about comes from Colorado State, and they're calling for 13 named storms, five hurricanes and two major hurricanes, which means Category 3, 4 or 5. Of course, as we know, it only takes one storm to pick things up.

Have hurricane forecasts improved in recent years through better science and better data?

If you're looking at the seasonal outlooks, they haven't gotten much better or worse. They've stayed about the same. But what has improved tremendously is the ability to forecast the track. We've seen the error margin of those forecast trajectories shrink a little bit. We're a lot more accurate as to where the storms will go. There still needs to be a lot of work on predicting the intensity of the storms. Hurricane Michael (in 2018) was forecast to be a Category 1 making landfall, and it was actually a Category 5. But the forecast landfall was fairly accurate – it always was looking like the Florida panhandle.

Why the difference between forecasting path vs. forecasting intensity?

It all comes down to the overall weather that steers and guides tropi-



CHRIS FRANKLIN

cal systems. It's just a little bit easier to forecast as opposed to the actual mechanisms and the minute changes in storms that are almost impossible to observe in real time and can drastically weaken or strengthen a storm. The steering currents around a hurricane are easier to track, so the path is more accurate.

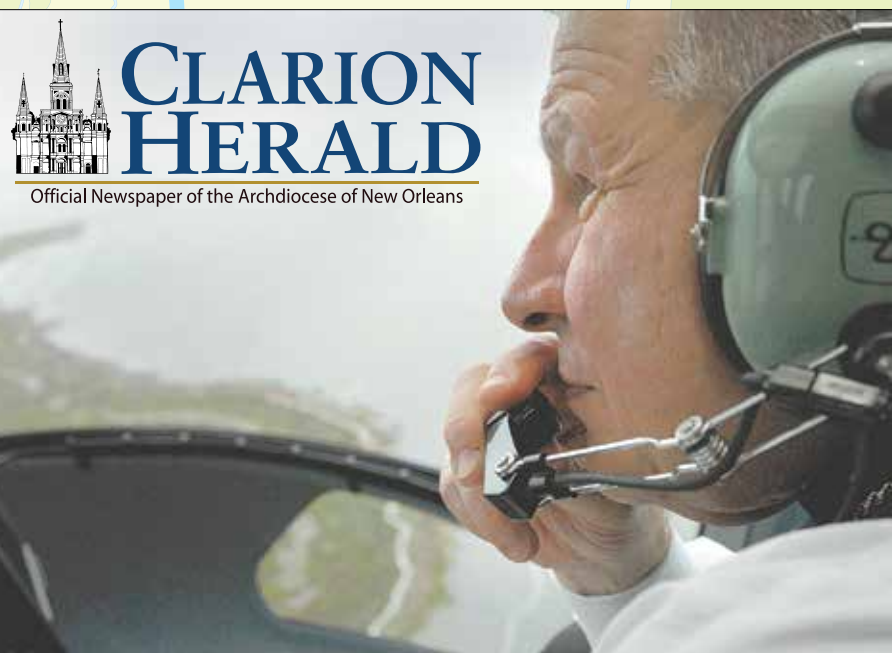
What does that mean for New Orleans?

If New Orleans is in the crosshairs – even if it's looking like a Category 1 – we need to be prepared, in the back of our minds, to evacuate. We just can't trust and rely that it's only going to be a Category 1. These can really blow up or weaken. Florence, along the North Carolina coast, weakened rapidly (in 2018). They anticipated a Category 5, and it was a Category 1.

Is there any cutting edge science coming that will make forecasts more accurate?

They're actually discussing the possible use of drones to monitor storms. Right now, the hurricane hunter airplanes drop instruments into the storm. Computer models always work better when they have as much data as possible. Drones might be able to collect more information.

Chris Franklin and his wife are parishioners of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Metairie, where their daughter attends school.



From a helicopter in 2010, Archbishop Gregory Aymond surveyed the Louisiana coastline devastated by BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

A personal Top 10 checklist when evacuating for a disaster

The following tips come from Cheryl Harper, regional manager for Catholic Mutual Group, the leading provider of property, liability and employee benefit coverage and related services for the Catholic Church in the North America.

- 1 Gather your important documents for you and all family members, such as birth certificates, passports, credit cards and all account numbers and passwords, insurances, wills, regular bills, etc. You can also take pictures of these documents on your smart phone as a backup and email them to yourself so you have them in two different places.
- 2 Take any prescription medications with you and keep renewal information handy (such as doctor's name and contact number). Remember your glasses and contacts.
- 3 Make sure all important computer files are backed up so they are not lost. "I have everything backed up on the cloud," Harper said.
- 4 Using your smart phone, video your home, room by room, closet by closet, to document your possessions, so in case of a disaster, you can prove what you had for insurance reimbursement.
- 5 Take with you jewelry, a first-aid kit, safe-deposit box keys and any heirloom items that may have been passed down or have important or special personal meaning. Take your photographs and photo albums in plastic bags. Remember charging cords for your computer and phone.
- 6 Establish an emergency call list

and update it regularly, especially before hurricane season so your relatives and coworkers know how to contact you and you know how to contact them.

- 7 Think about your home and property. Trim tree branches and limbs back away from your home or roof. Clean your storm drains of leaves, trash or grass so water will drain. Bring any objects that could become projectiles in a storm inside a garage or home.

- 8 Review and reassess home insurance coverage and base this on the current value of your home. Pay special attention to the named storm deductibles.

- 9 If you plan to evacuate, perform basic car maintenance (fill up car with gas, check fluid levels, tire pressure), clean out your refrigerator and freezer, shut off water, unplug appliances and electronics such as televisions and computers. It is recommended – starting at the beginning of hurricane season in June – to keep items in refrigerator/freezer to a minimum, so there is less spoilage to worry about when leaving.

- 10 Take at least three days' worth of non-perishable food, water (a gallon a day per person is recommended) and clothing and personal hygiene items for every member of your family, since you might not know where you will land. Don't forget a can opener and moist towelettes.

A printable version of a checklist for businesses and families prepared by FEMA is available at: <https://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit>.

Catholic Charities: There for the long haul

By Peter Finney Jr.
Clarion Herald

One of the important lessons Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans learned from recent natural, engineering and environmental disasters – Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, Hurricane Gustav in 2008, BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 and Hurricane Isaac in 2012 – was the importance of quickly marshaling its multiple recovery resources.

"Archbishop (Gregory) Aymond likes to say we are the early responders and the forever responders," said Tom Costanza, division director of Catholic Charities.

Full-time director

With south Louisiana's geographic vulnerability to hurricanes, Catholic Charities recently took a significant step by hiring its first, year-round, full-time emergency management coordinator, Kevin Carlson.

"Disaster management is one of the five strategic directions in our strategic plan," Costanza said. "We have a plan where we will be doing table-top (communications) with the City of New Orleans."

Catholic Charities discovered after Katrina the importance of visibility and quick response following a disaster, even though in previous decades it was known more for its long-term efforts.

After recent disasters, including the powerful, EF3 tornado in February 2017 that cut a swath through New Orleans East, Catholic Charities has been on the ground



Photo by Peter Finney Jr. | CLARION HERALD

After the BP oil spill in 2010, the staffs of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans and Second Harvest Food Bank, another archdiocesan agency, fanned out to provide immediate help to those affected.

quickly, establishing food and supply distribution centers at Catholic church parishes nearest the affected areas. Most churches have parking lots that can accommodate 18-wheelers and other large vehicles so that food, water and cleaning supplies can be distributed quickly.

Church parishes also have a large pool of dedicated volunteers and

organizations such as the Knights of Columbus or Knights of Peter Claver, who can cook meals for disaster victims and first responders, as well as help with clean-up.

"Churches can provide the labor, and we can coordinate the resources," Costanza said. "After that, we find a place to do long-term case management."

Carlson, who worked previously with Catholic Charities' Health Guardians program, has master's degrees in social work (MSW) and public health.

"He has a unique combination of social skills

and data management skills," Costanza said. "He has worked disasters before with us. When something hits, he will head up our emergency response team. Within our organization, we have plans set up when a storm is 72 hours out and 48 hours out. He'll be the point person to bring everyone together. Once the storm hits, we'll assess the damage and do what we've been doing over the last several years."

Joining hands

Catholic Charities in New Orleans also has strengthened its collaboration with its counterparts in the six other Louisiana Catholic dioceses. There also is a much more fluid relationship with local, parish and state disaster agencies as well as non-governmental organizations such as the Salvation Army, United Way and agencies run by the Lutheran and Methodist churches, Costanza said.

Much of the food and water distributed immediately after the storm comes from Second Harvest Food Bank, another agency of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

The motto of "forever responders" isn't just a nice catch phrase. Earlier this month, Catholic Charities finally closed the books on its case management response to the 2016 flooding and the New Orleans East tornado in 2017.

"We will be there," Costanza said. "This is what we should be doing as church."

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Photo by Peter Finney Jr. | CLARION HERALD

Ash Wednesday in 2006 was special as relief workers came from across the country to help New Orleans recover.

Louisiana has website, guide, app to help in emergencies

By Christine Bordelon
Clarion Herald

The Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (@gohsep on Facebook) has a helpful website – gohsep.la.gov – that gives needed information on how to prepare for a hurricane, rainstorm or disaster.

Mike Steele, communications director for gohsep, said the website has a downloadable Louisiana Emergency Preparedness Guide that features a two-page checklist for emergency supplies, as well as evacuation zones and contraflow routes and an "I Am Safe" tab to fill in before you evacuate to let loved ones know your final evacuation location.

'Getagameplan' app

The state also has a getagameplan app that can be downloaded for up-to-date information such as shelter locations during an evacuation.

There is also another app

– ALERT FM – that the state uses for emergency alerts to its residents "in the event of a public emergency."

Steele said the state recommends planning now for hurricanes. Don't wait until the last minute to decide about what you need, if you are evacuating or where you are going, he said.

The state plans evacuations in three phases. Those areas closest to the Gulf of Mexico are first; those areas a little farther inland are in phase two; and the New Orleans metropolitan area is evacuated third.

"If we have a full evacuation, the goal is to get everybody as far away from the coast as possible," he said. "You have all of the people along the coast out of the way first before you evacuate New Orleans."

If people adhere to this zoned plan, then contraflow – which is ordered by the governor after consulting with local

parish governments and emergency preparedness officials – is not enacted, he said. Steele compared contraflow to a "Hail Mary" pass – the last push to get everyone out to safety. "We hope we never have to use contraflow," he said. "There is no need for contraflow if people evacuate in phases."

With its border on the Gulf of Mexico, Louisiana's geography makes evacuations trickier, since residents have to go farther away for safety, Steele said.

"You have to get people a couple of hours away from the coast to get out of harm's way," he said. Because of this, there are no predetermined evacuation routes "until we know where a storm is going." The same holds true for shelters: They are not established until the path of the hurricane is clear.

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Novel Central La. evacuation site offers peace of mind

By Peter Finney Jr.
Clarion Herald

The geography and climate of south Louisiana make this less of a prediction than a guarantee: At some point in the future, a major hurricane threatening the Mississippi Gulf Coast will trigger a mandatory evacuation of residents in the Greater New Orleans area.

After experiencing monumental challenges in evacuating hundreds of elderly residents from Chateau de Notre Dame and Wynhoven Health Care Center before the landfalls of Hurricanes Katrina in 2005 and Gustav in 2008, the Archdiocese of New Orleans purchased a 46,000-square-foot former Winn-Dixie supermarket in Bunkie, Louisiana – about 30 miles south of Alexandria.

Even though the 400-bed facility has not yet been used for an actual evacuation, Wayne Plaisance, chief executive officer of Chateau, Wynhoven and Our Lady of Wisdom, says the one-of-a-kind emergency evacuation facility is a godsend and offers priceless peace of mind to his elderly, frail residents in assisted living and nursing-home care.

Out of harm's way

"I like to say it's in Bunkie because it's far enough away and close enough for us to go to," Plaisance said. "It's past Baton Rouge. Too many times, the storms have followed us to Baton Rouge. It's in a very rural setting, and people are very friendly. I hope we never need it, but when you are providing care in the bowl of New Orleans, which is



Photo by Peter Finney Jr. | CLARION HERALD

The evacuation center for elderly residents of Chateau de Notre Dame, Wynhoven and Our Lady of Wisdom is located in Bunkie.

hurricane prone, we have to be able to evacuate 400 people within a moment's notice."

The archdiocese purchased the former supermarket, which opened in 1997 but closed in a corporate downsizing in 2005, for \$550,000. Retrofitting the building into a ready-to-use medical facility over the next 18 months cost about another \$450,000.

It is a fully equipped

medical evacuation facility, complete with 400 beds, nursing stations, internet service, communications links, physical therapy equipment and a commercial kitchen to serve hot meals.

"Evacuation for a hurricane is a such a reality, and this center can be used for more than just evacuating for hurricanes," Plaisance said. "There could be a chemical (spill) issue."

Having regular beds in place is a boon compared to previous evacuations, Plaisance said, because for Katrina and Gustav the elderly patients were moved to Catholic school gyms in Baton Rouge, where their mattresses were placed on the floor. Most of the beds in the Bunkie facility were freed up when Chateau and Wynhoven replaced their beds in major renovations after Katrina.

With the massive flooding in Katrina, archdiocesan officials had to scramble to place residents in nursing homes across the state. Also, during Gustav, even Baton Rouge was affected by widespread power outages. That's why the decision was made to look even farther north for a facility.

The open layout of the former grocery store provides an effective way of caring for the patients. The facility greatly

reduces the amount and weight of supplies that have to be shipped in case of an evacuation. Instead of requiring three 26-foot trucks to haul mattresses and medical supplies, the evacuation now can be handled with one 16-foot truck. The only equipment shipped will be medication carts and specialized feeding pumps.

Additionally, 18-inch-wide wheelchairs used by airlines to get elderly persons on and off airplanes have been purchased to ease the loading of patients onto buses. Specialized wheelchair ramps have been fabricated to make it easier for rolling patients onto the buses.

One of the facility's biggest benefits is having rehab equipment in place so that patients can stick as closely as possible to their regular exercise routines.

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After Hurricane Betsy in 1965, newly installed Archbishop Philip Hannan surveyed the wind and flood damage in lower St. Bernard Parish. A year later, Archbishop Hannan established Christopher Homes, Inc., to provide dignified and affordable housing for the elderly and those with physical disabilities. The agency, which has grown to become the premier manager of affordable senior housing in the Gulf Coast area, currently manages 21 apartment complexes containing nearly 2,500 fully occupied units across the metro area.



Catholic Charities

Archdiocese of New Orleans



Our Mission

Impelled by the love and teaching of Jesus Christ, while respecting the dignity and potential of all people, we collaborate to offer life-giving programs, advocate for the voiceless and empower the vulnerable to foster a just society.

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