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# **In Houston: a Helping Hand after the Hurricane**

Women from Southgate Center in Houston are doing all they can to assist those affected by Hurricane Harvey's destructive force.

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On receiving news of the suffering and loss caused by Hurricane Harvey, the Prelate, Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, wrote a letter to Fr. Tom Bohlin, vicar of Opus Dei in the

U.S., expressing his closeness to those suffering from the catastrophe and assuring them that he was praying for everyone affected. And he added: “Let us ask our Lord to help us make the needs of the others our own and to do all we can to assist them.”

As soon as Hurricane Harvey’s torrential rain began to let up, a group of women from the University of St. Thomas, the University of Houston, College Station, and Rice University (all of whom attend activities at Southgate, a women’s center of Opus Dei in Houston) set out to help with the cleanup and salvaging of property in the Houston area, which at the height of the storm was 75 percent under water.

The devastation in Houston and other areas hit by Hurricane Harvey is impossible to grasp if you haven’t actually seen it, though the folks in Texas are grateful for what has been

conveyed by the news media and for all the help pouring in.

Besides the university women, there are also young professionals and school girls helping out, all of whom take part in activities at Southgate.

Claire P. is the mother of Anna, one of the volunteer university students. She is a great organizer and has helped to pinpoint families in need and dispatch the volunteer teams to do what they can to provide assistance.

The scenes they encounter are beyond belief. Everything in the homes damaged by the flood waters (furniture, clothes, food, rugs, mattresses, etc.) often has to be dragged out onto the sidewalk for dump trucks to collect, since if not discarded all of this material could quickly lead to mold, disease and infestation in the hot and humid atmosphere.

Besides cleanup work, a team of volunteers is also doing “sandwich duty.” The young women make a hundred sandwiches a day and deliver them to families who are back in their homes trying to clean up. One of the volunteers runs this operation from her own home and also lets parents leave their kids with her while they try to clean up their homes.

“We are just happy to be alive,” one woman said who had to evacuate her home with her 5 children aged 8 years to 3 months.

“We lost a lot, but other people are worse off,” said one head of a family in the neighborhood where the women are working.

“We lost everything and our house is under water, but those are just material things,” said a woman in her 70’s who was able to flee from her home in time.

The young women are warmly welcomed wherever they go, and find more than enough work to keep them quite busy for the foreseeable future.

“We are so grateful. We can never repay you for what you have done for us,” one person from the neighborhood told them.

One of the women whose family is receiving help said she plans to attend the next day of recollection at Southgate Center on Saturday, because she wants to give thanks to God for being alive and for the help they are receiving.

The volunteer work will continue as long as needed.

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