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### **Subject: Gulf Oil Crisis**

It is time for another update. Again, thank you to the many who have responded with prayers, e-mails, letters of encouragement, and financial assistance. I continue to read a few of notes each Sunday morning. Your words provide hope and confidence that many need to hear.

To date we have received over \$20,000 in funding to help the residents of the shores of Alabama. Your gifts have been to help bridge those in low paying jobs who are suffering the most to pay their utility bills, buy food, and even medication of some who have lost their insurance due to no longer being employed. Businesses are closing an average of one per week due to the insolvency that has been created. Essentially BP has been utilizing a delaying tactic waiting for the Feinberg/Government takeover of the "Making Whole Funds." People are told to hold on and wait, things will get better. But many of their vendors and creditors are not patient. Foreclosures are on the rise. All this is attributable to the oil spill.

You may have heard the oil is gone. Two days after this bold announcement we had three days of oil washing up on the beach. Go figure? The commercial fishing industry remains closed, even with the announcement that waterways are being opened again. Once the green light is given to start again, many of the buyers have already backed out of contracts for the next year of two. Their concern being any seafood caught in the area will be tainted.

The tourist season has now ended. It was the worst season we have had since Hurricane Ivan. Most of the businesses here are "Mom & Pop" shops, people simply scratching out a living. The interesting thing is that the new guidelines have restrictions related to the shoreline. You must be within 1 ¼ of a mile of the shore. We live on an island. The authorities are only using the Gulf side to determine eligibility. Businesses on one side will have their losses reimbursed, the one on the other side are getting denied. The island is only 3 miles wide. Do the math and you see there is no business further from the water than 1 ½ miles from the water. We are surrounded it all.

Many within the service industry, servers, condo cleaners, etc., know the crunch. We are in partnership with an Ecumenical ministry here called Christian Service Center. The center is completely staffed by volunteers. Even the Director and Social Workers are volunteers. I mentioned them in an earlier post. We are utilizing what reserves we have to keep these folks afloat by providing financial planning, assistance with bridging their bills, food packages, etc. Our reserves are beginning to get critically low. BP had even promised in June to donate \$40,000 to help immediately. The ministry is not immune to the stalling tactics.

We are now told we need to await a “formal policy” before they release funding to non-profits.

We did have Family Day, which I wrote about in a previous post. Over 300 children and roughly 100 adults were helped. We provided, through many of your gifts, 3 school uniforms per child, a free lunch (hot dog, chips, drink, and ice cream), school supplies (book bag, pencils, pens, scissors, ruler, paper, crayons, markers), free household items, and provided entertainment for 4 hours for the kids utilizing an inflatable slide and a dunk tank in which I was “baptized” repeatedly.

I did receive one telephone inquiry asking if we were utilizing the thrift shops. We emptied the thrift shops. Members of Peace Lutheran washed, repaired, and sized every article of clothing. I only wish you could see the impact it had on so many children dealing with the stress in their home right now. It gave them a brief respite.

I noted one young boy who when he came to the dunk tank appeared to carry a lot of anger. He was 7-8 years old. I took him aside to talk. His parents, both of them condo cleaners, had been laid off shortly after the spill began three months ago. He stated that “we haven’t anything to eat the last three weeks other than cereal. The lunch (see above) was as good as Thanksgiving.” After our talk, he seemed to have released his anger at least for the moment.

This was only one of a number of discussions I and others in the congregation had with the kids. This event will be forever imprinted in their history. They know what is going on. Families, many for the first time in their life, have to ask for help.

We, the people of Peace Lutheran and our community, again thank you all who have so graciously provided prayers and financial aid. Again you have privileged us by being at the forefront of a catastrophe and providing help to many in need. The work of spreading the Good News and hope will continue for as long as needed. This I promise you.

I could write much more, but I know it need to be brief. Should you have any questions, please call me or email.

Because of you we are here.

To God be the praise and glory.

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