

4-1-2006

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Recommended Citation

Lorenz, Alfred Lawrence (2006) "Katrina Strikes and Southern Jesuit Colleges Survive," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 29, Article 11.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol29/iss1/11>

KATRINA STRIKES AND SOUTHERN JESUIT COLLEGES SURVIVE

Students Spread Out Across the Country

By Alfred Lawrence Lorenz

Loyola University New Orleans sophomore Kevin Corcoran flew into New Orleans from his Strafford, New Hampshire, home on Friday, August 26, eager for classes to begin on Monday. He stashed his bags in his third-floor room in Cabra Hall, on the university's Broadway campus, and that night went out with friends for "a classic New Orleans evening," he said. As such evenings go, it was early Saturday morning before he got into bed, and then the telephone rang. It was his mother, calling "to tell me a hurricane was heading toward the city." Like most in the Loyola community, Corcoran left that weekend for what he thought would be a brief holiday; the university Web site carried an announcement that classes would start on Tuesday.

Tom Smith, acting vice president for student affairs, convened the university's emergency team that Saturday morning. Some dormitory residents were unable to leave, and the team decided that if all moved into Biever Hall and Buddig Hall dormitories, they might ride out the storm. As the day went on, however, forecasts showed Hurricane Katrina building in force and swirling directly at the city. By nightfall, when the team met again, Smith recalled, "there was no decision to be made; we had to get out."

At 10:30 on Sunday morning, a string of cars and vans carrying faculty, staff and about 140 students joined the clot of traffic headed west on I-10 to Baton Rouge. On a normal day, a driver can make the 90-mile trip in less than an hour and a half. On that Sunday of massive evacuation from southeast Louisiana, it was eight hours before they pulled up to Baton Rouge's Istrouma Baptist Church. That evening, as Katrina's outer bands lashed Baton Rouge, Frs. James C. Carter, S.J., a former president of the university, Si Hendry, S.J., director of the Jesuit Center, and Edwin Gros, S.J., dean of Campus Ministry, concelebrated Mass, and afterward the group turned in—to sleep on the floor.

When they awoke, Katrina was making landfall near the Louisiana-Mississippi border. Later in the day they learned

that levees holding back Lake Pontchartrain had broken, and much of the city had flooded. No one would be returning to New Orleans soon. Smith, the priests and other staff members worked through the next three days to get the students, some of them from abroad, to safe havens. Then the three Jesuits drove west, to the novitiate at Grand Coteau, La., where most other Loyola Jesuits had taken refuge.

Smith left for Alexandria. Administrators were establishing temporary quarters there for business operations, institutional advancement and student affairs. Provost Walter Harris set up his office in Houston. A satellite law school organized at the University of Houston began to offer classes to first-year students.

Loyola lost its Internet connection during the storm, and phone service in the 504 area code was out. Top administrators managed to keep in touch by keying messages into their BlackBerrys. On Wednesday morning, Rhonda Cartwright, vice president for business and finance, established sites on blogspot.com as community bulletin boards. Far-flung students and alumni also set up sites. The information technology department followed its disaster plan and got critical systems with student information and payroll going out of a facility near Chicago. Later, it operated a temporary mainframe at the University of Houston. With *The Maroon*, the campus newspaper, not publishing, editor Chuck Alexander established a blog to get news out.

Loyola's president, Rev. Kevin Wm. Wildes, S.J., had stayed on campus. As the storm neared, he moved out of his dormitory room and into a brick maintenance building, where he spent the night with about 15 campus police and physical plant workers while wind and rain raged outside. After Katrina had passed, Wildes inspected the main and Broadway campuses. Greenville Hall on Broadway needed

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its roof replaced (“It should have been done years ago,” Wildes said. “Katrina helped us.”); otherwise, he found only minor damage—losses he later estimated at a \$3- to \$4-million, though some faculty members would find other less apparent damage to their books, computers and other equipment when they returned—and he thought classes might resume by mid-September.

With the flooding, however, conditions in the city deteriorated, and while the campus stayed dry, it was obvious that the university could not reopen without the city’s resources. On Wednesday, Wildes took the wheel of a university pickup truck and drove to Grand Coteau, then to Alexandria.

Faculty and staff also scattered. Many did volunteer work. Some found institutions that provided office space for research; a few near Jesuit campuses taught or advised Loyola students. Most of the Jesuits taught courses at Spring Hill. All wondered what they would return to, and when the bowl in which the city sits drained, some 60 percent learned that their homes were damaged or destroyed. If there was solace, it was Wildes’ commitment that they would be paid and that the university would work to help them find temporary housing on their return.

With the Loyola community away, the campus became a National Guard camp. Guard commanders asked for space right after the storm, and Wildes gave it. As a result, perhaps, Loyola was spared looting that occurred elsewhere. “I was glad to have them,” Wildes said of the troops. And he still has them. They have offices in Mercy Hall while they continue to help police the city.

Spring Hill College, in Mobile, Ala., 145 miles east of New Orleans, had been in session for a week when Katrina hit. The campus is on high ground, inland from the Gulf and Mobile Bay, so while the coast was battered and much of downtown flooded, the campus escaped the worst. Trees were downed and roofs of some buildings were damaged, but officials figured the cost at only \$750,000 to \$1,000,000.

Seventy students who had been unable to leave



Members of the Utah National Guard operated a command center in the J. Edgar and Louise S. Monroe Library and used the library as a barracks. The West Road garage served as a motor pool and helicopter landing pad. National Guardsmen from Illinois, Oklahoma and Louisiana and units of the regular Army and Army Reserve were also based at Loyola for a time.

gathered in the university’s new residence hall. A generator kept Internet servers and library computer labs in service until power was restored two days after the storm (Loyola would wait six more weeks to have lights again). Classes resumed on Monday, September 5, using the Labor Day holiday to help make up for classes missed.

Hardly had the wind calmed when academic vice presidents of the Jesuit universities were on the telephone with each other, “talking about how we could help Loyola,” said Noreen Carocci, Spring Hill’s provost and academic vice president. “Then Fr. Currie [Rev. Charles L. Currie, S.J., president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities] came in, and we had it figured out fairly quickly.”

“It” was how to help the 3,000 or more Loyola and students from other New Orleans universities. As Currie put it in a message to students and their parents, each of the 27 other Jesuit institutions “agreed to admit Loyola students as visiting students for the fall semester.” The schools would try to get them into classes that matched their Loyola programs, and

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credits would transfer. More than 1,200 of Loyola's students enrolled in them, from eight at Saint Peter's to about 250 at Loyola Chicago, Kevin Corcoran among them ("I figured that under the circumstances, Chicago

Within a week after the storm, an anonymous donor sent Spring Hill a check for \$500,000.

would not be a bad place to spend time and continue my studies while the city of New Orleans is slowly resurrected," he wrote a professor he had had the previous spring). Others chose private or state schools. Some took the semester off.

Displaced students arrived on their new campuses with little more than the T-shirts and shorts they were wearing when they fled; left in their dorm rooms and apartments were still-unpacked clothes, stereos, computers, textbooks. For many New Orleans commuters there was an added burden: their families had lost homes and businesses—in some cases, everything. Host schools responded to their needs unselfishly.

At Spring Hill, for example, Carocci told evacuees and her college's own needy students from New Orleans not to worry about money. David C. Haddad, vice president of academic affairs at Loyola College, told new students who lacked cash, "just go into the bookstore and get your books and tell them your name. We'll help."

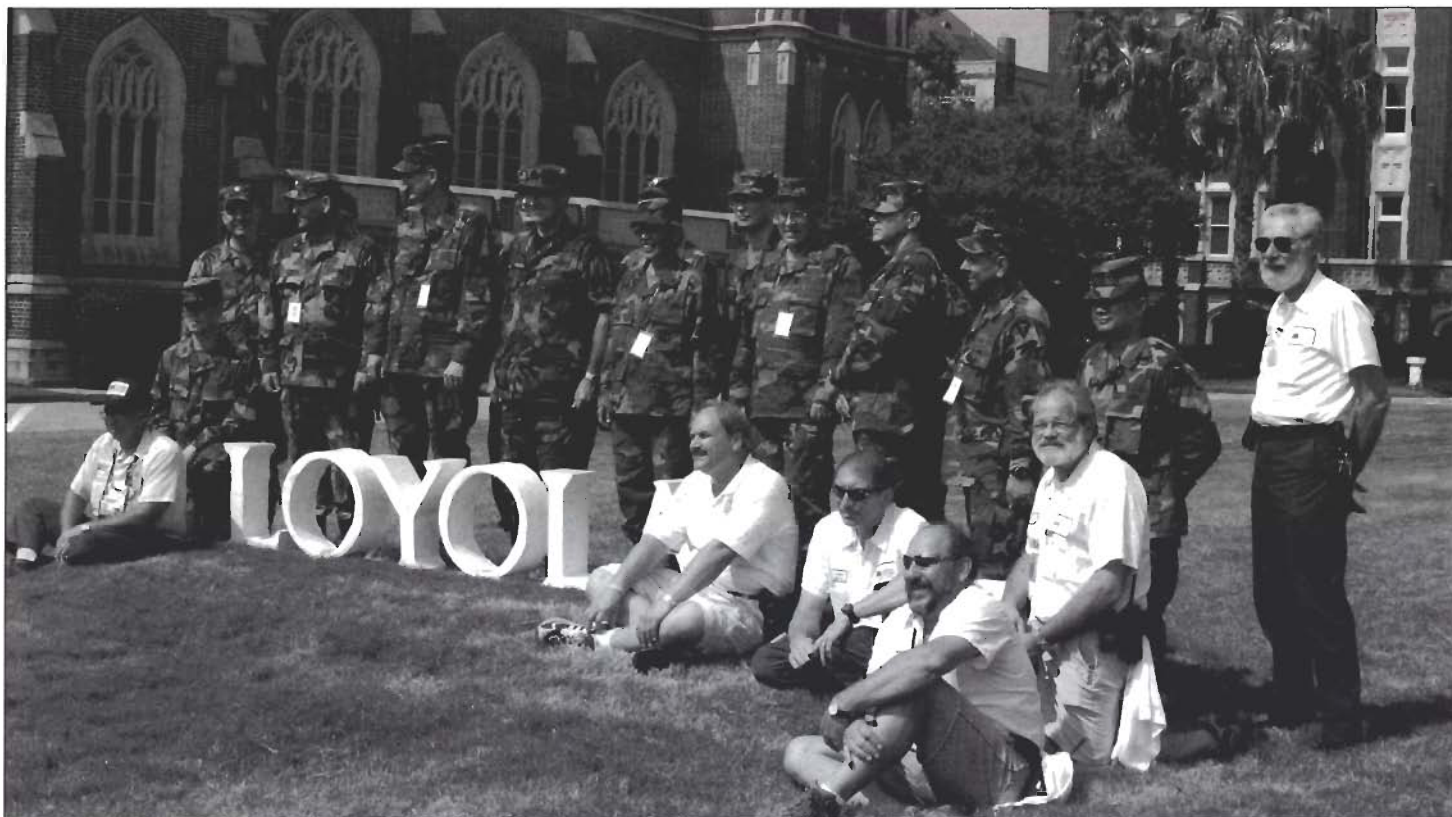
Their counselors also helped students deal with

the trauma they were going through. "A significant number of our kids were isolated from other students," said Christopher Flynn, director of Loyola's counseling center. They weren't all comfortable at their new schools and were anxious to get back, so they "found themselves betwixt and between," Flynn said. Carocci found many students had trouble focusing on studies, "which seem less important when homes have been destroyed or family is declaring bankruptcy." The situation was particularly difficult for freshmen, for whom starting college is stressful, even in normal circumstances, she said.

For the institutions, the new students meant strains on spreadsheets. Think of a poker game with everyone's chips in the same pile. Who owed what to whom for tuition, fees and room and board (and what were students and parents due, if anything, for tuition and fees already paid Loyola)? "It's one big paper, electronic, logistical nightmare," Spring Hill's Carocci said. But from Santa Clara to Fairfield, in small ways and large, the schools lived the meaning of "for others," and Wildes spoke for the entire Loyola community in saying, "We are overwhelmed by the support and generosity extended to us from our sister universities around the country."

Fortunately, benefactors were also generous. Within a week after the storm, an anonymous donor sent Spring Hill a check for \$500,000. Wildes established a fund that would help in "a major way to keep the university together." He set out on a cross-country

Jesuit Colleges and Universities Enrollment from Hurricane Katrina 2005	University	Total	Tulane	Loyola NO	Xavier	Other
	Loyola Chicago	317	24	286	2	5
	Boston College	131	46	84	1	
	Spring Hill	117	13	82	13	9
	USF	111	113	82	15	4
	Fordham	100	38	59	2	1
	Marquette	70	12	46	12	
	Seattle	63	10	38	15	
	Creighton	59	3	56		
	Fairfield	56	14	42		
	Santa Clara	44	8	32	1	3
	St. Joseph's	37		37		
	Xavier	28	8	11	7	2
	Rockhurst	27	3	21	1	2
	Canisius	24	2	22		
	LeMoyne	16	2	14		
	Saint Peter's	8		8		
	16 University Total	1208	193	920	69	26



Texas National Guardsmen who made Loyola their headquarters while helping to patrol New Orleans pose with Loyola staff members on the lawn in front of Marquette Hall. The staff, in white shirts, are (from left) John Robles, Patrick Bailey, Dannie Arnold, Ronnie Ordoyn, Bob Fenger and Walter Casanovas. Bailey is chief of University Police; the others are with the physical plant.

odyssey to tell students spending what he called their “domestic semester abroad” that the university would reopen in January and to ask donors help him fulfill that promise. “We are alive—a little fractured—but we’ll be well,” he told students and alumni in Chicago in late September. University trustee Shawn Donnelly, a communications graduate, pledged to match donations up to \$250,000. Gifts began coming in, even from donors with no ties to the university, including \$100,000 from one and \$300,000 from another. “They were looking for an alternative way to help victims of the hurricane,” he said.

Wildes was also meeting with Federal Emergency Management Agency officials and a private realtor to secure housing for those who needed it in January. And he was concerned about potential layoffs—“My nightmare,” he said at the end of the October, and he delayed making a decision until he had a better sense of spring enrollment. By early December, it appeared enrollment would be down by 20 to 25 percent, and he ordered that the operating budget be reduced by 20 percent and the salary budget cut by 15 percent—with resulting staff layoffs.

By All Saints Day, halfway between Katrina’s landfall and the opening of the spring semester, the Loyola campus had been cleared of debris, the grass was mowed, bushes trimmed. Internet servers were up and running. Some faculty members were back in their

offices. The admissions office was back, though recruiters were on the road telling high school counselors that Loyola was alive and persuading prospective students to be part of the university’s class of 2010. In response to a survey, nearly 85 percent of continuing students said they would be in class in January. A redesigned Web page showed the tower of Monroe Library against the New Orleans skyline, and superimposed was the slogan “Creating a Future for the City.”

Wildes had met with the board of trustees in Houston by then and, at their direction, had begun developing what he called “a focused three

year strategic blueprint to guide the University through this event and into the immediate future. The goal is to achieve stability and direction for the University in our new post Katrina world and city.”

At its core, undoubtedly, would be the vision Wildes sketched in Chicago back in September: nothing less than a resurrection. But not just a return to what the university was.

“New life; a transformation of old life,” Wildes said. “I want to go back and make it better than it was.” ■

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