

**Paper: Fort Worth Star-Telegram (TX)**  
**Title: Ministers led local relief efforts for hurricane evacuees**  
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Four years ago, at the urging of Fort Worth Police Chief Ralph Mendoza, a group of ministers got together to form an organization called Clergy and Police Alliance.

The goal was simple: "To have pastors respond to hurting people," said Lance McCune, pastor of Faith & Power Church.

Those ministers were among the first responders when thousands of hurting people came to North Texas after Hurricane Katrina, and the religious community is still very much involved with many of those displaced by the storm.

Sitting in what was once the indoor swimming area of the infamous Cullen Davis mansion — now home to Faith & Power Church's small congregation — Lance reflected on those first few days that evacuees began arriving here by the busloads and how he was quickly thrust into a new role as volunteer coordinator for Tarrant County.

Because **CAPA** was already in place, and its work known to local officials, it was only natural that some of the first people on the scene were members of the group and that their churches, along with Ministers Against Crime (MAC) quickly went into action to assist. They rounded up clothes and food, serving the first two meals the evacuees received after arriving, he said.

That Friday before Labor Day, when the first evacuees arrived at Wilkerson-Greines Activity Center, McCune said he worked at the designated shelter until about midnight.

The next morning the volunteers were told that more people were coming, but they had no idea how many. McCune got on the phone to some of the **CAPA** ministers, and "within two hours we had enough food and supplies for 700 people."

The pastor had already been moved to tears when he arrived at the shelter that Saturday morning.

Noting that the evacuees had been on buses for 20 hours and that many didn't even know what city they had come to, he couldn't help noticing a couple of displaced people doing what they could to help their neighbors.

One man had found an old coffee pot and was brewing coffee for his fellow evacuees, and a woman had found a broom and trash bag to begin cleaning up the place.

The coffee maker told McCune, "This is what I do in New Orleans. I serve people."

"I lost it," McCune said. "I cried. I broke down and prayed, 'Lord, whatever I can do, let me do it.' "

McCune would remember that prayer when a city official that Sunday afternoon asked him to take on the job of volunteer coordinator not just for the city, but the entire county. Within five minutes, he accepted the job and, beginning with his nucleus of about 60 churches, started to organize a volunteer bank.

The **CAPA** pastors were dispatched to every shelter site to assess needs. In some cases all they needed to do was assign extra volunteers, but in a few places they took on leadership positions, McCune said. With the city of Fort Worth's expert assistance, a call center was set up to assign those who wanted to help to the places and duties where they were most needed.

At one point, there were more than 300 volunteers being assigned for duty every 24 hours.

McCune praised local officials who were running the entire emergency assistance plan for their efficient and thorough operation, and for the way they were able to work with local nonprofit agencies and the ecumenical community.

This community really stepped up, and its leadership never wavered in a monumental task. The emphasis was on the evacuees and meeting their immediate needs of shelter, food and clothing, and getting the kids in school.

From the Red Cross to JPS Health Network to the Mental Health Association of Tarrant County, agencies and volunteers performed tirelessly along with city and county workers to make our new neighbors feel at home.

McCune said the fact that none of the evacuees complained of not being helped was proof of how smoothly the operation went here, even when volunteers were charged with issuing thousands of debit cards from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

When I met with him Monday morning, McCune had finished his official volunteer coordinating duties just three days earlier. The shelters were being cleared that weekend as evacuees were placed in apartments and hotels.

McCune, who will continue to be involved with evacuees in our community, is getting back to his pastoral duties at Faith & Power, which includes continued renovation of the converted Davis mansion, known primarily among area residents as the site of a sensational double homicide in 1976. He still gets drop-in visitors more interested in seeking a peek at the crime scene than attending a worship service.

And he has a quick response to their question about whether there are any ghosts haunting the place.

"The only ghost here now," he tells them, "is the Holy Ghost."

Bob Ray Sanders' column appears Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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*Author: BOB RAY SANDERS*

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