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CCI works to meet needs of hurricane victims

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BOISE — In the weeks since Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Catholic Charities of Idaho staff members in Boise have worked intensely to help find ways to meet the needs of hurricane victims.

Kristen Schlitche, CCI resource officer, flew to Houston, Texas, where she had contacts with Catholic Charities of Houston, to try to identify people who might want to relocate to Idaho and receive assistance from Idaho volunteers. She took three volunteers with her. Schlitche soon found out that most people did not want to leave the South because they wanted to find family members, be close to family and return to their homes if possible. One family that was displaced by the hurricane did return to Idaho with Schlitche and is receiving assistance through Catholic Charities of Idaho. *(Read Schlitche's story about her experience in Houston on page 11)*

At the CCI office in the days following the hurricane, staff members fielded hundreds of phone calls and kept records on people who were making donations, offering their homes for hurricane victims, offering jobs and other services for those displaced by the hurricane, or were willing to serve as volunteers in whatever capacity needed.

Bishop Michael Driscoll named Marcie Wilske, CCI parish social ministry coordinator, to represent the Idaho Catholic Church on the Governor's Task Force on Evacuee Resettlement. That task force started meeting on Labor Day, Sept. 5, with a broad range of representatives including from Homeland Security, the U.S. Attorney's Office, law enforcement officials, Health and Human Services, people from the education community, and many other faiths.

"There was a real sense of urgency," Wilske said. She said the task force worked aggressively breaking into smaller subcommittees and addressing all the possible needs of evacuees.

Members considered two possible scenarios. One, that Idaho would receive evacuees in large numbers. And two, realizing that Idaho may not receive large numbers, plans must be made to serve individual families making their way to Idaho and frail elderly who would need care.

"We knew that Idaho could, on a moment's notice be told we were a resettlement site," she said.

Wilske said the state is currently in "a holding pattern" regarding Gulf

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DISCUSSION AND PLANNING — Catholic Charities of Idaho staff members, Kelly Packer, left, administrative assistant, Gail Makley, receptionist, on the phone, and Marcie Wilske, parish social ministry coordinator, discuss what else they need to do to prepare for possible Hurricane Katrina refugees coming to Idaho. Catholic Charities has received hundreds of calls from people offering to help with everything from financial donations to providing jobs. The staff said people are extremely generous. (ICR photo by Colette Cowman)

Katrina

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Coast evacuees.

"Many are highly resistant to relocating anywhere," she said. "They still have shock and trauma and they just want to go home, but in many cases there are no homes. These people are just starting to come to grips with the situation. They are culturally connected to the South and they want to stay there."

Wilske said all the organizations involved in the Governor's Task Force are working to put a contingency plan in place in case Idaho does eventually receive a large number of evacuees. Catholic Charities is poised to help.

People who are calling at Catholic Charities of Idaho want to know what they can do to help with the recovery effort.

"The best thing people can do right now is make financial donations," Wilske said. "The structures to accept donations of food, clothing and other supplies are not in place yet in Mississippi and Lousiana."

People can send donations to Catholic Charities of Idaho earmarked for Hurricane Katrina Relief, 4202 West Emerald Street, Boise, ID 83706, or to Catholic Charities USA. Any monies received by CCI that are not needed in Idaho will be forwarded to Catholic Charities USA for hurricane relief, Wilske said.