

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE GAMALIEL FOUNDATION
02.28.06

Contact:

Laura Barrett, 314-443-5915
Kevin Whelan, 985-960-1108
Ann Smith, 312-357-2639
Mellody Parchia, 614-292-2634
Rev. Jennifer Jones-Bridgett, 225-248-9595

**HUNDREDS OF PRAYER VIGILS WILL MARK KATRINA
ANNIVERSARY
GULF COAST SURVIVORS TO SPEAK AT SOME EVENTS
NEW NATIONAL COALITION TO PUSH FOR FASTER REBUILDING**

Holding candles and signs while singing hymns, hundreds of congregations across the country will include a time for prayer and reflection in their services, conduct prayer vigils and visit their congressional representative to mark the six-month anniversary of the Katrina disaster. Major denominations, national faith-based organizing groups, organizers of Gulf Coast survivors and national policy and organizing groups will call for six weeks of prayer and action, starting on the weekend of March 3-5.

"Too many victims of this unprecedented disaster are still waiting for relief. The federal government must provide immediate and long-term help that will revitalize these devastated communities for everyone. The survivors now in New Orleans must be helped as well as survivors dispersed throughout the country," said Professor John Powell of the Kirwan Institute and an advisor to the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

A new coalition, the National Alliance to Restore Opportunity to Gulf Coast Survivors, is calling on the Washington leadership to:

- Rebuild the region,
- Improve the lives and destinies of Gulf Coast residents
- Provide opportunities and support for displaced Gulf residents and communities that received them
- Bring federal resources to the region without cutting other human needs programs.

"My fellow Katrina survivors and I have experienced more tragedy in the last six months than most people have in a lifetime. We have lost relatives, friends and our community. The federal government should live up to its responsibility to rebuild," said Dorothy Stukes of Houston, a spokesperson for the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association.

"The 1,600 Muslim, Jewish and Christian congregations of Gamaliel will be urged to act. We anticipate that at least 500 congregations will hold some type of event, using a common prayer and litany as well as visiting their Congressional representatives. Members of ACORN and PICO, who are Katrina survivors, will speak at several vigils," said Rev. Kevin Turman of Detroit, Chair of Gamaliel President's Table.

"Our congregations in the Gulf Coast were unbelievably devastated by hurricanes. The continued lack of response from the federal government has devastated them once again. We must see action from Washington now to abate the suffering of our people," said Fr. John Baumann, Executive Director of the PICO National Network. The NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), the Gamaliel Foundation (a network of 1,600 congregations in 18 states), ACORN (the nation's largest grassroots citizen group and organizer of Gulf Coast survivors), the People Improving Communities Through Organizing (PICO, a network of 1000 congregations in 17 states, including LA), Sojourners, Call to Renewal, Smart Growth America, the Kirwan Institute, Policylink, TIKKUN Community, Clergy Strategic Alliances, Equal Justice Society, IRP (Institute for Research on Poverty), Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University, the Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community at University of California, Santa Cruz, the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, Center for Social Inclusion and Earth House are the primary organizers of the event.

Spokespeople:

- Rev. M. William Howard, Newark, NJ, former President of New York Theological Seminary and pastor, Bethany Baptist Church
- Rev. Kevin Turman, Chair of Gamaliel President's Table
- Rev. Michael Battle, President of the Interdenominational Theological Center
- Fr. John Baumann, Ex. Dir. of PICO, People Improving Communities Through Organizing
- Manuel Pastor, Co-Director of the Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community, University of California, Santa Cruz
- Dr. Beverly Wright, founder and director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Xavier University located in New Orleans, Louisiana
- Professor John Powell, Executive Director, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and Katrina consultant
- Don Chen, Director, Smart Growth America
- Dr. Ann Smith, President of the Gamaliel Foundation
- Dorothy Stukes, Katrina Survivor and ACORN member
- Angela Glover Blackwell, Policylink Director and Katrina consultant
- Robert D. Bullard, Director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University