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Keri Suarez  
*Andrews University*

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## Hands-On Ministry

BY KERI SUAREZ

When Andrews University students awoke Thursday morning, September 4, few had any clue that by the end of the day they would be on a bus headed for Louisiana's Hurricane Gustav-affected region. It was only one day earlier when Jeff Boyd, director of WeCare Missions, was asked to organize and lead the mission trip. But after a flurry of activity, last-minute planning and packing, 42 students, staff and faculty boarded a bus headed south.

Rearranging schedules took top priority, not to mention packing for the trip. Latoya Wolfe, a graduate student, canceled particularly busy weekend plans including standing up as a bridesmaid in a friend's wedding. "As a Christian, sometimes God calls for us to drop everything and follow Him," says Latoya. "I know I'll never be the same [after the trip]. I'm still processing it."

The group drove 19 hours straight before arriving at the Adventist Convention Center in Hammond, Louisiana. Representatives from Louisiana Adventist Community Services (ACS) were on location as well as the Michigan Conference Adventist Disaster Response Communication Team and trailer.

Though it had been a long day of driving, the group quickly settled into their temporary warehouse-style lodging with limited electricity. Meanwhile, a team of five headed to the Seventh-day Adventist church near Baton Rouge to clean up debris.

On Sabbath morning, the volunteers were eager to be of service. Three trucks full of blankets and cleaning supplies were unloaded, while elsewhere the assembly of 100 clean-up kits was underway. Three chainsaw teams headed out into the community to clear debris from yards.

"One elderly lady who had lost her husband this year was especially thankful for the help. She said no one had helped her before," recalled Jeff.

Later that day, comfort kits and clothing were distributed to more than 900 individuals at two separate shelters.



Student volunteers assembled 100 clean up kits—complete with cleaners, a mop, a broom, scrub brushes and a bucket—to distribute to those affected by Hurricane Gustav.

"I was talking to a group of survivors at the distribution site. ... They were amazed the students were willing to come to help and live in the same conditions they found themselves in," said Joe Watts, ACS disaster relief director. "It reminded me of Christ. Christ was willing to come into this world and live in the same conditions as the ones He came to help."

The trip was about more than helping others in need;

it was also a time to connect with each other and Christ. Sabbath evening the group worshiped and shared together. They told of God's work in their lives; of coming to Andrews University; of their shared desire for coming on the trip; and of their journey toward spiritual growth. Some did all four.

With fulfilled hearts following a full day, the group got some much-needed rest. The following morning, clean-up kits were distributed, more debris was cleared and the convention center was cleaned and readied for the team's departure. The bus departed Sunday afternoon and arrived back to campus Monday morning.

"The Gustav trip was really eye-opening: to see how people can be so thankful for something as simple as a change of clothes," says Bradley Austin, junior photography major. "This was a Christian journey of action. We were Christ's disciples, involved in hands-on ministry."

Keri Suarez is a media relations specialist at Andrews University.