

Top Story

HEALING AMERICA, ONE FAMILY AND ONE INDIVIDUAL AT A TIME

ATLANTA, February, 2011 — This spring, volunteers in ten Southern States and surrounding areas in Texas, Indiana, Illinois and Virginia, will participate in a season of service. This 3rd annual service project provides thousands of volunteers in community organizations, faith-based groups and local government agencies the opportunity to link arms and lend a helping hand to those in need.

By rallying around individuals in need, organizations that serve the homeless and communities struggling in these tough economic times, demonstrate the strength and power of the American spirit. Unlike the two previous years, this season of service will be organized by local leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), in an effort to more fully meet the needs of local individuals and organizations.

The season of service is the vision of Elder Walter F. Gonzalez, member of the Presidency of the Seventy for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who presides over church affairs in the Southern part of the United States. For the third year in a row, he challenged every congregation under his jurisdiction to link arms with other churches and civic organizations to render significant and unselfish community service. The first Day of Service was held on April 25, 2009.

When Gonzalez gave the Day of Service challenge to LDS leaders to implement, he said that by linking arms and giving service, every community could become a better place to live. He added that people will forget their own problems as they experience the joy of service.

LDS congregations from the Florida Keys to Raleigh, North Carolina, and from Shreveport, Louisiana, to Savannah, Georgia, are partnering with city, county, business, humanitarian and faith-based organizations to donate thousands of hours of volunteer service to help heal America from the economic trials faced by So many honest, hardworking Americans.

Bruce Bartholomew, Ft. Lauderdale President over nine LDS congregations in Broward County explains, “We want to serve side-by-side with organizations and people with whom we have so much in common. These days of service unify and bond our communities. Like old-time barn raisings, we can accomplish more when we unite. It also helps us to let go of our own problems for a few hours and focus on others who need our help. We hope many will join us.”

Some of the government and community organizations linking arms in Broward County to serve the homeless include Broward Partnership for the Homeless, Hope Outreach Center, and The Shepherd's Way.

Edwin Copeland, program manager for The Shepherd's Way, is thankful for members of the faith community linking arms to help on the Day of Service. He said, "Our work, serving homeless and hurting families, would not be possible without the support of the faith community. Whether it's hosting a family for a week or coming out for a work day, when our partners put their faith-in-action the families we serve are blessed and reminded that they do not face this journey alone."

There are around 900 LDS congregations in the fourteen state season of service area, ranging from Florida to Indiana, each providing service in their community. To find volunteer opportunities, interested individuals can go to www.dayofservice.org, click on their state, and then choose their local community where the projects are listed.

Examples of service rendered in 2010 include:

Warming the Hearts of Veterans

In Tampa, Florida the Bay Pines Volunteer Services and various veterans groups in Pinellas and Pasco Counties partnered with LDS volunteers to provide much needed service for over 1200 veterans of foreign wars. Volunteers made critical repairs, landscaping, shrub and tree trimming, and cleaning the shoreline around the Bay Pines campus. These efforts were conducted at the Veterans Administration Bay Pines Hospital, the Outpatient Centers, and the Foster Care Facilities. The veterans in the hospital and the full-time residents in the long term care facility were warmed by receiving individual hygiene kits, having personal conversations, listening to children sing, and accepting personalized cards from the children thanking them for their service to their country.

Healing the Homeless

In Orlando, Florida, the LDS volunteers partnered with the Homeless Services Network of Central Florida (HSN) and Families in Transition which serves the homeless in Seminole County Schools, to provide critical services to homeless and low income families in the area Donna Parker, Day of Service Chair, stated that there are over 50 homeless camps in Central Florida and that in 2010 there were 350 families in the HSN network as opposed to 145 last year, a 141% increase. Parker's heart was warmed as single mothers with children called to register for the day and thank for sponsoring this life-saving event.

In addition to legal and medical services, attendees had a family picture taken and children were provided with crafts they could make for a Mother's Day gift. An Eagle Scout provided lunch for the project and provided the families with take-home bags of food.

Prior to the event, Allison Estes, Director of the Homeless Services Network of Central Florida, said about Day of Service:

“It is so vital to have these Community Service Days. Homeless Services Network is happy to team with The Jesus Christ Church of Latter-day Saints and other agencies for the ‘It’s About Families Event’. This event will bring awareness to our community of the great need for services for homeless and low-income families. Because of this event, we will be able to provide much needed services like ID, food stamps, medical care, and much more. We are anticipating to see over 350 families on April 24. HSN hosts similar events throughout the year, and we find them to be an extremely effective tool to help those in need, and give volunteers a great event to dedicate their time to.”

“We are grateful to have the opportunity to help the homeless,” said President James R. Pratt who presides over the nine Orlando congregations. “We pray people will be comforted and strengthened through these efforts.”

In Charlotte, North Carolina, the volunteers took a new twist on helping the homeless. Heather Jenkins, Day of Service Chair, arranged a partnership with Community Link (www.communitylink-NC.org) to provide families in transition from homelessness to housing with necessary items to get started creating their home. Volunteers gathered pots, pans, toilet paper, paper towels, dish soap, irons, laundry baskets, mops and brooms. In addition to providing help to families in transition, on April 24th the Charlotte LDS congregation partnered with St. Stephen United Methodist Church and Crisis Assistance Ministry to sponsor a 2-hour poverty simulation experience for the community in which attendees were divided into ‘homeless families’ and given the task to survive. The simulation exposed participants to the realities of poverty. It gave them first-hand insight into the complex world of government services, private agencies, and commercial enterprises that impact poverty. The exercise makes homelessness more real and raises awareness of the need to reach out to these families.

Helping the Elderly

The East Chattanooga Task Force and the East Chattanooga Weed and Seed (<http://www.eastchattanoogaweedandseed.org>) work to improve the quality of life in East Chattanooga. They, along with numerous other community organizations, partnered with the Chattanooga LDS congregations to serve shut-ins, widows and the elderly in East Chattanooga who do not have the means or manpower to repair their homes.

President Richard Youngblood, who presides over 13 LDS congregations in the Chattanooga area, estimated that between LDS and community volunteers, 1,700 people served on April 24th. As some volunteers made repairs, painted and cleared debris from homes, others assisted a nursing home by sewing new drapes and making individual quilts for the elderly residents. Children participated by delivering handmade greeting cards and singing cheery songs to the residents.

“This Linking Arms and Helping Hand project helps volunteers realize they are a part of something larger than their own congregation,” said President Youngblood. “As they bond with their brothers and sisters in the community, they feel the strength of community and a connection to something larger than themselves.”

Youngblood made this observation: “Ultimately, however, this Day of Service is about people learning to take care of themselves but working together as friends and neighbors to do so. The citizens being served contribute what they can. One widow we contacted and volunteered to help was extremely appreciative and commented that she often feels lost because no one remembers her. She could not do physical work but eagerly volunteered to feed anyone who came to help.”

Protecting Migrant Workers

For the second year in a row, LDS volunteers partnered with the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry in Raleigh, North Carolina. The service included gathering long-sleeve shirts and pants for the farm workers so the workers are protected from the sun and from pesticides as they work in the fields. Father Tony Rojas, Director of the Episcopal Farmworker Ministry, said "We are indeed grateful for the compassion your church has for these farmworkers and their families. We were overwhelmed with your support last year and are very grateful to link arms again this year to provide clothing, food, and hygiene kits."

Elder John Taggart who coordinated the Raleigh area for the LDS Church commented on the Migrant Farmworker Ministry: "Father Rojas is a humble, dedicated disciple of Christ and servant of his people. We Latter-day Saints are honored to work with him."

In the 2009 Day of Service, 47,755 volunteers from 13 states participated for a total of 554 projects and 223,204 man hours worked with 1,267 community partners. The totals for 2010 are expected to exceed these baseline numbers.

For more information visit www.dayofservice.org. To schedule interviews with organizers and partners or to follow volunteers on the Day of Service, contact Karla Brandau at 770-923-0883.