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I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to address you today. I am humbled.

We are most grateful for all you are doing to assist the victims of Katrina and Rita.

Since 1727, the Catholic Church has been providing care to the poor and vulnerable of our nation. In fact, Catholic health, education and charities all trace their roots back to the 9th ward of New Orleans, and the Ursuline nuns.

This past year, Catholic Charities provided services and care to over 125,000 people in the Archdiocese of New Orleans – the Greater New Orleans Area. Our dedicated staff and volunteers operate more than 30 programs and services addressing needs such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, abuse, violence, mental illness, homelessness and affordable housing.

All these issues and problems are affecting the hundreds of thousands of victims of Katrina – the poor of the past together with the vulnerable of the present.

Prior to Katrina, we, along with church and city officials, urged folks to evacuate. Gordon Wadge, my partner in leadership, and I spent Saturday and Sunday helping our residential programs for the abused, the homeless, mentally ill and retarded to load up and leave town. We then headed to the Dome to be with the poor.

The first 24 hours, we helped transport and minister to the medically fragile. The second 24 hours, we took care of missing and lost children. We waded out of the Dome late on Tuesday, realizing that we needed to change roles – and begin organizing a massive response and relief effort.

We first sent staff and volunteers to minister to the frail and sick at the airport. We re-organized our Second Harvest Food Bank, and soon were shipping 400,000 pounds of food a day. We subsequently mobilized teams of doctors, nurses, and professionals to care for first responders, police and firemen, and then to other special- needs populations. We have since provided emergency services, case management and mental health counseling in addition to a host of other services.

Today, thousands of people are living in hotels and motels. Thousands have moved in with family and friends – often more than two or three families per apartment.

How can we begin to help people put their lives back together – get a job, child care or school for their kids, medical assistance, and the critical mental health that is so desperately needed – if they don't have a place to call their own and a place to begin healing? They are in dire need of temporary trailers, of housing waivers, of more options. Their brave spirits are in need of hope – of a plan for tomorrow, next week, next month and next year.

Prior to Katrina, 20% of our citizens lived below the poverty line – 30% of our children, and 47% of African Americans. Sixty percent of the residents of New Orleans were renters and only 40% were homeowners – the opposite of the national average.

The week before Christmas, a number of significant pieces of legislation were finally passed by Congress that would help us to begin addressing our levees and flood protection, and the critical needs of our citizenry to have a place to live and to call home.

We appreciate the major part your committee played. We also appreciate your support of the Baker bill and are hopeful of its passage within the next 90 days.

Where and how to rebuild continues to be debated. Many outsiders do not fully understand a problem where the solution seems so logical. Build on the highest ground first!

Can you imagine if the northwest and southeast quadrants of Washington, D.C. flooded – and you had to decide – in priority order – which neighborhoods would be rebuilt first – and which would be abandoned?

In New Orleans, two-thirds of the housing units flooded, approximately 120,000 out of 180,000. There were an estimated 327,000 flood victims, 77% of whom were African American.

Rebuilding should be carried out in a manner that treats the area's poorest citizens with the same respect and dignity as the more affluent. High ground should be set aside for the poor and the rich – both black and white. Mixed-income neighborhoods are critical to a successful future. Without government intervention and assistance, the market will not be kind to the less fortunate.

In recently passed legislation, Congress directed the Secretary of HUD to preserve section 8, 202, 811 and HOPWA housing. Yet as of November 1st, HUD cut off rental payments to non-profit 202 landlords. Many of these damaged and vacant apartments – for our low income seniors – are nearing default. HUD's most successful housing program will no longer be available to our seniors – our parents, our aunts and uncles. Even if the apartment buildings were repaired, it would not be time for them to return. They must wait on their doctors, their pharmacies, their children – their critical support networks.

Each issue, each problem is much more complex – once fully explored.

The recent increase in low-income working tax credits is most welcome. Sadly, however, it will only allow the building of approximately 20,000 units of affordable housing. The new guidelines allow potential renters to earn 60% of the median income rather than the original

50%. Although opening the housing to more families, it does not encourage or require a certain percentage of apartments – might we suggest 20% - be built for the poorest and most vulnerable.

The new regulation also requires that the State's low-income housing tax credits be spent in the year allocated. We are fearful that New Orleans, whose land problems are so complex, will not receive its fair share of credits. Development in parishes (counties) with less damage, and on higher ground, could receive a disproportionate share of credits due to immediate availability.

The construction of new affordable housing units will take time. What can be done today to address the critical need for affordable housing for our police and firefighters, for our medical and childcare workers, for our city and state employees:

- (1) Fast-track the rehabilitation of offline public housing units.
- (2) Increase the number of HUD housing vouchers.
- (3) And increase the value of these vouchers including KDHAP to 130% of fair market rates.
- (4) Transfer all housing responsibility from FEMA to HUD.
- (5) Strongly encourage HUD to work with state and local municipalities in the development of comprehensive long-term plans – that ultimately will call for more low-income housing tax credits, more HOME funds, and more vouchers for our impoverished and vulnerable neighbors.

Experts predict that only 275,000 out of 475,000 people will return to New Orleans. Are you aware the 79% of Louisiana residents were born here in Louisiana, the highest percentage of any state? The most typical local greeting is "*How's your mom an' 'em?*" and close-knit families and extended families are the true fabric of our city and state.

I believe that the experts will be surprised, and that over the next seven years, 75% of the citizens will wish to return. That is, if we have a place for them to come home to.

In scriptures, in Ephesians, we are all called to be one body, one spirit, one hope! To be successful, we will need a spirit of humility and collaboration. Most importantly, we will need God's Grace and God's Speed.

I pray for you and your Committee's success. I am certain that God will bless you and your efforts – and through you – the good and brave people of the Gulf Coast.

Thank you.