



## Subcommittee on African American Affairs (SCAAA)

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### Statement on the 20th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

August 29, 2025

On August 29, 2005, the world's attention was drawn to New Orleans, Louisiana, and the surrounding Gulf Coast region due to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. This disaster changed the lives of many from the area, and the lives of the communities across the country in which people sought shelter and stability. Even more, Hurricane Katrina threw into stark focus the deep racial and socio-economic disparities across various sectors, including environmental justice, systemic housing inequality, and disaster response. As we mark the 20th anniversary of this tragedy we remember those who were lost and displaced but also renew our commitment to racial equity and justice in every sector of public life.

Some of the most catastrophic damage occurred in neighborhoods like the [Ninth Ward](#), a predominantly Black neighborhood, which was under so much water that many of the residents had to take refuge in their attics and on their rooftops to avoid the rising tides. Today, we pray with those who still suffer from the loss of family and friends and whose very identities were affected. In the destruction of the hurricane, we saw the loss of irreplaceable items handed down through generations such as photos, videos, diaries, genealogical records, documents, and other mementos that are an essential means of sharing a person's existence, history, and culture.

This tragedy revealed the fragility of our cities to natural disasters and the reality of poverty among the most vulnerable in our country. Despite the scale of devastation, it took days before the federal government responded with aid. People longed for "home," even though there was uncertainty about how and when they could return. Even once the cleanup was underway, many residents were unable to return home because gentrification caused their former neighborhoods to become unaffordable. Disparities, rooted in historical and structural racism, intensified the suffering of many Black residents.

In the immediate aftermath, the powerful witness of the Catholic Church filled the gaps of an inadequate governmental response to the tragedy. It was people of faith, moved by their hearts, who assisted in resettlement efforts in new cities, and supported rebuilding when people attempted to return home. There are many inspiring examples of how the ministries of the Church accompanied the people of the Gulf region and provided tangible immediate needs. These include:

- Catholic Charities USA and their local agencies provided and coordinated hundreds of teams of volunteers from across the country to clean, remediate and help rebuild thousands of homes.
- Catholic Home Missions Appeal provided more than \$3 million in immediate financial assistance to five dioceses attending to urgent pastoral needs.
- The [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#) gave \$665,000 in special grants to low-income communities across 11 dioceses in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas funding faith-based and grassroots community and economic development projects, advocacy efforts, and long-term recovery activities.



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- The Knights of Columbus provided \$2 million in relief assistance.
- Through the work of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the generosity of bishops and Catholic school superintendents, 95% of Catholic school students in New Orleans were in a Catholic school somewhere in the country by October 1.

Hurricane Katrina exposed the dire need for equitable investments in climate resilience and preparedness. Our changing climate creates conditions for more frequent and severe storms putting communities at greater risk of devastation. Katrina revealed how quickly entire communities can be overlooked, their cultures erased as neighborhoods vanished—taking with it cherished cultural spaces and historic landmarks. Many still struggle to rebuild intangible bonds. Over 1,800 people lost their lives and many more suffered traumatic experiences during the aftermath. Today, the impacts of ongoing mental and physical injuries remain and today the cost of the injuries is borne unequally. Unfortunately, 20 years later, the gap between the wealthy and poor continues to grow, with the once stable, middle-class, now struggling to survive in today's economy.

On this anniversary of a tragedy that shook the country and devastated a community, we ask all people to reflect on the words of Pope Leo XIV, “In our time, we still see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of the other, and an economic system that exploits the Earth’s resources and marginalizes the poorest.” Let us join together, as one community, responding to the call to be leaven for the world. As Church, let us be a lifeboat in the flood waters of injustice.

Most Reverend Roy E. Campbell, Jr.  
Chairman, Subcommittee on African American Affairs

Most Reverend Joseph N. Perry  
Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism

This essential work of advocating for authentic representation and working toward healing is central to the work of the U.S. Catholic bishops' [Subcommittee for African American Affairs](#) and the [Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism](#). We call all Catholics to join us in this mission.