How To: Use Your Church to House Volunteer Groups

CASE STUDY

In response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, there was an outpouring of support – volunteers, money and supplies came in from around the country and the world. The Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana knew that many parishes in affected areas would not be running usual parish programming for some time, and they also knew that many volunteer groups were looking for places to stay. Sensing a match, they called key churches in the region and encouraged them to open their doors to house these volunteers.

St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church in Metairie, LA, heeded this call to action. Many parishioners were not able to help with the physical recovery work, but they could participate in a ministry of hospitality. For four years the church provided housing for individuals and groups coming to do volunteer work in Louisiana. The Rev. A.J. Heine became Rector at St. Augustine’s just after the church had begun to provide volunteer housing. He witnessed the growth and development of this program. When asked what compelled the church to run this ministry for such a long time, Heine said, “Our motivation came from a sense of gratitude. Our church was spared so much damage. This ministry was a way to reach out and do our part in making things better in our community.”

GETTING STARTED...

- **Decide if your church has the capacity**: Consider the space and its many uses. Is your church an appropriate match for this ministry? If not, consider partnering with another church in the area whose space may be more suitable for housing volunteers. The most important step in this process is understanding what your church and congregation can realistically provide.
Things to Think About:

• **Added Expenses:** If you are housing volunteers, it is likely that your water, heat and electricity usage will increase. Being prepared for these extra expenses is an important part of readying the congregation for receiving volunteers.

• **Charging Groups to Stay:** If your congregation is unable to absorb the extra costs that come with hosting, consider asking visiting groups to pitch in. Some churches charge a small fee to ensure this cost is covered ($10 per person, per night for example). Others try to educate groups about these costs and ask for a donation at the end of their stay. Whatever decision you land on, it is a conversation worth having ahead of time with your congregation and with the volunteers.

**Additional Resources**

For more information on volunteer management please see the following online resources:

• “Housing Volunteers at Church”
• “How To: Volunteer Orientation”

Share your own disaster response stories or tips to help a community in need at [www.episcopalrelief.org](http://www.episcopalrelief.org)