

# The Katrina Connection— Prayer shawls and Mennonite women

by Laurie Oswald Robinson with Elaine Good

After months of churning in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Vivian Chapman experienced how prayers of God's people brought her from the storm's fury into the "eye" of God's healing presence.

Expressions of relief and joy etched once-weary faces Feb. 25 at Pine Lake Fellowship Camp in Meridian, Miss. It's when Vivian and about 90 other women received the shawls provided by a Mennonite Women USA Sister-Link project.

"This shawl is the most beautiful reminder of how much God loves us, and how much God's people love us," says Donna, who lost her home in Katrina and is a member of the badly-flooded Lighthouse Fellowship in Buras, La.

"It always amazes me how the hearts of people so far away are tugged for the hurting and how much they care and want to provide comfort and support. Every morning since the retreat, I take the shawl down from where it's draped on my closet door and wrap it around me. When I wear it, it is easier to pray and to feel calm."

These women came from hurricane-ravaged areas in southern Louisiana and Mississippi to the retreat, "Wrapped in God's Love," sponsored by Mennonite Women of Gulf States Conference. They worshipped, shared their grief and received 170 prayer shawls, knitted and prayed over by women across Mennonite Church USA who wanted to show solidarity in time of loss.

Elaine Good, past president of Mennonite Women USA (MW USA) and coordinator of the prayer shawl effort, brought the gifts on behalf of MW USA. The organization's Sister-Link projects connect groups and individuals in relationships to meet

needs and strengthen the church locally and globally.

Vivian and other participants received shawls from Good and Elaine Maust, retreat speaker and co-pastor of Jubilee Mennonite Church in Meridian. They wrapped shawls around recipients' shoulders with hugs and blessings.

"It was such a privilege to be there, seeing how grateful these women were," Good says. "I want to say thank you for every one of those prayers. Every one of those stitches will give much courage and hope to the women who received them."

Good and her husband Leon lugged 160 shawls—attached with personal notes and addresses from the knitters—in the trunk and back seat of their car. They drove hundreds of miles from their home in Lititz, Pa., to

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Mississippi. MW USA groups from the Lancaster and Atlantic Coast area conferences provided the Good's travel expenses.

Women from 14 states sent shawls to Good, who received her request of 150 long before the Jan. 31 deadline, and she turned some away. Ten shawls from Texas also came directly to Maust.

Maust encouraged the women to grasp new hope both through the prayers of those who knit the shawls and through David's prayer in the



Elaine Maust (left) of Meridian, Miss. and Vivian Chapman of Philadelphia, Miss.

psalms. She told stories of how David cried before God.

"If any of you are like me, the last six months you have been sowing in tears, cooking for work groups in tears, listening to people's stories in tears," Maust said.

"We are those who sow in tears but will reap in joy. ... I imagine David being in prison, lying on a cot with tears pouring down his face.

"Yet he could sense God was kneeling down at his cot, catching his tears. Our tender, gentle God can do anything he pleases, and yet he is tender enough to catch our tears."

Laurie Oswald Robinson is editor of *Timbrel*, the magazine of Mennonite Women. Elaine Good is past president of Mennonite Women USA and prayer shawl coordinator. Reprinted by permission of *Timbrel*. For a free copy call 316 283-5155 or email: [timbrel@MennoniteWomenUSA.org](mailto:timbrel@MennoniteWomenUSA.org)