

## News and Current Events :: Some 600 African-American Baptist Katrina Evacuees Sent to Mormon State

### Some 600 African-American Baptist Katrina Evacuees Sent to Mormon State - posted by Yodi (), on: 2005/9/9 13:05

*I was watching the CBS evening news the other day and found this story interesting. I found the article on their website.*

#### Evacuated to a New Land

If God works in mysterious ways, so do those organizing the Katrina evacuation. They have sent some 600 African-American Baptists to a state that is overwhelmingly white and Mormon. The evacuees who ended up at Camp Williams, Utah, near Salt Lake City, weren't even told where they were going until their plane took off.

When I visited Camp Williams, I thought I might find many evacuees distressed at being taken so far from home to a place so different in everything from culture and religion to climate and geography. What I found however were many Southerners who seemed surprisingly ready to make Utah their new home.

Thirty-nine-year-old Charles Burnett from New Orleans had never seen mountains before. He looked toward the Wasatch range, glowing red in the sunset, and said he had already decided to stay. "The hospitality here has been just overwhelming," he said.

Outside the evacuees' dormitory I saw Chinita Chairs, an African-American mother of three being embraced by Debbie MacKay, a white mother of six from suburban Salt Lake City. Debbie, a Mormon, was delivering a trailer full of diapers, cribs, clothing and toiletries collected by her church. "We need more African Americans in Utah," she said. "We're gonna make history," said Chinita.

But making history is certain to mean a big dose of culture shock. France Davis, the African-American Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, has been in Salt Lake City for 34 years. He says it takes strength and self-confidence to live in a state where African-Americans make up less than 1 percent of the population. But Davis says that can also be an advantage. In the South, he says "you'd be one of many, but here, because of the small number, you can shine."

And many of the evacuees seem ready to try to shine in this place that is so different. Looking toward the mountains from Camp Williams, Tahira Lee from New Orleans says with a big, determined smile: "Utah, here I am."

### Re: Some 600 African-American Baptist Katrina Evacuees Sent to Mormon State - posted by Yodi (), on: 2005/9/9 14:44

*Found another interesting article online from the Salt Lake Tribune in Utah. I'm not saying that one of the tactics of the Mormons in getting people to join their religion is to be really nice, but I can see how it could draw people who aren't Christians. It is true, Mormons are really nice. Be praying for the salvation of the evacuees who have been sent to Utah and have decided to make this state their new home.*

#### 'We're staying - God knew what he was doing when he sent us to Utah'

By Carey Hamilton  
The Salt Lake Tribune

LOOKING FORWARD TO A NEW BEGINNING, LEWIS TOWNS throws his arms in the air and exclaims, "God sent us here," while his wife, Edwa, pushes his wheelchair in the rose garden at Salt Lake Regional Medical Center on Thursday. The Towns, evacuees from New Orleans who boarded a plane not knowing it was bound for Utah, are overjoyed about their new home and have no plans to go back.

Even before Hurricane Katrina forced Louis and Edwa Towns from their home and into the filth and chaos of the New Orleans Convention Center, life was rough for the couple.

Drug dealing, shootings and gangs were rampant near their rented home in Orleans Parish, a poor neighborhood now submerged under toxic water.

But since landing in Salt Lake City over the weekend, the Towns truly believe the deadliest storm in American history is the best thing that could have happened to them.

"We're staying in Utah," said Louis on Thursday, sitting in a wheelchair at Salt Lake Regional Medical Center. "We are not going back to New Orleans. The looters can have all our stuff. We're starting a new beginning."

The Towns were two of the 22 evacuees rushed to local hospitals after arriving in Salt Lake City. And that's when their lives started looking up.

Edwa, 39, was treated for high blood pressure and diabetes, while doctors gave Louis, 49, antibiotics to eradicate an infection on the bottom of his foot from the poisonous waters. Louis' doctor said he might lose some of his toes, but he learned Thursday that amputation is unnecessary.

And, much to her surprise and delight, Edwa will start a new job at Salt Lake Regional's admissions department Monday - just two weeks after her life unraveled. She did the same type of work at Tulane Medical Center before the hurricane hit.

Hospital staff are collecting money, furniture, kitchenware, electronics and other items needed to set up a home for the Towns, and workers have contacted the American Red Cross to find them an apartment. For now, the couple are sleeping in a hospital room until Louis is discharged. He eventually wants to get a job in security.

"God knew what he was doing when he sent us to Utah," Edwa said. "The people's hearts here are filled with love. I've never felt so much compassion, ever."

After surviving many previous hurricanes, the Towns thought they would ride out Katrina, too. Once the storm passed and water from the broken levees began rising, they packed a suitcase and walked three miles in chest-deep water to the now infamous convention center.

They expected to be picked up by buses, but that never happened.

What followed in the next five days will leave an imprint on them forever. Louis is chronicling the fights, dying babies and elderly people, rapes, marauding gangsters, the stench of feces and urine, food shortages and dehydration in a book he just started, called *The Convention Center Madness*.

Louis was nursing a bad work-related foot injury and Edwa was running out of diabetes and hypertension medications. "I thought my wife and I wouldn't make it," Louis said, choking with tears. "We were basically on our own."

Louis would fan his wife at night, amid the sweltering heat and humidity. They prayed and read the Bible for solace and comforted others.

When Louis heard food was available, he ran outside and says he saw a man shot in the head. Twice, when the sounds of helicopters scared the crowd, the couple were trampled, exacerbating Louis' injury. His leg was so swollen when he arrived in Utah, a National Guardsman had to help him walk off the plane.

The couple are grateful their three grown children and other relatives are safe. They already are planning camping trips to the mountains and say they will just get coats to deal with the coming cold weather.

**Re: - posted by dougkristen (), on: 2005/9/9 15:07**

Mormons are big into preparedness for disasters... I'm not sure the theology/history or philosophy behind why, but prior to Y2K they were big in helping people prepare and sell a lot of preparedness products in case the world came to an end in 2000.

Most evangelical Christians do not think about preparing for disasters but should. It's a topic for another thread.

In Christ,  
Doug

**Re: - posted by markm, on: 2005/9/9 15:54**

For drawing unbelievers with hospitality, how can Christians compete with Mormons? If "they will know we are Christians by our love," what is the difference *in the eyes of the world* between the love of a Christian and the love of a Mormon?

We claim our love is authentic. But how will the world know the difference?

Authentic love is unconditional.

**Re: - posted by Yodi (), on: 2005/9/9 16:35**

**dougkristen**

I'm not sure of the theology on preparing for disasters either, but my late grandpa was a Mormon, though not much of a practicing one, and he had built a basement under his house, here in California (basements aren't really the thing here), filled with jarred and canned food and other stuff. I'm not sure why Christians don't really prepare for disasters. I know they did for Y2K, but they don't tend to in preparation for natural disasters.

**markm**

Your point was good, concerning the difference between the love of a Christian and the love of a Mormon. How would a non-Christian tell the difference? I think you came up with a simple answer, "authentic love is unconditional". I really do hope these Baptists who are saved and love the Lord and have been relocated to Utah truly will be a shining light. I could see God using this. I hope He does.