

Gideons salvage Bibles and give them to survivors

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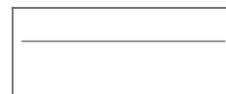
By Dee Ann Campbell

Associated Baptist Press

GULFPORT, Miss. (ABP)—When the casinos first began to open in Gulfport in the early '90s, most area Christians saw them merely as a detriment. Wallace Majors also saw them as an opportunity, a chance to reach more people with the Word of God.

As a member of Gideons International, he placed hundreds of Bibles in hotel rooms that were part of the gambling facilities along the Mississippi coast.

Now, with those casinos lying in ruins, virtually destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, the message of hope presented in those Bibles, said Majors, could hold Gulfport and its people together.



College students pray during Focus Sept. 2 in Fort Worth. Their prayers centered on the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and the students gave \$11,600 toward hurricane relief the following morning of the annual event that kicks off the school year. The students at Focus also gave \$10,195 for summer missions, and more than 1,000 of them participated in ministry projects the afternoon of Sept. 3.

Ironically, Majors might never have placed those Bibles at all if not for Hurricane Camille, previously the region's worst storm, which hit 36 years

ago.

Standing in front of his flood-damaged home in Gulfport, Majors, 74, blinked back tears, clears his throat, and tries to talk about it.

“My mother lost her home on the beach in Camille,” he said as he piled more debris from inside his own home onto a large mound of rubble by the street. “Now I realize what trauma she went through. She was the same age then as I am now.”

“My mother was a Christian,” he continued. “She raised us in church. I watched her when she went through Camille. And it was her faith that gave her strength to live through it. I saw how much she trusted him.”

Majors, then 38, worked with Mississippi Power Company when Camille struck. He was sent to the Pass Christian, Miss., area to help restore electricity. “There was lots of water in homes then,” he remembered. “But nothing like this. This is much worse.”

Admittedly a nominal Christian at the time, Majors was not yet fully committed to his faith. But Camille changed that. “God told me during that storm, ‘It doesn’t matter if I take you home tonight or leave you here. I’m still God,’” Majors recalled.

Touched by God’s provision during Camille, and seeing his mother’s faith despite the destruction of her home, Majors felt called to Christian ministry. “That’s when I decided to become a Gideon,” he said. “I’ve been giving out God’s word since then.”

Gideons International is a lay organization committed to distributing the Bible in the traffic lanes of everyday life, most notably hotels.

The marked change in his life that occurred after Camille was particularly obvious to his family, including his daughter. “Camille changed my father,”

said Rebecca Mills of Tuscaloosa, who traveled to Gulfport, along with others from her church, to bring relief supplies to her former hometown. "He was a Christian before. But he really began to live it after Camille."

Majors joined the Gulfport Gideon's Camp and has been working with the organization for about three decades. When the casinos came to the area, he wasted no time in contacting them to request permission to place Bibles in their hotels.

"I asked them if I could put Bibles there," he said. "They allowed me to place a Bible in every one of those rooms. I don't know who might have read them, but I know God used them."

Majors and his wife, Nell, left Gulfport before Katrina hit, traveling to safety in Tuscaloosa. Upon returning to their home, they found it still standing but seriously damaged by the swell of water that ravaged it.

Prior to the storm, the couple had been able to save a few items from their home. Among them were several New Testaments he had intended to give out in the near future.

He placed those New Testaments in the hands of hurricane victims as they waited in line for water at a FEMA distribution site. Working to distribute the Bibles were teenagers from his daughter's church, Calvary Baptist in Tuscaloosa.

"We gave them bags filled with supplies," said Mills. "Inside the bags, we placed one of those New Testaments."

For Majors, the distribution of the few Bibles he had salvaged from Hurricane Katrina was a continuation of the work he had been doing in the Gulfport area since Hurricane Camille.

"I couldn't tell you how many Bibles I've handed out over the years," he

said, pulling a small brown New Testament from his shirt pocket. “I haven’t given this one yet, but I will.”

Despite his loss, and the near-total destruction of the city that he calls home, Majors is adamant that God is still in control, and that it is the gospel message contained in those Bibles that will be the thread that holds his city together.

“We’ll all regroup,” he said. “God stays grouped. We have to regroup. We have to listen to him. He’ll show us.

“I’ve been through hurricanes twice now. The first one changed my life. This one, I hope, will change someone else.”

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