

2007 Summer Academy

Megacities: Social vulnerability and resilience building

Ritual, Religion, and Resilience: Hurricane Masses and Devotion to Our Lady of Prompt Succor in New Orleans

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Preliminary data from dissertation research indicates that ritual and religious practices play an important role in resilience and resilience building. In particular, practices of devotion to Our Lady of Prompt Succor are important within Catholic and other religious communities. Devotees and clergy use prayer, shrine worship, and special masses and ceremonies to petition for relief and recovery from hurricanes and for protection from future adverse events. Religious practices vary according to the specific vulnerabilities faced by each individual and community. Case studies of various religious groups across the greater New Orleans urban area demonstrate the diversity of human conditions, resilience practices, and revitalization movements.



Prayer at the National Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, Uptown, New Orleans

Prayer to Our Lady of Prompt Succor

“Our Father in Heaven through the intercession of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, spare us during this hurricane season from all harm. Protect us and our homes from all disasters of nature. Our Lady of Prompt Succor, hasten to help us. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen”



A Marian yard shrine stands in front of a demolished home, Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans

Case Studies and Findings

- The National Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor - Preliminary findings from interviews with devotees and clergy indicate continued and increased devotional practices and new commitments to prayerful action and service post-Katrina.
- The Crusade for the Conversion of Greater New Orleans - Preliminary research examines the activities of prayer group members focused on the moral conversion of the post-Katrina city, including the continuation of the perpetual Novena to Our Lady of Prompt Succor, begun in 1995, for the end of evil, depravity, violence, and rosary walks through neighborhoods as acts of public reparation.
- La Source Ancienne Sosyete Ounfo - Proposed research with this local Vodou religious community will focus on spiritual renewal and revitalization, including their annual hurricane protection ceremonies that honor Our Lady of Prompt Succor and Ezili Dantó, neighborhood rituals to raise energy and vibration and bring harmony and healing, and community service projects focused on social and political issues such as poverty and environmental justice.

Directions for Continuing Research

- Continued interviews with devotees and clergy in all case studies.
- Evaluation of the role of religious practices in relation to resilience, particularly in terms of the development of adaptive capacities and networked social resources.
- Analysis of religious groups and activities as popular and religious revitalization movements intended to produce social and cultural change.
- Collaboration with scientists and scholars across disciplines to present findings in policy relevant ways.