

# After the Storms: Turning the Spotlight on Senior Hunger in Southern Louisiana

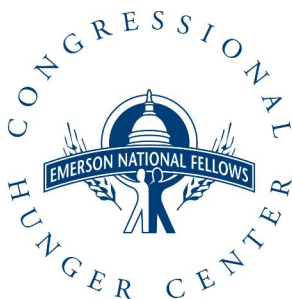
February 2008

This publication was created on behalf of Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana and all the senior service providers in southern Louisiana.

*It is our hope that hunger among the elderly will be a thing of the past,  
and may this document help turn that hope into a reality.*

Authored by Gagan Gupta, Emerson National Hunger Fellow, 2007-2008.

The Emerson National Hunger Fellowship  
is a program of the Congressional Hunger Center.



## **Introduction: Laissez les bons temps rouler/Let the good times roll!**

*Anomaly* is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as a “*deviation or departure from the normal or common order, form or rule; difficult to classify.*”<sup>1</sup> If that is the case, the editors may have thought to substitute that definition with the following two words: Southern Louisiana. Considered as a member of “the South,” Louisiana bears much in common with its neighbors; an unquestionably warm sense of hospitality, sun-filled summer afternoons sitting on the stoop, and the guaranteed friendly hello given to any who passes by.

But such a classification falls terribly short of painting a true portrait of southern Louisiana. Its layers of history and culture form as strange a configuration as the Mardi Gras processions, led by recently crowned kings and queens, that wind through New Orleans’ historic French Quarter. Or the multitude of accents and dialects that change dramatically even from neighborhood to neighborhood, until you finally reach bayou country where the dental fricatives of its Cajun-English make the language almost indiscernible for outsiders. Or the deep appreciation for fine foods and fine music; southern Louisiana is home to some of the world’s finest culinary and musical artists, where their techniques alone are often the most essential ingredients.

But those parades, those dialects, those chefs and musicians would be nothing without this region’s greatest asset: its people. I have discovered a deep love of this place amongst its people, and a deep appreciation for life as well. Festivals abound not only as celebrations of various histories, religions and cultures, but also as intersections for an incredibly diverse people to revel in their common love for this place. But even more, natives welcome newcomers to their home turf with a zeal found in few places, eager to explain the subtleties and nuances that so characterize this region. Many have told me, “I’ve never left southern Louisiana, and I never want to leave southern Louisiana. Why would I?” After spending six exciting and challenging months here, I find myself asking the same question. “Laissez les bons temps rouler!” (Let the good times roll) is not just a saying. It’s a way of life.

With that said, it must be noted that southern Louisiana is far from perfect. Indeed, the region’s unique energy and richness are unparalleled. But its host of social, political and economic concerns also departs from the common order when compared to the rest of the country. This region ranks near-last on any number of social indicators. Louisiana is one of the poorest states, with the single-highest poverty rate in the country as of 2003 (20.3%, compared to the median 11.4% in Michigan),<sup>2</sup> with the 4<sup>th</sup> highest obesity rate in that same year,<sup>3</sup> and with the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest number of people aged 25 or older with high school diplomas in 2006.<sup>4</sup> And whether because of limited resources, a lack of political will or an incomplete understanding of the issues facing this region, the overall fight to reverse these trends in southern Louisiana has always been a formative challenge.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition* (2000), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>2</sup> American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, “Percent of People Below Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months,” (2003) <<http://www.censusbureau.biz/acs/www/Products/Ranking/2003/R01T040.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Trust for American’s Health, “The State of Your Health: Louisiana, Key Health Facts,” (2003) <<http://healthyamericans.org/state/index.php?StateID=LA>>.

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau (2006), <[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=04000US22&-\\_box\\_head\\_nbr=R1501&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_&-\\_lang=en&-format=US-30&-\\_sse=on](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US22&-_box_head_nbr=R1501&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_&-_lang=en&-format=US-30&-_sse=on)>.

But what no one knew is that the region was about to experience its biggest challenge yet. On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, followed by Hurricane Rita in the region's western parishes on September 24<sup>th</sup> of that same year. Together, the hurricanes were two of the costliest and deadliest ever recorded, permanently altering the landscape of this region. Millions were displaced, entire neighborhoods and towns destroyed, and the vibrant sense of life unique to this region almost came to a standstill.

### **After the Storms: Turning the Spotlight on Senior Hunger**

The storms, like most natural disasters, were indiscriminate. Few, if any, residents of southern Louisiana were untouched by the devastation following the hurricanes. And this was particularly true of the region's food needs which increased for every single demographic group. Every person, regardless of who they were or where they came from, needed to eat in order to survive. And needless to say, food was scarce during this time.

What most people fail to realize, however, is that these struggles were particularly dramatic for the region's seniors, arguably the hardest hit group in southern Louisiana. For example, it is estimated that 74% of storm-related deaths in the city of New Orleans were senior citizens, and this figure is by no means unique to Orleans Parish.<sup>5</sup> And seniors were *already* uniquely vulnerable to hunger; limited public transportation networks, financial constraints and a lack of available food retail outlets made guaranteed access to food uncertain at best.

But almost two and a half years later, the situation has only grown worse. Seniors continue to divert already limited resources to rebuilding their homes, and food retail outlets continue to go out-of-business. Furthermore, the transportation network remains fragmented, and even in many places where the network is recovering, there is still only a limited presence of accessible grocery stores, especially for immobile or slightly mobile seniors. And many of these seniors also live alone, whether because their family lives in another city, or even another state, or because they simply have no living family members to look after them. When all of these factors are considered, it is remarkable how a number of seniors in the worst of these situations are able to secure food at all.

### **Ever-Changing Demographics**

Many organizations are taking on the challenge of assisting these seniors, by developing programming to curb hunger in the emergency recovery effort, as well as by investigating long-term solutions to address the root causes of senior hunger. But as they have moved forward with these plans, these same organizations have realized the importance of first understanding the new circumstances of seniors in need.

These new circumstances, largely involving the barrier of access and availability discussed above, are as varied and nuanced as the street names of uptown New Orleans. But a number of senior service organizations, private partners and donors, public officials and even volunteers have pointed out the need to understand and calculate the current numbers of seniors still in need, and the extent of that need.

---

<sup>5</sup> "A Look at the Community," The New Orleans Council on Aging/New Orleans Area Agency on Aging Fiscal Year 2007-2011 Area Plan, Section Three (2006).

This information would improve the development of anti-hunger programming in the short-term, and would provide a deeper understanding of the appropriate long-term solutions, particularly in the context of post-disaster recovery.

Unfortunately, however, this information is both unavailable and difficult to collect. The most current, available data documenting poverty statistics for seniors in southern Louisiana dates back to the 2000 National Census.<sup>6</sup> And of course, senior poverty statistics, along with every other demographic measure imaginable, have changed dramatically since the storms.

To be fair, an ever-changing demographic landscape makes any accurate assessment of such trends almost impossible. Millions were displaced, and others continue to come and go as they rebuild their lives.

But complicating matters further is the minimal attention and emphasis placed on updating and cataloging these important trends as best as possible. And the importance of understanding this region's demographic trends from the past few years, as discussed above, cannot be stressed enough.

Because this lack of attention is so striking, I have focused my Hunger Free Community Report not only on determining the current numbers of seniors in need throughout GNOA's 23 parishes in southern Louisiana, but also on measuring the extent of that need, *as best as possible given what we currently know*. Additional research must be conducted to develop a true picture of senior demographics in this region. But in the meantime, I hope that my research will provide a temporary but thoughtful lens through which to view the current plight of this region's seniors, and the current service-gaps that need to be addressed. For a complete methodology of how these statistics were determined, please consult Appendix B.

---

<sup>6</sup> Seniors defined as individuals 60 years of age or older; southern Louisiana defined as the southern 23 Louisiana parishes served by Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana. For a full parish listing, please see Appendix A.

**Table 1: Senior Population Totals and 2006 Poverty Estimates for GNOA's Service Area (southern Louisiana)**

Parish	Senior Pop. (before) (2000)	Senior Pop. (after) (2006)	% Change	In Poverty (before) (2000)	<b>Estimated in Poverty (after) (2006)</b>	% Change
Acadia	9,570	10,060	5.12	2,246	<b>2361</b>	0.05
Beauregard	4,911*	6,013	22.44	750	<b>918</b>	0.22
Calcasieu	29,007	31,111	7.25	4,007	<b>4298</b>	0.07
Cameron	1,503	1,333	<b>-11.31</b>	241	<b>214</b>	<b>-0.11</b>
Evangeline	5,950	5,979	0.49	1,703	<b>1711</b>	0.00
Iberia	11,154	12,113	8.60	2,150	<b>2335</b>	0.09
Jefferson	78,630*	81,455	3.59	7,007	<b>7259</b>	0.04
Jefferson Davis	5,549	5,702	2.76	1,083	<b>3580</b>	2.31
Lafayette	24,420	28,096	15.05	3,246	<b>3735</b>	0.15
Lafourche	16,593*	15,325	<b>-7.64</b>	2,200	<b>2032</b>	<b>-0.08</b>
Orleans	73,331*	44,272**	<b>-39.63</b>	14,233	<b>8593</b>	<b>-0.40</b>
Plaquemines	3,647	3,501	<b>-4.00</b>	756	<b>726</b>	<b>-0.04</b>
St. Bernard	11,859	2,992	<b>-74.77</b>	1,292	<b>326</b>	<b>-0.75</b>
St. Charles	5,796	7,235	24.83	692	<b>864</b>	0.25
St. John the Baptist	4,790	6,105	27.45	809	<b>1031</b>	0.27
St. Landry	16,031*	16,485	2.83	3,972	<b>4084</b>	0.03
St. Martin	6,790	7,632	12.40	1,406	<b>1580</b>	0.12
St. Mary	8,164	9,024	10.53	1,582	<b>1749</b>	0.11
St. Tammany	26,285	36,949	40.57	2,479	<b>3485</b>	0.41
Tangipahoa	16,521*	16,959	2.65	2,743	<b>2816</b>	0.03
Terrebonne	18,288*	16,544	<b>-9.54</b>	2,278	<b>2061</b>	<b>-0.10</b>
Vermillion	9,498	9,786	3.03	1,804	<b>1859</b>	0.03
Washington	8,221	8,384	1.98	1,616	<b>1648</b>	0.02

\*100% of the poverty line for all estimates in Table 1

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, provided by Margaret McGarity of the Louisiana Governor's Office on Elderly Affairs

\*American Community Survey (ACS), 2005 Gulf Coast Area Data Profiles - <http://www.census.gov/acs>

Governor's Office on Elderly Affairs (Margaret McGarity)

\*\*NOCOA FY 2007-2011 AREA PLAN - (SECTION THREE)

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Sample Data File

**Table 2: Extent of Senior Services before and after the storms for GNOA's Service Area (southern Louisiana)**

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Estimated in Poverty (2006)</u>	<u>Seniors Served (before)</u>	<u>Seniors Served (after)</u>	<u># Meal Sites (before)</u>	<u># Meal Sites (after)</u>	<u>Income Eligibility?</u>	<u>Weekends?</u>	<u>Holidays?</u>	<u>FFF/FFS (Sept. 2007)</u>
Acadia	2361	350-370	350-370	3	3	yes	no	no	1994
Beauregard	918	---	156	2	2	yes	no	no	1086
Calcasieu	4298	---	---	---	12	---	---	---	1818
Cameron	214	120	150-160	4	2	no	no	no	262
Evangeline	1711	422	362	5	5	no	no	no	1309
Iberia	2335	---	320	4	4	no	no	no	1233
Jefferson	7259	1500	1200	19	13	no	no	no	< 4443
Jefferson Davis	3580	250	250	4	4	no	no	no	738
Lafayette	3735	600	450-500	5	5	no	no	no	1933
Lafourche	2032	---	---	7	7	no	no	some	1484
Orleans	8593	2,000	600	32	10	no	no	yes	< 4443
Plaquemines	726	200	90-100	4	2	yes	no	yes	0
St. Bernard	326	500	35-50	1	1	no	no	no	0
St. Charles	864	> 233	233	4	4	no	some	---	459
St. John the Baptist	1031	160-180	180-200	3	3	no	no	no	493
St. Landry	4084	> 750	750	---	---	no	no	no	3295
St. Martin	1580	340	298	2	2	no	no	some	1217
St. Mary	1749	323	323	4	4	no	no	some	912
St. Tammany	3485	---	300-350	7	7	no	no	no	831
Tangipahoa	2816	325-375	350-400	6	6	no	no	no	1845
Terrebonne	2061	850	850	8	8	no	no	no	1979
Vermillion	1859	350	310	5	4	no	no	no	1084
Washington	1648	300	275	4	3	no	no	no	1261

\*100% of the poverty line

\*130% poverty

Sources: Table 1

\*The remaining information was collected from each respective parish's Council on Aging, except the final column which records the distribution numbers of Louisiana's Food For Seniors/Food For Families program for September, 2007

--- Denotes an unknown or a no response.

## Analyzing the Data: Many Seniors Still in Need

As both Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate, many seniors are still in need. And the extent of that need is not only significant, but has grown significantly following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

### *Table 1:*

Table 1 demonstrates that the estimated number of seniors in poverty has risen for almost every parish.

Upon further inspection, however, it appears that these increases were only marginal. In other words, the increases only range from than +0.25% to +2.50%. But as the methodology in Appendix B points out, these estimates provide the baseline assessment of the current numbers of seniors in poverty. Therefore, we can conclude the following with confidence:

- 1.) Poverty rates, at minimum, have increased across the board in southern Louisiana.
- 2.) Because these estimates provide the baseline assessment, and because of the methodological approach discussed in Appendix B, senior poverty rates have likely increased much more dramatically than the estimates show.
- 3.) The estimates provided in Table 1 only provide a starting point for understanding the true need in southern Louisiana.

Furthermore, six parishes seem to have had actual decreases in their poverty rates. But this phenomenon can be easily explained. First, these parishes were also alone in experiencing decreases in their total post-storm senior populations. And as we know, many of the absolute poorest seniors were unable to return home following the storms (due to financial constraints, or worse, not surviving the storms). As a result, they moved to different parishes, or to different regions of the country altogether, contributing to the decline in both population totals and poverty estimates demonstrated in Table 1.

Nonetheless, it is an important finding that, at minimum, senior poverty rates have increased across the board following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

### *Table 2:*

Table 2 demonstrates that the need is still great in southern Louisiana, and that many service gaps still need to be addressed.

The information in Table 2 comes largely from the semi-autonomous, parish-level Councils on Aging (CoA) which govern the delivery of senior services throughout their respective jurisdictions. Specifically, as discussed in Appendix B, the Councils on Aging were queried in regards to their nutrition programs, all of which provide hot lunches during the work week, Monday through Friday.

As Table 1 demonstrates, 15 of the 23 parishes experienced significant decreases in their service capacities following the storms. Almost every parish reported a rise in both first-time seniors registering for their nutrition programs, and in seniors placed on waiting lists. But most striking of all were the remarks and comments from the Council on Aging nutrition directors

concerning their diminished ability to serve seniors in need. As Table 2 demonstrates, seven parishes lost entire meal sites to the storms, and no parish was able to gain meal sites following the storms. The rebuilding process is still in full-swing, and many parishes hope to regain functioning meal sites, despite scarce resources.

Furthermore, Councils on Aging noted staffing difficulties and depleted volunteer bases as additional reasons for their diminished service capacities. The sweeping elimination of income eligibility requirements (19 of the 23 parishes) also suggests that the Councils on Aging determined the need to be so great as to allow any senior, regardless of income, to register for CoA nutrition programs. In other words, even financially secure seniors may have difficulty securing food in a post-disaster environment, for many of the reasons discussed above.

Finally, the significant numbers of seniors served by the Food for Families/Food for Seniors must be considered (the final column of Table 2). Initially it appears as if FFF/FFS is filling the remaining gaps in GNOA's service area. But such an interpretation would slightly miss the mark. While this program does serve tens of thousands of seniors throughout Louisiana, it provides these seniors with a 40-pound box of commodities once-a-month. And while this supplement goes a long way in helping seniors avoid hunger, it falls extremely short of the daily meals provided by the Councils on Aging. In other words, while FFF/FFS does serve thousands of seniors a month, these seniors are still unable to meet their monthly food needs, especially those that are not simultaneously receiving the daily lunches through the parish-level Councils on Aging.

Furthermore, eligibility for the Food for Families/Food for Seniors program is governed by strict income guidelines, set at 130% of the poverty line. Therefore, this program's participation numbers account for the minimum numbers of seniors in need for each parish, demonstrating that there are indeed tens of thousands of seniors still in need.

And this conclusion also underscores the validity of GNOA's poverty estimates as baseline assessments of senior need. In other words, the program participation numbers often approximate GNOA's own poverty estimates, justifying the estimates with tangible program participation records. For example, if 2,361 seniors are estimated to be in poverty in Acadia Parish, and 1,994 are being served by FFF/FFS, then our estimates are indeed very close to the real situation in Acadia. And FFF/FFS has commented that they are still not capturing a significant number of seniors in need, leading any observer to conclude that indeed, GNOA's estimates serve as absolute baseline assessments.

## **Conclusions and Prescriptions**

For anyone who has spent significant time in southern Louisiana after the storms, it goes without saying that the need here is overwhelming. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita left this once vibrant region broken and devastated in so many ways. In some places, the physical damage was almost cataclysmic, and the psychological, emotional and financial damage can still be felt almost everywhere.

And as the data clearly demonstrates, seniors were especially affected by every form of devastation that the hurricanes left behind. Preexisting barriers to food security were worsened by the storms, and these barriers continue to disproportionately affect seniors; transportation, availability, access, choice, and cost, to name a few. And the mental and emotional stability of many of this region's seniors is tenuous, at best.



Most striking, however, are the current numbers of seniors still in need, and the growing gaps in senior services. Not only did the storms force thousands of former middle-class seniors into poverty, but they also disturbed the delicate financial balance of already impoverished seniors. And they destroyed many service organizations attempting to help those seniors continue to live meaningful lives.

This situation must be addressed. It is my hope that this Hunger Free Community Report, despite its cumbersome methodology, will be a step in that direction.

### Addressing the Research and Service Gaps

At minimum, this report highlights the need for more research to understand the current realities in southern Louisiana, especially for the most vulnerable demographic groups, such as seniors. Without understanding why and how these vulnerable populations are struggling after the storms, and without understanding the complete impact of the storms from numerous perspectives, intentional programming and adequate long-term solutions cannot be developed.

The lack of government and public support for both quantitative and qualitative research, especially so long after the storms, is frankly a travesty. Though the serious instance of hunger and poverty in southern Louisiana may be obvious for the region's residents, many do not understand how to address these complicated issues. And to make matters worse, outsiders are beginning to wrongly assume that Louisiana's recovery effort is complete.

In the meantime, emergency programs targeting senior hunger must be implemented throughout the entire southern region of Louisiana. The storms diminished an already insufficient supply of such programs, and the service gaps are only increasing. And until long-term solutions that target the root causes of senior hunger can be developed for this region, seniors must be provided with additional food assistance.

### The Senior Brown Bag Program<sup>1</sup>

As part of my time with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana, I have developed and implemented one such program targeting seniors who are at risk of hunger. Specifically, the Senior Brown Bag Program will supplement existing senior meal services that are already helping seniors avoid hunger, such as the Meals on Wheels services operating through localized senior centers.

Many of those services, however, are closed during weekends and holidays, leaving many seniors without access to food during this time. For example, the senior centers, organized by the semi-autonomous, parish-level Councils on Aging described above, provide hot lunches during the week, Monday through Friday. But like most other service-oriented organizations, they too are closed on the weekends. It is this gap in preexisting services that the Brown Bag Program will address.

Every Friday, the food bank delivers a box of easy-to-prepare, nutritionally appropriate food to low-income seniors in cooperation with these preexisting services. These meal kits contain approximately 12 low-sodium and low-sugar food items, including fresh produce when

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information regarding the Brown Bag Program, and becoming a Brown Bag Program host site, please contact GNOA at 504.734.1322, or visit their website at [www.no-hunger.org](http://www.no-hunger.org)

available. The seniors also receive a monthly newsletter, offering information about nutrition and services for the elderly.

The food bank recognizes that its new program is only an emergency solution to ending senior hunger. But such a solution is more than appropriate for a region recovering from such a terrible disaster. If you wish to receive more information about the Senior Brown Bag Program, or about becoming a Senior Brown Bag Program host site, please contact GNOA at 504.734.1322, or visit their website at [www.no-hunger.org](http://www.no-hunger.org).

## **Final Thoughts**

The descriptions above paint a portrait of not only what southern Louisiana used to be, but of what it is becoming now. In other words, it is important to note that despite the challenges and difficulties of such an exhausting recovery effort, this region is indeed recovering, and at a remarkable pace.

Witnessing this region's traditions and festivals continue largely undisturbed, with even more energy and enthusiasm than before, provides a glimmer of hope for tourists and locals alike. Or watching the region come together to form Food Policy Councils, or to tackle historically challenging issues such as housing, education and infrastructure, makes any observer confident that region is well on its way to outshining its glory days.

In other words, this region cannot be forgotten, both for the utter devastation caused by the storms, but also for the region's uniqueness and cultural nuances. And in particular, its seniors must not be forgotten, who enrich and understand this place more than anyone living today. At minimum, the very people who created the region that so many visit and appreciate today deserve our help. If not for them, there would be no southern Louisiana today.

**Appendix A**23 Parishes Served by Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana

Acadia  
Beauregard  
Calcasieu  
Cameron  
Evangeline  
Iberia  
Jefferson  
Jefferson Davis  
Lafayette  
Lafourche  
Orleans  
Plaquemines  
St. Bernard  
St. Charles  
St. John the Baptist  
St. Landry  
St. Martin  
St. Mary  
St. Tammany  
Tangipahoa  
Terrebonne  
Vermilion  
Washington

## Appendix B

### Methodology

Though not without its shortcomings (which will be discussed), the following methodology provides the best estimates of senior poverty statistics (given currently available data).

#### *Table 1:*

Table 1 attempts to determine current (2006) senior poverty statistics given what we currently know...

Column 1: Senior populations before the storms (in 2000).

Column 2: Senior populations after the storms (in 2006).

Column 4: Seniors in poverty before the storms (in 2000).

...to determine what we are missing:

Column 5: Seniors in poverty after the storms (in 2006).

Using the given information, we can extrapolate Column 5 by determining the poverty *rate* from the year 2000. A poverty *rate* is the percentage of seniors in poverty for a given year, or:

Number in Poverty/Total Senior Population = Poverty Rate (or “percent in poverty”).

We can then multiply this rate by Column 2, the Senior Population in 2006, to estimate the current number of seniors in poverty:

Poverty Rate (2000) \* Senior Population (2006) = **Number in Poverty (2006)**

Using this methodology, we are assuming that the poverty rate remains unchanged for both the years 2000 and 2006. And as a result, the current number of seniors in poverty for the year 2006 can be determined by simply comparing the 2000 poverty rate to the current senior population totals in this region.

Poverty rates, of course, change drastically from year to year, much less over a six year period. So initially this methodology seems seriously flawed. However, the methodology works if we consider the following trends:

- 1.) National poverty rates have increased since 2000.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Historical Poverty Tables, US Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, Poverty and Health Statistics Branch/HHES Division, <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov3.html>>.

2.) Poverty rates have increased after the storms.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the 2000 poverty rate is a conservative estimate of what are likely higher poverty rates for the year of 2006. Poverty rates have not only increased annually in the years following the storms, but have worsened substantially following the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

As a result, it is likely that we have severely underestimated current senior poverty numbers found in Column 5. As discussed, the actual poverty rates for 2006 will likely be much higher, so the current estimates in Column 5 provide the absolute baseline assessments of the numbers of seniors in need. And we must use such baseline estimates not only to remain honest, but because the 2000 poverty rates are the only ones available.

In other words, as put by a reader who wishes to remain anonymous, “If a certain percent of seniors were in poverty before the storms, that at least that percent will be in poverty after the storms. So just compared the percent before the storms with the updated population, and you’ll have your estimates!”

*Table 2:*

Table 2 documents the extent of senior food needs throughout southern Louisiana. The information was gathered by querying (via telephone) the nutrition director for each individual parish’s Council on Aging. The following questions were asked concerning their nutrition programs, and the answers were documented in the respective tables:

- 1.) How many seniors were you serving before the storms?
- 2.) How many seniors were you serving after the storms?
- 3.) How many meal sites existed in your parish before the storms?
- 4.) How many meal sites exist in your parish now, after the storms?
- 5.) Do you have an income eligibility requirement?
- 6.) Do you or any organizations in your parish serve meals during weekends?
- 7.) Do you or any organizations in your parish serve meals during holidays?

Finally, the last column documents the numbers of seniors being served by Food for Families/Food for Seniors, and organization serving 40-pound boxes of commodity foods to seniors once-a-month in each of our 23 parishes. This information was gathered from their headquarters in New Orleans, Louisiana for the month of September, 2007.

---

<sup>2</sup> Although no official data exists concerning current poverty rates in southern Louisiana, it is safe to assume that, at minimum, relative poverty rates have increased. Individuals and families have lost significant portions of their property and wealth in the wake of the hurricanes’ destructive forces; the housing market was squeezed as supply diminished, leading to price increases of sometimes more than 50%; and the general cost of living has increased across the service area. Furthermore, most observers agree that the “need” in the region has increased, again a relative measure of poverty. But many also contend that absolute poverty rates are likely to have increased as well.

Works Cited

- “2005 Gulf Coast Area Data Profiles.” American Community Survey (ACS).  
<<http://www.census.gov/acs>>.
- “A Look at the Community.” The New Orleans Council on Aging/New Orleans Area Agency on Aging Fiscal Year 2007-2011 Area Plan, Section Three. 2006.
- “Percent of People Below Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months.” American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau. 2003.  
<<http://www.censusbureau.biz/acs/www/Products/Ranking/2003/R01T040.htm>>.
- “R1501. Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed High School.” American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau. 2006.  
<[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=04000US22&\\_box\\_head\\_nbr=R1501&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_&-\\_lang=en&-format=US-30&-\\_sse=on](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GRTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US22&_box_head_nbr=R1501&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_&-_lang=en&-format=US-30&-_sse=on)>.
- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 2000.
- “The State of Your Health: Louisiana, Key Health Facts.” Trust for American’s Health. 2003. <<http://healthyamericans.org/state/index.php?StateID=LA>>.
- U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000. Provided by Margaret McGarity of the Louisiana Governor's Office on Elderly Affairs. <<http://goea.louisiana.gov/>>.