

OFS DISASTER RESPONSE TEAM

By Jim Flickinger, OFS

About three years ago NAFRA began investigating the possibility of establishing an OFS team to respond to disasters in our country.

After this was looked into, a decision was made to establish the team, but to “roll it out” from region to region. Our plan was to work with Catholic Charities in Florida, an area where we know hurricanes will occur and with an organization (Catholic Charities) that has experience in responding to such disasters. After getting some experience, we would work to respond to disasters in other regions of the country.

We have had a very good response from Secular Franciscans who are willing to help with the disaster relief work. Our “problem” — if we want to call it a problem — is that there have been no hurricanes in Florida during the past three years. The result is that our team has not been able to gel, gain experience, and expand into other regions of our country.

During the past year NAFRA began looking into joining forces with St. Vincent de Paul USA Disaster Services (SVDP). NAFRA saw a number of advantages of unification with SVDP:

- 1) It is very experienced.
- 2) It has a full-time staff.

- 3) It has teams in place at all times, responding to disasters across the nation.

- 4) It has relationships in place with the American Red Cross, FEMA, etc.

- 5) NAFRA would not have to gain experience or “roll out” our program over what might be several years. Secular Franciscans can immediately join up with the SVDP team.

- 6) SVDP volunteers would, by working side by side with Secular Franciscans, be introduced to our Order.

As a result of our investigation and discussions with SVDP, NAFRA decided to unite forces with SVDP rather than develop its own disaster response team. Our unification should be seamless, easy, and immediate.

If you would like to become an active volunteer with SVDP, take a look at the SVDP website at <http://www.svdpcdisaster.org>. From there you will need to make contact with Jim Butler, the Director of Volunteer Management for SVDP. His e-mail address is jbutler@svdpcdisaster.org.