

Post-hurricane donors show record generosity: Near \$3 billion given

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The outpouring of private charity to the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina and two sister storms now ranks as the most generous in American history, surpassing donations after September 11, according to researchers who track philanthropy.

Americans have donated about \$2.97 billion to families affected by hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, said Patrick Rooney, director of research at the University of Indiana's Center on Philanthropy.

That surpasses the \$2.8 billion donated after the terrorist attacks of 2001, he said.

Moreover, the center's estimate is low, Rooney said. The center based its estimate on a survey of more than 175 organizations that report storm-related collections and distributions. As a result, it missed the value of other kinds of gifts, including the value of thousands of volunteer laborers and truckloads of supplies sent into the storm zone by independent churches, the value of private convoys and other relief efforts organized by families with relatives in the storm zones, and the value of private homeowners opening homes to displaced families, the center said.

The center included aid for hurricanes Rita and Wilma in its research because that's how most agencies solicited help, Rooney said.

Americans' response after the hurricanes was remarkable in another way, Rooney said: money poured in at a furious rate. People contributed \$1 billion in just three weeks after Katrina. By contrast, it took eight weeks to reach that level after the terrorist attacks four years ago, he said.

"The rapidity of the growth in donations to hurricane relief is really quite astonishing," he said. "We think it was a combination of so many people affected, the incredible media coverage . . . the permanence of the damage, and also the clear evidence of the disproportionate impact on the poor."

In addition, Americans are growing ever more comfortable going to their computers and giving money over the Internet, he said.

The slow and relatively ineffective governmental response probably also had an effect, he said. "I think a lot of people must have said, 'We'd better give some money because they're screwing this thing up,'" Rooney said. "Just about everybody I know felt the need or desire to do something."

The American Red Cross was far and away the greatest provider of relief, according to the center's figures. By mid-November it had already given away or committed almost \$1.6 billion.

The next-largest providers were the Salvation Army, giving \$270 million by late October; Catholic Charities USA, which committed \$105 million; and the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund, which reported \$100 million in mid-November, Rooney said. *-Religion News Service*