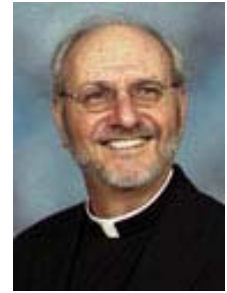


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## Stockpiling a Hurricane

After Hurricane Katrina delivered a body blow to New Orleans, one local official compared the city to the aftermath of a nuclear bomb without the radiation. Indeed, throughout the Gulf Coast whole neighborhoods were leveled and even small towns washed away. The U.S. had never experienced destruction in recent times so wide and intense within its borders. But, a hurricane does not equal a nuclear bomb. With a hurricane, no radiation lingers for decades at ground zero and not every tree and house is vaporized.

Before TV images of the hurricane's rubble fade from mind, the analogy to a nuclear blast can spark a needed meditation. The U.S. continues to stock pile nuclear weapons for deterrence and defense. Multiple times more devastating than hurricanes, nuclear weapons have the power to wreak incalculable destruction on our planet. The question: what would motivate people of faith to react to the nuclear threat in the way they would prepare for an impending hurricane?

Photos of Hiroshima and Nagasaki show the annihilation of two cities from first-generation nuclear weapons. Few buildings stood after the blast, yet people crawled out from cellars and walked around bewildered. Some people had been incinerated instantly. Some suffered burns over most of their bodies, and others after years died slowly from radiation sickness. To Americans, all this human destruction remained some place else, "out there." Numbers keep the devastation abstract. Hiroshima probably lost 100,000 people the first day, Nagasaki perhaps 50,000. Numbers are numbing. The recent earthquake in Pakistan claimed more than 40,000 lives; the tsunami last year over 400,000. Who can envision that many people?

The death toll from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (estimated above 1,000) appears small in comparison, but to Americans who had so many loved ones affected in New Orleans and around the Gulf Coast, the enormity of

the tragedy gripped the heart. Tragedies hit loved ones, not only regions—that's the meditation coming from the hurricanes. Nuclear weapons annihilate loved ones, not just targets—that's the meditation coming from people of faith.

A great storm is approaching and its dark clouds already appear visible. Depleted uranium (D.U.) shells, composed of low-level radioactive waste, can penetrate most kinds of armor on the battlefield. When a D.U. shell strikes metal, the D.U. vaporizes, then settles as dust blown by the wind. That dust can enter the body by inhaling, ingesting or through open wounds. In the 1991 Persian Gulf war the U.S. used over 320 tons of D.U. (944,000 rounds), according to the Pentagon. The U.S. maintains D.U. poses no significant health risks, but the U.K. Atomic Energy Authority estimates a half-million people in Kuwait and Iraq could eventually die from the D.U. used in that first gulf war. After the 1991 war, cancer rates increased 7 to 10 times in Iraq, and birth deformities increased fourfold to sixfold.

Returning home after the first gulf war, thousands of the estimated 436,000 U.S. soldiers who entered the area contaminated from D.U. radioactivity reported sicknesses associated with lungs and kidneys. Some developed leukemia. These American soldiers bring home the reality of nuclear weapons. To possess nuclear weapons means exposing loved ones to sickness.

In a natural disaster like a hurricane, the victims depend on help from the larger community. With the politics of nuclear weapons, the world depends on people of faith to confront their leaders to heed the admonition of Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican Nuncio to the United Nations: "The Holy See again emphasizes that the peace we seek in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be attained by relying on nuclear weapons."

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*The Catholic Conference of KY (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops, established in 1983. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 388,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.*