



**CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER**  
Historic Episcopal church, founded in 1849. Jefferson Davis was vestryman, and church is shrine of many other Confederate leaders. Present structure was erected in 1876.

MISSISSIPPI HISTORICAL COMMISSION 1951

PHOTO: RON ELIAS/SUN HERALD

# From Camille to Katrina

## LESSONS LEARNED. AGAIN.

*(From the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding & Renewal)*

**T**he hurricane, fueled by near-perfect conditions for a monster storm, crashed ashore in August. It pushed a record storm surge onto the Mississippi Coast, erasing in a matter of hours lives, homes, and assets that would take years to replace. No one had ever seen anything like it, nor did they expect to see its like again. It was the 100-year storm. The awful aberration.

After the hurricane came the analyses. A special commission was appointed by the governor. Experts were consulted, and wise folks agreed on key points. Chief among them: Coastal communities risked too much by ignoring the realities of life in a hurricane zone. They must plan for safer patterns of growth. They must toughen zoning and building codes. It would also be prudent, said the experts, to leverage the recovery for future economic development. Why not

OPPOSITE LEFT: The Church of The Redeemer was a casualty of Hurricane Camille. Part of the stone bell tower was damaged by the storm along with several live oaks that were uprooted by high winds. BOTTOM LEFT: George Juanico Jr. visited the Hurricane Camille memorial in Biloxi on August 18, 2005. The \$130,000 structure, dedicated on August 17, 2001, was the first Coastwide memorial to 172 dead and missing in the 1969 hurricane. The memorial incorporated the 1891 church bell tower that survived '69, although the sanctuary it was attached to disappeared. BOTTOM RIGHT: Hurricane Katrina damaged the memorial, loosened the marble slabs, and claimed the wooden bell tower.



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turn Highway 90 back into the scenic beach boulevard it once was by creating east-west transportation alternatives farther inland? Tourism, an economic driver before the hurricane, promised to be an even more powerful force in coming years. Wouldn't a scenic boulevard heighten the appeal of a Coast with a uniquely Mississippi sense of place?

While they were at it, Coastal governments, whose population growth and service demands were outpacing revenues, should

Will we get it right this time?

think about consolidating efforts — especially with regard to water management, sewer systems, and solid waste disposal. There were attractive opportunities for

getting more bang for the infrastructure buck, too, by regionalizing transportation planning.

All good ideas backed by convincing evidence. You can read the details in the pages to follow, or you could turn back to the reports of the Governor's Emergency Council in the wake of Hurricane Camille 36 years ago. The themes are eerily similar. As all Mississippians know, Camille was the benchmark disaster until Katrina came along. For those who survived it, Camille was a life-changing experience. There were "lessons learned," volumes of them, recorded in the state's archives and in the libraries of disaster preparedness throughout the country. But if they were learned, the lessons were not exactly taken to heart.

In August of 1969, Camille was a tightly wound Category 5 hurricane that left 130 dead and destroyed 3,800 homes in the six southernmost Mississippi counties where its effects were concentrated. Overall, Camille's damage totaled just under \$9 billion in current dollars.

In August 2005, Katrina came ashore as a slightly less intense but far larger storm than Camille. Its storm surge was undiminished from its Category 5 levels before landfall. When Katrina was finished,

Mississippi had more than 230 dead and 65,000 homes wiped from the map. The federal bill for recovery in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama is inching toward \$100 billion. The costs to state and local governments, to property owners, and to private businesses may be incalculable. If we had really learned the lessons of Camille and applied them in the years between 1969 and 2005, could we have saved lives and dollars? Without doubt. The money we were reluctant to invest in storm-worthy infrastructure and storm-ready procedures we will pay many times over in restoration costs. The rules we put off enacting and enforcing would have kept many out of harm's way and would have made buildings more resilient to high winds and high water. The hard choices we ducked in 1970 await us in 2006, only with more zeroes on the price tags. So, here we are again in the aftermath of a nightmare. We have another hard-working commission, another set of recommendations, another opportunity.

Will we get it right this time?

