

# "God Had a Plan"

by Roland Foster

*[I think this was written in 2002]*

Recently in Kinston, North Carolina, we met a remarkable couple named Sam and Lou Jones. Sam and Lou had a roofing business until two and a half years ago. Then, Sam having attained a certain age, they decided to retire. They put their business property up for sale and headed for the North Carolina sea coast. Some unforeseen circumstance, I don't know what, brought them back to Kinston last August. What they said about it was, "The Lord closed the doors on our stay at the coast."

Shortly thereafter, in September of 1999, the weather dealt a horrific blow to eastern North Carolina. You may not have seen many details about it where you live, so you may not be aware that Hurricane Dennis poured eight inches of rain on the area, went out to sea for a day or two and, after downgrading to a tropical storm, came back to dump almost as much rain a second time. Less than two weeks later, along came Hurricane Floyd with another twenty or more inches of rain. The rivers and streams were already swollen, the ground was saturated, and, as one observer put it, all that water "had no place to go but up."

And up it went, to 20, 30, even an estimated 43 feet above normal water levels. Wild animals, farm animals, and pets were drowned by the thousands; chickens, by the hundreds of thousands. The official human death toll was 51, though a resident assured us it was actually higher. And, as you can imagine, the property damage was incredible. Many thousands of people lost everything except the clothes they were wearing.

After the flood, relief supplies began to come to the First Pentecostal Holiness Church in Kinston, faster than the church could store and distribute them. The pastor, Bobby Williams, asked Sam Jones to pray about becoming their disaster relief coordinator. "Brother Bobby," Sam replied, "I'm already prayed up to where you are. The Lord has already shown me that we have to get organized or it's going to be out of control." As Sam repeatedly says, God had a plan.

The plan involved the Jones's business property, comprising a large warehouse and another smaller one. Sam and Lou had prayed for a buyer for over two years, and wondered why the Lord had not brought one to them. Now it became apparent that their place was perfect for a receiving and distribution center for the relief supplies. Sam and Lou and a team of four dedicated volunteers got to work.

They began by ministering to flood victims from their own church, then their extended families, then friends and acquaintances. As the ministry grew, they opened it to the public, accepting referrals from the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, and the Department of Social Services. As of June 1, nine months after the flood, they had served over 1000 families, some 3500 individuals! But there are still hundreds more living in temporary trailers or with family and friends, having lost everything to the invading flood waters.

What does the relief ministry provide? All the necessities of life: food, clothing, shoes, furniture, bedding, dishes, utensils, supplies. (They are phasing out food, which is now readily available from other sources.) Where do they get the items? "We pray, and God meets our needs," says Sam. "People call and say, 'We heard about you and what you're doing. We have some items in our warehouse that you could probably use.'"

One day they needed dishes, and Lou went to K-Mart to buy four sets. On the way to the cash register, she felt impelled to go back for a fifth set. Later that same day a lady called to say she had 2000 place settings of new dishes, and would donate 400 of them. When Sam called back for directions to come and pick them up, she said that the Holy Spirit had since led her to give them 500 place settings, rather than the 400 she had promised. Such little "coincidences" reassured them that God indeed was working out His plan.

The real story of the relief ministry, though, is seen in the people who have been helped. One chilly morning the Red Cross called to ask for help for a family of five who had been burned out during the night. The family arrived about 3:00 p.m., still in their pajamas, without coats or even shoes, and having had nothing to eat all day. Soon they were fed and had enough food, clothing, shoes, and coats for their immediate needs.

A deaf lady from Princeville lost everything in the flood, as did so many others. The Lord sent someone to rescue this dear lady the night before the dam broke. She would not have been able to hear the military rescuers who came around after the flood. She found Sam and Lou, and is now living in an apartment in Kinston with furniture they provided.

There are as many stories as there are people who have been helped. On the morning of our visit Lou, who manages the office, was interviewing an elderly mother and her daughter, finding out what assistance they needed. "Are you sure, now, Mrs. \_\_\_\_, that you don't need anything else?" After they left, Lou said, "I'm sure there must be something else we can do for them." It distressed her to think that they might not get all the help they needed.

Sam and Lou are praying people who have known and served God for many years, and if they see God's hand in all of this, who could disagree? They seem to have been hand-picked, prepared, and anointed for this ministry. They have hearts for serving God and helping people. They are retired, which means they can devote at least 40 hours per week to the ministry. Sam has organizational skills that he used to run a successful business for many years. Lou has the ability and energy to work in an office anywhere, although a head injury suffered a year or so ago has kept her from seeking a job. And they just happened to have two empty warehouses.

God has blessed Sam and Lou with enthusiasm and joy, as He has blessed many people through their obedient service. Having been unable to sell their business property, and having now spent a good bit of their retirement fund to get this relief ministry going, their financial future might seem a little uncertain to many, but God's word leaves no doubt that He has a plan for that, too.