

## **Aum Sri Sai Ram**

### Hurricane Sandy Relief Effort

Second Update – November 8, 2012

We, the devotees of the Mid-Atlantic Region offer our heartfelt gratitude to our Beloved Swami for keeping us safe during and after Hurricane Sandy and we also offer our humble support, love and comfort to the people impacted by the hurricane.

This report is submitted to Dr. Narendranath Reddy, Chairman of the Prashanti Council. It is the second update, made ten days after Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast of the USA. With this report we are also sending some pictures of the havoc created by Hurricane Sandy in the New York and New Jersey areas. There are also pictures of the actual seva being performed by the devotees of the New York and New Jersey Sai Centers.

### **BACKGROUND**

A rare hybrid of a hurricane merged with a powerful storm system in the North Atlantic to create an unprecedented super-storm, named Hurricane Sandy. Initially Hurricane Sandy created havoc in Jamaica, Cuba and Bermuda before unleashing its fury onto the Eastern seaboard of the United States. The main brunt of the storm was felt in Region 2 (Mid-Atlantic Region) of the Sri Sathya Sai Organization of USA. The areas that were in the path of the storm were the states of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Connecticut and the cities of Washington DC, New York City and Long Island.

The storm came up the East Coast on Monday, October 29 and within a timeframe of 24 hours left devastation and natural disaster unparalleled in the history of the region. Death toll from the storm has reached over 200, with thousands of homes damaged, communities ravaged and initial estimate putting the cost of recovery in tens of billions of dollars.

New Jersey, New York City and Long Island were among the hardest hit with storm-packed wind gusts reaching 90mph, heavy rain and ocean surge caused by high tides and a full moon. The wind uprooted thousands of trees from the roots causing power outages over 90% of the communities. The rain and ocean surge caused flooding in all the major rivers and the overflow also flooded major tunnels and highways connecting the metropolitan New York area. In preparation for the storm, mandatory evacuations were ordered for low lying areas, airports, subways, trains and highways were closed and emergencies were declared in all the states impacted by the storm.

All along New Jersey state's 127-mile coastline, the storm wrecked communities rich and poor, from multimillion-dollar homes in Bay Head and Mantoloking to blue-collar bay front bungalows. Boardwalks were trashed, a roller coaster dumped into the ocean. The worst damage was nearest the ocean, but winds and water wrecked homes several miles inland as well.

The famed New York City subway system was flooded as well as several tunnels linking the city to neighboring communities. The community of Breezy Point in the Rockaway's was totally wiped out by a raging fire caused by downed power lines and swept by the high winds.

In its wake, millions of people were left without electricity power and drinking water. Landline phone service was unavailable and mobile phone service was severely disrupted. Social media and electronic communications were also unavailable in many locations. Emergency shelters were soon opened as well as warming centers for people to

come and charge their phones and laptops. Food and water was distributed to the thousands left homeless by the storm. Lack of power and lack of fuel delivery at gas (petrol) stations left motorists waiting in line for hours.

As of November 7, 2012 (nine days after the storm), there are over half-a-million people without power in the area. Various shelters are still open and food is being distributed. Repairs are going on everywhere, people are working long hours but inevitably frustration is growing. To make matters worse, on November 7, 2012, another Nor'easter storm, with high winds, rain and heavy snow caused more power outages and has threatened to undo all the hard work and progress that has been achieved.

## **INITIAL RESPONSE**

Our initial response to the storm started right away with first checking on Sai devotees closely followed by serving and helping in the community. Some of these efforts are listed below:

1. The Regional Officers have contacted all the Center officers in the region to determine how the local Sai devotees are doing. Most of the centers reported back that the devotees were coping well under the circumstances. The biggest problem was the lack of electricity in people's homes. Power was gradually returning to residences, however the weather was turning cold and nights were especially difficult. We did not receive any reports of injury or any widespread damage to property. Despite the difficulty, most everyone is in good spirits and thankful that they did not experience more extensive damage.
2. The Regional Service Coordinator, through an email to the Center Service Coordinators, has asked them to be in touch with local devotees and see to their needs as best as possible. They were also asked to stay in touch with local emergency management authorities so updates can be provided on a regular basis.
3. We are working very closely with the USA National Council President and National Service Coordinator to assist the region with involvement of other regions in the USA. A proposal has been submitted to keep the relief effort moving forward.
4. We identified a need for focused communication and efficient handling of service projects. To facilitate this, we have designated two people to be the points of contact for service being provided on the ground.
5. With the active help of the Young Adults in the impacted region, we have also identified two locations where supplies and provisions can be taken and stored. At this moment, they are in devotee's basements and garages and we are seeking some warehouse-type storage space.
6. We are conducting regular conference calls among ourselves to provide updates on the current conditions, where service is needed, what provisions are required and who is willing to help. A current provisions list has been created and being kept up-to-date. .
7. We have created a set of guidelines that can be used for Sai volunteers to Be Safe, Be Practical and Be Local.
8. Most importantly, our devotees are actively serving in the community, providing food, water, clothing, blankets, smiles and comfort to those impacted by the storm. The volunteer activity is listed below:
  - **Queens College Shelter in Flushing, New York**  
About 500 residents are in this shelter after being evacuated from homes affected by floods and fire. This shelter is setup by the city of New York and Sai devotees from New York City are helping support by providing essential supplies and volunteering regularly.

One Sai moment occurred when an elderly woman in the shelter was very anxious and desperately looking for someone to speak in Farsi, the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan. She wanted to convey that her family didn't know of her well being in the shelter and would be looking for her. When Sai volunteers were approached for assistance, they directed the request to a fellow devotee from Afghanistan who was able to connect heart-to-heart with her and his research resulted in her reunion with family members in New York who were looking for her and were unsure of her well being.

- **American Legion: 209 Cross bay Blvd, NY (Far Rockaway, Queens)**  
Being used as a hub where donations (food, clothes, supplies, etc.) are being received, sorted and distributed, and run by local volunteers. They also cook and serve hot meals. Residents living in the area come in and take what they need and leave.
- **St. Frances de Sales Parish: 219 Beach 129th Street, NY (Far Rockaway, Queens)**  
The church has been converted into one of the City's official non-perishable food, blanket, and water distributions locations, and is staffed with city workers, National Guards, as well as local volunteers. It is huge and there are hundreds of people there every day to receive and sort donations. They are over-flowing with clothes, blankets, and other supplies that are pouring in. Residents come in and take what they need. Volunteers cook and serve hot meals (but outdoors).
- **Police Precinct: 95 Beach Street, NY (Far Rockaway, Queens)**  
This area looks like a war zone. The roads and streets are covered with sand. Many groups are out there serving food and water. Some groups also are distributing clothes, blankets, etc. All activities are outdoors.
- **25 Beach Street, NY (Far Rockaway, Queens)**  
After requesting permission for a location where we can set up and serve hot meals, Councilman Sanders asked us to serve this community. The folks here have to walk to Beach 59th Street daily to receive food and water. Approximately 600 meals are being served.
- **Sathya Sai Baba Center of East Brunswick NJ**  
The center has been collecting various items and delivering them to the various shelters in North and South Jersey. Some of the items that have been collected are: Toiletry items (tooth paste, tooth brush, soap etc), Non-perishable canned food items, Clothes, Coats, Blankets and Shoes.
- **Newark Shelter – North Jersey**  
Many devotees from the New Jersey centers have come together and packed more than 1000 meals (Baked ziti, peanut butter jelly sandwiches, bananas, and juice pack) for distribution at various shelters in these towns. We have been working closely with Councilman Darrin Sharif. More than 20 trays of pasta were supplied to 15 of the state-run senior care facilities in Newark that are under Mr. Sharif's care.
- **Lakewood – South Jersey**  
We were requested to send pasta to other facilities not run by the state. These folks had received very little help to date and were still without electricity. The Sai Center members helped to make sandwiches and pack pasta, fruit juice, sandwiches and fruits into bags to make it easy to distribute. A few Sai devotees went to 3 different places to distribute all the food made which was about a 1000 packs.
- **Long Branch – Jersey Shore**  
The church from the Newark also requested to provide pasta for about 100 people in Long Branch, a township at the sea shore of New Jersey. At this place soup, bread, pasta, clothes, toothpastes, toothbrushes, socks, soap, scarves were distributed with help of the Long Branch township police department. Since only 40% of the town had electricity and everyone enjoyed the hot food and were grateful for the help rendered.

## NEXT STEPS

Our devotees, as well as relief workers from the local/federal governments and other organizations, are doing an admirable job in supporting the community through this disaster. The situation is fluid and changes day to day. Shelters will be consolidated, power will gradually come back, roads and tunnels will open up and gas shortages will ease.

We will soon move from immediate needs (food, shelter, clothing, warmth etc.) to more medium term needs such as supporting shelters, helping schools and school children get back to normalcy and assisting in the re-building of small communities. We will need to respond to the rapid changes that can happen in the community.

In summary, we once again express gratitude to Swami for keeping us safe. Our devotee's are making a big difference in the community. A lot of effort and service with a smile has been provided. Much more needs to be done. We will keep you updated via these reports.

We pray to Swami to utilize us as His instruments in whatever manner He deems appropriate.

Thank you.

Sai Ram.