

Ceremonies Honor Katrina Victims

By BRETT MARTEL
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NEW ORLEANS -- Singing "We shall overcome," sorrowful residents and religious leaders accompanied by an old New Orleans brass band walked up a repaired levee and put their hands on a new flood wall Monday in a Memorial Day remembrance for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Some participants at the ceremony in the city's Lower Ninth Ward carried American flags as organizers also called on the crowd to remember fallen U.S. soldiers.

Noting all the state's residents who have fought for America, organizers said they now need Americans to fight for southern Louisiana and help restore the region's levees and wetlands for protection against future hurricanes.

A second ceremony, in the opposite end of the city at the site of a breach in the 17th Street Canal, drew a crowd of about 100 mostly middle-class residents of the area. The memorial in the devastated Lower Ninth Ward drew about 150 people, few of whom have the means to rebuild without help.

Ministers praised residents' resilience and dedication to their devastated neighborhoods, and urged them to set aside questions of blame and focus instead on how they might help each other.

"If we can find it in our hearts to say, 'Hey, y'all, how ya doin', how's your mama 'n them,' then we've caught the vision," said the Rev. Oliver P. Duvernay, drawing smiles and light laughter from the crowd in the Ninth Ward.

At a makeshift podium within sight of a handful of laborers working on the Industrial Canal, which flooded the Lower Ninth Ward, memorial participants read hundreds of names of people who died during and after the storm in Louisiana. As they read, the Treme Brass Band softly and slowly played "A Closer Walk with Thee" and other funeral staples.

Near the 17th Street breach, participants sang "God Bless America" and dropped 1,557 carnations _ one for each known Louisiana victim _ into the canal to honor the dead.

Most homes are abandoned near the sites of the two canal breaches.

"From here, it looks hopeless, but we need to learn to transcend what we can see with our eyes," Duvernay said as he looked around after the ceremony.

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