Mississippi Oral History Program

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Ralph H. Buchhorn

Interviewer: Rachel Swaykos

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Biography

Pastor Ralph H. Buchhorn was born December 17, 1952, in Chula Vista, California. He earned his BS at San Diego State and his MDiv at Concordia Seminary. He is a Lutheran. He and his wife, Pam, lived in San Diego, California, at the time of this interview, with their two children. In 2005, he came to the Mississippi Gulf Coast nine days after Hurricane Katrina, as part of the Crisis Disaster Team of Extra Mile Ministries. He and his team, which included therapy dogs, provided emotional and spiritual support for survivors of Katrina as well as other volunteers.
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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

RALPH H. BUCHHORN

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Ralph H. Buchhorn and is taking place on June 27, 2007. The interviewer is Rachel Swaykos.


Swaykos: Wonderful. So where are you from originally?

Buchhorn: From San Diego.

Swaykos: And how did you end up out here?

Buchhorn: I’m with the Crisis Disaster Team called the Extra Mile Ministries, and we respond to crisis and tragedy around the nation. And nine days after the hurricane, we came out. We were asked by our Lutheran denomination to come out and look for pastors and churches because of communications were down, phones were down, so just basically search the churches, how they’re doing, and then provide basically crisis ministry.

Swaykos: So you were sent up here with no direction, really, besides find them and work with them?

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: OK.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: And when you—let’s go into—(brief interruption) OK. So you were out in San Diego during the storm?

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: So what was that like for you? What did you see on TV? What were you thinking? What were you feeling?

Buchhorn: Well, because we do crisis and disaster work, we work crisis all around the nation. As I began to see the storm and seeing it getting worse and worse, I knew
that we needed to mobilize our team and respond. So we were going to respond, and then I got a phone call from our headquarters in the Lutheran church, and they asked me how quick I could get out there with a team.

Swaykos: OK. What other job are you doing out there?

Buchhorn: I do part-time pastor work at a church. I basically quit the parish as a full-time pastor to do this ministry; it’s a faith-based ministry.

Swaykos: OK. I see. How long have you been a pastor?

Buchhorn: Twenty-five years.

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh, that’s wonderful. So you ended up coming out here. From what you saw on TV and what you saw when you got here, what was the difference? What were you expecting, and what was it like the first trip here?

Buchhorn: My expectations were about the same. I knew having worked disaster before, I pretty much knew what was going to happen. You know, we had to be mobilized. We had to make sure that we had food and water ourselves, take care of our team. We brought a team of three people and a dog; four of us and a dog. So I knew that we had to be prepared ourselves because, you know, phone lines were down, communications not there, no food and water, and I knew that people would be needing, obviously, help. But our goal wasn’t physical; our goal was emotional and spiritual. And just do some of those first seeds of hope for people.

Swaykos: OK.

Buchhorn: Yeah.

Swaykos: So what day did you get here?

Buchhorn: Let’s see. Now I forgot, nine days after. Nine days after—

Swaykos: So nine days after the twenty-ninth.

Buchhorn: Yeah.

Swaykos: Around the seventh or something like that?

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: OK. And where did you go first?

Buchhorn: Well, first of all, there wasn’t a place to stay, so we had to stay in Pensacola.
Swaykos: OK. Where did you fly into?

Buchhorn: Mobile. I think we flew into Mobile, or maybe Pensacola.

Swaykos: The planes were running by then to that close.

Buchhorn: Right. And we stayed there and actually met people there at the hotel from New Orleans, people staying there who were displaced.

Swaykos: (inaudible)

Buchhorn: Yeah. So then we commuted here. First place was, well, into a shelter outside of Mobile. We got into a shelter and visited the people with the dog and everything.

Swaykos: So you started work right away.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: (inaudible)

Buchhorn: Right. And then we started moving closer and closer. Pascagoula, spent time in Pascagoula working with people. There’s a big church there, a Baptist church that was doing, had food and clothing. Red Cross was working out of there, so. And then we moved to, basically, Biloxi. I went to Slidell, too, but Biloxi was here. We met the pastor and met the people staying here, and that opened the doors for us to continue to come.

Swaykos: Did y’all have maps and stuff of the area?

Buchhorn: Yes.

Swaykos: And how it looked very different at that time?

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: Had you ever been here before?

Buchhorn: No.

Swaykos: OK. So this is your first time, your first experience with the area. What were people saying? You said you were working with people all the way from the day you got there. What were you doing?
**Buchhorn:** A lot of times we’d drive around, and we’d see people cleaning up debris, and so we’d offer water, a lot of times water. I brought with me a thousand books.

**Swaykos:** Oh, my gosh.

**Buchhorn:** Now, I’m not the type of guy that’s going to throw out a bunch of pamphlets, but there’s an excellent book called *When Your Whole World Changes* that’s fantastic. It talks about, you know, survivor guilt, talks about tears and all sorts of issues. And so we had those available for people, and we gave them to some churches just to pass out. We’re more like normalizing. We try to normalize people. We talked about, ‘How bad was it for you?’ We tried to let them tell their story. Telling the story is healing, so we let them tell their story. Where were you? What took place? Listened a lot. Some normalization, meaning “This is what you can expect in the future,” like the nightmares, the flashbacks, the sounds that will not go away.

**Swaykos:** So you’re like preparing them, too.

**Buchhorn:** Right, preparing them what to expect emotionally and spiritually. And then when we came to church we were able to come again. Like two weeks later, I met with a church here, and then I met with local pastors to do preparation again. What to expect, things that are going to be happening.

**Swaykos:** Right. What type of stories were you hearing?

**Buchhorn:** Oh, the stories, you know, everybody tells—

**Swaykos:** That stick out in your mind from someone you heard in the beginning?

**Buchhorn:** The children, some of the children. We were in Waveland, I remember, talking to a couple of children who were all so high up, and the water was so high, and they were all the way up in the attic. And they tell you which is the only toy left, I have left. The children, because of the dog, too, we were able to—we got in some shelters. I remember the twelve year old girl who lost her grandmother; didn’t know where she was, so she was really freaking. “I can’t find my grandmother. I can’t find my grandmother.” At that stage not a lot of anger, more in the stage where, “Thank you for coming.” You know, just, “Thank you.” So we would just listen. We heard those stories. The man in the tree, who stayed five hours in the tree.

**Swaykos:** Is it harder to talk to kids at that point? Because you know you can rationalize with adults, but you know you can explain nightmares and PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and all that to them, but maybe kids don’t understand? How do you get to them on their level?

**Buchhorn:** That’s a good question because the kids have really suffered. They really have suffered. I think it’s the same, just listening to their story, talking to them. I
mean, I’m not afraid to talk about bad dreams and things with them, because somehow we think we have to protect them, but reality is it hits them.

Swaykos: That’s going to happen.

Buchhorn: Our dog that we use in our ministry, a comfort dog, really grounds people, and for a minute they feel safe. Because in a crisis you feel like you can’t trust anybody, you feel like you’ve lost your safety, and the dog helps ground them for a few minutes and opens the door to be able to kind of talk to people. See, I think people are in a fog, and our crisis response disaster team, we’re like emotional-first-aid people, spiritual first aid. We kind of helped them get out of a fog, mostly, a little bit.

Swaykos: Is it hard to push that boundary, keeping them out of the fog? All of a sudden it’s going to hit them, so you have to be their support long enough to pick them—

Buchhorn: Right, and then be able to find people. I consider I’m a sort of triage. I’m the tow truck driver; the ambulance sort of just brings them back in and hopefully puts them into resources. Of course resources were, well, maybe not, but they were steps, so that, yeah, that was difficult.

Swaykos: Can you explain to me the whole thing with the dog? How did you come to be using a dog with your—

Buchhorn: Sure. When I first quit the parish and started the crisis disaster ministry—

Swaykos: So you started this?

Buchhorn: Yeah.

Swaykos: OK.

Buchhorn: I’m also chaplain with the FBI serving on the crisis team for them, and I went to the Pentagon for 9/11 for twelve days.

Swaykos: Wow, OK.

Buchhorn: And doing ministry there, we met people with dogs with the victim, the family members.

Buchhorn: And I said at that time, “Man, if they can use dogs, why can’t I use a dog in my new ministry?” And so about a year and a half later, I met a lady who raises dogs, in North Carolina, to do service therapy work. And I said, “Well, I’m going to use that, but I’m not going to go to nursing homes and hospitals. I’m going to be out doing disaster work, working with cops and special agents.” And so we got one. And
we started working the fires in Southern California. One of the firemen said, “Chaplain, having a dog is like having five chaplains.” So I started calling him “Canine Chaplain.” Went to the hurricane in Florida.

Swaykos: OK. And her name is?

Buchhorn: My first one was Cutie; now this one’s Georgie. And we actually have expanded now. We have Marley, who is Georgie’s sister in Slidell, Rava who’s working here at the camp. She’s going to be getting a new one, too.

Swaykos: Oh, great.

Buchhorn: And we believe there’ll be a three-year-old named Maggie. And then we have contacts with people in New York who have dogs, so we’re networking all across the country so when a disaster happens, we can provide dogs on the scene.

Swaykos: When you created that, did you imagine that you would be able to reach so far?

Buchhorn: No, not really, no. It’s cool. (phone rings) I mean that’s like, the dog’s flown nineteen times with me.

Swaykos: Oh, my gosh.

Buchhorn: She’s been here nine. We’ve been in DC a month ago, St. Louis, Portland, all around the country.

Swaykos: For so many people and their pets here, losing their pets, or staying because of their pets, was she what opened the door—

Buchhorn: Oh, excellent, yeah. We would go to Bethel Medical Clinic down the street, and I just go in the lobby with people, and people would start petting her and start crying, and it would open the door.

Swaykos: How many people told you pet stories, not their own stories, but told you stories about their pets?

Buchhorn: Dozens, oh, yeah.

Swaykos: Did you hear that a lot were lost?

Buchhorn: Yeah. One lady I remember was petting Georgie. She started crying, and she says, “I can’t find my dog.” This would have probably been in, maybe, February, and she had lost her dog in the storm, and she still couldn’t find it, but she was still trying to find it, yeah.
Swaykos: It's hard, I guess, to not have hope when they were showing stories on TV about shelters coming down and taking them to California or whatever, and finding a dog there. How do you give someone hope while still preparing them for maybe it’s not going to work out?

Buchhorn: That’s a good question. I think reality and being honest and truthful is so important in a crisis in disaster work in that if there is a possibility of hope, yeah, but look at it. Let’s see it. And what can I do to help you? Here are some shelters. We’ll try there, but also reality, too.

Swaykos: Yeah. What was the biggest reality for you coming here? Did anything set in as a big surprise?

Buchhorn: Bugs and heat. (laughter) But that’s pretty typical.

Swaykos: Yeah, you’ve been here before.

Buchhorn: Yeah.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Buchhorn: The massiveness of this whole thing. It just—because we went to Slidell and Waveland, and just how spread out this disaster was, that’s—yeah. And then for so long—I’ve been coming every month now. For so long, driving down like [Highway] 90 or something and wondering what it was like. What was it like before? What was it like? And so that was my inner struggle. “I wonder what it was like.” And then when they started bringing out the books and the videos and old pictures of what it was like, that was kind of good.

Swaykos: Everyone, I’m sure, wanted to tell you what it was like then.

Buchhorn: Oh, sure.

Swaykos: Do you start to feel like this is sort of a home?

Buchhorn: Oh, sure.

Swaykos: And you missed how it was even though you didn’t see how it was.

Buchhorn: No. I can’t miss that because I never saw it.

Swaykos: It’s what it is right now.

Buchhorn: Right. But this is a home. I mean, this is the family here. I mean, I come now and work the Camp Biloxi staff; we do stress management classes. We have a support group for the volunteers that come because we need to take care of them,
because they go home, and it may be only a week, but they go home, and [they’re] seeing things they never experienced before, and so we try to do some post-traumatic stress, vicarious trauma stuff with them. We have a talk time every Thursday night. We had hoped to set up a pastoral counseling center. We have a food distribution center here. We have a medical clinic going to be starting, and we’re going to connect that with a pastoral counseling center. And I hope to get retired pastors to come and part-time office hours and things.

Swaykos: Right. So you’re coming every other week.

Buchhorn: Yeah, basically, because of my commitments in California.

Swaykos: So you have family out in California?

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: Do you have a wife?

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: And her name?

Buchhorn: Pam, and a grandson who lives with us, Gregory.

Swaykos: OK, wonderful. So you have children.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: How old are they?

Buchhorn: Well, my wife has children.

Swaykos: Your wife?

Buchhorn: Yes. I’m the stepdad.

Swaykos: Oh, OK, cool.

Buchhorn: Actually have two kids.

Swaykos: Wonderful. How are they feeling about your coming out here?

Buchhorn: Well, my wife grew up in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. So she just knows that she’s a stay-home person. And she’s retired Air Force, and she was my office manager for five years, but she’s pretty much good at just staying home and taking
care of the fort and the dogs. We have dogs down there. Because I don’t bring
Georgie all the time. Weather conditions and things.

Swaykos: Right, and it probably costs a bit to fly a dog.

Buchhorn: No, because of her specialty that I did at the flight, for free. She flies on
it with me.

Swaykos: That’s so wonderful. What airlines do you have [inaudible]?

Buchhorn: US Air right now has been really good. As a matter of fact, we’re going
back to Virginia Tech with her August 20 to do ministry there.

Swaykos: Great. That way it won’t be stressful.

Buchhorn: Right. (phone rings) We hope to have eight dogs and have nine people
that’ll be there.

Swaykos: How did they receive you when you were there?

Buchhorn: Oh, it was great.

Swaykos: Good.

Buchhorn: It was great. (phones rings)

Swaykos: Why did you get hooked up with this church? How did you end up here,
setting up shop and doing—

Buchhorn: This was one of the churches that we are asked to visit. I mean, basically
what we do is we took a map, we took our Lutheran Annual, and we just, we have a
laptop, and we put the map on it, looking, “OK. Where are churches?” And we said,
“Ah. There’s a church in Biloxi.” So we came here. We saw people here, began to
hear their story, talked to the pastor. I said, “I’d like to come back and help out
again.” So I came back, and from there I got a grant to keep me going for six more
months, and I got a grant to keep me going for six more months, and so I’m kind of
living on grants. My grant now is about due in September.

Swaykos: Who are you getting the grants from, and are you doing your own grant
writing?

Buchhorn: No. Lutheran Church Charities. And then Lutheran’s Medical Mission
have granted us some money, and also I get the motor home unit I stayed in, which is
good. Our church there does our grants. We’re looking at a huge grant that we’re
trying to get that would basically get us—
Swaykos: (inaudible)

Buchhorn: Yeah. That would get me here more often, too.

Swaykos: Are you writing those yourself?

Buchhorn: I'll, through, with Camp Director John.

Swaykos: OK. And I’m sure they’re appreciating your time here.

Buchhorn: Yeah, I think so.

Swaykos: Is there a way to thank you? Have they found a way to thank you?

Buchhorn: Oh, I’m sure, (inaudible) but yeah. (laughter)

Swaykos: How are the people receiving you that you’re helping?

Buchhorn: I think it’s good. You see, what I do now a lot of times in camp is, I loiter with intent. I just make myself available, sort of like the paramedic or the firemen who sits at the station. I come up here because a lot of things are happening here at the Green Hills(?) I hang around. I talk with them sometimes, just diffusing, go around and talk to camp staff. I do devotions, at times. We have other people doing devotions, too. I lead a prayer service Wednesday, and then talk time Thursday. And then we set up stress management classes, so I think it’s just a good happy face that comes in and let’s them just take a deep breath.

Swaykos: Do you think it’s good that you weren’t from here? You’re sort of removed from it?

Buchhorn: In some ways, yes.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Buchhorn: Yeah.

Swaykos: How do you do this? How do you hear sad story after sad story and take it home?

Buchhorn: I have good (inaudible). That’s a good question, because for a long time I tried to do this stuff by myself, because we may work with military families who’ve lost their loved ones in the war, as well. And, yeah, for a while it was really getting to me, but I went back to the clinical psychologist just sort of to debrief and diffuse, because that’s really important.
Swaykos: Yeah. How does Georgie deal with it? I know dogs are very intuitive. Does she show any stress when she’s here? Does she show extra loving when she’s here?

Buchhorn: Sure, there are times when she gets stressed, and she lets me know by—let’s say this table we’re sitting at right now. Now if she’s stressed, she’ll go under the table and just stay there, and that’s her time out. She does not—(inaudible). Yeah, she does that a lot; she’ll just go under her table, under a table, under somewhere, go in a corner and just debrief herself. That was a good question because we do have to take care of them. Sometimes I forget she’s a dog. She goes everywhere with me.

Swaykos: Uh-huh. What support are you setting up for volunteers? You’ve kind of alluded to it, but what work are you doing with them as they come down?

Buchhorn: Right now we have something that I produced called “The Camp Biloxi News.” And it’s a handout that I give them that talks about what they’re going to see, experience while they’re here.

Swaykos: What kinds of things do you put in there?

Buchhorn: You are spiritual and emotional. Wear people out spiritually, [and] they may be questioning God. They may be angry at God. They may be angry at the state, the City, so don’t take offense of that. They may be still having nightmares and flashbacks. Some of them feel guilty, survivor’s guilt. So I try to sell the people some of those things that when you’re talking they still may be numb. They just want to tell their stories, so listen. And then in the handout I also talked about when you go home how to take care of yourself. Find someone to talk to if you yourself are having nightmares. So that, like, we have three locations. It’s called the “Camp Biloxi News” that they all get. And then we have somebody else is doing the morning devotions, like the word for the day. We try to sum up in the evening. We have devotions Monday and Tuesday. We try to sum out how their day was. And then on Thursday is our debriefing, where they’re invited to come talk about, “How was your week? What were the good things? Where did you see maybe God working? What are the things that are going to stay with you.”

Swaykos: What kind of things do you hear now?

Buchhorn: Well, one lady in her seventies said, we were talking about flashbacks and she says, “I keep thinking all week, I keep thinking about this one scene that I saw. And this one guy I was talking to, he just won’t go away.” And I said, “Well, congratulations, you’re having a flashback.” And she says, “Oh, thank you.” And she hugged me because I just normalized her; I told her, “That’s normal, to expect it.”

Swaykos: Yeah. What do you get with the kids? I know a lot of kids come through here. What’s it like for them, and what do they tell you about their experience?
Buchhorn: It’s always, well, generally a good experience. What we hear over and over again from people is how the city appreciates us. And they find that surprising that you’re thinking—and they keep thanking me. And I think humility. Some people are still shocked because they thought it was all cleaned up, and they come back and say, “I can’t believe this.”

Swaykos: With the work that you do, you’re used to this. You’re used to going wherever and giving, (inaudible) for the rest of the country to come down and give up their time to people they maybe would never have talked to before. What has the storm fostered in the rest of the country, do you think?

Buchhorn: I think for the church, to get back to what our mission is about, about searching for the lost, helping and going out into the world, I think that’s fostered for a lot of churches that call. I mean, we’ve always been good at going and taking missionary trips all around the world doing things, but now we see there’s a bigger mission field, and you know the mission field’s right here. And a lot of churches haven’t really done a good job of creating that atmosphere within the churches and say, “Hey, we have a mission here.” And I think that’s been a real positive thing. And some people come, and they say, “I don’t think I want to come back. I’m glad I came down.” I met a lady who’s like in her eighties who had never been away at Thanksgiving, never, and she decided to give up her time, and she was so glad she did.

Swaykos: That’s good.

Buchhorn: And we found projects to do around here, around the camp for her, working in distribution.

Swaykos: Right. So some people aren’t able to go out.

Buchhorn: So you find jobs around camp to do because you have 180, 200 people in camp [to] take care of them, feed them, make sure they got showers, working bathrooms, so that takes a lot.

Swaykos: Right. You talked earlier about questioning God. Have you see that more in your volunteers, more in the people out in the community? Have you seen it even with the people here who are working at the church, and they know they’re doing God’s mission? Do they start to question?

Buchhorn: Right. I’ve seen it with the volunteers; not so much staff. The staff get burned out, because of the politics of a huge effort like that. They get frustrated because they come, and the staff that’s here all the time, contractors and things, they want to help. They just want to get it done, and then when all the roadblocks come, it begins to be—it becomes frustrating for them. I think the volunteers, sometimes, come, and they expect, “Well, they’re going to go do this job or that job.” And when they don’t do this or that job, they get frustrated. So it kind of reminded me about the
lady who cleans Jesus’ feet, or you may have to do a job that you’re not used to or uncomfortable with. But questioning God, I don’t really see that as much anymore.

Swaykos: OK. Just in the very beginning?

Buchhorn: Yeah, I think some of the typical stuff, “Where were you, God?”

Swaykos: Yeah. “How could you let this happen?”

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: I see. You were talking about the politics. What roadblocks are you guys having to doing the work that you want to do?

Buchhorn: Well, I think just all the rules and permits and codes and—

Swaykos: (inaudible)

Buchhorn: That, but also just from even a church-like body. This group says, “Well, we got money.” This group has money, and this one says, “Well, no. We’d already given you this money, and well, no, we want it.” And it’s just the politics, even of the church, that’s frustrated people to see like the church, and how they even played politics when money’s involved. That has become real frustrating.

Swaykos: With all these faith-based organizations, everybody’s praising them down here, saying, “Without them, we would be nowhere.” But they are having their own issues.

Buchhorn: All right.

Swaykos: How do they get back to just being the healthy entity that they are, and not becoming so bureaucratic and governmental?

Buchhorn: Well, if you think about this, this is really, really new for—there are churches that have disaster ministries. But what’s happened here is we had to have volunteer camps. Normally, let’s say Biloxi was just damaged. Well, we would set up places for people to stay, Gulfport, other cities, but because everything was so damaged, we’ve had to develop camps, and all volunteers come to the camps. So all of a sudden this ministry that has never been in the camp business has taken that over, and that’s been a huge, huge issue for them. I mean—

Swaykos: So at least control.

Buchhorn: Oh, well, all the agents are just trying to develop a camp.

Swaykos: Right.
Buchhorn: Buildings, tents, all those issues.

Swaykos: OK. Have you done any work with other religions, and what do you see down here as far as the cooperation between different religions?

Buchhorn: Oh, I think the different faiths have been pretty good. I mean, at this camp we had Baptists last week, Presbyterians, Methodists. We get all backgrounds, and I think it’s been generally pretty good.

Swaykos: Is that different than normal, you think?

Buchhorn: Not when it comes to—

Swaykos: Or was it just not showing before?

Buchhorn: I think maybe it’s not showing before, only when it comes to a disaster. I mean, when I worked the Pentagon with the FBI, there were 110 agencies at the Pentagon, working.

Swaykos: Wow.

Buchhorn: And we got along pretty good.

Swaykos: Good. You talked about that book earlier, and I was just thinking to myself that you were handing out to people in the very beginning. Do you think they really read it then?

Buchhorn: No, I know—

Swaykos: Or do you think it’s now?

Buchhorn: No, no. It wasn’t so much we were going around, handing them out to people. It depended on the situation. We had them available. We gave them in the churches to give to people; it wasn’t like we were going out and putting out brochures because I’m really against that. It was more, if we began to talk to someone and in depth, we had it available.

Swaykos: I see.

Buchhorn: A lot of what we do is called short-term diffusing, maybe five or ten minutes, just finding out how they’re doing, putting apple seeds in there, but yeah.

Swaykos: OK. Are you working with the community now at all, or are you doing mostly camp work?
Buchhorn: No. Our goal right now is to help the church here any way we can, help the camp and also the community. We were in the community the last two weeks ago, especially the homeless in this area, talking with them, and then we had a free breakfast for the homeless. We try to offer some things for the homeless in the area. We have like vouchers and things that we have for people who come, if they need gas. We got Wal-Mart cards that we pass out. We make sure that the food distribution is running. So The Extra Mile, our ministry now, we have different people working for us. So if a volunteer comes in and says---like we have a pastor right now who says, “I’d like to do some calling.” We’ve given him some names, and he’s out making some calls. Yeah. And so like if a teen goes out and works on a house, and they say, “I think maybe the person could use a pastoral visit.” It might be me; it might be somebody else. So we’re doing visits, trying to do some follow-up with people.

Swaykos: Do you see a bigger need now that the fog and the shock have lifted? Is your job more demanding now, or was it more demanding in the beginning? (phones ring)

Buchhorn: I think that’s a good question. I think it’s harder now. It’s harder now, but the goal is the same. It’s harder now, but people are entrenched. And at first, everybody would come out to support everything. Now, it’s like you got to kind of go in and dig it up and find them. I mean, they’ll begin to be entrenched, and that makes it harder. You could just say, “We’re having a support group,” and, “Oh, I’m doing OK now.” Well, what we’re finding is that if we keep on going into the homes and building, we can talk to them there. But then with our food distribution tent or trailer, that’s what’s real important. They’re still coming to us. So that provides a way for them to talk. We want to do that on a more regular basis.

Swaykos: Have you guys set anything up for just children? Have you thought about that?

Buchhorn: Well, we have a preschool here, but I don’t think this is—I mean, that’s just a preschool, and we work with them, but the children are really suffering. I’ve talked to psychologists in town about it. We really haven’t set anything up for that.

Swaykos: How connected are you with the mental health services going on in the area?

Buchhorn: Not too connected. What we’re connected with---I am, in the Extra Mile--is the caseworkers that are working with us, and so that’s a constant. They’ll let us know, “Here’s someone who could use a visit.” So I make sure we get that visit. That’s our good connection is the caseworkers because they’re on the ground. They know the resources. If someone comes in, I can say, “OK. Well, we have a caseworker,” who we then refer him to. That’s how I work, using the caseworkers who are social workers who know the community.
Swaykos: Right, OK. When you go out into town and someone has referred you to a house—

Buchhorn: Sure.

Swaykos: —to a person, how do you start talking to them without making the—I mean, if someone just showed up because someone told someone that I was having a hard time, and I would think, “Gosh. This man thinks I’m crazy, and that’s why he showed up.” How do you get in and let them know that you’re just there for some support; you don’t think anything down on them; you’re just there to lift them up? You know what I mean?

Buchhorn: Sure. I mean, I had someone recently who they referred to me, and they said they think he’s really having troubles. So we went over to his house and began just to chat, “How’s it going? Tell me your story of what happened.” And he told me a story, told me a story, and then I said, “Well, what’s the worst part now?” Sometimes it’s just some one-line things, “What’s bothering you the most right now?” And that usually opens the door. And I think most of the time, 95 percent of the times, people want to talk. We went and made two visits. One was a caseworker visit where we were getting information about her loss and things, “What do you need?” And then after we prayed at the end, she just started crying. So it was like it just opened the doors, and a couple of times, prayer just opened the door. We had one lady last time I was here. It was a week ago. Her house had not been dealt with for two years. Mold was everywhere. They were still living in there, and she started crying and everything with her daughter when they started taking stuff out. So they called me up to chat with them and come over and talk to her. So I just sat next to her for two hours and just talked.

Swaykos: Taking a nonintimidating approach.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: Letting them come to you once they—

Buchhorn: Basically, right.

Swaykos: What do you think is more important when a disaster strikes versus now? Is it physical or emotional? Does it change?

Buchhorn: Well, of course. First of all, it’s physical, your needs. You don’t have, gosh, you don’t have food; you don’t have your belongings. So you take care of that first. And then slowly—(Side 2)

Swaykos: About what’s more important, physical or emotional?
Buchhorn: Yeah, slowly, you begin working with them emotionally and spiritually as they’re beginning to come out of the fog. I mean, there’s a honeymoon phase at first. And then sometimes they go through—where they love all the volunteers—they go through like the anger. I mean, I was talking to some people in New Orleans at a church, and I says, “How are you guys doing?” They said, “Fine, we’re good.” And so, “OK, good.” And then I said something like, “What’s the worst part?” And all of a sudden they started getting mad and said, “All these volunteers, all these Texas license plates, they’re in our way every time we drive somewhere.” So like the anger started coming out. So there’s the honeymoon phase, “The helpers are great.” And then there’s an anger phase, “They’re in my way. Will this ever get done?” And then I think they kind of mellow out a little bit, and that kind of comes and goes.

Swaykos: How do we start to reach the people who are maybe stuck in the anger thing? I don’t know if you were here this weekend, but the gentleman who killed his wife and then killed himself, that’s been happening a lot more. And this was just the most recent in town. How do we reach those people? Because obviously no one did.

Buchhorn: See, that is a really good question. I think it’s what mental health is struggling with. I think it’s, to me, also, the issue of domestic violence and suicide ideation coming up because a lot of them are still living in trailers, families packed in there, and then the issue of the kids. I mean, they’re used to seeing all this debris, and so maybe they’ll grow up thinking that their equilibrium now is just—

Swaykos: Trashy.

Buchhorn: —trashy. And so what does that do to you? It’s a good question. How do you do it? I mean, one of the things that we did in the fires in Southern California is the churches would put up signs, “Oh, we’re having a support group meeting tonight.” Who would come, or where were they coming? They were still going to the caseworkers. They were still going to the recovery centers, and I mean, they’re still coming here. They’re still coming for food, and so that’s where I believe we need to have people available and around. And having—

Swaykos: How many more do we need?

Buchhorn: Well, I’m trying to get here full-time through a grant so that we can just establish more people. I think, yeah, I think more because I think a lot of people don’t understand that when people go to bed at night, yeah, maybe we fixed the roof, but they’re still going to bed with nightmares and dreams.

Swaykos: With the government and other grant agencies starting to pull money because we are so far out. And it’s very ironic that people are trying to be full-time, and then that’s when the money’s going out.

Buchhorn: Right.
Swaykos: And you’re saying they need even more now.

Buchhorn: That’s right.

Swaykos: How do we make the country and all these other agencies realize that mental health services now are what is needed so badly without showing them—I don’t know. Do you show them the effects? Do you show them that people—

Buchhorn: I sadly—

Swaykos: —are killing each other?

Buchhorn: I think, sadly, that’s what it’s going to take.

Swaykos: Really?

Buchhorn: I mean, I’m going to a conference today on, I think, probably MEMA [Mississippi Emergency Management Agency], and where are we at, but unfortunately I think people are going to have to see the statistics.

Swaykos: Right.

Buchhorn: And that’s really, really sad because they---

Swaykos: Does it mean we’re using people? Does that make sense? That we’re using them, we’re turning them into statistics to get what we need.

Buchhorn: Well, I think statistics are, yeah, I think it happens. (phones ring)

Swaykos: Yeah.

Buchhorn: “I think maybe we’ll give you a grant, Chaplain Ralph, if you can show me statistics.” And some of this isn’t about statistics, you know?

Swaykos: Right. (phones ring)

Buchhorn: I mean it’s—

Swaykos: If the person is sad, how do you just turn them into a number? (phones ring)

Buchhorn: Exactly.

Swaykos: But it’s such a circle. (phones ring) You need the money before it would get that way, to help them not get that bad, but it’s not going to happen until then. Did you go to the Mississippi Mental Health Conference that was down here?
**Buchhorn:** No, I missed it. I came in like the day after it ended, but some of our caseworkers here on staff went.

**Swaykos:** OK. What did they say about it?

**Buchhorn:** Well, they were saying there was a lot of good resources, and I think that’s what’s important, the resources, and I think referral. I think if like pastors in the city and business people have good referrals, and if we’re building that up, which you know we are, that’s important.

**Swaykos:** What resources are you able to hook people up with right now?

**Buchhorn:** Well, getting with the caseworkers; that’s one of the big ones for me. We have the caseworkers. We have food. We have the mental issues, more of the caseworkers than they—and that’s why I want my pastoral counseling centers, so that we can do some pastoral counseling. I mean, people are dropping by here, and I’ll do one on one, some counseling with them and some follow-up. And we have a man right now doing some follow-up work. But we’re struggling, too, because of the finances. They’re putting a lot of money into building houses, which is true, but try to get people convinced that we need to work the emotional and spiritual. It’s like a meeting of the church doesn’t see that.

**Swaykos:** Really?

**Buchhorn:** Yeah, and that’s been my frustration.

**Swaykos:** I see.

**Buchhorn:** Um-hm.

**Swaykos:** Because then you would want some funding from them. And do you feel like you’re having to prove yourself all the time?

**Buchhorn:** All the time, sure.

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Buchhorn:** Oh, yeah. What we do in crisis disaster work for my response team, it’s always, it’s—

**Swaykos:** How do you prove yourself to these funding agencies? What do they have you show?

**Buchhorn:** Well, we’re tracking right now how many visits we make. We’re tracking. We have a spreadsheet now of how many times we went and visited
someone. Yeah, we’re tracking statistics. How many food cards do we give out? How many homeless did we work with? So we’re trying to track some of that stuff.

**Swaykos:** Are you having at all to refer people to higher levels of care, maybe a regular psychologist or psychiatrist they can meet with from Gulf Coast Mental Health?

**Buchhorn:** Yeah, at times, but I haven’t been at that level, really.

**Swaykos:** OK. So you’re not seeing regulars at all? This is just kind of—

**Buchhorn:** Regular homeless because we have a lot of homeless. There are a lot of regular homeless that are coming in, some regular people, but it’s a lot of diffusing. As yet we haven’t referred.

**Swaykos:** Can you tell me about your homeless services? I don’t know if there’s really been anyone out there to help them. I mean this impacted them, too. This was their home even though they’re homeless.

**Buchhorn:** Homeless, pretty much, we have the, like the Wal-Mart cards and things we give them. They can get food here, some clothing during winter, of course the blankets and things like that. They’re welcome here. The pastor does a good job with them, too. We have the free breakfast that we’ve done a couple of times, and now we hope to establish that on at least a monthly time. We’re talking, we’re really talking about trying to do something in the way of shelter.

**Swaykos:** OK. Do you have any requirements for them in drug and alcohol sobriety, violence, or crime?

**Buchhorn:** Well, right now they’re not allowed, really, beyond the church property into the camp. We’ve had to kick out a couple of them who’ve been drunk up in the camp, so we don’t do background checks or anything like that.

**Swaykos:** Right, no. I just mean do you require it?

**Buchhorn:** But if they’re having problems with [it], we won’t let them into the camp, but we pretty much—you have to call the police, but it’s pretty much, we have a pretty good relationship with people.

**Swaykos:** Have you seen any higher stress levels in them, or are you doing stress management with them as well, or is it pretty much physical needs with them?

**Buchhorn:** No. It’s stress, too. I mean, that’s a difficult issue, the homeless.

**Swaykos:** Right, definitely. I’ve been talking to a couple of judges, and they said they’ve been doing, I mean, ten times more commitments of people to mental wards.
Do you see—I guess you weren’t here before, but— as time goes on, an increase in severe mental illness in the homeless, because they’re not getting help they deserve?

**Buchhorn:** I don’t know if the statistics would increase because of the storm; I’m sure. What I see is a lot of people come down here to help and end up homeless.

**Swaykos:** Really?

**Buchhorn:** Yeah, we’ve contacted quite a few people.

**Swaykos:** How does that happen? I mean what have you—

**Buchhorn:** I know a family right now who lives in a camper trailer. They were charged $500 a month for just a little hookup, and they came down to help and couldn’t find a job, and now they’re—

**Swaykos:** A whole family?

**Buchhorn:** Three; mother, [father], daughter, and a five-year-old daughter. I know another couple that came here with a nine year old and a seven year old, daughters. They, again, came to help. He’s a worker, had some trouble, and they’re living in a beat-up, old trailer. So we’ve had that, which is kind of amazing, but they’ve come, and then they ended up homeless.

**Swaykos:** Yeah, that’s really sad that we can’t help them.

**Buchhorn:** I don’t think this town really offers a lot for the homeless or shelters and things.

**Swaykos:** No, I haven’t seen anything.

**Buchhorn:** That’s a real problem.

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Buchhorn:** So we’re talking about it, and I don’t know how it will work here, but we--

**Swaykos:** (Inaudible)

**Buchhorn:** Oh, yeah.

**Swaykos:** The homeless outreach and then just haven’t seen that. Even soup kitchens are scarce around here, and I’m not sure, there’s but one or two. We talked about stress management. What do you teach? What do people do?
**Buchhorn:** Well, I teach something called the Face of Christ. Well, that’s more—that’s not so much the stress management. But taking care of self, self-talk, learning to relax, making sure you’re eating, some of the typical, HALT, hungry, angry, lonely, tired. If you’re eating or eating too much or not enough, that’s a sign. Angry, if you’re feeling angry or lonely or tired, sleeping too much or not enough, that’s HALT stuff. Oh, yeah, my little stop things, stress things. Taking care of yourself, looking at what’s going on with yourself.

**Swaykos:** What was the other thing you were going to say, the Face of Christ?

**Buchhorn:** Oh, the Face of Christ is what I teach in a disaster or crisis class. When someone goes out to the field, remember the acronym FACE. What are they feeling? What actions are they taking? What actions can I take to help? How are they coping? How can I help them cope? And E, how can I encourage them? So it’s like just a little—for them to remember. In crises, the critical response to intensive situations intently supportive, it’s the acronym, because I’m ADD. Well, see, I even—I don’t have any with me; I have little handouts that I give people, “Trying to Take Care of Oneself.” They can put in their pockets or something. And then we’ll provide these little stress dolls sometimes, this latest one with the stop sign. And one time I did a class on being a parachute packer, taking care of one another, and I gave them little parachutes, then blowing bubbles. We all blew bubbles together. Yeah, just a lot.

**Swaykos:** Do you see any of the volunteers having some guilt, going out and realizing what they have at home or maybe feeling guilty, feeling like they couldn’t do enough? I know they think they’re going to come and change the world, and maybe they think I just put in a floor or something like that.

**Buchhorn:** I think so. I think guilt—and I think what’s happening is some volunteers go into a house, and maybe it’s (inaudible) and they aren’t quite finished, or they see projects that need to be done, and so they make promises, and then they know—well, they don’t know—but then they don’t come back. But the promises are meant to be “because I want to help you and maybe I can get that done; maybe I can get that for you.” And then it doesn’t happen, so they let people down, and maybe that’s guilt motivated. I’m not sure. We’ve had that problem, so we’ve had to tell our volunteers, “Don’t promise anything.”

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Buchhorn:** “Well, we’ll come back and cut your grass,” or “I’ll get that electrical thing fixed,” and then maybe the problem is we may not have an electrician next week to come help.

**Swaykos:** I see that.

**Buchhorn:** I may not have a plumber next week.
Swaykos: How do we help the community accept the volunteers? You said they go through that anger period, and some of them have been so angry that they worked on their house, and set it on fire, that was built by volunteers. How do we help them cope with, “They’re going to be here; they’re going to be here for a long time, but it’s for your benefit”?

Buchhorn: That’s difficult.

Swaykos: Yeah.

Buchhorn: It’s difficult because of the [political issues], too. I mean, one minute it looks like the camp is going to stay, and the next minute, “Well, maybe we’ll pull funding.” So that is difficult.

Swaykos: Is it something that we can do? Is there something we can do about it, or is it just—

Buchhorn: It’s huge.

Swaykos: It’s just kind of big?

Buchhorn: Yes, it’s huge. One day you have 180 volunteers in camp, the next day maybe only twenty.

Swaykos: OK.

Buchhorn: And so the camp is trying; you’ll hear John later, trying. We’ve got DVDs going out. We’re trying to make sure volunteers keep on coming and not to be forgotten, but that’s—I mean, that is a tough issue.

Swaykos: You’ve been here for almost two years.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: Where are we now? You’ve done other crisis response. I’m not sure you’ve stayed this long.

Buchhorn: No, I’ve never done really the long-term.

Swaykos: Right. So where are we two years down the road, emotionally and spiritually, and where do we need to head from here?

Buchhorn: I think there’s much more work to be done, emotionally and spiritually. I think there’s huge opportunities to help people and make them whole. I mean, I don’t want to get critical, but I think the church here maybe could do a better job of integrating the community. And I think that needs to be organized, and it might be
happening in other churches, too, that we’ve kind of just gone on about our business, and there’s more things that could be done. I think there’s more things can be done with the volunteers and community. We’re going to start doing house blessings where we go in and bless the house after it’s been finished, and that’s kind of a nice little touch.

**Swaykos:** At this point do we need to bring in the people who—I don’t want to say who have been fixed down here, but those who are back to their normal? How do we pull them in to start then helping the rest of their own community after they’ve been in helpless mode for two years? How do you get them back into the helping mode?

**Buchhorn:** That’s a good question, because sometimes when they’re that, they’re there, they don’t maybe want to go.

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Buchhorn:** They just, “That’s over with. I don’t want to see that again.”

**Swaykos:** Yeah.

**Buchhorn:** But I think motivation comes in repetition, repetition, repetition, you know?

**Swaykos:** (laughter) Yeah.

**Buchhorn:** And leaders doing it; when they see leaders doing it. Leadership is important.

**Swaykos:** Um-hm. How do you see your role as a leader, as someone coming from the outside to lead a bunch of people who have been hurt?

**Buchhorn:** It’s frustrating for me, because of the funding. [We] can’t get the continuity that we have had now. Some people working for us here—I have a part-time program manager who’s here all the time. We’re able to pay her, so that keeps some stuff going. Now, I think I come in, in that we do have some people working for us here, I can just keep by motivating them. I’m here. I come in and teach the classes now. [I] don’t necessarily do all the ground work, but we have people who can assign volunteers to do some of our work. So I guess I’m just the leader trying to come in and motivate him and say, “We need to keep on doing this, keeping a vision alive for what we’re doing.”

**Swaykos:** Should the funding run out, how are you going to feel? What are you going to do?

**Buchhorn:** Yeah, if the funding comes out and quits, then I can’t come anymore. I just have to go on to our ministry and do other things.
Swaykos: With so much time devoted to this right now, when and how are you finding time to go to other disasters? I know you went to Virginia Tech—

Buchhorn: Yeah, we were in Alabama working there. Because we have two people on our disaster team from Slidell and here, that makes it a little bit easier, too.

Swaykos: I see.

Buchhorn: They’re part of our response team. We have to pick and choose because we’re still a small, faith-based ministry. We have to pick and choose, really. “Will this work? Will this not work for us?” I mean, I would’ve loved to have gone to West Virginia last year, or two years ago during the mining, but I was committed here, so it’s we have to pick and choose. But we’re trying to build that network. We have names of people all across the country now who want to joint us. So we’re trying to discover how we can coordinate that.

Swaykos: OK. How long do you see the effects lasting here, past when all the houses are rebuilt, and all the condos are—

Buchhorn: I think the emotional and spiritual effects, for years. I think the kids, their nightmares, I mean, that will dissipate but just the effects, the effects they won’t even know that are happening.

Swaykos: Right.

Buchhorn: The broken marriages for years to come.

Swaykos: How does a community cope once everybody’s pulled out? Once you’re gone, all the volunteers are gone, once the mental health money really is gone, how are they going to cope?

Buchhorn: I just think there’s going to be a huge sense of loss. It will be a sense of loss and in grief, so I think it’s a huge thing. And I don’t think we’ve seen it on this scale. You know we see it in disasters around the country. It happens; volunteers leave, and there’s a grief; there’s a loss. But then I think working—I think, and it might be happening—but working with the local churches and communities to be able to establish. See, part of my denomination believes that basically it’s a local church that needs to be responsible for the community, and so they won’t necessarily come in and interfere with the local church. If the local church like this one had asked me to come in and help them, then it works, but I just can’t come in and say, “Well, I’m going to do, you know”—

Swaykos: OK.
Buchhorn: So that’s not a problem to some extent. Where I see we need to go in and be really proactive, some in our denomination think that, “Well, no, if the church hasn’t asked us to come in.” Yeah.

Swaykos: What more would you like to be doing for them? What are you being held back from?

Buchhorn: I think making this more of a full-time crusade for at least three or four years.

Swaykos: Three or four years, wow.

Buchhorn: With a staff. In our denomination I would have a deacon who would be available on staff, maybe a social worker, spiritual deacons doing more and more training within the camp. The food distribution center, I don’t know how long that’s going to last. But setting up more and more programs, small group programs and things like that. And identifying needs, more needs assessment. But I think a full-time staff, that’s what we’re looking for. We’re actually looking for a $300,000 grant for the next two years. And we actually have a guy from our board in St. Louis coming in on Thursday, and we’ll be talking to him.

Swaykos: Oh, good.

Buchhorn: He’s had this grant for like two months, and so we’re going to push him and see. So I think more in a sense like more boots on the ground with the specific goal of doing emotional and spiritual work.

Swaykos: How does spirituality help in something like this? We talked about questioning God, but how does the faith in God help here?

Buchhorn: I think the spirituality is just the base, and I think down here a lot of people have the faith. It is definitely the base of their life, the rock, the foundation, and sometimes we begin to question it and struggle with it. I think that it’s the bottom line, and sometimes we have to help in some of the people’s lives. We find it; I guess, look for it again. They maybe lost it.

Swaykos: Do you think some who lost it before the storm are back? Do you think there’s some increase in people?

Buchhorn: Some yes, some no.

Swaykos: Really?

Buchhorn: I mean some people—a sheriff’s deputy told me, “Watch out. Some of the people who were doing drugs before are still doing drugs now.” It’s like the same population. I think the church should be a community—I mean, I think people in this
community should really look like this church, “This is our church. This is our place.” And I want to be able to do that, multicultural, multiethnic, and bring opportunities and things. I mean I’d like, if we got our grant, I’d like to have some sort of resource center, maybe every day or every week, a resource center or a drop-in center sort of like the Vets used to have and still do have. You can come in and just drop by. Or make it a lounge; make it whatever, just a drop-in center for people to come by, and get the word out, “Every Saturday from nine to one we have a drop-in center.” I think that would work with the homeless. And just let people know.

Swaykos: OK. You alluded to ethnicity. You come from somewhere that is very different with race relations, I think. What have you seen down here as far as race relations, with the help in community, as well as maybe how people are treating each other now after the storm?

Buchhorn: I think it’s part of our church body to general Lutherans. We have a black ministry in our denomination, but you see a lot of white volunteers coming here. I’d like to see more black volunteers. We need to be in the community. I mean, I’ve got into the community. We’ve advertised. We’ve talked to them, but we need in the church, and since I’m not the pastor here, I mean, the church needs to offer ministry that is multiethnic.

Swaykos: OK. What do you think they could do?

Buchhorn: Through worship. Through worship, through worship styles, through friendliness, and we have vacation Bible study this summer that was pretty successful. We had numerous blacks, which is a good thing. We need to encourage that and Hispanic, as well. (phone rings)

Swaykos: I was going to say, do you see them embracing—Hispanic is known for that—

Buchhorn: Right, right.

Swaykos: (Inaudible)

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: But that’s new here. How are they accepting them and how—

Buchhorn: One of the churches, Lutheran churches in New Orleans started Hispanic ministry because of the volunteers.

Swaykos: Wonderful.

Buchhorn: We have Hispanic Bibles ready to go.
Swaykos: Oh, good.

Buchhorn: I tried to do some work with the Vietnamese church. Father Gregory down at the Point I met numerous times, and we have a good relationship, and I think that’s important. But, yeah, Hispanic. We’ll be talking, actually, Thursday, with our guy from St. Louis. He’s Hispanic, and I want to talk about how we can reach out to the Hispanics and—but yet to get on part-time, it’s like if we can establish our ministry here full-time, where we can really—I mean think about it: 95 percent blacks use our food distribution. And we try to make some follow-up calls to them, but I want to go the extra mile with them and say, “This is what’s available at this church.” But you see, if you don’t have a product on Sunday—and so I think we need to work on a better product for blacks and ethnics, multiethnics.

Swaykos: Do you think we’d be a lot further along as a community if we could put all that aside—

Buchhorn: Oh, sure.

Swaykos: —and just work together?

Buchhorn: Oh, sure.

Swaykos: We talked about young kids. We talked about adults. Do you see any teens? I feel like they’re the most forgotten in this. They’ve had every activity taken away, issues with school when it was already a hard time for them, emotional issues when it’s already a very hard time for them.

Buchhorn: I’ve worked with some of the teens here at our church. I worked with one of the runaways we’ve had that had some family problems. But, yeah, that is an issue. But teens kind of go in and out with their own grief issues and loss issues. The peers thing is so important.

Swaykos: How are you—do you need to relate to them differently than you would, say, an adult?

Buchhorn: See, I don’t think so. I think, honestly hearing their language and trying to talk, not talking the teenage speech, but hearing what they’re saying and trying to understand it and not prejudge it, and just be honest with them, and don’t go over their head, just straight. I think that’s been successful for me, you know?

Swaykos: Good.

Buchhorn: And sometimes my confirmation classes in years past have been we sit down and just talk, and sometimes they want to talk about sex, and, “Oh, OK.” “Hey, we can talk about that with a pastor. We can talk about drugs with a pastor, and we don’t have to feel like, ‘Well, that’s taboo.’” Because I want them to always
remember that I could do that. Because I talked to a teenager one time who was suicidal, and she says, “Do you think there’s any way I’m going to tell my church that?” So letting the teenagers know that you can talk.

Swaykos: So just honesty with them.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: And everybody else.

Buchhorn: Right.

Swaykos: Lastly, is there anything else that you think needs to be said about this community, with all the work you do, that needs to be recorded for later study, for later interests?

Buchhorn: I think one of the issues---and you might talk to John about this, too---that I see is because this is a new creature of these camps coming in and people living in tents, and people living in motor homes, that causes a lot of stress even within the camp.

Swaykos: Does it?

Buchhorn: People left their families to come here.

Swaykos: Right, right.

Buchhorn: And they’re living—I was talking to a guy who’s about my size, earlier, and he says, “Yeah. My shower’s very small. I dropped the soap and I got a---it’s so tiny.” So I think that’s just a, maybe that’s just a, you know, implementational problem, but I see there’s a lot of stress at some of these camps, trying to put volunteers in, the long-term volunteers—I don’t know how you’d answer that, but I see that’s creating a lot of stress management (inaudible) problems. And I think vetting people is important. We had a lot of volunteers come who want to work long-term, who brought a lot of emotional issues here themselves, and we’ve had to hire and fire. And so that’s the nature of a disaster. People come out of the woodwork, and so that has been a problem.

Swaykos: So the volunteers, there’s a blessing and a curse that comes with them.

Buchhorn: Well, right, exactly.

Swaykos: It’s what needs to be examined for further—

Buchhorn: Right.
Swaykos: OK. Thank you so much.

Buchhorn: Thank you. I appreciate it.

(end of interview)