

**Interviewee: Dozier, J. David**

**Interview: December 19, 2005**

**University of Houston  
Center for Public History  
Houston Project**

**HOUSTON'S RESPONSE TO THE  
VICTIMS OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH**

**Jack David Dozier**

Mr. J. David Dozier is the Director, Congregational Liaison Disaster Preparedness, Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, 3217 Montrose Blvd., Houston, Texas 77006. During the rescue efforts of victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Mr. Dozier was involved with the planning and execution of housing evacuees in private homes and shelters through joint efforts with faith-based congregations throughout the Houston area.

The interview was conducted by Ernesto Valdés, Center for Public History, University of Houston where the tape is deposited in M.D. Anderson Library on the main campus of the university.

Done on Houston, Texas, December 19, 2005

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**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Interview with: Jack David Dozier**

**Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes**

**Date: December 19, 2005**

**Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola**

EV: We are at Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston on 3217 Montrose. It is December 19, 2003, at 3:00 P.M. and I am interviewing Mr. Dave Dozier, who is the Director, Congregational Liaison Disaster Preparedness of Interfaith Ministries. Would you please give your complete name please?

JDD: My name is Jack David Dozier.

EV: When were you born?

JDD: 1954.

EV: Where?

JDD: Little Rock.

EV: Could you give us just a little bit about your educational background?

JDD: My education – LSU, Shreveport. English major. I did not complete school. I have been married 33 years. I was a lay leader and licensed to preach in my denomination. Sales background most of my life. I came to work with this nonprofit about 9 months ago.

EV: And before that, you were with the church or doing ministry work?

JDD: It was lay work in the church and sales, outside sales, all of my career.

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EV: Was that work that you were doing here in Houston?

JDD: Houston and Shreveport, Louisiana. All my adult life goes between those two.

EV: How did you got involved with Interfaith Ministries?

JDD: At our church, I met a lady representing Interfaith Ministries for refugee services. She knew that I was in the welding industry in sales and asked me if I could help some refugees find jobs in welding. I came over and worked with some of those men, saw what I liked here and put in my resume.

EV: So, you were here maybe seven months before Katrina hit, is that right?

JDD: That is correct.

EV: Can you tell me when you first realized you were going to be part of the Katrina rescue?

JDD: Well, the mayor of Houston's office had called our CEO and asked for him to be in on a conference call. I don't remember exactly what date . . . it was when we realized that we had many people coming here from New Orleans. And so, we sat in, Jennifer and I and some other people in the office Thursday, sat in and listened to the conference call and Tom DeLay, Sheila Jackson Lee, I believe, Pastor Ed Young from Second Baptist and some other community leaders. They said, "We've got tens of thousands of people coming here. We're going to need to house them, we're going to need to feed them. We don't know how we're going to do that." So, a few hours later, probably 200 people representing faith communities and judicatories and groups from around the city met at the United Way and before you knew it, we were putting together meetings first for *Operation Compassion* to feed those many people we thought at that time coming to the Astrodome and then probably the week or two after, the mayor asked Interfaith Ministries

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for Greater Houston to take what we do in refugee services where we helped people from Somalia to Vietnam, places like that, who were made refugees and came into the United States to take those principles and use them to create a program to help the people coming here from New Orleans to acclimate to the city of Houston.

EV: When you superimposed that refugee program on to the evacuee program, was there some modification you had to go through?

JDD: I don't think it was large. I am not the one that made that modification. A guy named Aaron Tate who was manager of refugee services did that, but many of the principles are the same. When you train the locals here, we have some cultural sensitivity pieces, some guidelines for receiving these people, what the program does not want you to do, what it does want you to do. So, we basically, I think, took and transferred a lot of those principles over.

EV: And you were the man carrying this ball?

JDD: On the ground, I was. Now, Paul Roby, who you interviewed last week, he was, at that time, a volunteer from Seattle and he did a lot of the statistical work. A gentleman, a doctor, by the name of Jamison Day with U of H put together much of the program, especially the electronics and the data side of it, concept. I was the lead man, if you will, in training the congregations and in attempting to find the evacuees and connect them with the neighbors from Houston – to make the connection between the new and the welcoming neighbors.

EV: Can you tell me what would have been one of your typical days during this time?

JDD: We would be, me and the team working and we had some beautiful volunteers. We had some volunteers from Indiana, a couple of pastors with the Disciples of Christ

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Church and people that were in-house here, we would be calling or going to visit apartment complexes that we had found out from the city were housing Katrina evacuees. We would be getting their buy in to our contacting the evacuees within their complex. We would also be finding congregations that were in proximity to those apartments and convening a meeting or putting together a meeting between the leadership of those congregations and the apartments so that they could actually do the work.

EV: Did you solicit these congregations?

JDD: When Katrina first hit, there were many, many willing hands and since the city and the mayor had endorsed Neighbor-2-Neighbors, many people came for training. We had a hiccup in the sense that we did the training early September but we found out afterwards that the New Orleans people weren't ready to be matched up because they were still staying in the George R. Brown or the Astrodome and they weren't really interested in a neighbor until they figured out where they lived. So, there was an unfortunate gap of time between the time we trained all the people in Houston, the Houston congregations, and when the New Orleans people were ready to receive and be matched with new neighbors. Did I answer your question? It might be starting a relationship with the congregation, it might be cultivating that relationship, it might be introducing them to an apartment complex where it might be even helping them put together some type of party or function. We call them Matching Parties, where there might be some food, might be some entertainment and congregation members and the evacuees were there and we wanted them to meet, befriend one another and actually match.

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EV: You said you had that hiccup that caused some delay and that was caused by the evacuees not being ready yet to move out of the Convention Center?

JDD: Oh, no, they were ready to move out but they didn't know where they were going to live. So, they were more concerned about finding out where they would live.

EV: In terms of . . .

JDD: In terms of the apartment complex. For instance, I would go to the George R. Brown and talk to evacuees about the Neighbors-2-Neighbors program and they would say, "That sounds great. As soon as I get an apartment and find out about food stamps and where my kids are going to go to school, I'll want to do that." And unfortunately, that was several weeks for many of them and even more. So, we got a large number of Houston people trained and ready and excited about Neighbors-2-Neighbors early to mid September but the matching didn't actually begin until mid-October.

EV: And like food stamps and housing, I suspect they didn't want to leave and lose contact with the folks that were giving them the foods stamps or get the housing?

JDD: No. That was number one on their priorities. In other words, they wanted to make sure they could eat and have a roof over their head, then they'd worry about a neighbor.

EV: What kind of staff did you have, or support?

JDD: At the highest level, we had about 8 people plus myself. A couple of them were volunteers from out of town. A couple of them were full-time staff and then some people who were part-time as well.

EV: Did you ever go to New Orleans or to Louisiana or any impacted areas after Katrina?

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JDD: Not after Katrina. I am a native from Louisiana but I have not been there after Katrina.

EV: That is what I mean. Just, the Katrina experience was done here.

JDD: That is correct.

EV: Are there any ongoing programs are still matching folks up? Are you pretty much out of that?

JDD: We are in transition. Originally, we were trying to make individual matches – one family to one family or one household to one household. That is very cumbersome and hard to manage because Houston is such a big place. So, what we are focusing now on is finding congregations that want to participate and finding apartment complexes in proximity and facilitating matches there. We are also supporting people by being a network or resource for information – a referral, if you will.

EV: And you are still getting calls for all that?

JDD: Yes.

EV: Have you experienced any unexpected problems with any of this? I mean, matching up people with the Neighbors-2-Neighbors. There are so many bad things we have been hearing about in the news.

JDD: We haven't had any real bad things happen. We have had some disappointed Houston neighbors because they signed up and wanted to be matched with a New Orleans person or a Louisiana person. And there just wasn't anybody to match up with them in their zip code or close by. What we found is that so many of the evacuees have been moved outside of the loop. That is where housing is easier to find or more affordable,



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and so many of the congregations who wanted to help were not very close to those apartment complexes. So, that has been a challenge.

EV: As a result of this, are there plans underway to modify the system for matching the neighbor with the church?

JDD: Well, again, we are getting away from the individuals and letting congregations and, of course, the congregation may have people who live in various parts of the city. So, if that congregation says, you know, we've got people in 4 zip codes, then we can help them or it is easier for them to match up.

EV: Are there any special recollections you would consider a watershed moment for you during any of this Katrina endeavor.

JDD: Well, one of the watersheds for us is right after the mayor's conference call and the meeting at the United Way, we were here until about 11 o'clock for a couple of nights calling and mobilizing people of very different faiths to come to *Operation Compassion*. And I think we, by God's grace, did a very good job in mobilizing some Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and other faith groups to participate alongside of . . . most of the faith community in Houston is Christian but they participated in *Operation Compassion* and it truly was an interdenominational or interfaith activity. That was big for me. Meeting some of the Katrina evacuees who had serious problems and had not had them addressed in weeks and even over one month and then seeing some of the neighbors that we had trained latch onto these people and walk them through the maze of red tape to get medical help or legal help, that was a real blessing and I would say a milestone just to witness that.

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EV: Who provided legal help? Did you have a battery of attorneys who volunteered to help coach or certain firms that pitched in?

JDD: You know, now that I think about it, I probably misspoke. It was medical help. I don't know of anybody specifically. There are a number of legal organizations that offered free assistance to evacuees.

EV: O.K. Could you describe what some of the special problems may have been?

JDD: Oh, sure. There was a lady who had had a terrible wreck before Katrina in New Orleans. She was confined to a wheelchair and she had 3 pins, stainless steel pins, through her leg which is not pretty to look at in the first place. Now, I met her on October 3 and she had yet to see a doctor, and it had been 6 weeks, maybe 5 weeks, since she evacuated from Katrina. So, she was in danger of gangrene. She was in danger of terrible things happening to her. And by God's grace, some of the ladies from the churches that came to that function took hold of her and walked her through the system to get the medical help she needed and could not find. She had left much of her identification, her gold cards in New Orleans. You know, when you evacuate, you don't always grab everything you need, and it was just very overwhelming to her to make phone calls and get passed from one service to another and she needed some advocates. And that is what these neighbors did for her.

EV: Do you have any idea how many folks you were able to help during all this?

JDD: We had documented over 400 matches of household to household. Now, I suppose, I believe we got a couple of thousand matches. The reason there is such a big jump is this: Many congregations and many people of faith who came to our training went out and did it but they did not take the time to report back. And it is not unusual for

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me to meet, on almost a weekly basis, somebody who says, 'Oh, I did that and we helped so many families.' We don't have any record of that but we see that. But we have the documentation for, I think, almost 450 families or households, I should say, through our system.

EV: For the record, would you explain what you mean by "household to household" what does that encumbers or what that entails?

JDD: Well, sometimes it might be a single adult. Sometimes it might be a grown brother and sister with children living under one roof. So that is what I mean. If you say family to family, sometimes that can get muddled. It could be 3 different families under one roof.

EV: And Neighbors-2-Neighbors, it is almost a synonym of what you just described, is that right?

JDD: Yes.

EV: Are there any folks who are still in apartments due to their own special needs or their own special problems?

JDD: There are more needs than I think we can enumerate or count or look at. You have people still in hotels waiting to get into apartments. We have many people who are in apartments who have yet to find furniture. They are sleeping on the floor or an air mattress. I am certain there are people who are still trying to find their family members. There are people who are still in need of medical care, I suppose. I don't know of those people but I hopefully can find a way to get them taken care of. It is amazing what we see. In some places, we find people who have just about got back to where they need to

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be, at least, living in Houston, and then a few apartment doors down, there is still somebody who doesn't have furniture. So, it is still very much an ongoing project.

EV: Do you feel that the government agencies responded properly? What would you recommend they do to improve?

JDD: I need a minute to think on that. Why don't you ask another question? I don't mind coming back to that. I'm not going to dodge it but I want to think about it.

EV: You used a term that I am not I understand: "judicatories." Exactly what does that entail?

JDD: Judicatory is just the Catholic church. (Calling to someone in the adjacent cubicle) Help me, Jennifer. I used to have a definition of that.

Jennifer: Judicatory is a governing body of most Christian denominations.

JDD: So you might go to UMCOR..

Jennifer: That is the disaster judicatory. They have their own United Methodist conference.

(Too many people talking at one time)

JDD: Presbyterian synod, yes, that is exactly it. Judicatory. So, a conference. So, instead of talking to one Methodist church, you talk to the head, at least in this area. So, that is what it is.

EV: Were you involved in any debriefing of Katrina? We touched on it a little bit, I know, but are you all involved in the higher levels, like on the state level where they are reevaluating their evacuation tactics?

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JDD: Well, at the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response, we train congregations on evacuation. Jennifer is a regular attendee at VOAD which is Volunteers Organization After Disaster.

Jennifer: I am the secretary.

JDD: She is the secretary of VOAD, Gulf Coast, at this time. But no, we are not participating as an office in Louisiana. Neither are we in any decision making role for Texas. What we do is advise the congregations that we train on what the rules are and what they can expect after a disaster and hopefully by doing so, people are better protected.

EV: Let me ask you regarding the confluence aid and the response. If you had the opportunity to revamp how this was done what changes would you like to make?

JDD: Well, one of the first things I would do, in fact, we are working on that right now, is help the city identify all of the people who would be at risk in the event of an evacuation. There are many, many elderly people who live in Houston, who live in Harris County, and if we were hit between the eyes with a large hurricane, those people very likely would not survive, they would not escape, or they would be in much the same case situation that the people in New Orleans were. And the problem is the city doesn't know who these people are and where they live. And that is a real problem. Mrs. Jones, an elderly woman who lives on Smith Street, 83 years old. She can't drive. She doesn't have surviving family nearby her. There are social services that bring her service, maybe bring her Meals on Wheels. But those agencies cannot report her name or her address to someone like us or even to the city without her permission. That is what HIPAA has done for us. So, yes, I have a real bone of contention with HIPAA – there you go. I do.

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And so, we are having to go through a convoluted route of sending out sheets asking Mrs. Jones to give us permission to contact her to see if she does need help during an evacuation. So, in a sense, it has really tied our hands. Right now, if Houston was hit, many people would probably die if we were hit just right. And the national news would say about Houston just like it said about New Orleans – Houston didn't care for its elderly. Well, the bottom line is it takes time and forethought and cutting through red tape to identify these people and make a plan to help them in the event of an evacuation. So, number one, I would streamline that.

Number two, I'd make sure that congregations and the citizens at large understand their responsibilities in a disaster. Every agency that has to do with disaster, be it Red Cross, be it Salvation Army, be it the federal government, will tell you and me, Joe Citizen, that I need to be ready to live on my own and self-sufficient for 72 hours. I need to have the food, I need to have the water, I need to be able to watch after myself because if it hits the fan, someone will come to rescue me but I need to be ready to be on my own and self sufficient for 72 hours. Much of what happens, much of the emergency that took place in the Katrina evacuation and the Rita evacuation . . . if you recall, all these people dehydrating on the highway – they didn't even have water in their car, you know. If the citizenship is exposed to the responsibility and trained in how to protect themselves, we would do far better in the case of an evacuation. And then finally, I think better communication between the faith-groups which, in the end are the ones that really help protect and help clean up, and the large sources of income and aid such as Red Cross, Salvation Army, and so forth. I think there can be a lack of communication before disaster and then, after the disaster, it is exacerbated.

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EV: Do you think that can be done, in terms of communication?

JDD: Well, as a matter of fact, that is one of the things that we are working hard at. We, in this office, are communicating to the congregations what the responsibilities of Joe Citizens are and what they should expect from the Red Cross in the event of a disaster or Salvation Army or FEMA and what they should not expect and hopefully aid them in developing those relationships, those life lines before, rather than after the fact.

EV: I am concerned about what you said regarding this survival information filtering down to the elderly people living alone and how we need to become aware that they are even there. That seems like an insurmountable problem. I mean, I can see where a congregation could become aware through zip codes. And still, maybe somebody that is not a member of a congregation, or maybe never went to church to begin with – some cantankerous old guy who just didn't ever go to church to begin with . . . and I can see a tremendous violation of your Constitutional rights if somebody is poking around trying to find out who and what they are doing. I suspect that giving them some kind of packet or something that says, let somebody know where you are, what you are doing would probably be the solution?

JDD: Well, what is being done is we've got a Meals on Wheels program here and they serve almost 3,000 people a day. And our drivers are going to bring out a survey for these people to fill. And If Mrs. Smith says, no, I don't have a plan, no, I don't have family here to help me, yes, I would like to be contacted by the city and signs it, then she will be contacted. But I am afraid, I think HIPAA sometimes presents more good than it should.

EV: What is HIPAA?

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JDD: That is the law that came into effect a few years ago and that is why you have to sign a paper to let one doctor talk to another to release records. It is privacy. It has to do with privacy.

EV: Do you know what it stands for? (transcriptionist note – HIPAA stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). What I understood on television and media is there are a lot of problems with the medical records, too. Folks who had certain drugs they had to take, have no way of being able to prove they needed these drugs. Is there any idea maybe of having some kind of computer bank that somebody could tap into here that would be . . .

JDD: I have not heard of that problem. I have not. I am sure it could exist and I know that bank records were lost and criminal records were lost from the flood so why not medical records.

EV: Yes, as a matter of fact, a friend of mine works in the Medical Center and says that was the problem that they were getting hit with, to some degree . . .

JDD: . . . And many of them, even when offered help, are going to refuse but it really aggravates me that we have to go through all this.

EV: (Laughter) Are you blaming it on the Democrats, David?

JDD: I am one of the few Republicans here . . .

EV: O.K., Mr. Dozier, is there anything else that you think you may want to add to this? Is there anybody you think we may want to talk to about it, that might be able to give us some more information?



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JDD: Well, I mean, if you would want to speak with some of the people that are more on the ground, I would be happy to point you that way, to people in congregations who are dealing with these end users, work with these new neighbors, these Katrina evacuees.

EV: Those are things that we can certainly use and we will filter them through and see if we need to go and spend any time . . .

JDD: I can also tell you there are 4 lovely ladies 20 steps away that were all from New Orleans. They were just debriefing me on their experiences. I don't know if that is something you'd ever want to . . .

EV: Are they working for you, you said?

JDD: Yes.

EV: I will make a note.

JDD: I'll introduce you to them.

EV: O.K., I think that is all that I have.

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