

# DUMP FEMA: FEDS SHOULD AID CHURCHES

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, two things seem obvious: the federal, state and local government response has been a disaster, and the response of churches has been nothing short of heroic.

If there is any lesson to be learned, it is that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should be dumped and that federal aid should be given to churches and other houses of worship that participate in emergency relief efforts. But the aid, either in the form of reimbursements or grants, must be offered without compromising the autonomy of churches.

The evidence that government cannot do the job of churches is overwhelming. To take one example, there was an article in the September 9 edition of the *New York Times* entitled, "A New Meaning for 'Organized Religion': It Helps the Needy Quickly." The news story detailed the failure of FEMA and the triumph of churches.

Regarding the response of government, the article reported that "many people said they could not wait that long, or did not have the patience to deal with all the bureaucratic mix-ups." Fortunately, the article said, "churches stepped into the void in what observers say is probably the largest such outpouring in recent memory, with tens of thousands of displaced people stretched out across the country."

The time has come for common sense to prevail: we need to end the stranglehold that the paranoid church-and-state extremists have had on directing public policy. And that means that in times of emergency, a new partnership between government and religion should be forged: federal dollars—without any strings attached—should be given to churches that provide emergency

relief. It's time we put the best interests of the needy first.

Fortunately, President Bush said in his September 15 address to the nation that he will authorize the federal government to reimburse the churches (to some extent) for their efforts. That, at least, is a start.