

## ORTHODOX UNION

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# New Jersey NCSY Trips to New Orleans Set For March and April

### OU Staff

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FROM NEW JERSEY TO NEW ORLEANS: FIVE YEARS LATER, STILL SO MUCH FOR NCSY TEEN LEADERS TO HELP REBUILD; VOLUNTEER MISSIONS PLANNED FOR MARCH 1-6 AND APRIL 6-10

They come to clean up, to clear out, to take apart – they also come to reestablish, to build up, to strengthen. They take the mundane, the worn out, the forgotten and they elevate them – restoring hope, restoring homes, restoring lives. The trips were always two-fold: as proud Americans, they travel the country to assist in communities damaged by natural disasters, regardless of the faith and cultures of those citizens; and proud Jews, they invest energy and love to inspire and strengthen the local Jewish communities impacted by those disasters. This is the work of Jewish teen leaders with New Jersey NCSY.

NCSY | Jewish Youth Leadership is the international youth movement of the Orthodox Union.

Led by Rabbi Ethan Katz, New Jersey NCSY Associate Regional Director, Jewish teen leaders are off to New Orleans for two such relief missions, from Tuesday, March 1-Sunday, March 6; and from Wednesday, April 6-Sunday, April 10. These trips will mark the tenth New Jersey NCSY volunteer mission, the fifth visit to New Orleans.

Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, Regional Director of New Jersey NCSY, declared, “This generation of Jewish youth needs to do more than learn Judaism — they need to live Judaism. These trips provide an opportunity for Jewish teens to express their Jewish values in a tangible way that impacts the broader world.”

Students on the first mission, from Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School in Livingston, will be volunteering with Common Grounds, a New Orleans-based nonprofit dedicated to repairing and strengthening communal life of the city. Teens on the second mission, from The Frisch School in Paramus, will be volunteering with Habitat for Humanity. During both missions, students will be given hands-on opportunities to assist in rebuilding homes within the city and visit the local Orthodox community and day school.

“Every time Rabbi Katz and his NCSYers visit, they infuse our congregation with life,” expressed Rabbi Uri Topolosky, Rav of OU-member synagogue Congregation Beth Israel in Metairie. “We are blessed to have a relationship with NCSY — specifically with Rabbi Katz — who has brought his teenagers to our community year after year, exemplifying that the teens come to build a relationship with other Jews, and not just for a fun Shabbaton. It’s very important for us as a community to know that we have friends who care about us, and want to help us in our continued growth.”

Student participants are chosen by their schools based on various qualities: scholastics, character development, leadership potential and content of a qualifying essay they write. Students attend training seminars before the trip, covering topics such as the concept of what a person’s own responsibility is to mankind and the country in which he or she lives; the Jewish ideals of tikkun olam, repairing the world; and responses to expect from non-Jews unfamiliar with Jewish clothing or ways of life.

“After all of these years following Katrina, there are still hundreds of homes that have not been rebuilt — numerous empty lots, and empty streets,” Rabbi Katz declared. “Our students have a special opportunity to work as a team to accomplish the set tasks and serve as a tremendous Kiddish Hashem (sanctification of God’s Name). We know that they will tackle any assignment given with tremendous spirit and eagerness to assist and to improve the quality of lives however they can.”

“People are curious who these teens are when we walk into places such as Wal-Mart in the middle of nowhere, or fly with airline flight attendants who don’t know what it means to be an Orthodox Jew,” noted Rabbi Katz. “Our NCSYers are a tremendous Kiddish Hashem, able to confidently explain what are kippot and tzitzit, our organization and why we have come to help.”

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