That is what Brethren do: responding to Missouri flooding

by Sharon Fränzén with Gary Gahm, district disaster coordinator, Missouri/Arkansas district

BDM Rebuild Program

In Oct. 2016, Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) volunteers from Illinois/Wisconsin and Missouri/Arkansas districts participated in a rebuild blitz in Eureka, Mo., working on homes damaged from record flooding following Winter Storm Goliath in Dec. 2015. When Missouri/Arkansas district disaster coordinator (DDC) Gary Gahm began planning a second rebuilding trip to Eureka, beginning on April 30, 2017, he had no idea what challenges and opportunities he would find that week.

Gahm had assembled an enthusiastic and diverse group of volunteers from 10 different Church of the Brethren districts. The 18 volunteers included not only Brethren, but also members of Assemblies of God, Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist congregations. They came from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. The average age of the volunteers was about 65 years old, with all but two over age 60.

As the scheduled work week approached, heavy rains gave rise to anticipation of severe flooding as the Meramec River began to swell upstream. Eureka, which had been badly hit by flooding in 2015, began preparing for yet another flood. As BDM volunteers journeyed to Eureka, Gahm told them that their immediate focus would not be on rebuilding, but on reducing the damage that the flood would bring. He reported that “no one wanted to turn around as there were people in need.” The answer he received, which became the unifying phrase for the week, was continued on page 2

We rejoice at the news that 82 more of the schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram from the Chibok (Nigeria) Secondary School in April 2014 were released in May. (Some of the girls are shown here in a meeting with Nigeria President Buhari.) Twenty-one girls had been released in Oct. 2016. Most of the kidnapped girls were members of Ekklesiayar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN). Prayers are still needed for the remaining girls, and hundreds of others, who remain captives of the extremist group. Donations designated for the support of the freed Chibok schoolgirls can be made to the Nigeria Crisis Fund. (www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis)
Missouri flooding

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“that is what Brethren do.”

Within an hour of their arrival in Eureka, the BDM volunteers, in their red hats and shirts, were either filling sand bags along with hundreds of other volunteers, or making sandbag fillers using upside-down cones mounted on wooden supports. In the next few days they worked to save the downtown business district. In the end, the 200,000 sand bags that were made kept much of the water at bay.

The BDM volunteers also helped residents prepare for the rising water. BDM project leader, Larry Ditmars, recalls, “We stood side by side with the community and other volunteers as we worked to save a downtown from raging waters, to transport appliances and other belongings to higher ground and to find and employ sump pumps in various applications.”

Some of the group also helped to distribute cleaning supplies at a nearby Baptist church.

The Meramec River, whose flood stage is 19 ft., crested on Wednesday, May 3, at a new record high of 46.11 ft. As the water receded on Thursday, the BDM volunteers were ready to work on houses. Sadly, all the houses they had originally been assigned to work on were once again under water. While some of the group worked on a house that was above the flood area, the others helped to remove wet drywall, carpet and appliances from houses that had flooded.

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The volunteers spent six days and 870 hours in service to others in the Eureka area. That is an average of over 8 hours per day. Although exhausted, they were able to focus on the positive opportunities provided by their experience. Ditmars commented that many people “knew from whence their hope and reason for faith and life came,” and “on the tips of tongues everywhere was the name of Jesus.”

“We had fun. We had fellowship. There were so many positives,” enthused Gahm. “Our red shirts and red hats were seen by many people. We told [the survivors] our story and they told us their story. People we talked to could not believe we would come from so far and help them.”

And why not? After all, that is what Brethren do!

Children’s Disaster Services

Like other DDCs, Gary Gahm wears several “hats”. In the week leading up to the scheduled April 30-May 6 rebuild week in Eureka, Mo., Gahm added his “DDC hat” to his “rebuild hat” and participated in daily conference calls with MOVOAD (Missouri Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters) regarding current and anticipated flooding in the southern part of the state. While considering how the flooding would affect the rebuild volunteers, Gahm also donned his “CDS hat” and connected Children’s Disaster Services (CDS) associate director, Kathy Fry-Miller, with the local American Red Cross to explore the possibility of sending CDS volunteers to the flooded areas. We are grateful to Gahm for his graceful juggling of all these hats and for putting the needs of flood survivors first.

CDS was eventually asked to send volunteers to Missouri to provide childcare in MARCs (Multi Agency Resource Centers), where flood survivors come to seek assistance. CDS teams worked in 12 MARCs over an 11-day period, sometimes with two teams in two different MARCs on the same day. Beginning in the southwestern part of the state, in rural communities, they made their way across the state to the St. Louis area, moving to a new location each day, as well as new lodging most nights.

The nine CDS volunteers cared for 161 children and worked alongside agencies that provide services to families whose homes were damaged or destroyed in the record level floods. One of the volunteers shared, “Yes, it was very intense, but also very rewarding!”

Kam Kennedy, of the Red Cross’ North Central Division, praised the CDS response. “You guys have done such a tremendous job with this very heavy lift,” she said. “We really appreciate your dedication and can’t thank you enough.”

And why not? After all, that is what Brethren and their partners do!
Rebuild Program updates

Columbia, S.C.

Brethren Disaster Ministries
Rebuild teams continue to serve in the Columbia, S.C. area in homes damaged in the Oct. 2015 flooding. Construction materials are still funded by grants from the United Way of the Midlands. We are also partnering with the United Black Clergy and SBP to serve additional homeowners. The project is anticipated to continue through the summer, depending on how long the funding is able to cover materials to complete the homes.

Clay County, W.V.

From Feb. 26 through April 12, BDM Rebuild volunteers served in Clay County, W.V., as part of the recovery efforts from the statewide flooding that occurred in the summer of 2016, when up to 10 inches of rain fell in 12 hours. These groups helped to repair seven damaged homes and also helped set prefabricated Tiny Homes as replacements for several destroyed residences. There were also many repairs done to the volunteer housing site in a building that flooded in 2016 and which, in return for repairs, is being offered as a housing location this year for volunteers helping with the recovery efforts. After serving in February, the Shenandoah district returned to the area in May on a district-sponsored rebuild trip.

Project 2—Eureka, Mo.

BDM had anticipated opening its Project 2 location in Eureka, Mo., starting in June 2017 to help with rebuilding from the December 2015 flooding. Plans were underway for the move until the spring 2017 flooding hit in that same area and drastically affected the recovery for many homeowners. BDM now plans to open the Eureka, Mo., site as Project 2 in July 2017.

In the meantime, the BDM groups scheduled for the month of June are helping in disaster affected areas where we would otherwise not have been able to serve. One group from Northern Ohio district and one from Atlantic Northeast district will travel to Ashland, Kan., to work on wildfire recovery efforts with the local Mennonite Disaster Services region.

Replacement van

BDM purchased a lightly used van in May to transition out one of its vans that required extensive repairs. It is a 2014 Ford F350 Wagon XLT which is very similar to, but newer than, our current fleet. To prepare it for a BDM site, Atlantic Northeast district volunteer Kervin Miller installed a BDM-purchased hitch, as well as a ladder rack and a middle partition which were donated by Pine Tree Motors of Ephrata, Pa.

Local Washington response

By Frosty Wilkinson, district disaster co-coordinator, Pacific Northwest district

Volunteers from the Church of the Brethren Pacific Northwest district enjoyed a successful week working with the Okanogan County (Wash.) Long Term Recovery Group, serving survivors of devastating wildfires that destroyed hundreds of homes in the summers of 2014 and 2015. From Nov. 13-19, 2016, the team of eight volunteers blew insulation into the attics of five new houses built for survivors who had lost their homes. Volunteers also installed door knobs and locks, set up a wood stove, cleaned plaster and paint drips from windows and bathtubs, scraped floors to prepare for flooring, hauled a ton or more of construction debris to the dump, and finished various other jobs. One of our volunteers was our cook and prepared our meals at the Church of Christ in Pateros, Wash., where we stayed. Funds from the District Disaster Auctions were used to pay for the food and transportation expenses.

In March 2017, a group of volunteers from the Southern Ohio district spent a week repairing homes in Clay County, W.V. As most volunteers find out, giving and receiving are both a part of a BDM rebuild trip. Volunteer John Dillon (above with his wife Darlene) noted, “On the last Friday the volunteers spent an evening in a nearby Senior Citizen’s Center enjoying local music and dancing. It gave us a real feel for the culture [of the area]. It was a perfect ending after a week of hard work.”

Photo courtesy of Southern Ohio district

Haile Bedada, from the Pacific Northwest district, carries insulation tubing during the local disaster response in Okanogan County, Wash., in Nov. 2016.

Photo by Frosty Wilkinson
BDM is an answer to prayers

By Mary Mueller, BDM project leader, serving in Columbia, S.C., in February 2017

“Wait till you meet her, you’ll never guess how old she is!” That’s what I was told about Dorothy Brown of Columbia, S.C. I met her today and I find myself wondering if this vibrant woman with the dancing eyes can really be 88 years old?! I notice her movements are more fluid than mine as she rises from her chair to answer the phone and I hear that she stayed up to 4 A.M. moving things out of her bedroom so that the repairs that BDM volunteers completed, she has now been able to secure homeowners insurance which she was denied in the past. And her dancing eyes do a little jitter-bug as she says, “I know God answers prayers!”

Through a grant for construction materials from the United Way of the Midlands, Brethren Disaster Ministries has repaired Brown’s home, which was damaged by the 2015 storms and floods. Volunteers left her with a repaired roof, new flooring, and a host of new friends. She mentions that she has been delightfully surprised by the women working alongside of the men. During our visit, Brown proudly shows off the pictures and notes that the volunteers from previous weeks have sent her. “They were so sweet, they were so wonderful,” she exclaims as she picks up the pile from the table next to her chair. “I always asked them to send me a copy when they took pictures and they did!” It is obvious she takes great joy in their notes and cards.

Although Brown is certainly grateful to the BDM volunteers, she doesn’t plan to stay home much. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays will find her back at the senior center; there is church on Sunday and Bingo on the weekends. She confides that this is part of the secret to staying young—keep moving! She doesn’t plan to just sit in her rocking chair waiting to be called home!

Mrs. Brown is so grateful to God for the help she has received. “I didn’t know what I was going to do,” she recalls, “I just prayed to God for help with my home.” Following the repairs that BDM volunteers completed, she has now been able to secure homeowners insurance which she was denied in the past. And her dancing eyes do a little jitter-bug as she says, “I know God answers prayers!”

DRSI team accelerates disaster recovery in Illinois

On Feb. 28, 2017, 10 confirmed tornadoes tore their way across northern central Illinois. The strongest (an EF-3 tornado with wind speeds up to 155mph) carved an 800-yard wide path for 11.5 miles. As it made its way east through Naplate, the tornado damaged more than half of the area’s 236 homes, before moving through the town of Ottawa. In total, approximately 600 homes were damaged, 68 nursing home patients were left homeless, 14 people were injured and 2 people lost their lives. Among the wreckage was part of the Pilkington Glass Plant, one of the area’s largest employers. The tornado that changed this community forever had lasted only about eight minutes.

Although the impact of the tornado was extensive for the towns of Ottawa and Naplate, the damage did not meet either state or federal disaster declaration thresholds. Without a federal declaration, and the accompanying assistance and resources, the community experienced early challenges in facilitating recovery for many of the affected households.

At the invitation of the community, Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI) team members Rachel Larratt and Tim Sheaffer were deployed to La Salle County, Ill., to provide guidance in the formation of the Ottawa-Naplate Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG). DRSI is a joint initiative of the disaster ministries of the United Church of Christ (UCC), Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Church of the Brethren. The DRSI team is providing mentorship, training, support and guidance to both the LTRG and various other community organizations who are working towards recovery. A crucial ingredient of this assistance has been damage assessment and the implementation of disaster case management.

Determining the unmet needs of a community is essential after every disaster, but the process is often challenging and more time-consuming than expected. With the support of the DRSI team, the Ottawa-Naplate LTRG has registered approximately 300 households, which are in process for disaster case management.

The DRSI team has enabled local leadership to develop their capacity quickly, identify necessary components for the recovery and avoid potential (and common) pitfalls. After a recent visit, Zach Wolgemuth, of UCC Disaster Ministries, observed that “the LTRG is farther along than would be typical at this point—perhaps a couple of months ahead of where they might have been.”
The first deployment of the year came after a tornado hit Albany, Ga. The CDS team set up in the morning at a MARC (Multi Agency Resource Center). In the middle of filling out applications, a mother had to leave to pick up her children from school. When she saw the children’s area, she said, “This is great! I’m bringing my kids back here!” Knowing that the children were safely cared for enabled this mother to concentrate on talking with people from organizations offering many types of services, as well as filling out paperwork to take care of her family’s needs.

Making local connections for CDS

It is helpful when volunteers make local, state and regional contacts with Red Cross, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), and emergency managers. Please let CDS staff know if you are working on contacts, attending meetings or exercises, or sharing information about CDS in your local community, state, or region. We would be glad to assist you in whatever ways we can and to share news about your efforts. Here are some examples of local contacts by CDS volunteers:

- Volunteers set up a child care center during the Palm Beach (Fla.) International Airport (PBIA) Disaster Drill in March 2017. Tina Christian, CDS gulf coast coordinator, led a group of five volunteers, some of whom had not been able to be out on response. It was a great learning opportunity for them. Tina wrote, “The team was set up in the Family Assistance Center (FAC) at PBIA with the Red Cross, airport officials and other partner agencies to provide grief counseling, childcare, family reunification and other services. This was the first time the FAC was part of the required disaster drill and the information provided by the Red Cross, CDS team and other partners will help the PBIA officials be better prepared in the event that such a disaster occurs.”

- Patty Henry gave a presentation on behalf of CDS at the Mountain West VOAD Conference, which included 11 states. She said, “I showed the [CDS] You Tube video and a PowerPoint that I put together showing how kids process their feelings through play and went through my mini kit of comfort explaining the purpose of the items, our safety measures and training procedures and answered lots of questions. It was rather fun! FEMA was there and told how much they appreciate our presence from past our experience.”

- Charlot Cole was interviewed by her local paper in Virden, Ill. following her recent deployment in Missouri. She shared information about CDS as well as photos (with parent permission), which made for an informative article.

- Two events took place recently in Southern California. Kathy Fry-Miller, associate director of CDS, attended them both.

  - Volunteers planned a luncheon to talk about VOAD and other meetings they had attended, contacts they had made, recent responses, and updates from the national office.
  - Judy Lewis worked for several years on planning a disaster academy in Ontario, Calif. The academy featured a number of wonderful speakers and panelists in disaster response.

CDS deployments

January to May 2017

- Albany, Ga.—tornado
- Oroville, Calif.—evacuation due to possible dam breach
- Perryville, Mo.—tornado
- Oak Grove and Smithville, Mo.—multiple tornadoes
Worship service closes upper campus of the Brethren Service Center

Excerpts from a report by Cheryl Brambaugh-Cayford in the May 5, 2017 Newsline

A worship service on Sunday, April 30, closed the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. Some 125 people gathered on the lawn in front of the Old Main building on a warm, sunny afternoon to remember and celebrate the ministries that have taken place at the campus.

The lower campus continues as the Brethren Service Center and houses office and/or warehouse facilities of Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services, Material Resources, On Earth Peace, and SERRV.

In November 2016, the Church of the Brethren signed a purchase agreement with Shanghai Yulun Education Group for the “upper campus” of the property in New Windsor, which had been listed for sale since July 2015. The purchaser intends to establish a private school on the property. It is anticipated the sale will be finalized later this spring.

A simple service

Those who led the simple, 40-minute service represented the leadership of the denomination and Annual Conference, Mid-Atlantic District, area congregations, and current and former staff of the center.

Pastor Jim Benedict of Union Bridge Church of the Brethren gave a message that called the church to acknowledge its attachment to the place, and to acknowledge the importance of the ministries.

“But we must be careful not to let our imaginations, memories, and love for this place keep us from seeing the opportunities that we still have to serve God,” he reminded. “We must continue to listen for God’s call, and be ready to get up and go when we hear it.”

“Those who grieve would be wise to remember that there was a time before this place was ours, before there was such a thing as the Brethren Service Center, and no one but God knew that there ever would be such a place,” he continued, in part. “Our leaders would be wise to consider ways to recreate in new forms and new places the important things that have happened here. And we can all remember, and give thanks, that our God is consistent in his mercy and love but unpredictable in his methods, always surprising us and making a way where there seems to be no way.”

A note from the general secretary

As you may know, I am committed to visiting all the Church of the Brethren districts in my first year with you as general secretary, to hold listening sessions. As I have visited in districts, I have been uplifted and encouraged not only by your hospitable and hopeful spirit but by your commitment to our common ministries together in the Church of the Brethren.

One of the themes that is clearly emerging from 1000+ voices that have participated to date, is that we in Church of the Brethren are getting Brethren Disaster Ministries right. Providing the cup of cold water to people in need is one of our defining ministries, and one that is a beacon of light and hope in some of the darkness of our lives and world.

My friends, I do hope you can see that we are the cup in our service to others. Our efforts at offering the cup of cold water—offering ourselves—witnesses to the world that we are about another way of living—the way of Jesus. May we not forget that through our simple acts of service, we too are working to save the world—in Jesus’ name.

David Steele began his term as general secretary of the Church of the Brethren on Sept. 1, 2016.

Don’t forget to give blood at Annual Conference!

If you are headed to Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, don’t forget to make room in your busy schedule to donate blood.

DeVos Place Grand Gallery B
Thursday, June 29
Friday, June 30
8:00 am - 5:00 pm
Brethren Service Center—
we are still open!

Although the upper campus of the Brethren Service Center (BSC) closed at the end of April 2017, the lower part of the campus, previously known as the annex, is still very much open and is now the official Brethren Service Center. Located at the BSC are Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services, the Material Resources warehouse, and BSC finance and information technology offices. On Earth Peace and the Serrv distribution center are also housed at the center. As part of the transition, the offices at the BSC were recently renovated. Please stop by to see our fresh look when you are in the area!

Brethren Disaster Ministries is excited to announce the hiring of Terry Goodger as the program assistant for the BDM Rebuilding Program and Sherry Chastain as the program assistant for Children’s Disaster Services. Both Sherry and Terry are former employees at the Brethren Service Center (BSC) and we are happy to welcome them back to the campus.

Terry Goodger was the office manager for the Church of the Brethren’s Material Resources, the warehouse ministry based at the BSC, from 2006 to 2016. She brings strong administrative and bookkeeping skills, combined with a deep passion for disaster ministries. As a BDM volunteer herself, Terry is excited to work more closely with rebuilding volunteers.

Sherry Chastain served IMA World Health as the senior human resources associate and executive assistant to the vice president from 2008 to 2016. Her many administrative strengths will assist Children’s Disaster Services in managing volunteer deployments and training. Sherry shares a passion to support mission oriented programs.

BDM staff
announcements

Children’s Disaster Services Fall 2017
workshop dates and locations

New York, N.Y.
Sept. 16, 2017
Specialized training for Child Life Professionals.
Interested Child Life Specialists may register at http://cldisasterrelief.org/new-york-new-york-registration/
CLS Contact: Katie Nees
E-mail: cldisasterrelief@gmail.com

Bridgewater, Va.
Sept. 22-23, 2017
Bridgewater Church of the Brethren
420 College View Dr
Bridgewater, VA 22812
Local contact: Gladys Remnant
Telephone: 540-810-4999
E-mail: glremnant@aol.com

Jacksonville, Fla.
Sept. 29-30, 2017
Florida Christian Center
1115 Edgewater South
Jacksonville, FL 32205
Local contact: Tina Christian,
CDS Gulf Coast Coordinator
Telephone: 561-475-6602
E-mail: cdsgulfcoast@gmail.com

Northville, Mich.
Nov. 10-11, 2017
Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church
40000 W 6 Mile Rd
Northville, MI 48168
Local Contact: Jen Pifer
E-mail: cakegirl680@gmail.com

CDS held a special workshop for Child Life Specialists in the Dallas-Ft. Worth (Texas) area in March 2017. Many of the participants have already completed their requirements and are now certified CDS volunteers.

Photo courtesy of Child Life Disaster Relief
Haiti update: Hurricane Matthew Response

by Roy Winter

The long-term recovery process is underway in Haiti in response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Matthew in Oct. 2016. Emergency food distributions in 15 communities have helped people survive this crisis. This was followed by five mobile medical clinics, serving those in the greatest need, and the distribution of seeds and goats to help farmers recover their livelihood and feed their community. Later this year, home reconstruction is planned for families in the far northeast of Haiti. The total budget for the Hurricane Matthew Response is $160,000.