



Brethren Disaster Ministries **BRIDGES**

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

Vol. 21, Summer 2020

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Choosing to Serve in These Challenging Times

by Roy Winter

In these unusual and difficult times our fears, emotions, anxiety, and possibly even anger, may be uncomfortably close to the surface. For our own wellbeing, it is important to not only acknowledge our reaction to uncontrolled situations, but also to embrace these feelings and to accept that they are part of us and that they are normal, understandable reactions. As the Psalms teach us, an honest lament with God is a form of worship and faith. After we lament, we are often more able to move beyond our immediate reaction and begin to genuinely choose how we will respond. We can choose to be the people of God in this crisis.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, with churches and businesses closed, and many people out of work, our routines and basic understanding of being in community, of

being the Church, and of being disaster response volunteers, are upended. Our individual situations are different but we all have much to offer our community. As disciples of Christ, we are compelled to come together and make our churches, neighborhoods, and world a better place, especially in a time such as this.

Imagine for a minute what the best of our united response to COVID-19 looks like. Imagine a diverse but compassionate Church supporting each other, other churches, and our neighbors. Imagine God's light shining on each person with whom we come in contact, especially virtually and in social media, through our words and actions. Imagine how we might lift God up to fearful and anxious people by being the church in the world and in our communities right now, even while taking actions to keep others safe from the virus. Imagine how we lift up those who are hungry and help feed both their stomach and soul.

While this is my own vision, it's not so different from the focus of COB staff, who are working together on the COVID response. The national COB staff has created a response team, has organized resources to support and encourage ministry in this time and is trying to care for the fabric of the whole Church. One part of this work is the special grant program run by Brethren Disaster Ministries, inspired by this text:

If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. Isaiah 58:10



We have been delivering food and knowing and learning about the love of God and ways of bringing light and hope to the people in Flor del Campo. This effort blessed the entire community since more families are witnessing how God cares for the needy. Thank you, brothers and sisters, for sending not only a monetary contribution, but also your spirit of solidarity and compassion by walking with us in the Spirit of Christ.

Photo/words from report by COVID-19 grant recipient
Viviendo en Amor y Fe in Tegucigalpa, Honduras



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For more information on
Brethren Disaster Ministries
1-800-451-4407
www.brethren.org/bdm



Church of the Brethren

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Challenging Times

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U.S. COVID-19 Pandemic Grants

A special Emergency Disaster Fund grant program has been created to support churches and districts in meeting humanitarian needs in their congregations and communities. The hope of this program is to *encourage significant ministry, big and small, throughout the denomination*. By providing relief for vulnerable people in COB congregations and communities (people who are ill, single parent households, elderly, children, widows, widowers, handicapped, immigrants and those living in poverty), we introduce people to a loving God and sometimes reignite passion and faith in our own churches.

- As of June 5, 2020, 18 grants totaling \$72,600 have been provided to congregations in Atlantic Northeast, Atlantic Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, Northern Ohio, Pacific Southwest, South/Central Indiana and Western Pennsylvania districts.
- The grants are supporting humanitarian aid such as food distributions and pantries, feeding programs, assisting with rent and utilities, childcare program support, help with medical bills, and providing cleaning/hygiene items, school supplies and personal protective equipment.



Volunteers from Ephrata Church of the Brethren (Atlantic Northeast District) load food into a car during their once weekly food donation program. The church received a COVID-19 grant to expand their program as the need increased in the community due to unemployment during the pandemic.

Photo courtesy of Ephrata Church of the Brethren

- People being served include those who are unemployed or who have reduced wages due to COVID-19 restrictions, living in poverty, recent immigrants, children and elderly.

Other Church of the Brethren programs have been expanded to support the local COVID-19 response. The **Brethren Faith in Action Fund**

provides grants for outreach ministry projects which serve communities, strengthen congregations, and expand the reign of God. The **Ministry Assistance Fund** and **Church Workers' Assistance Plan** provide assistance to pastors and church employees experiencing financial hardship. The **Going to the Garden** program supports food security programs and community gardens. Find out more about these and other resources at www.brethren.org/covid19.

International Pandemic Grants

Responding to the Growing Hunger Crisis—If They Don't Work, They Don't Eat

In many parts of the world, there is a much greater fear from hunger than from the COVID-19 pandemic. Most developing countries do not have food banks, unemployment assistance or aid for those unable to work because of the virus. For millions, if they don't work, their whole family will go without food and will starve.

In response to this crisis, \$150,000 in Emergency Disaster Fund COVID-19 grants have been provided to Church of the Brethren to sister churches, mission points and partners in 10 countries (DR Congo, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, Spain, and Venezuela). Additional grant requests are anticipated from



While their parents receive food supplies funded through an International COVID-19 grant to the Church of the Brethren in Rwanda, these children received flyers telling them how to prevent infection from the novel coronavirus.

Photo by Etienne Nsanzimana

several other countries. If funds are available, a second round of grants will be considered in July. In most of these responses, the funds are providing life-saving food distributions when workers are required to shelter at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Sustaining the response

The COVID-19 responses were launched even though it was suspected that donations to the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) would be different than most years. This quickly became evident when the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction (supported by the Southern Pennsylvania and Atlantic Northeast Districts) and the Mid-Atlantic and Shenandoah district auctions were canceled. These auctions are important district level fundraisers for the EDF.

Even in this uncertain financial time, it was important to boldly step out in faith to begin the COVID-19 grant programs, knowing that this work is critical and believing that it will be supported by those that who are able to do so. Giving from congregations and individuals will be critical for BDM to continue this program and to have resources for programming in 2021.

When we all work together a circle of faith is created: those that volunteer, take action; those that can give, support others; and those in need send back prayers and blessings to all who give aid.

Rebuilding Updates

Carolinas Project

The BDM Carolinas project has not hosted weekly volunteers since mid-March due to COVID-19 concerns as well as a previously planned break in the schedule around Easter. BDM was recently notified by the church where our volunteer housing is located that they will not accept out of state volunteers this summer due to concerns around COVID-19. This meant that volunteer groups on the Carolinas schedule for June needed to be cancelled. Most of those groups had either already cancelled or were down to very low numbers. The site is now scheduled to be packed up in late June, two months before the planned departure.

Another local partner in Lumberton, the N.C. Baptist on Mission, has offered to host any BDM volunteers who are still interested in serving there and can house volunteers in their own building. For more information on serving with the Baptists, contact Terry at 410-635-8730 or tgoodger@brethren.org

National VOAD Grant award and Nebraska Response

BDM was awarded a \$5,000 grant from National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) through funding provided by UPS. This grant supports recovery from flooding in the mid-west in 2019. Plans are being made to offer a short-term response in Nebraska during the weeks of August 16 –29, 2020. Anyone interested should contact Kim Gingerich, long-term project leader, at 717-586-1874 or bdmnorthcarolina@gmail.com.

BDM will be monitoring the COVID-19 situation prior to the scheduled dates, and changes or cancellations may be made based on travel restrictions or guidance in August, and conversations with local partners. If this response takes place, there will be specific COVID-19 safety protocols in place and all

volunteers will be expected to follow them. On-site project expenses from Monday-Friday will be covered by BDM but travel expenses to and from the site are the volunteer's responsibility. Please note that BDM is not responsible for non-refundable travel expenses if cancellations occur due to COVID-19.

Project 1 New Location

Final discussions and plans are being made for BDM to move the Carolinas Rebuilding site east to a new location in Pamlico, N.C. This area was greatly affected by Hurricane Florence in September 2018, mostly due to flooding. Florence brought a record breaking storm surge of 9 to 13 feet and devastating rainfall of 20 to 30 inches in some areas along the coast of the Carolinas. The county long-term recovery group reports that there are still over 200 families that have not completely recovered almost two years later. Volunteer housing plans are being finalized and work partners have been established. BDM volunteers are currently scheduled to begin serving again on Project 1 in mid-September. If/when this site can open, it is expected that there will be work available through at least the end of 2020 and possibly longer, depending on work and funding availability. More details will be set and shared in the coming weeks and months.

COVID-19 Protocol

BDM staff and volunteers are looking closely at what practices and protocols need to be in place to enable rebuilding volunteers to serve when it is safe to do so. A COVID-19 *Informed Consent Agreement* has been created that all volunteers who



BDM donated over 300 N95 masks to the Southeastern Regional Medical Center (Lumberton, N.C.), and additional masks to a local retirement community, from the inventory on the Carolinas site. Seen here (l to r) are Steve Keim, BDM project leader; Jason Cox, COO, Southeastern Regional Medical Center; and Pastor David Ruth, First Presbyterian Church of Lumberton (the host for Rebuilding volunteers).
Photo by Heather Miller, First Presbyterian Church of Lumberton, N.C.

wish to serve must read, sign that they agree to follow, and return to BDM before they leave home. A COVID-19 *Travel Guidance List* will also be shared, with helpful tips and suggestions for groups to consider and observe during the travel to and from the BDM Rebuilding sites.

Each site will have a written plan addressing all the aspects of that specific site. This will include plans for meals, housing, job sites, vehicles, and more. In some locations, this plan will need to be reviewed by the local Health Department as well as our work and housing partners. All these plans and documents will be reviewed on a regular basis to keep up with any changing guidance and suggested precautions from the CDC and other state and local officials.

Cloth Masks Needed

Are you looking for an opportunity to volunteer at home? BDM is looking for volunteers to make cloth masks and has two patterns (with instructions) to suggest. When Rebuilding sites open again, these masks will be provided to volunteers who do not have their own. Depending on the supply available, they could also be provided to homeowners, other partners in the project areas, or other places as identified. If your church group or district can help with making and providing masks, please contact Terry at 410-635-8730 or tgoodger@brethren.org.

One-year Anniversary of Tornado Outbreak

Memorial Day weekend 2020 marked the first anniversary of the devastating tornado outbreak that caused much damage in the area around Dayton, Ohio. The National Weather Service recorded that on May 27-28, 2019, nineteen tornadoes hit the state, affecting 10 counties and damaging over 7,000 homes, 1,500 of which were destroyed.

There are many aspects of this tornado recovery that are unique. Because the large-scale events happened in the Southern Ohio/Kentucky district, where BDM volunteers are very active both locally as well as nationally, Church of the Brethren members were able to react quickly on a cleanup response. Brethren leadership and volunteers jumped to action just days afterward, organizing and carrying out debris removal, tree clearing, and roof tarping, and canvassing for those needing help. Multiple Brethren churches provided breakfast for the volunteers during the first month of daily work. The district reports that they have hosted 65 workdays with 665 daily Brethren and non-Brethren volunteers serving over 290 families.

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) deployed a team of volunteers to serve families in the area in June 2019 caring for children in shelters and a Multi-Agency Resource Center. The team responded for six days and had 64 child connections.

An intense support for collaboration in organizing recovery efforts from representatives of BDM, other Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs), community members, and a local college resulted in the formation of the Miami Valley Long Term Recovery Operations Group (MVLTRG). In an effort to keep the local recovery efforts and stories in the news, the Dayton Daily News committed to regular coverage in a video and print series entitled "Walking the Path of the Storm". The first part of the video focused on CDS volunteer Wanda King and her husband Albert, whose home was one of the first to be hit and destroyed by the largest tornado.

After a lull during the winter, MVLTRG and other community members planned to restart clean-up and rebuilding efforts in earnest in the spring of 2020. BDM staff kept in close communication with the recovery group through local BDM leaders who remained actively involved. BDM was able to plan to open a new national rebuilding project site in Dayton much faster than is typical in disaster locations due to the early intervention of local volunteers and the successful formation of the recovery group. The scheduled move to the site was planned for April 2020 but was delayed by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has caused MVLTRG and many volunteer housing facilities to pause their hosting and service opportunities over health concerns as well as restrictions from local and state government. BDM still hopes to move the rebuilding site to Dayton, but it has been delayed until COVID-19 protocols can be in place and the extensive work needed on the hosting church can be completed. It is hoped that the site will open in mid-July 2020, beginning with local volunteers who will not need housing because they can stay in their own homes.



In June 2020, a small group of volunteers from the Southern Ohio/Kentucky district continued outdoor work on a home damaged in a Memorial Day 2019 tornado. Photo by Burt Wolf

Grateful Thanks from Florida Partner

Excerpted from a letter by Jill Hockin, Recovery Volunteer Coordinator, The Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church

The Florida United Methodist Conference Disaster Response group, in the Northeast, Tampa Bay and Central/Lakeland regions, send our heartfelt appreciation for all the volunteers that gave up their time to come and serve those affected by Hurricane Irma. Your teams left a lasting impact on the families you served and the people in the community as well as our organization! During the time you

served with us, from September [2019] to mid-March [2020], Brethren Disaster Ministries provided us with about 350 volunteers that came into our areas to help. Without your help, our regional closing goals would have been much harder to accomplish.

Most recently, the Tampa Bay and Central regions are grateful to have worked so closely with the leadership of Jerry Moore and his field team

leaders (Cliff Kindy, Doug Campbell and Brian Roten) that graciously traveled, worked countless hours, and helped lead the Brethren volunteer teams that served in our regions.

Thank you for the hope and love your teams brought to the communities of the Northeast, Tampa Bay and Central regions. We wish you all well and hope to serve with you again!

An Update from Puerto Rico

by Carrie Miller, BDM long-term project leader, Puerto Rico

Travel restrictions due to COVID-19, which began in mid-March, 2020 meant that the Puerto Rico BDM Rebuilding site had to shut down completely for an entire month. As the pandemic worsened, BDM, in consultation with the Puerto Rico district, made the decision to cancel future volunteer groups, especially considering that the project was only scheduled to be open for volunteers until May 23. Thankfully, with new protocols in place, work has been able to start back up slowly with a local contractor and with BDM construction liaison, Carmelo Rodriguez.

Some families in Puerto Rico were approved to receive construction materials paid for by Emergency Disaster Funds and then complete the work themselves. An unexpected plus of strict stay at home orders is that many of these families have been able



As COVID-19 restrictions began in Puerto Rico, the BDM leadership team were delighted to cross paths while delivering materials to families, but maintained their social distance. (l to r) Raquel and José Acevedo (District Disaster Coordinator), Carmelo Rodríguez and Carrie Miller Photo courtesy of Carrie Miller

to finish their work.

To date, the project has completed work for 87 cases and has 25 cases in progress that are expected to be finished by the end of June. Though circumstances are not ideal, we are

beyond grateful for our partnerships with the Puerto Rico district, local contractors and community members as we work together in finishing out our work.

Parable from a Crawl Space

by Darlene Miller, White Oak Church of the Brethren, Atlantic Northeast District

Jesus used parables, simple, everyday stories, to illustrate spiritual lessons. On our January 2020 Brethren Disaster Ministries trip to Lumberton, N.C., God showed us a parable in the dirty crawl space of the house where we were working.

Where is the dirtiest, nastiest place that you have ever worked? We try to avoid uncomfortable situations. Picture with me an 18-inch crawl space under a flood-damaged house with damp, sandy dirt, old snake skins, and charred floor joists from a long-ago fire. This is the tight space where Matt Zimmerman willingly squirmed his way around to put up insulation batting. His dad, Wilmer, pushed the insulation to him as far as he could reach, and Matt wrestled it into place. We repeatedly heard Wilmer call out, “Matt, are you okay?” or “If I don’t hear him answer me, I’m tearing up the floor boards to get him out!” As we watched father

and son work together, we were impressed with Matt’s willingness to do the dirty work and Wilmer’s protective concern.

While reflecting on their dirty job, the Lord showed me a picture of God’s great love for us! He sent Jesus down from heaven to this old, dirty world to do what only the SON could do—he hung as payment for our sins on the old, rugged cross. Matt was the only person who could fit under that house, and JESUS was the only person who could hang on that tree. Matt didn’t complain, but got the job done. Jesus didn’t complain, but said, “Father, not my will, but thine be done.”

Jesus is fully God and fully man. Had he been only man, he could not atone for our sins. Had he been only God, he could not have died. But he did both. Thank you Jesus for saving us from the filthiness of our sins ... Hallelujah, what a Savior!

COVID-19 Does Not Have to Stop Your Service

While we know that BDM Rebuilding sites and CDS training and deployments are suspended right now, that does not mean you have to stop volunteering! BDM encourages you to discover places in your home church and community to serve or even volunteer remotely. Examples include giving blood, delivering food and medicines to people at high-risk, working at food distributions, assisting with the needs of your local school system, and providing administrative or organizational support from home to churches or non-profit organizations.

Visit our new COVID-19 website at covid19.brethren.org/volunteering (or contact BDM at 800-451-4407) to find more ideas on where to look in your local area for places to serve safely until you can serve with us again.

Nigeria Update—Disaster Ministry Continues during COVID-19 Pandemic

by Roxane Hill, former Nigeria Crisis Response coordinator; interim office manager, Global Missions

The Nigeria Crisis Response is in its sixth year of providing relief for the people of Nigeria who are suffering because of the Boko Haram violence. The cumulative effect from years of violence continues to be felt on many levels and is now compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The Disaster Response Ministry (DRM) of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN) works in many sectors of life to bring help and healing to those affected by the insurgency. Security in some districts remains uncertain with continued attacks from the Boko Haram. The disaster team works tirelessly, often traveling to dangerous and out of the way places, to help both Christians and Muslims who are in need.

The plans for continued work in 2020 include food provision, agricultural support, home repairs, medical care, fresh water sources, education assistance, trauma programs and disaster preparedness training. Food distributions for the most vulnerable were completed in January through March. Fertilizer and seeds have been ordered for 1200 families with plans to distribute in June. The team has provided three much needed and appreciated new water sources in remote locations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the work of the disaster ministry. Their ability to travel has been severely restricted a time when the assistance needed by the vulnerable people has increased due to food shortages and lockdown orders. The DRM distributed food in the areas they could reach. However, since they could not travel to Maiduguri, where thousands still live in camps, funds were sent to the district in order to complete the planned food distributions there.

In May, a \$14,000 Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) COVID-19 grant was awarded to EYN to provide

assistance for some of those most affected by the pandemic conditions. One group needing assistance are young women widowed during the Boko Haram violence, who have difficulty providing for their families even in the best

situations. Through the EDF grant, 300 widows in Hildi, Kwarhi and Giima were identified and provided bags of maize (corn). Another group affected by the lockdown were students at Kulp Theological Seminary, who, because of travel restrictions during the lockdown, were left stranded and vulnerable when the school was closed and they



The EYN Disaster Relief Ministry teams delivered food supplies to widows who have even more difficulty supporting their families due to COVID-19 restrictions. The program was funded through an EDF COVID-19 grant. Photo courtesy of EYN

could not return home. They were provided with emergency food supplies through the grant. The grant funds also supported awareness building about COVID-19, along with hand washing stations, at 27 EYN churches.

Please continue to pray for EYN leadership and the Disaster Ministry during this challenging time.

Flooding in Democratic Republic of the Congo

From April 16-18, 2020, heavy rain in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo caused extensive flooding in South Kivu province. The flood left at least 36 dead, displaced more than 80,000, and damaged or destroyed businesses, medical clinics, 15,000 homes, and seven bridges. Many more families lost all their stored food, household supplies, clothing and bedding.

In the town of Uvira, the Mulongwe river flooded causing the greatest damage in the region. The flooding impacted many Church of the Brethren members in the town and surrounding communities, including damaging the home of Ron Lubungo, the local Church of the Brethren pastor.

A \$20,000 Emergency Disaster

Fund grant provided household supplies and a mattress to 500 households (about 4,000 people) displaced by the floods.



A survivor of the April 2020 flooding in Uvira, Democratic Republic of the Congo, received a mattress and other household items through an EDF grant. Photo by Ron Lubungo



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Church World Service canceled its spring kit depot collection due to COVID-19 concerns. Most will now be open August 17-September 4.

Go to cwskits.org/depots for updated information or contact Glenna Thompson at gthompson@brethren.org or 410-635-8797.

Bridges is published three times a year by
**Brethren Disaster Ministries of the
Church of the Brethren.**
Associate Executive Director: Roy Winter
Director of Material Resources: Loretta Wolf
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In February 2020, families in an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, received food and non-food items from EYN Disaster Relief Ministry teams.
Photo courtesy of EYN



Rice bought in bulk is repackaged for distribution to church and community members in Haiti. This program was funded through an EDF COVID-19 grant to the Church of the Brethren in Haiti.
Photo courtesy of Church of the Brethren in Haiti



The Puerto Rico District of the Church of the Brethren was awarded a \$5,000 grant to respond after a series of earthquakes hit the island in early 2020, the strongest of which was a 6.4 magnitude. In this photo, Pastor Lillian (l), from the Bayamon Church of the Brethren, presents a check to a homeowner to assist with repairs to her home.
Photo courtesy of the Puerto Rico district