



# Brethren Disaster Ministries **BRIDGES**

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

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## WATER WIND FIRE and more



Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services (CDS) and Material Resources have been challenged with one of the most demanding late summer and fall disaster seasons in program history. Never have we responded to so many disasters at one time, and back-to-back, without a break. Responding to these disasters, while continuing our ongoing work, stretched resources, staff, volunteers and all capacities. In less than two months, CDS responded to two hurricanes (Harvey and Irma), a flood in Missouri, the deadliest shooting in recent history (Las Vegas) and wildfires that engulfed thousands of acres overnight in California; Material Resources shipped 37 tons of Church World Service kits and blankets to locations in Texas and Florida, and shipped a container of kits, tarps and other supplies to Puerto Rico; BDM prepared to ship a container of emergency/recovery supplies and canned chicken to Puerto Rico; and BDM staff participated in myriad disaster coordination calls and discussions with National VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) partners and FEMA. In the meantime, CDS held three workshops, the Rebuild Program continued to respond in Missouri (due to several floods) and in South Carolina (following Hurricane Matthew), and globally BDM supported Hurricane Matthew recovery in Haiti and continued the largest response in BDM history in Nigeria.

This issue of Bridges can only begin to tell the stories of these responses and the volunteers who are out ministering to families in their times of need. This has all been possible because of the amazing support of churches, individuals, families, district response programs and disaster response auctions – THANK YOU. Together we are sharing God’s love in a broken world.

**Top:** Hurricane Irma flooding in Florida. Photo by Kathy Fry-Miller **Left:** Hurricane Maria damage in Puerto Rico. Photo by Roy Winter **Right:** Destruction from wildfires near Santa Rosa, California. Photo by Wendy Hartley

  
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Church of the Brethren

# “Being the Church” after a catastrophe: responding to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico

by Roy Winter

After the devastating damage of hurricanes like Maria, civil society often breaks down. Desperate or opportunistic people start looting or stealing, and stresses keep increasing. Another part of society pulls together and helps each other, bringing out the very best in human nature, and our faith often brings out the very best of being the Church. The Puerto Rican churches are an inspiring example of **being the church in a crisis**. While burdened with many hardships, the Puerto Rico Brethren are coming together, supporting each other and reaching out to their communities.

Already struggling with damage from Hurricane Irma, Puerto Rico was struck with the eye of the category 4 Hurricane Maria on Sept. 20, 2017, causing widespread damage from wind, rain, flooding and storm surge. The storm caused catastrophic damage to the island’s power grid, communication towers, agricultural crops and poultry industry and badly damaged sewage treatment plants, water supply, and roads. One month later, only 18 percent of the homes had power, cellular phones functioned on just 25 percent of the island and only about half of the island had running water, which still had to be boiled or treated before use. With expected long-term delays in repairing the power grid, difficulty with communication, and limited water, the recovery in Puerto Rico will be slow and difficult.

In light of this destruction, communicating with the Church of the Brethren in Puerto Rico has been extremely difficult. With the help of an informal Brethren network and recent travel to Puerto Rico, we now know there was limited damage to church structures. In mid-October, I joined the Puerto Rico district executive, José Otero, on a journey

to visit pastors, six of the district’s seven churches, the district board chairperson, and some families who had been seriously affected by the storm. During our time together, we completed an initial assessment of the impact on the Puerto Rican district and started formulating plans for recovery.

While homes in the communities where COB churches are located had a wide range of damage or were destroyed, only 20 members’ homes (some from each church) were known to have received major damage or flooding. Through district leadership, a disaster response program is being built, with each church conducting needs assessments and organizing to provide disaster assistance in their community and to their members.

At the Castañer Church, flooding in several buildings ruined appliances, flooring and furnishings, but caused limited damage to structures. In Río Piedras (Caimito), the Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera church building had little damage, but the community center and several houses owned by the church had moderate to major roof damage. The other five churches reported only minor damage from the storms.

During my visit, José reported that “the church members are keeping a positive attitude” and their faith is abundant. When visiting one couple, Judex and Nancy, to see the major destruction of their home, their calm manor and warm hospitality



*Although they now live in a single room by the garage of their hurricane-damaged home and manage without water or power, Judex and Nancy Diaz, of Puerto Rico’s Vega Baja church, warmly welcomed visitors with hospitality and coffee.*

*Photo by Roy Winter*

shone above the damage. It was humbling when they, like many with damaged homes, quickly offered us coffee and a seat, even as they had so little left. In visits with pastors, we heard all about their members and the community and how they hope to help with the recovery. Again, it was humbling to see leaders so focused on the needs of others.

Like most of Puerto Rico, these pastors and families are challenged with no power, no water and, for many, no cellular communication

*continued on page 3*



*Kathy and José Otero (Puerto Rico district executive), Roy Winter, Pastor Lillian Ramos and Puerto Rico district board chair, Rafael Ramos, met at the Bayamón church to discuss hurricane response in Puerto Rico. Photo by Roy Winter*

# “Being the Church” in Puerto Rico

continued from page 2

without driving for miles. Daily life is very difficult for all, especially for those with health issues and young children. Many also have reduced income due to lost jobs, reduced work hours and longer travel times due to damaged roads and destroyed bridges. Simple tasks are more difficult, such as having to wash laundry by hand, communicating with an employer or finding cash to buy food.

The Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board has already approved \$100,000 for a major response in the Caribbean, with a focus on Puerto Rico. Brethren Disaster Ministries is supporting the Puerto Rico district response, and the work of each congregation by providing funds, disaster response expertise, response planning, skilled labor and a container of critical supplies. This community-based response will focus around the ministries of each Puerto Rican church. BDM will also help with communication and coordination with other COB efforts to support Puerto Rico.

Current joint district and BDM projects include:

- At the Río Prieto church (Río Prieto Iglesia De Los Hermanos) a drinking water station is being developed for families without access to safe water (this is in the mountains miles from safe water sources). Several large water tanks are being installed that will be filled by water trucks. Periodic food distributions are also planned. The Castañer Hospital has been using this church to provide clinics for this region.
- In Caimito (Río Piedras), at the Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera and community center, work teams from the U.S. mainland are repairing a few homes, the community center and volunteer housing. These teams are being organized by a long-term volunteer with funding from BDM for supplies and volunteer support.

- Specific needs of families with home damage, medical needs, lack of food/water and many other issues, are being addressed by each church leadership.



Pastor Lawrence Crepo, of Puerto Rico's Arecibo church, reflects on the extensive damage to church member Carmen's home. Photo by Roy Winter

- A container is being shipped from the Brethren Service Center with canned chicken from the Mid-Atlantic & Southern PA districts, 15 generators, gas cans, power cords, chain saws, a BDM carpentry tool kit and saws, 200 water filters and buckets, 200 large heavy-duty tarps, and solar lanterns.
- Funding will be provided for a part-time staff person to help facilitate the disaster response in Puerto Rico.

**Coordination of COB activities in Puerto Rico:** Since José Otero has limited cell phone access, and even less access to email, he asked me to share that volunteers, churches and districts planning response programs, or who want to support Puerto Rico, should contact me at [rwinter@brethren.org](mailto:rwinter@brethren.org) or 410-596-8561. I will try to help José coordinate and communicate

response activities during weekly planning calls.

**Volunteers for Puerto Rico:** At this time, it is not possible for the Church in Puerto Rico to host volunteers from the U.S. mainland. The lack of housing, electricity, food and water means volunteers can add to the hardship rather than help. A few self-sufficient groups set to travel soon to help with temporary repairs are covering all costs and staying in hotels. A workcamp is planned for January 13-20, 2018, led by Shirley Baker. BDM expects to establish other work teams, and perhaps a sustained volunteer presence, when the church leadership feels this is helpful. Volunteers interested in the January trip, or later programs, should contact Terry Goodger at [tgoodger@brethren.org](mailto:tgoodger@brethren.org) or 410-635-8730.

## BDM welcomes BVS volunteers

BDM is happy to welcome Erv and Joan Huston as BVS volunteers assigned to work with our ministry. Both Erv, a retired Church of the Brethren pastor, and Joan, a retired nurse, are from the Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren in the Atlantic Northeast District and have volunteered previously on BDM projects. They began their year of service in August 2017, spending their first weeks at the project site in Eureka, Mo., followed by some time at the New Windsor office and attending the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction in Lebanon, Pa. They are currently assisting at the BDM site in Marion County, S.C.



# Rebuild Program updates

## Columbia, S.C.

In October 2015, heavy storms brought historic rainfall totals (almost 17 inches in five days) and caused wind and flood damage to homes in the Columbia S.C. area. BDM opened its rebuilding project in Columbia in October 2016. The project closed the last week of August 2017, and was moved to Marion County, S.C.



*A volunteer paints molding for one of the first homes BDM worked on in Marion County, S.C.*  
Photo by Jenn Dorsch-Messler

## Marion County, S.C.

Marion County, S.C., was one of the poorest and hardest hit areas affected by Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. In response, BDM opened a new project site there in September 2017, partnering with Palmetto Disaster Recovery, as well as two other local long-term recovery groups. The tools, equipment and vehicles formerly located on the Columbia, S.C., project were moved to St. John AME Church in Marion, where there are bunk rooms, a dining area and a kitchen on the basement floor for weekly volunteers. BDM disaster project leaders are housed in the parsonage next to the church. It is anticipated that the Marion County site will be open for at least 12 months.

## Eureka, Mo.

BDM opened a rebuild project in

Eureka, Mo., in July 2017 to support recovery from flooding that occurred in December 2015 and in the spring of 2017. Volunteers are staying at the Eureka United Methodist Church, which has hosted various volunteers since 2015. BDM volunteers are repairing mobile homes located outside of the floodplain to allow for relocation of displaced flood survivors, and rebuilding houses throughout Jefferson and Franklin counties. Local partnerships are with the Salvation Army and other local organizations. BDM was originally scheduled to stay through the end of December 2017, but will now stay until the end of March 2018.

## Hurricane Harvey response

BDM sent a group of 3 volunteers from October 22-28 to help with Hurricane Harvey recovery in Houston, Texas. Volunteers stayed at St. George Orthodox Church and work was provided through a partnership with International Orthodox Christian Charities.

## Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI)

From August through the middle of September, the DRSI team supported an area in Southeastern Wisconsin following a flooding event in July 2017. The DRSI team, working with the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons, communicated with the local county and state leadership to discuss the formation, structure and function of a long-term recovery group (LTRG). The result was the formation of



*Volunteers paint walls in one of the first homes BDM worked on in Marion County, S.C.* Photo by Jenn Dorsch-Messler

the Tri-County Long Term Recovery Group.

Following this deployment, the DRSI team divided to explore multiple communities affected by Atlantic hurricane season events in 2017. At the request of local leaders, Rachel Larratt, LTRG formation specialist, traveled to the U.S. Virgin Islands to support initial discussions on recovery from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and how the DRSI, as well as BDM, might be involved. DRSI team member Tim Sheaffer traveled to the Houston, Texas area to find out if communities without pre-existing long-term recovery groups would be open to receiving assistance from DRSI as they planned their recovery from Hurricane Harvey.



*BDM volunteers from South/Central Indiana and Illinois/Wisconsin districts repaired a roof in Ottawa, Ill., damaged in February 2017 by an F-3 tornado. The team worked with the Ottawa/Naplate Long Term Recovery Group, which had formed with support from the Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI).* Photo courtesy of Cliff Kindy

# Children's Disaster Services updates

The last few months have been very busy for Children's Disaster Services, with eight responses between June and October, in addition to preparing for and holding three volunteer workshops. In addition to the events detailed here, CDS volunteers responded to flooding in Utica, N.Y., and to flash floods in Kansas City, Mo. In September CDS volunteers responded in three places at one time—a new record!

Having updated availability and contact lists of CDS volunteers made filling response teams so much easier in such a busy time! Please send an email ([cgs@brethren.org](mailto:cds@brethren.org)) with your availability dates every few months (or when you hear of a disaster that you could respond to) and please remember to let us know if your contact information, especially your email, changes.

## Hurricane response

CDS volunteers responded to both Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. CDS was also on alert to serve evacuees, if needed, from the Virgin Islands following Hurricane Irma and from Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria, but were not called to serve. Between the end of August and mid-October, CDS teams served in 17 different locations in Texas and

Florida with 74 caregivers serving over 1,400 children. The teams served in Red Cross evacuation centers before Irma hit, and in Red Cross shelters for both Harvey and Irma. Later, three teams served in FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers in Texas. Ten Child Life Specialists in Texas, who are CDS certified caregivers, served as “day workers” for the Harvey response, supplementing the teams on their days off during the week and on weekends.

CDS has been working on developing partnerships, and the hurricane response was a wonderful example of how the community of partners all came together to respond with compassion and skill in a chaotic situation. We are grateful to our response partners (American Red Cross and FEMA) and our funding and support partners (Week of Compassion, National Benevolent Association and Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ]; and United Methodist Committee on Relief).

We are also grateful for many other partners who supported this work in so many ways, including local and state governments, Child Care Aware of America, and Save the Children. And, of course, we could not do it without our volunteers who responded so capably, and to those who continue to be ready to respond.



Children put on a puppet show for CDS volunteers in a Local Assistance Center during the California wildfire response.

Photo by Wendy Hartley

## California wildfires response

The western U.S. has faced months of wildfires which have caused billions of dollars in damage. CDS has had two recent wildfire responses in California. In July, four volunteers served in Local Assistance Centers (LACs) in Mariposa County, where they saw 50 children in four days. In October, Red Cross asked CDS to quickly respond to fires in Sonoma and Napa counties, which spread rapidly overnight on Oct. 8-9. Arriving on Oct. 13, CDS volunteers provided childcare in several shelters and LACs in the area. In 17 days, 19 volunteers cared for 327 children, many of whom had to flee at a moment's notice through the flames and/or had lost everything in the fires. As a measure of the respect that their colleagues hold for Children's Disaster Services, one person reported, “I listened to one of the early wildfire briefings for national Red Cross, and there was cheering when it was announced that your agency was responding. Bless you for all you do!”

## Las Vegas Critical Response Child Care

On Oct. 1, 2017, a gunman opened fire on a crowd of concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival in Las Vegas, Nev., leaving 58 people dead and nearly 600 injured.

Seventeen Critical Response Child

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“The kids taught me so many things. I learned that cardboard boxes can be transformed into castles, homes, airplanes, places to sleep or hide, or boats that can rescue from the floods,” said CDS volunteer/Child Life Specialist Karla Edwards who served in a Texas shelter serving survivors of Hurricane Harvey.

Photo courtesy of Karla Edwards

# Rebuilding hope and home in Nigeria

by Roxane Hill, coordinator, Nigeria Crisis Response

In 2018, the Nigeria Crisis Response will continue to rebuild hope and home in Nigeria with a budget of \$700,000. The focus will remain on the humanitarian needs of food (distribution and agriculture), medical support, water source development, and shelter. The peace and trauma work will be expanded to include “Listening Companions” assigned to villages to work one-on-one at reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. As Northeast Nigeria recovers, more emphasis will be placed on education, livelihoods for widows and orphans, and agricultural projects designed to help stabilize the economy. The response will also continue to support Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria’s (EYN’s) Disaster Ministry Department and offer core support to church leadership.

The crisis response work in 2017 has so far included 17 food distributions, medical help at 10 locations, numerous trauma workshops and training of “Listening Companions”, roofing for destroyed homes of the most vulnerable, livelihood empowerment to 400

widows and orphans, education assistance to 1,389 students (including full-time care of 164 orphans), six boreholes (two run by solar power), seeds and fertilizer for 2,000 families, a soybean initiative project, two tractors, and core support for EYN Headquarters, including internet service and the building of additional office space.

Walking alongside the Nigerian Brethren is still very important. This year church staff and volunteers from both the U.S. and EYN worked side by side in three workcamps in Nigeria. The opportunity to work and fellowship together was a blessing to all. The Church of the Brethren was represented at EYN’s annual conference and the U.S. church brought EYN leadership to participate in its own annual conference. In the spring, volunteers Dave and Pam Reist traveled to Nigeria and were invaluable in getting the tractor project off the ground. Prayer for Nigeria continues to be a key ingredient as the recovery effort enters 2018.



Livelihood training has enabled widows and orphans, like this woman, to earn a living and start on the path of self-sufficiency.

Photo by Roy Winter

Nigeria Crisis Response partner profile:

## Dr. Rebecca Dali of CCEPI receives UN award

by Roxane Hill

Dr. Rebecca Samuel Dali is the executive director of the non-profit Center for Caring Empowerment and Peace Initiative (CCEPI), with which the Church of the Brethren has been partnering since 2014. Dali and CCEPI were some of the first to respond to the violence caused by Boko Haram in Nigeria. CCEPI’s work includes providing food and household supplies; trauma healing and peace work; documentation and data collection of the crisis; and skills acquisition centers, with an emphasis on widows and orphans. Dali’s passion, and the quality of her work, has attracted the attention and support of numerous sponsors to continue and expand these efforts.

On August 21, Dr. Dali received the 2017 Sergio Vieira de Mello Humanitarian Award, conferred biennially to draw the world’s attention to efforts to do something special and unique to reconcile people and parties in conflict. Dali was recognized because of her work in caring for women, children, and orphans in northeast Nigeria. She was also commended for the courageous efforts of CCEPI to promote the re-integration into their local communities of women who returned after being abducted by Boko Haram.



In August 2017, Dr. Rebecca Dali received the Sergio Vieira de Mello Humanitarian Award at U.N. European Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

Photo by Kristin Flory

# Nigeria Church Rebuilding Workcamp

## January 5-22, 2018

Join this workcamp to help the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN) rebuild a church building, medical clinic or church offices as they continue their journey of recovery in the aftermath of Boko Haram violence. The construction work will be cement block and masonry, so lots of lifting and carrying is involved. The trip also includes travel to get a firsthand look at EYN projects, attend different churches and visit communities near the worksite (the specific work location has not been determined). The most important thing you will do is build new relationships.

Costs for the trip are approximately \$2,600. This includes obtaining a Nigerian visa, airfare, food, travel and lodging while in Nigeria, as well as about \$500 towards the building project. Not included in this cost are: travel insurance, vaccinations and medications necessary for travel. It is best to begin planning your trip as early as possible to save on airfare. To register or for more information, contact Kendra Harbeck at 847-429-4388 or [kharbeck@brethren.org](mailto:kharbeck@brethren.org)



Church rebuilding workcamps: Come and join us—let us rebuild! Photo of Jay Wittmeyer, director of Global Mission and Service, at a 2016 workcamp, by Donna Purcell.



BDM volunteers from the Western Plains District worked with Lybrook Community Ministries, near Cuba, N.M., to build a new laundromat at the mission. Volunteers also worked alongside their Navajo brothers and sisters on painting, siding, and flooring projects in two families' homes.

Photo by Susan Taylor

## CDS updates

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Care volunteers were deployed by CDS, in partnership with Red Cross, to Las Vegas to serve in the Family Assistance Center set up to provide services to families of those who were killed or injured, as well as survivors. The team cared for 122 children in 15 days. The CDS Critical Response Child Care team is made up of experienced volunteers who have received additional training in mass casualty disasters and are able to deploy quickly. The team members were deeply personally affected as they served children and families who are dealing with the grief of this horrific tragedy.

### Partnering in your community

CDS is grateful to those who attend local and state meetings on behalf of Children's Disaster Services. This summer, CDS caregivers/Child Life Specialists, Allene Osborn and Kunteang Som, attended a partnership meeting in Seattle, Wash., on preparing for and responding to children's needs in disaster. Kunteang reported, "It was a wonderful place to network with others who are passionate about serving children in our community." In addition to sharing about CDS and Child Life Disaster Relief, she was also able to connect with the director of the Asia Pacific Cultural Center in Tacoma, Wash.

### CDS Workshops

CDS' fall volunteer workshops



CDS volunteers transform their spaces into safe, friendly and secure play spaces. In the Family Assistance Center where Critical Response Child Care volunteers served in October 2017, following the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nev., cardboard and paper became an inviting playhouse filled with cozy blankets and books.

Photo by Boon Murray

were held in Bridgewater, Va., Jacksonville, Fla., Northville, Mich., Bethel, Pa., and a Child Life specialized workshop in New York City. One participant expressed a common response on her evaluation: "I can't wait to get started!" Workshops for 2018 are forming and will be posted on the website ([www.brethren.org/cds](http://www.brethren.org/cds)) as confirmation is received. Currently scheduled spring workshops include La Verne, Calif., (April 14-15) and Trotwood, Ohio, (April 20-21) with specialized Child Life Disaster Relief workshops in Syracuse, N.Y., (March 3) and Washington, D.C., (May 3).



# BRIDGES

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## Top-notch work with joy in their hearts

by Lavada Smith

As a Disaster Case Manager, I was introduced to the best non-profit disaster organization so far: Brethren Disaster Ministries. This is an organization that truly gets the job done. Not only do they work around the clock, but they do it with pure joy in their hearts. I have been able to bring hope to numerous disaster survivors with the ongoing dedication of BDM. BDM serves a mission through their numerous volunteers that come in weekly to provide the necessary work on housing rebuilds. The volunteers are nothing short of amazing. It has been a pleasure to meet so many spiritual people from all over the world. God's work is truly being done when you see a white pickup truck with 'Brethren Disaster Ministries' on the door. I always knew if I could convince Kim and Steve to take "just" one more client, then that client was in great hands. BDM hardly ever turned down a rebuild project that

I desperately needed completed. They show up and they show out. All of their jobs are top-notch work and my clients have always been totally shocked by the great rebuild work they have received. I could go on for days about all the blessings BDM has provided to the community of Columbia, S.C. I'm truly grateful for the time I was able to work with this VOAD. I am so sad they had to move on with their ministry but they will always be a part of the conversation about the October 2015 Flood Recovery.

Lavada Smith is a Disaster Case Manager for Lutheran Services Carolinas Disaster Case Management in Columbia, S.C.

*Students from West-Mont Christian Academy, in the Atlantic Northeast district, were one of the groups that served during the 12 months that the BDM Columbia, S.C. project was open.*

*Photo by Jenn Dorsch-Messler*



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