

*“Bear one another’s burdens,  
and in this way you fulfill  
the law of Christ.”*

*Gal. 6:2*



# **BRETHREN Disaster Ministries**



# **Volunteer Handbook**

## **Brethren Disaster Ministries**

Inspired by Jesus, Brethren Disaster Ministries focuses on rebuilding homes, caring for children and providing international relief by engaging our volunteers, supporters and partners to serve communities recovering from disaster. Brethren Disaster Ministries includes home rebuilding, Children's Disaster Services, and global response and is a program of the Church of the Brethren.



*Rebuilding Homes.  
Nurturing Children.  
Responding Globally.*

**BRETHREN  
Disaster Ministries**

Devotional handbook for disaster relief volunteers  
for reading before you go:

### **Brethren Disaster Ministries “Here I Am”**

See your DDC to obtain a copies or request them from  
Brethren Disaster Ministries (Phone 800-451-4407)  
BDM, P.O. Box 188, New Windsor, MD. 21776-0188  
[bdm@brethren.org](mailto:bdm@brethren.org)  
[www.brethren.org/bdm](http://www.brethren.org/bdm)

Cover photo by Diane Fox

BDM is a member of



**National  
Voluntary Organizations  
Active in Disaster**

COOPERATION | COMMUNICATION | COORDINATION | COLLABORATION

## WHAT IS DISASTER RESPONSE?

### Disaster Response is Faith in Action

*“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” James 2:17 (NIV)*

Brethren Disaster Ministries, under the auspices of the Church of the Brethren, provides an opportunity to live out one’s faith in a very practical way by rebuilding homes and providing hope for survivors dealing with loss from hurricanes, floods, fires, tornados, etc.

### Why Volunteer

There are many benefits to volunteering. Some reasons to consider: meet new people; find fellowship in working together; personal growth; get some on-the-job training and learn a new skill; and achieve a sense of satisfaction for being able to give something back. The pure JOY of helping others is priceless.

### Before You Go

- Inform your **District Disaster Coordinator** (“DDC”) of your interest in volunteering, the number of people going with you (if any), your skills and your expected time of arrival to the project. The DDC will pass this information on to the Project Leadership Team.
- Be sure to contact your DDC to get the Project phone number, address and directions.
- Be sure you are up-to-date with your tetanus vaccination.
- Pack your bedding and towels.
- Pack prescription medications you are taking.
- Pack appropriate work clothes, work gloves & shoes.
- If you any have questions, contact your DDC or the BDM office.

## **Volunteer Release Forms and Parental Consent Forms**

These standard forms should be provided to you by your District Disaster Coordinator before you leave.

### **Travel**

Plan to arrive at the project by early Sunday evening. As you prepare to leave home, be sure to allow enough time to reach your destination safely. Driving long hours without rest is dangerous to both drivers and passengers. Make arrangements to stay overnight when traveling long distances, or if the weather becomes inclement.

You may be asked to drive a BDM vehicle once you arrive at the work site. You must have a valid driver's license and be 21 years of age or older. Please read BDM's Vehicle Safety Handbook!

### **Expenses**

Check to see if your local congregation or District Office pays for transportation costs for disaster volunteers. If not, you may want to plan a special fund raising activity before you go.

BDM will provide project meals from Monday breakfast through Saturday breakfast, and housing. Cooks have Sundays off, so volunteers need to make other arrangements for all Sunday meals. Have enough cash to cover meals as you travel.

If you use your own vehicle for project related work, you may request a mileage payment from BDM Project Leadership before you leave.

Some districts may provide insurance for uninsured volunteers. If you are uninsured you should check with your District Disaster Coordinator to see if it is provided.

## Volunteer Requirements

- ☑ Volunteers are welcome regardless of skill level. A willingness to learn new skills is essential.
- ☑ A desire to share God's love through helping others.
- ☑ An attitude of cooperation and flexibility.
- ☑ Be in good health and have the stamina to work a full day.
- ☑ **All volunteers** must complete the **Volunteer Registration/Release** before starting work.

## Youth

- ☑ Minimum age is 15 years, or 14 if accompanied by a parent or court-appointed legal guardian.
- ☑ All youth under 18 must be accompanied by an adult youth leader, age 21 or older, or a parent.
- ☑ One adult youth leader is required for every 4 youth.
- ☑ If the youth group is of mixed gender, both male and female adult youth leaders are required.
- ☑ Projects outside the U.S.; minimum age requirement is 16. Volunteers aged 16 or 17 must be accompanied by a parent or court-appointed legal guardian.
- ☑ **Authorization of Consent to Emergency Care of Minor** and **Volunteer Registration/Release** must be signed and mailed to BDM offices at least one week before minor volunteer leaves home and as well as additional copies taken with the volunteer to the project location

***“Jesus is no longer physically with us.  
Your hands are the only hands he has to do his work.”  
St. Theresa of Avila***

## **Upon Arrival at the Project**

Upon arrival, BDM Project Leaders will welcome you, collect any forms you might have and ask you to fill out a Volunteer Registration/Release form. They will orient you to the project, covering such topics as house rules, work schedule, safety, tools, daily devotions, expectations, etc.

The project cook will usually ask about special dietary needs. If you have a dietary restriction or food allergy, please let the cook know, so that they can try to accommodate your needs.

It is important that you carefully fill out the Volunteer Registration/Release form with information about your skills, experience and limitations. This allows the Project Leadership to make work assignments and form work groups. You may request a different work assignment if you feel the work is more physically demanding than you are capable of doing.

## **Ethical Guidelines**

The following statements are guidelines for all Church of the Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteers.

### **BDM volunteers strive to...**

1. represent the Church in all they do with attitudes and actions that keep with the teaching of Christ and the values of the Church of the Brethren. Each volunteer is a living example of Christ ministering to others.
2. understand and accept the reality that their actions and attitudes reflect on others.
3. be sensitive to people and take time to listen to disaster survivors. (Listening requires an understanding heart as well as a listening ear.)
4. assist disaster survivors within the limits of their training and abilities.
5. respect the belongings of disaster survivors, and be especial-

ly careful to salvage irreplaceable personal items such as family pictures, legal documents, wedding albums, etc.

6. put their faith into action and should not engage in religious exploitation of disaster survivors. However, sharing of one's faith when asked, "Why are you here?" is appropriate.

7. respect personal information obtained from disaster survivors. Sharing of financial matters and/or personal matters should not be done. Sharing general experiences of work done / persons served, is acceptable.

8. be sensitive to persons' feelings and seek permission to take pictures of individuals and damaged property.

9. keep the volunteer housing facility clean leaving accommodations in as good or better shape than when they arrived assisting in meal preparation, dish washing and general cleanup.

10. be good stewards of donated funds, tools, materials and time; putting wants and desires aside in order to address the needs of others.

11. be committed to stewardship of the environment and will take extra measures, whenever possible, to preserve natural resources and conserve energy.

**BDM volunteers may not...**

1. not solicit and/or contribute funds or in-kind donations for individual disaster survivors.

2. accept damaged items from the disaster survivor nor attempt to salvage items from the disaster area for their personal use.

3. accept cash contributions from persons being assisted. Persons wishing to make contributions are encouraged to make contributions by check, payable to the Church of the Brethren Emergency Disaster Fund.

### **Helpful Tips**

You may want to let your family know of your safe arrival. Many will use their cell phones to do this, but in some areas cell phones do not work nor will everyone have a cell phone with them. Please limit your use of the BDM project phone to one personal call.

The work day includes time for mid-morning and mid-afternoon rest breaks, and you should include snacks in the lunch coolers for break time.

### **Spirit of Cooperation**

It is very important that a spirit of cooperation be maintained at the project. Are you ready to be a servant? You may be asked to serve in a capacity that you had not anticipated—such as assisting in meal preparation, dishwashing and general cleanup.

Many circumstances affect the work schedule and Project Leaders often need to be flexible and change work assignments. If you expect to use a hammer but are asked to do something else, can you accept the unexpected assignment and wholeheartedly join the group effort, focusing on the survivor's best interest?

Disaster Project Leadership will set up daily routines and make the final decisions regarding job assignments and how the work is to be done when there is a question.

If you have unresolved issues or concerns, discuss them with Project Leadership. If you do not find that helpful, you may want to discuss them with your DDC or with the BDM staff. It is BDM's intention that all volunteers have a good experience.

***“The things, good Lord, that we pray for,  
give us the grace to labor for.” St. Thomas More***



## Compassion

While it is gratifying to meet the person or persons you are serving, circumstances may not make that possible. God's goodness can be felt even though you may not meet the homeowner directly.

Volunteers serve as God's hands, and an attitude of "Here I am, Lord" can allow God to accomplish God's purpose.

BDM serves survivors who have little or no resources and who have been screened by an interfaith or recovery group to qualify for our help. We do not know their circumstance, nor should we. It is important not to be judgmental regarding survivors situations, lifestyles, or the support we are providing.

Take time to listen to the survivors. They may need to talk and tell you the story of the disaster. Don't focus on your own story - **listen**. They do not expect you to FIX it; they need to talk it out.

It is OK to show your emotions. If people cry when they share their story, and you empathize with them and tears come, that's OK. The emotional stages of recovery for the survivors take time. Be sensitive to their need to express real emotions.

Remember to respect their confidentiality and privacy. Ask permission before you take photos of individuals. If possible, ask permission from property owners before taking pictures of damaged property.

Disaster response should be seen as putting faith into action; a form of sharing the "Good News." The disaster response worker should not engage in religious exploitation of disaster survivors. However, when asked "Why are you here?" sharing your faith is always appropriate.

## **Safety Issues**

Make sure you know:

- the address of the place where you will be working,
- if **911** is activated in the area,
- if there is a phone on site or if cell phones work in the area,
- the location of a local Emergency Care facility or hospital.

Project Leadership will provide this information. There should be a vehicle or phone at each work site in case of emergency.

## **Tools and Tool Safety**

BDM provides a tool trailer with hand and power tools, ladders, generators, compressors, etc. Each trailer is equipped with tool “Kits”. Be sure to use the “Kits” in the manner they were intended, leaving each “Kit” fully equipped and in working condition for the next group of volunteers. If maintenance is needed, make Project Leadership aware of the problem. In the case of paint, dry wall and cement/masonry tools, please be sure they are properly cleaned at the end of each use.

If you have your own hardhat, eye protection, work gloves, tool belt or favorite hand tools, plan to bring them along. If you do not have your own safety equipment, we will provide it and strongly recommend its use.

All volunteers are expected to observe standard safety procedures when operating power tools. If you are not experienced with the use of a tool, Project Leadership can provide training or assign an experienced person to train you. Do not attempt to use any tool without the proper instruction.

***The task ahead of us is never as great  
as the power behind us.***

### **As You Leave To Go Home**

Your cooperation is needed to help keep the volunteer housing facility clean. We aim to leave the accommodations in better shape than when we arrived.

Please fill out an evaluation online at [www.brethren.org/bdmevaluation](http://www.brethren.org/bdmevaluation) or you can receive a paper copy from Project Leadership at the end of the time of service. You may fill this out individually or as a group, and return it directly to BDM, New Windsor.

### **When You Return Home**

If you have pictures that you would like to share, please send them as an email attachment to [bdm@brethren.org](mailto:bdm@brethren.org), or mail a CD or jump drive to BDM, P.O. Box 188, New Windsor, Md. 21776-0188.

Please tell your friends and church about your experience, and encourage others to participate on a BDM Disaster Project.

It is not unusual for some people to feel distressed once they return home. They may dwell on the disaster survivors' situation and feel guilty about living in comfort. If you experience this and it lingers on, it may be helpful to discuss it with your pastor.

If you find this ministry rewarding and wish to volunteer in another way, you may want to consider volunteering as a Project Leader or at BDM headquarters please contact BDM Staff. Training is available if you are interested.

***King Saul thought Goliath was too big to fight;  
David thought he was too big to miss.***

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**My District Disaster Coordinator is:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_



Brethren Disaster Ministries is a  
program of the Church of the Brethren