



Vol. 22, Summer 2021

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Church of the Brethren

# Brethren Disaster Ministries BRIDGES

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

## Pondering Connections— Hurricanes, Tornadoes, Migrating Children, and NE Nigeria

by Roy Winter

While pondering the diversity of BDM's different ministries in this issue, I was struck by how they have an important connection. Maybe thinking about these connections can help us be better partners in disaster recovery and even work more at preventing future disasters.

Having two major hurricanes strike land in November (Eta & Iota in Central America) caused me to really pause and wonder. November hurricanes are unusual and ones that make landfall are even more unusual. But having two storms form in November has never happened, and they both struck Nicaragua within 15 miles of each other and just 13 days apart. The greatest destruction of homes from these storms occurred in Honduras, where government corruption and organized crime already made most people's lives difficult and dangerous, or worse.

When reflecting on the rebuilding project in Dayton, Ohio, I recalled that the 2019 Memorial Day tornado outbreak had some unusually strong tornadoes and set a new record for the most tornadoes to touch down in one day in Ohio. In my 20 years working with BDM, we have often responded to unprecedented or record-breaking hurricanes, typhoons,



*Aerial view of some of the flooding caused by Hurricane Eta in Honduras.  
Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy*

tornadoes, and floods. I understand that warming oceans and climate change are a significant part of these trends.

I also recalled listening to Nigerian farmers and church leaders share their deep concern about climate change, changing rains, longer droughts, and more years with crop failure. Some are trying different crops that are more drought tolerant. This, along with a growing population of young adults without job prospects, helped to create the crisis in Northeast Nigeria. I then remembered how Haitian farmers talked about similar changes and hardships from changing rain patterns.

Climate change is an area of program emphasis for many of our partners, including Church World Service. The United Nations puts it this way: "Climate change is the defining crisis of

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# Pondering Connections

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*our time and disaster displacement one of its most devastating consequences.”* ([www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html))

The challenges of climate change, including more frequent and devastating disasters, are also part of the mix in global migrations (certainly violence, poverty, economic opportunity, and more also play a part). We see it in the influx of Latin American and Caribbean refugees along our southern border. As a parent of two married children, and hoping to be a grandfather soon, I understand parents wanting to make sure their children don't have to struggle to simply survive. We want our kids to do better than us. Called by Christ to care for the stranger, CDS is responding by caring for children at an immigrant respite center in Texas.

These issues are complex, with many factors besides the environment and climate impacting people living in poverty and those who become

migrants. One solution is to help address the hunger and poverty in the countries from which migrants flee, such as by rebuilding homes in Honduras, so that people will be able to recover from the storms and find hope again in their homeland.

In my pondering, I keep wondering how the Church and BDM should address the root causes of poverty, hunger, and migration. Given the influence that changes in climate have on disasters and BDM's ministry, it is time to focus more on reducing the impact on disaster survivors through better mitigation and preparedness.



The 2019 Memorial Day tornadoes in Ohio damaged or destroyed 1,779 residences, including apartment buildings.

*Photos courtesy of Sam Dewey*

## COVID-19 Response Updates

### COVID-19 Outbreak in India Worsens for Indian Brethren

A spiking of COVID-19 infections in India started in early April and quickly grew to the world's worst outbreak with more than 4,000 COVID-19 related deaths a day. Sadly, this has led to the deaths of several Church of the Brethren in India leaders. Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grants have been offered to support the church, but an Indian law called the Foreign Exchange Management Act, passed in 1999, makes transferring funds to India very difficult and so far grant funding has not been possible.

Brazil (and other countries in northern South America) have also seen their highest spike in cases and deaths in 2021. Brazil Brethren also suffered the death of a key church leader to COVID-19. Church leaders, seeking to be independent of EDF and

other grants, encourage their churches to support outreach and relief efforts themselves.

The U.S. COVID-19 Pandemic Grant program supports churches and districts in meeting humanitarian needs in their congregations and communities. Even though the pandemic is better controlled in the United States and vaccines are being provided, new grant requests are still being accepted. Churches that received grants and have provided good reporting are offered the

opportunity for additional grants.

The Global COVID-19 Pandemic Grant program continues to provide emergency support to global Churches of the Brethren and selected partners, including CoB groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nigeria, Rwanda, Spain and Venezuela, and mission points in Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and South Sudan.

The COVID-19 grant programs will continue as long as needed, providing funds are available.

COVID-19 Pandemic Grant Summary 2020 — May 31, 2021		Amount
U.S. Grants	29 congregations from 11 districts	\$177,562
Global Brethren Grants	11 Global CoB denominations and mission points	\$231,050
Global Partner Grants	3 Partners – Church World Service, IMA World Health, Project Global Village	\$80,000
Total		\$488,612



# CDS Updates

## Texas Deployments

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) deployed three teams to work with children along the U.S./Mexico border in Texas in April and May 2021. The teams spent a total of six weeks at the Catholic Charities Humanitarian Respite Center of the Rio Grande Valley (CCRGV), providing creative play opportunities for the children and much needed rest for their parents before the next leg of their journey. They averaged 73 child contacts per day, with a total of 2,651 children served during their deployments. The volunteer coordinator at CCRGV stated, "Thanks for all you do to help. We truly appreciate it and the children love it!"

CDS reconnected with the center, where it worked in 2018, in response to the growing pressure since the beginning of 2021 on systems designed to help migrant families seeking asylum due to two devastating hurricanes that hit Central America in November 2020 and changes in U.S. border policy. Sister Norma Pimentel, executive director of CCRGV, reminds us that this humanitarian work is crucial, saying "touching somebody's life, reaching out to them, bringing a smile to a child is



The second CDS Texas team photographed with Sister Norma Pimentel (second from right).  
Photo courtesy of Patty Henry

amazing. This is love, this is beautiful". CDS was glad to be able to be part of the children's journey for a brief time while they passed through the CCRGV.

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## Who is my neighbor?

by Raiza Spratt, CDS volunteer, Texas, April 2021

*Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13: 1-2 (NIV)*

My neighbor sometimes arrives like a quiet whisper or a breeze I may or may not notice.

My neighbor is the child who comes running with a grateful hug because he found a safe oasis to play.

My neighbor is a person who feels pain, feels hunger, feels anxiety, feels the blisters on their feet from walking, feels the weight of problems that are too big for any one person or any one country to solve.

My neighbor yearns to be noticed, to be seen as a human being.

My neighbor hides the struggles and pain that they carry with them.

My neighbor's journey took anywhere from days to years, enduring the unpredictable weather of valleys, mountains, deserts, rivers, and politics. Sometimes crossing 5 or 6 nations before arriving to what they hope is the Promised Land: a safe home.

My neighbor is a pregnant teen, who, not by choice carries the future of the next generation.

My neighbor asks for the most basic of things: shoes

that fit them, clean clothes with dignity, water that hydrates, a doctor with compassion, work without exploitation, and food without strings attached.

My neighbor sometimes comes without physical belongings but they carry the Minga and Fiesta, they carry heritage and values with them. They carry a language with memories.

Some neighbors are polite and share and some neighbors grab and take because they remember a time when they didn't have and they don't know when their next opportunity will come.

My neighbor is a person, a human being, someone who chooses Hope over fear, and it is that hope that helps them endure the unimaginable and fuels their resilience and strength.

My neighbor . . . The human I'm called to love.

My neighbor is a migrant, a homeless, a survivor, a fighter, a sometimes invisible human being.

Blessed be my neighbor.



Photo by Raiza Spratt

# Rebuilding Lives in Central America: Hurricane Recovery

**Sponsor a house in Honduras for hurricane survivors: \$2,500**

Less than six months after powerful 2020 Hurricanes Eta and Iota caused widespread destruction, affecting more than eight million people, lives are being rebuilt in Central America. In Honduras, where the majority of those impacted live (4.6 million), key BDM response partner Proyecto Aldea Global (PAG, Project Global Village) is building new 400 sq ft houses on land above the flood plain for survivors who lost their homes.

These new homes are being built for about \$2,500, with the homeowners providing much of the labor. Through PAG, BDM is also helping rebuild community water systems for \$5,000-\$10,000 each. These small-scale catchment and piping systems bring safe water down the mountain into homes and community water stations.

Another BDM partner, Church World Service (CWS), is focused on rebuilding livelihoods, replanting crops, repairing or reconstructing homes, and rehabilitating water systems in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Helping these families rebuild quickly, and in many cases live in better homes on higher land, gives them hope in a future and enables them to stay in their community.

Through mid-May, \$70,000 in Emergency Disaster Fund grants

provided for both immediate recovery from the storms and for starting long-term rebuilding. The early response work included CWS, PAG, and a third partner, Christian Solidarity Program for Honduras. With \$45,000 in immediate relief grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund, these partners supported communities in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua with food kits, hygiene supplies, blankets, medical supplies, water, and the transportation for a container of food from the U.S.

The 2021 goal is to provide an additional \$75,000 to help build 25 new homes and several water systems.

## CDS Updates



*A boy at the respite center enjoying imaginative playtime. After a long journey of hardships, the children enjoyed just being kids again.*

*Photo courtesy of Patty Henry*

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At the end of the deployment of the second Texas team, project manager Patty Henry remarked, "We were a sad group saying goodbye today. Efrian, the male security guard, told us that we set the bar high and team three will need to fill big shoes. As we were leaving the main room at the Respite Center, the front desk all stood up and applauded our team and thanked us for our big hearts and so much help."

CDS continues to seek places where their volunteers can contribute to the care of children affected by trauma and disasters, especially those aged 4 to 12. In the age of COVID-19, many new protocols are in place to help ensure



*These new houses in Honduras for hurricane survivors are being constructed on high ground to reduce the risk of future flooding.*

*Photo courtesy of Proyecto Aldea Global*

the safety of both the volunteers and the children. CDS looks forward to additional deployments in 2021 as it monitors the humanitarian situation and prepares for the summer and fall disaster seasons.

## CDS moving forward with fall training schedule

CDS is working with a few locations to resume standard CDS trainings in the fall of 2021 with increased safety protocols in place. Registrations for fall trainings will open soon. Two locations are currently confirmed, with plans to add at least one more:

### **Lombard, Illinois**

York Center Church of the Brethren  
September 24-25, 2021

### **Roaring Spring, Pennsylvania**

Roaring Spring First Church of the Brethren,  
November 5-6, 2021

Watch the CDS Facebook page for registration details and additional locations to be released soon.



*Children rejoice as the water to their home is restored after the village system was damaged in the hurricane and flooding.*

*Photo courtesy of Proyecto Aldea Global*



# Grants Expand Nigeria Crisis Response and COVID-19 Relief

In early March 2021, Rev. Yuguda Mdurvwa, director of EYN disaster relief ministries (DRM), reported that fertilizer prices had risen well above the planned relief program budget and that the displaced families in camps around Maiduguri were “left without food.” The Nigeria Crisis Response budget for 2021 includes supporting farmers with seeds and fertilizer, food distributions in critical areas, repairing homes, medical care, and education. However, ongoing attacks, other violence, and kidnappings continue to challenge the country, especially Christians in the Northeast. It is a challenge to find enough funds to do all that is desperately needed in this long-term response.

In response to Rev. Yuguda’s March alert, an Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grant of \$15,000, above the planned 2021 budget of \$110,000,

provided emergency food for households in two IDP (internally displaced person) camps in Maiduguri: Christian Association of Nigeria (162) and Shuwari (202).

After the distribution, Mr. Markus, from the Shuwari camp, exclaimed “We are very happy. We thank you for sustaining our life in the camp. My mouth cannot thank the DRM enough for the intervention they brought to us today.”

An additional EDF grant of \$15,000 from the COVID-19 grant program provided relief programming to widows and orphans, plus face coverings and hand sanitizer for the recent EYN Majalisa (Annual Conference).

Through the Nigeria Crisis Response, the Church of the Brethren has partnered with the Nigerian Brethren in their journey of relief and recovery. The response continues and will be needed for years, with the



*Residents of Shuwari IDP Camp in Maiduguri (Northeast Nigeria) joyfully receive food after experiencing hunger.*  
Photo courtesy of EYN

ongoing violence only getting worse. This need was highlighted in an update from Rev. Yuguda, received on May 21, 2021, sharing that “the security situation is getting worse and out of control” and “all the states in Nigeria [are] under attack” This includes the “murder” of an EYN pastor in Gombi on May 18.

Please continue to pray for our Nigerian Brethren.

## Volcanic Eruption near Goma, DR Congo

The eruption of Mount Nyiragongo on May 22 and weeks of earthquakes and tremors caused havoc for families in cities of Goma (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Gisenyi (Rwanda), and many villages on the northern end of Lake Kivu. UN OCHA (Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) reported at least 32 people died, thousands of homes were destroyed, and hundreds of unaccompanied children were in temporary care centers. Property damage was reported in the villages and in Goma’s suburbs and in some parts of Rwanda. A May 27 evacuation order from the provincial governor for parts of Goma, along with the fear of an additional eruption, caused thousands to flee to areas west and south of Goma, while thousands more fled across the border to Rwanda.

This disaster is likely not over. The volcano’s crater has begun to refill with lava and magma has been detected under parts of Goma and a



*Lava flow from Mt. Nyiragongo came near to Goma, DR Congo.*

*Photo courtesy of Bill and Ann Clemmer, IMA World Health*

section of nearby Lake Kivu. There is concern the continued earthquakes could lead to another fissure and lava flow, or to an eruption on the land or under the lake.

Brethren Disaster Ministries is working with Congolese Brethren leader Ron Lubungo and Goma pastor

Faraja Dieudonné to establish an appropriate response. An Emergency Disaster Fund grant of \$5,000 is supporting immediate needs in Goma while longer term plans are being developed. Another grant to the Rwandan Church of the Brethren is

*continued on page 6*

# Rebuilding Updates

## Dayton, Ohio Project

The rebuilding site in Dayton, Ohio, reopened in mid-April 2021 to recommence support of the recovery from the Memorial Day tornadoes that swept the area in 2019. Local Southern Ohio/Kentucky district volunteers provided the labor for the first two weeks before overnight volunteers from the full BDM schedule returned. This location is scheduled to be the only national BDM rebuilding site through October 2, 2021, when it will close completely as the local partners are scheduled to conclude their work.

BDM is continuing to monitor many elements of this site, including the supply chain of materials for completing the repairs. Availability of products has been affected and prices have risen in the Dayton area, as they have in many locations across the country, altering the cost and timeline for completion. Purchasing available plumbing supplies has been a challenge recently due to the historic freeze in Texas, as many parts were sent south to help with that recovery.

## Prince Georges County (Md.) Flood Response

BDM partnered with Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA) to help with repairs after the September 2020 flooding in Prince Georges County, Md. Veteran BDM volunteer Galen Martin, from the Mid-Atlantic District, served on Saturday, May 22 to provide construction leadership to help train a group of new IRUSA volunteers on replacing and finishing dry wall in one of the affected homes.

## Interim Rebuilding Assistant

Kim Gingerich has been hired as the interim program assistant for the Rebuilding Program of Brethren Disaster Ministries, working out of the Brethren Service Center in



New Windsor, Md. Since January 2014 Kim has been serving and living full-time on the BDM Rebuilding sites as a long-term disaster project leader, covering office and household management. Kim is from York, Pa., where she previously served as the district disaster coordinator for the Southern Pennsylvania District. She is also an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren. Kim began this interim work May 17, 2021.

## Dunker Punks Podcast Featuring BDM/BVS Volunteer

Evan Ulrich, who is serving for a year with BDM during his Brethren Volunteer Service, was featured on the Dunker Punks Podcast #115 on May 15, 2021. Visit the website at [www.arlingtoncob.org/dpp](http://www.arlingtoncob.org/dpp) to listen to his incredible testimony. Evan concludes his period of full-time service on July 23, 2021, and will enter graduate school at the University of Vermont.



## Puerto Rico District Celebration of Hurricane Maria work

The Puerto Rico District of the Church of the Brethren is planning a celebration on Saturday, September 25, 2021, at the Río Prieto Church of the Brethren, to commemorate the fourth anniversary of when Hurricane Maria devastated the island as well as the incredible work that the district did in response and recovery. Brethren Disaster Ministries is proud to have had such a strong partnership in ministry with our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico, thanks to the volunteers and donors who faithfully supported this recovery. If you are interested in finding out more about this celebration, please contact the BDM office ([bdm@brethren.org](mailto:bdm@brethren.org) or 800-451-4407).

# Volcanic Eruption

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supporting the displaced families in Rwanda. Additional grants are anticipated as the response plans develop.

BDM partners IMA World Health and HEAL Africa have programs in Goma and are organizing a response, which BDM may also support. Watch for updates in Newline or on the BDM Facebook page.

Prayers are requested for Church of the Brethren members and congregations in the Goma and Gisenyi areas, and for all those affected in the DRC and Rwanda.

## Would you like to receive BRIDGES by email?

Brethren Disaster Ministries is now offering our Bridges newsletter electronically for those who would prefer not to receive a paper copy.

If we have your email address, you will be receiving an email asking about your preferences. In the meantime, you may also send an email to [bdm@brethren.org](mailto:bdm@brethren.org), or give us a call at 800-451-4407, regarding any preferences or any questions you may have.

## BDM Project Expenses Correction

An error was made in the totals listed on the Brethren Disaster Ministries 2020 Project Expenses table on page 6 of the Winter 2021 Bridges. The correct totals are listed below.

Brethren Disaster Ministries 2020 Project Expenses	
U. S. Total	\$523,083
International Total	\$702,098
<b>TOTAL BDM PROJECT EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,225,181</b>



# A New Pathway for Renters in Dayton, Ohio

When a tornado rips through a community it does not discriminate between homeowners and renters. This was very evident in the Miami Valley area of Ohio where the National Weather Service recorded 19 tornadoes on Memorial Day 2019.

According to FEMA data, it is estimated that 42 percent of the residences damaged by these tornadoes were inhabited by renters. In an area that already had limited rental units and high rent prices, many of these families were required to relocate, often leaving the neighborhoods they called home and moving away from schools, jobs, friends, family, and beloved communities.

Through an incredible community-wide collaboration of over 20 partners, the Tornado Survivor Pathway to Homeownership Project (Pathways) was formed through the Miami Valley Long Term Recovery Operations Group to provide opportunities for former renters to return to the community and become owners of safe, affordable homes. Initially these homes will either be formerly vacant nuisance houses repaired by BDM or new builds on empty lots completed by other voluntary organizations. The program is expected to continue as a long-term option to provide affordable housing in the area.

The Pathways program addresses multiple issues:

- There is a lack of affordable housing in the area. This program allows qualifying survivors, who were renters prior to the tornadoes, to purchase housing in the neighborhoods they call home, likely with a mortgage that is lower than their previous rent payment.
- There are large numbers of vacant lots and properties that, if transformed, could be advantageous to the neighborhoods and jurisdictions.
- The project can leverage the opportunities and volunteers currently working in the area in support of the tornado recovery, providing reduced labor costs.

- Education and financial support will be provided for the new homeowners to help them thrive in their new environment.
- The homes will be sold at fair market value so will not negatively affect the value of the homes in the neighborhood. As each home is sold, the funds will go back into the repair or building of the next home to keep the program going.

While BDM's work in Dayton focuses on repairing houses for homeowners affected by the disaster, the Pathways program will allow for some homes BDM works on to support the large rental population in order to support recovery for the whole community.



The before and after view of the first Tornado Survivor Pathway to Homeownership Project home worked on by BDM volunteers. The trees were removed as a safety measure. Photos courtesy of BDM

## Rebuilding Homes and Mending Broken Hearts

*A letter from Pamlico County Disaster Recovery Coalition and Pamlico County (N.C.) Government*

The citizens of Pamlico County (N.C.), Pamlico County Disaster Recovery Coalition (PCDRC), and Pamlico County Government would like to convey our deep love and appreciation to Brethren Disaster Ministries and to the Church of the Brethren.

The Church of the Brethren, Jenn Dorsch-Messler, Steve Keim, Kim Gingerich, and Brethren Disaster Ministries' many volunteers have completed over 9,300 hours of disaster rebuild work in Pamlico County, more than any other team to present. Just as important, not only have you helped to repair hurricane damaged homes,

but you have also helped to restore and mend broken hearts. The light you have shown, and the relationships you have built with survivors and their families, will long have an impact on them and their generations.

In addition, the kind wisdom, love, and fellowship shown to your partners at PCDRC, Fuller Center Disaster ReBuilders, Mt. Zion OFWB Church, and our at-large community have been a huge blessing.

We already miss you and your presence so much. We hope that BDM will still be able to return in the fall to continue our precious and productive partnership of serving those in need.

With loving appreciation and gratitude.

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# BRIDGES

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## Virtual Blood Drive

**The 2021 Annual Conference has gone virtual—and so has the Blood Drive.  
There is still time to participate!**

The Blood Drive at the Annual Conference has been a tradition since 1984 with over 8,800 pints of blood donated through 2019. We missed the blood drive last year when the conference was cancelled and we didn't want to miss it again this year. So, the drive has gone virtual with participants pledging to give and donating blood locally.

A virtual blood drive campaign, managed by Brethren Disaster Ministries, has been set up through the American Red Cross SleevesUp online site ([www.brethren.org/virtualblooddrive2021](http://www.brethren.org/virtualblooddrive2021)) where Church of the Brethren members and guests can pledge to donate blood through the end of July, regardless of whether they are attending the Annual Conference online. Alternatively, pledges can be made by contacting BDM. The pledges are not mandatory, but it does help BDM keep track of who is willing to give blood and will help when following up on donations.

Once a person donates, they need to contact BDM to confirm their donation. Individual donations will not be tracked at donation sites, so this is the only way for BDM to get a final count of the number of pints we as a church were able to donate in 2021. Even if a person gives on a regular basis, their June/July donation can count for the Church of the Brethren. As an extra bonus for the campaign and the celebration of the Virtual Blood Drive, we encourage people to send photos of themselves giving blood.

Information flyers for the blood drive are available at the Annual Conference website ([www.brethren.org/ac2021/activities/blood-drive/](http://www.brethren.org/ac2021/activities/blood-drive/)) and the BDM homepage ([www.brethren.org/bdm](http://www.brethren.org/bdm)). For further information, questions, and to record your pledge and/or your blood donation, contact BDM at [bdm@brethren.org](mailto:bdm@brethren.org) or 800-451-4407 x1.

**THANK YOU FOR PUTTING YOUR FAITH INTO ACTION TO SAVE LIVES!**



*Leonard Matheny pledged through the 2021 Virtual Blood Drive and gave blood at a Red Cross location in Illinois.*