

Brethren Disaster Ministries **BRIDGES**

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

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Servant Leadership: Do You Hear the Call?

The programs of Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) and Children’s Disaster Services (CDS) cannot function without volunteers. The hands, hearts, and faith of volunteers are the lifeblood of the programs and ministry that transform the lives of those who are served. The BDM/CDS staff help to facilitate and



Construction disaster project leader Rex Miller (c) demonstrates the next step in building this deck for a home in Dawson Springs, Ky.
by Benjamin Hoffmann

coordinate these ministries, but it is the volunteers that give this mission its wings.

One of the keys to the remarkable impact of these programs are the volunteer servant leaders who support and encourage other volunteers to accomplish this amazing program and ministry. Leaders help to create efficient and effective programs in the midst of chaos and foster meaningful volunteer experiences. They are usually recognized and encouraged by other volunteers who see servant leadership skills in someone with whom they have served. A committed and prayerful discernment process helps to identify those who are and are not a good fit for a BDM/CDS leadership role.

A servant leader provides good communication and coordination of activities and may attend meetings representing the program area. They facilitate this ministry with a servant’s heart. A person does not need leadership

experience or to be a member of the Church of the Brethren to be called as a leader. All leaders are given experiential training, internships, support from the BDM office, and the tools to be successful in their role.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteerism has decreased for most programs in the US. The programs of BDM and CDS, as well as the fundraising auctions, all need more volunteers. The need for volunteer leaders is even greater. **Identifying additional servant leaders is the greatest challenge BDM and CDS face today.**

Ways to Serve in Leadership: BDM Rebuilding Program Leadership

Disaster project leaders (DPLs) provide the foundation of hosting on the Rebuilding Program sites, enabling the projects to offer a great volunteer experience while also delivering high-



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



Church of the Brethren



Household disaster project leader Doretta Dorsch (l) serves on rebuilding sites several times a year for a month at a time. Photo courtesy Ephrata CoB

quality construction work to communities. Construction DPLs prepare the job sites and materials for each group that arrives and strive to have meaningful work ready each day. They are also skilled in construction work and can help to train unskilled volunteers, providing the opportunity for each volunteer to participate and serve. Household DPLs serve and lead in hospitality at the volunteer housing location, providing two meals a day and lunch supplies for packing as well as managing the upkeep of the facility.

The work of the DPL teams goes beyond swinging hammers and large group cooking, however. These leaders are the long-term presence in the community and the main contact with our partners, providing strong relationships that are built and nurtured over time. They share their skills and life, and hold all the pieces together to make the BDM sites successful in serving families and volunteers.

The terms of service for DPLs range from a month at a time to a year or more. Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) volunteers may also serve with BDM during their one-year term. Each future leader is recognized and recommended for training by current leaders on the sites, and goes through a training and discernment process.

CDS Leadership

CDS disaster project managers (DPMs) serve on disaster sites, coordinating the CDS volunteers and

facilitating the ministry to children and families, in consultation with the CDS office. The DPM also makes connections with the CDS partner agency, such as Red Cross or FEMA, and will likely attend daily disaster response briefings. A key role is coordinating with the manager of the shelter or assistance center where services will be provided and making sure the space is safe and appropriate for giving care to children. Project managers facilitate daily debriefings and self-care for the whole CDS team and for individual volunteers.

District Disaster Coordinator

The role of the district disaster coordinator (DDC) is very integral to the ministries of BDM. It is a critical part of the relationship between BDM staff and the districts, as well as between volunteers and BDM staff. DDCs are appointed by their specific district office and report to the district. They help to build and maintain a disaster response network within the district; recruit volunteers for disaster response projects and CDS; promote disaster preparedness and mitigation; and increase awareness in the district about CDS, the BDM Rebuilding Program, and the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF). DDCs may coordinate and/or lead local district responses. They may also attend their state VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) or local long-term recovery group meetings, where they represent BDM and their districts, including sharing and gathering information and connections.

Disaster Relief Auctions

Three major auctions, facilitated by individual districts or boards, provide critical fundraising support for BDM programming. They are very much in need of volunteers to join the auction leadership, to manage key parts of the auction, and to help set up for and clean up after the auction. These major auctions are the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction (Southern Pennsylvania & Atlantic Northeast districts in Pennsylvania), the Mid-Atlantic District Disaster Response Auction (Maryland), and the Shenandoah District Disaster Ministries Auction (Virginia).

Call for Help

Volunteers, especially volunteer leaders, are needed in all of these program areas. Is the time right for you, or someone you know, to prayerfully and persistently consider answering this call to serve?

For more information, please contact BDM at bdm@brethren.org or 1-800-451-4407 or any staff member.



CDS project manager Melodie Bernhard (third from left) led the CDS team serving in Guam (August 2023) through many challenges.

Photo courtesy of Melodie Bernhard



CDS project managers liaise with other agencies. Here, Crystal Baker (c) speaks with staff of partner agency Red Cross about the CDS care center.

Photo courtesy of Crystal Baker

Rebuilding Updates

Dawson Springs, Ky., Tornado Response and Anniversary

One of the commitments of the Brethren Disaster Ministries Rebuilding Program is to support communities impacted by disaster with their long-term recovery. While BDM may not be the first to serve survivors in an area, it is often on the ground providing volunteers for years after an event when families are still in need of rebuilding. Due to its long-term presence in these communities, BDM leaders and volunteers may be present during the annual anniversaries of the events that caused the need. With an understanding that such times can be very traumatic for those who lived through the disaster, they walk with the survivors and join in commemorative events and services.

BDM opened its current project site in the town of Dawson Springs, Ky., in January 2023. In December 2023, the town marked the date two years prior when homes, businesses, and the lives of 19 individuals were lost during a tornado. BDM volunteers attended a commemorative event where disaster project leader Cliff Kindy was invited to share remarks on behalf of BDM. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, whose extended family is from this



Dawson Springs, Ky.: This memorial to the community members whose lives were lost in the 2021 tornadoes can be seen from many of the homes that BDM is working to build back in the town. Photo courtesy BDM

small town, was also present. Jason Greene, a volunteer from Western Pennsylvania District, served during the week of the anniversary and shared, “To be there on Monday morning [Dec.] 11, two years to the day [of the tornado], and imagining what the people from Dawson Springs woke up to,

is mind boggling to me. Looking over the city from the rafters that morning will be an image stamped into me forever. It still sends chills to me thinking about it.”

After a brief break for Christmas, the site reopened in January 2024 and is scheduled to continue for the groups on the schedule for Project 1 through at least the end of June. The future location of Project 1 is still being researched and developed by BDM staff and will be shared as soon as it is determined.

Eastern Kentucky Project Completion

Just before Thanksgiving 2023, BDM completed a 10-week flood recovery rebuilding project in Breathitt County in Eastern Kentucky, where homes had been damaged in summer 2022 flooding. BDM had previously served in this area during a two-week short-term project in April 2023. Volunteers returned to support the work of our partner, the Eastern Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church Disaster Response. During this fall project 19 families received help from BDM teams and leaders who traveled to serve there.

Some of the families whose homes were repaired have owned the properties for generations, dating back to the late 1700s. They welcomed and appreciated BDM’s presence and work. The daughter of one homeowner, who



Volunteers on the Eastern Kentucky rebuilding site built decks for families whose homes were damaged by flooding. Photo by Benjamin Hoffmann

had been scammed by a previous contractor, told a group of BDM volunteers that they were “the nicest people [she] had ever met.” BDM’s partner wrote that they “wanted to take a moment to thank [BDM] for your faithfulness to God and your servant’s heart. We, as a team, thank you for giving of your time to be with us and assisting us in meeting the needs of so many people in our community.”

Detroit Local Response

A group of five volunteers from Living Peace Church (Michigan District) participated in a Fall Clean-up Blitz in Detroit, Mich., on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2023. BDM staff connected the church with the After the Storm-Metro Detroit Flood Recovery Project for this



Volunteers from Living Peace Church (Michigan District) removed flood-damaged carpet and other items from this house in Detroit. Photo by Wendy Russell

local response. This organization is working with survivors of flooding from a June 25-26, 2021 storm which brought six to eight inches of rain during a 24-hour period. Many stormwater pumps were not working due to power outages, causing basement backups and flooding. A case manager for After the Storm decided to reach out to BDM because she had been on staff with the local partner for the BDM Michigan

Rebuilding site which was open from March to December 2016. The October volunteers, led by Wendy Russell, served in four homes needing repairs to basement handrails and stairs, as well as some mucking out and carpet removal.

Project Leadership Training

A Disaster Project Leadership training was hosted on the BDM Dawson Springs, Ky., site at the beginning of

2024. The training was a partial ecumenical collaboration between BDM and Week of Compassion, which is a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). After two days of virtual training over Zoom, participants received on-site training from Jan. 31 to Feb. 7. Trainees included seven on the construction path and two focused on household leadership. Trainers included veteran BDM disaster project leaders, many of whom have served as long-term leaders. Staff from BDM and Week of Compassion also facilitated portions of the training. Following the classroom and workshop portion of this event, trainees who move forward will complete a one-month internship on a project, shadowing experienced leaders for additional training.

BDM Connections Lead to Joint Ramp Project

by Ed Olkowski, district disaster coordinator, Atlantic Northeast District

Pastor Jeff Snyder, from the Middle Pennsylvania (Middle PA) District, knew that his cousin, Emily, who lives in the Atlantic Northeast (ANE) District, was in urgent need of assistance. Emily has muscular dystrophy and found it difficult to navigate the steps to get into her home. She had contacted multiple agencies to ask for help in building a ramp but they were backlogged for years and a professional contractor was beyond her budget.

Jeff reached out to the ANE director of witness and outreach, Mary Etta Reinhart, to see if the district would be able to help Emily. Mary Etta turned to me, as district disaster coordinator (DDC), for ideas. It just so happened that I had worked on BDM rebuilding trips with a group

from Middle PA, which has a ramp building ministry in their district. I contacted Middle PA DDC Terry Hershberger to discuss a collaboration between his ramp building experts and some ANE volunteers.

Meanwhile, Mary Etta arranged for the Paxton Church of the Brethren to be the sponsoring church for the district's Helping Hands Benevolence Fund grant that would provide the funding to build the ramp. The church also agreed to provide lunch and refreshments for the ramp builders.

On Sept. 19, 2023, a group of eight volunteers showed up at Emily's home and proceeded to work on the ramp. Emily watched in anticipation of what was to come. At 3 p.m. that afternoon, Emily made her first trip with her walker down the new ramp. She was very happy and appreciative, sharing, "The deck was transformed into a beautiful, well built, safe [ramp] and has given me some independence."

This is just one example of the many connections we make in our BDM volunteering that leads to helping people in need in our own communities.

The volunteers who made this project possible are Dick Appleman, Don Bookhammer, Ron Bookhammer, Ken Hackett, Terry Hershberger, Ed Olkowski, Dwight Phillips, Kathy Phillips, Pastor Jeff Snyder, and Udo Sommerhoff. We are thankful to Mary Etta Reinhart for helping to pull this all together.



Emily (front) and the volunteers from the Atlantic Northeast and Middle Pennsylvania districts who built a ramp for her in one day. Photo courtesy Ed Olkowski

Rebuilding Volunteers Share Highlights of Their Experience

- The overall organization and preparation for every need . . . and everyone's flexibility.
- An unexpected experience was the overwhelming presence of the Spirit of God. I expected the experience to be faith-based, but it was an amazing week for me. To GOD be the Glory!
- The talent of the group. Not just the work we accomplished but also the fellowship we experienced. The tenderness I saw with and for [the homeowners].
- Meeting great people including one of the homeowners who worked beside me.
- The feeling of community [and] the opportunity to help others in a small way.
- I appreciated the great leadership . . . and the food was so delicious!

CDS Servant Leadership: Responding to the Call

“ . . . whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve . . . ” Mark 10:43-45

Children’s Disaster Services (CDS) is a ministry that serves children and their families after disasters. CDS trains, certifies, equips, and supports volunteers to travel to disaster-affected areas, often arriving soon after an event, to care for the youngest disaster survivors amid the chaos of those early days. A vital and necessary link in the ability to provide this service are specially trained CDS volunteer servant leaders, such as project managers, center leads, and trainers.

Project managers and trainers are experienced volunteers who have displayed their leadership skills and deep understanding of Children’s Disaster Services, and have undergone specialized training. Before they are invited to participate in the additional training, they must be recommended by other leaders and CDS staff. These leadership positions are not taken lightly and the entire discernment process is completed prayerfully and diligently.

Children’s Disaster Services leaders help volunteers achieve the knowledge, confidence, and skills needed to work as a team when serving on assignment with CDS. Trainers provide potential volunteers with foundational knowledge of CDS as well as basic training on caring for children who



CDS project manager Tom Cooper (c) managed this very busy care center in a school in North Carolina following Hurricane Florence in 2018. *Photo by Erin Myers*

have experienced the trauma of a disaster and are in the process of recovery. They get to know workshop participants and will ultimately recommend those who will be asked to consider becoming a volunteer.

Project managers (PMs) are specially trained to manage the operation of a care center, including relating to partners and others. Working closely with the CDS associate director and staff, PMs determine the needs of the volunteer team, both as a group and as individuals, so that they serve the children and their parents in the best way possible. They have ultimate responsibility for the security and well-being of all children in CDS centers and provide management support, encouragement, coaching, and emotional and spiritual care to the volunteers. Volunteers who serve as center leads are experienced child caregivers who support the project manager and provide coordination and support to volunteers in a CDS center. Leads are selected by the PM from among the volunteer team on site and may rotate from day to day.



As center lead in the CDS center in San Antonio, Texas after 2017’s Hurricane Harvey, Wanda King (c) accepted a donation of supplies from local CVS employees. *Photo by Pat Krabacher*

The CDS servant leaders who manage responses on-site have a significant impact on the children and families served as well as on

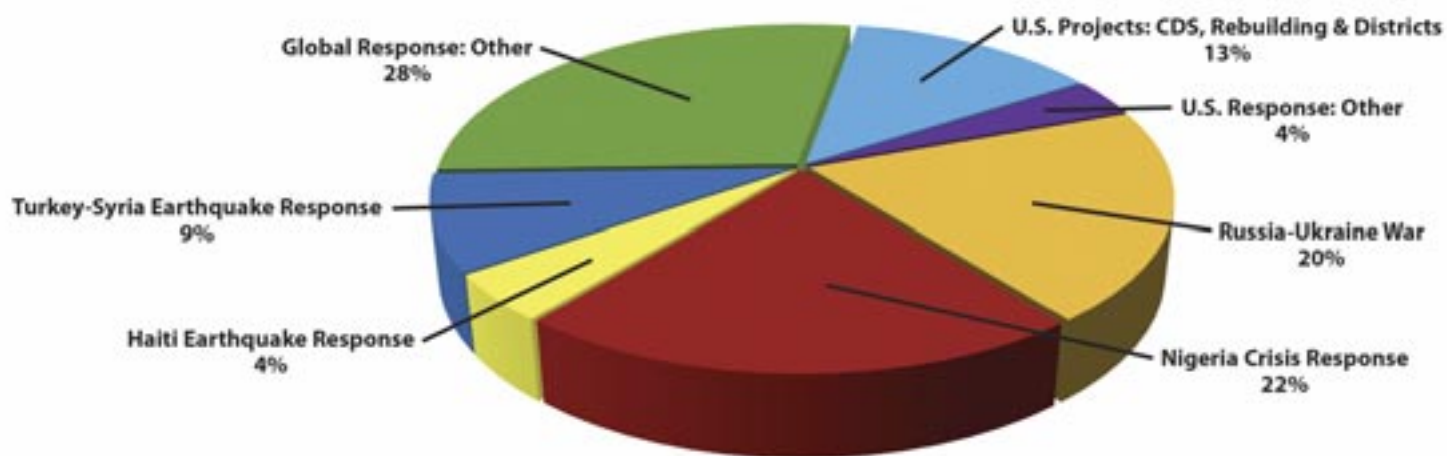
their fellow team members. These leaders must be good listeners and keen observers. They need to be well organized and be able to respond quickly and calmly in delicate and stressful circumstances. They must also model flexibility and be willing to learn from others.

CDS leaders work to lift up team members to be the best that they can be. One recent volunteer praised their project manager for being “a great team member that contributed her cheerful personality to [the] response”, saying they loved “being able to deploy with her and learn from her”. Another volunteer commented that “project managers worked above and beyond expectations to arrange [physical and logistical] support” for the team. A volunteer who was part of the response in Lewiston, Maine in October 2023, stated, “I felt well supported by my experienced team members and project manager. I learned a lot while realizing each situation is different. I am always proud of the small but important role CDS fills in disaster recovery.”

Children’s Disaster Services is grateful for all those who accept the call to become servant leaders. Their leadership enables CDS to respond after a disaster to provide the calm, safe, and reassuring presence for children and their families for which it is well recognized.

Brethren Disaster Ministries 2023 Project Expenses

Status	U.S. Projects	Amount
Active	International Orthodox Christian Charities—Marshall County, Ky., 2021 tornado response	\$30,000
Active	BDM—Kentucky December 2021 tornado response	\$109,393
Completed	Washington City Church of the Brethren—asylum seeker support	\$4,515
Completed	BDM—Eastern Kentucky 2022 summer flooding response	\$29,702
Completed	Somerset County Long-Term Recovery Group—Chesapeake Bay (Md.) 2021 tidal flooding	\$1,704
Completed	Child Life Disaster Relief—local team capacity building	\$8,750
	U. S. Total	\$184,064
Status	Global Projects	Amount
Active	Bittersweet Ministries—Tropical Storm Hilary recovery in Mexico	\$6,300
Active	Lutheran World Relief—Turkey-Syria earthquake response	\$25,000
Active	Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development (LSESD)—Turkey-Syria earthquake response	\$75,000
Active	Rwanda Church of the Brethren—aid for street children and DR Congo refugees in Rwanda	\$10,600
Active	Church of the Brethren in DR Congo—humanitarian aid to families displaced by violence	\$99,500
Active	BDM/Haiti Church of the Brethren—humanitarian response to multiple crises in Haiti	\$60,200
Active	L’Arche International—displaced Ukrainians with disabilities	\$25,000
Active	International Orthodox Christian Charities—Russia-Ukraine war and humanitarian crisis	\$120,000
Active	Church World Service—Russia-Ukraine war and humanitarian crisis	\$75,000
Active	Church of the Brethren South Sudan Mission—humanitarian aid for flooding and displaced families	\$40,000
Active	BDM/Haiti Church of the Brethren—2021 Haiti Earthquake Response	\$49,624
Active	BDM/Church of the Brethren in Nigeria—Nigeria Crisis Response	\$237,447
Completed	Church of the Brethren in DR Congo—emergency flood relief	\$5,000
Completed	Rwanda Church of the Brethren—emergency flood relief	\$23,500
Completed	Dominican Republic Church of the Brethren—Hurricane Fiona response	\$17,000
Completed	Proyecto Aldea Global (PAG)—Hurricanes Eta and Iota response in Honduras	\$50,000
	Global Total	\$919,171
TOTAL BDM PROJECT EXPENSES		\$1,103,235



Brethren Disaster Ministries 2023 Project Funding & Grants

Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) Total <i>Nigeria Crisis Fund (included in EDF Total)</i>	\$1,884,770
CDS Program Grants (<i>not included in EDF</i>) Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Grant	\$15,000

Brethren Disaster Ministries 2023 Rebuilding Responses

Project location	Disaster type	Weekly volunteers*	Work days	Hours served	Value of service**	Families served
Rebuilding Projects						
Dawson Springs, Ky.	Tornadoes	538	3,827	30,616	\$973,588.80	27
Eastern Kentucky	Flooding	140	880	7,040	\$223,872.00	19
BDM Short-term Responses						
Eastern Kentucky	Flooding	30	186	1,488	\$47,318.40	6
Totals		708	4,893	39,144	\$1,244,779.20	52

* Includes repeat volunteers **Estimated Value of Volunteer Service for 2023 is \$31.80 per IndependentSector.org

Children's Disaster Services 2023 Responses

Location	Disaster type	Volunteers*	Total work days	Hours served	Value of service**	Children served
Monroeville, Pa.	Fire	2	2	16	\$508.80	5
Marble Hill, Mo.	Tornado	3	10	80	\$2,544.00	14
Little Rock/Jacksonville/Wynn, Ark.	Tornado	5	29	232	\$7,377.60	80
Guam (US Territory)	Typhoon	6	133	1,064	\$33,835.20	563
Baring-Edina, Mo.	Tornado	2	2	16	\$508.80	6
Maui, Hawaii	Wildfires	13	294	2,352	\$74,793.60	457
Plum, Pa.	Explosion	4	4	32	\$1,017.60	0
Lewiston, Maine†	Mass Shooting	5	35	280	\$8,904.00	9
Oak Park, Ill.	Asylum Seekers	4	16	128	\$4,070.40	51
Total: 9 responses		44	525	4,200	\$133,560.00	1,185

*Includes repeat volunteers **Estimated Value of Volunteer Service for 2023 is \$31.80/hr per IndependentSector.org †Critical Response Childcare

Children's Disaster Services 2023 Training Workshops

Date	Location	Type of training	Participants	Trainers*	Volunteer trainer hours	Value of service**
3/17/2023	Bradford, Ohio	Level 1	12	2	40	\$1,272.00
4/14/2023	Newark, Del.	Level 1	9	3	60	\$1,908.00
4/15/2023	La Verne, Calif.	Level 1	14	2	40	\$1,272.00
4/28/2023	Portland, Ore.	Level 1	13	3	60	\$1,908.00
10/20/2023	Bridgewater, Va.	Level 1	10	3	60	\$1,908.00
10/27/2023	Kalamazoo, Mich.	Level 1	14	3	60	\$1,908.00
Totals	6 Trainings		72	16	320	\$10,176.00

* Includes repeat trainers ** Estimated Value of Volunteer Service for 2023 is \$31.80/hr per IndependentSector.org

Prayer Underpins the Ministries of BDM

Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) is one of many organizations focusing on the repair and rebuilding of homes following disasters. However, one thing that makes BDM stand out is the emphasis on ministry. The Rebuilding Program is a ministry that allows Christians to live out their faith in service to others who are the most vulnerable in their communities. While doing the physical work of rebuilding or assisting at the housing site may be the most visible way to share one's faith, there are other vital ways that faith can be expressed and strengthened as part of BDM's ministry. One of the most important of these is through the spiritual discipline of prayer.

The BDM network includes faithful supporters who have never been on a rebuilding site but who support it in other ways, including prayer. Prayer provides the opportunity for all, whether on site or at home, to lift up those impacted by disasters as well as those who serve them. It is a critical factor for the BDM network near and far. Sometimes those intercessions

lead to answers on BDM's behalf even when people don't know exactly what to pray for. Some examples of this are when

- an issue developed with a BDM vehicle and a mechanic showed up that week knowing how to fix it;
- BDM partners shared that they hoped to get current drone footage for the work being done and a BDM volunteer brought their drone to the site without knowing of the conversation; and
- significant donations or bequests have been made to the Emergency Disaster Fund to financially support the ministry, just when needed.

Prayer is also an integral element of the weekly experience of volunteer groups and provides an opportunity to grow in discipleship. When hammer swinging and meal preparation is paired with prayer and devotions, volunteers can grow in their faith and build their community of support with each other. Some weekly groups assign prayer partners for the group who pray for each other even before they get to the site and then throughout the week. Prayers and blessings for the families being served may be lifted up when working, or written on the lumber framing the structures. When volunteers finish working on a home, a group may form a circle in the driveway to bless the home and those who worked on it, inviting the homeowner to join if they so choose.

On one site, a household leader learned that their brother-in-law was gravely ill, and the family was traveling with the expectation that he did not have long to live. When the volunteers heard this, they paused their work and gathered to pray. They continued to pray each day on the job sites after reports were received. Not only did the



Volunteers pray for future homeowners and often write prayers, Bible verses, and messages of hope on the lumber framing the structure.
Photo by BDM

patient soon walk out of the hospital, but he is doing well to this day!

The power of prayer can also be a part of the ministry once volunteers return home. BDM groups come from all over the country and their connection to each other binds them across the miles and on social media networks. Toward the end of 2023, the family of a BDM volunteer reached out to the group he had served with in Dawson Springs to ask for prayers as he had become sick and was in the hospital with symptoms of multiple illnesses. They shared that the next 24-48 hours would be critical to his outcome. The group began praying. With the permission of the family, a general request was posted to the BDM Facebook page to amplify the call for prayers. Improvements were quickly seen and recovery began in major ways. The family shared, "[It was a] wild turnaround from a week ago when the respiratory doctor qualified him as the 'worst case in the hospital'." He eventually returned home.

Volunteers learn and improve many new skills when they serve on a BDM rebuilding site. It is our hope that the prayer life of all those connected with the ministries of BDM will also be strengthened and that their conversations with God will develop as well.



These BDM volunteers studied scripture in the evening on the Eastern Kentucky rebuilding site.
Photo courtesy BDM

Nigeria Crisis Update: A New Direction in 2024

Following the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) it would be wonderful to announce the end of systemic violence in Nigeria. However, that is not the case. In the last few years, the unrest has spread from the Northeast to involve much of Nigeria, and includes continued attacks by Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Fulani tribesmen. This has resulted in little or non-existent security; abductions for ransom; the killing and injuring of civilians; and the ceaseless destruction of property, including homes, businesses, and churches. These circumstances foster a constant state of fear and trauma, and the continued new and secondary displacement of affected populations, while also preventing those already in displaced person camps from returning to their homes.

Some displaced families try to support themselves by renting farmland or by going back to their own lands to farm while hiding out in the wilderness. However, they face questions of safety and other difficulties. Habila John, the chairperson of a displaced persons camp in Maiduguri, said, "Some of us used to go out to farm in fear, but like

during last year, Boko Haram allowed us [to plant and tend the farm] until harvest time, then they chased people away and harvested [the food themselves]."

Even with all these challenges, the Nigeria Crisis Response (NCR) made good progress in 2023 by feeding those who are hungry; repairing homes and helping families resettle back on their own land; providing fresh water by drilling eleven new wells and installing hand pumps; and by providing seeds and fertilizer to farmers who are able to resume farming.

In 2024, the new direction for the NCR is an increased focus of the \$230,000 budget resources on the long-term goal of self-sufficiency—helping families to rebuild and recover from the crisis so they can support themselves again—and less focus on feeding programs. There will be a greater emphasis on livelihoods projects, seed and fertilizer programming, wells for safe drinking water, and support for the education of orphan children. The response will also include the resettlement of refugees returning from Cameroon.

This year is also the beginning of a phasing out of the crisis response programming. Current plans are for a reduced budget in 2025, and a further



Providing new roofs for repaired houses is a major program of the Nigeria Crisis Response.

Photo courtesy of EYN

reduction in 2026. At the end of 2026, the formal joint Nigeria Crisis Response program of BDM and EYN will end. EYN will still be welcome to submit Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grant requests for specific disaster response programs. Any continued donations to the NCR will support EDF grants for EYN.



Some communities continue to experience violent attacks, including loss of crops, and are still in need of food assistance.

Photo courtesy of EYN

Continued Violence in the DR Congo

Violence between a large well-armed rebel group, the M23, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo/DRC) military continues, keeping an estimated 1.1 million people trying to survive in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in North Kivu province. Roughly half of the displaced households (about 500,000 people) fled, and are still fleeing, to the greater Goma (capital city of North Kivu) area and have built temporary shelters using tarps and trash, with many living in highly precarious conditions needing better shelter, food, water, sanitation, and healthcare. In November 2023, a fifth EDF grant to the Church of the Brethren in DRC, for \$42,000, provided a third food distribution in this response. It focused on

320 vulnerable families (2,560 men, women and children) who had been recently displaced. The grant provided corn meal, beans, vegetable oil, salt, and soap. Each household also received two pots, plates, cups, a mattress, and a tarp. One elderly couple remarked, “We are deeply touched by your help. These ... items are a ray of hope in our difficult reality. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for this assistance, which is helping us regain a semblance of normalcy despite the challenges we face.”



This vulnerable newly displaced elderly couple were very grateful to receive assistance after fleeing the fighting in North Kivu, DR Congo.

Photo courtesy of DRC CoB

Assisting Neighbors in Need in Mexico

Bittersweet Ministries, located in Tijuana, Mexico, received an Emergency Disaster Fund grant of \$6,300 to assist four families who were severely affected by Tropical Storm Hilary, which passed through the area on Aug. 20, 2023. Bittersweet Ministries was founded by Gilbert Romero, a Church of the Brethren pastor in the Pacific Southwest District, who, along with teams of volunteers, has served the community for decades. It's ministries include

a migrant shelter, a daycare center, feeding program, and a guesthouse.

The guesthouse is surrounded by substandard housing which was especially susceptible to damage by the unusual heavy rains and winds of TS Hilary. Bittersweet Ministries chose to help four of its most vulnerable neighbors with their recovery by repairing three roofs and by building a new simple home for one family (a single mother with three children) whose patched together home became unlivable.



This home became unlivable after damage by Tropical Storm Hilary.

Photo courtesy of Bittersweet Ministries



This single mother with three children receives the keys to her new simple home from Bittersweet Ministries' Guadalupe Lomeli (r) and José Rincón González (l).

Photo courtesy of Bittersweet Ministries

Would You Like to Receive BRIDGES by Email?

If you would like to receive an email edition of the BRIDGES newsletter instead of a paper copy, please contact BDM to tell us to put you on our email list. (bdm@brethren.org or 800-451-4407) Emailed PDFs of the newsletter are easy to read, save, and forward on to others. Electronic mailings also help BDM cut down on printing and postage costs. Bridges is also available online at www.brethren.org/bdm/updates.

Annual Conference and Virtual Blood Drives

The 2024 Annual Conference Blood Drive is scheduled for **Thursday, July 4 from 7:00 AM to 2:30 PM, and Friday, July 5 from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM.** It will be held in the Devos Place Convention Center, Grand Gallery B, in Grand Rapids, Mich., in partnership with Versiti Blood Center of Michigan.

Conference attendees are encouraged to sign up online in order to book the blood donation time that is best for them. Information on the registration link will be available soon. You may also sign up to give blood at the conference. Look for the sign-in table near the conference registration or see Brenda or Ed Palsgrove.

Volunteers are needed to help in the registration and snack/recovery areas. Please contact Sharon (sfranz@brethren.org) before the conference or Brenda/Ed Palsgrove during the conference.

Virtual Blood Drive

Not attending the Annual Conference in person? No problem! Once again a Virtual Blood Drive will be available for anyone wishing to join in the blood donation efforts by



Donating blood at the 2023 Annual Conference
Photo by Donna Parcell

donating locally. The process is easy:

- Pledge to give blood at www.brethren.org/virtualblooddrive 2024 OR by calling/emailing BDM to indicate your desire to donate.
- Find a local blood drive (www.redcrossblood.org/give.html find-drive or through your local blood services agency) and make an appointment to donate between June 1 and July 31, 2024.
- Let BDM know (through the above portal or an email/phone call) that you followed through with your pledge so that your blood donation will be counted.
- Take a photo, if you can, and send it to us! We will be happy to share it with others to encourage them to also donate.



Mark Cripe has participated in the Virtual Blood Drive for several years. Be like Mark!

Photo courtesy of Mark Cripe

The Virtual Blood Drive and in-person Annual Conference Blood Drive totals will be pulled together to get a full picture of the Brethren who are saving lives this summer! For information or questions, contact BDM (bdm@brethren.org; 800-451-4407).

2024 Disaster Response Auctions

Brethren Disaster Ministries benefits greatly from the proceeds of several annual disaster relief auctions and other fundraisers. We are very grateful for the time, hard work, dedication, and creativity this represents—almost entirely by volunteer effort.

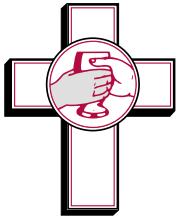
The dates for the 2024 auctions are listed below. For up-to-date information on the status of each auction, please see the contact information below and look for updates closer to the dates of the auctions.

If you are holding an additional auction or fundraiser to benefit the Emergency Disaster Fund/Brethren Disaster Ministries, please let us know and we can help to advertise it.

May 4: Mid-Atlantic District Disaster Response Auction—Carroll County Agricultural Center in Westminster, Md.; Breakfast begins at 7:00 AM. See www.madcob.com/disaster-response-auction or call 443-960-3052

May 17 & 18: Shenandoah District Disaster Ministries Auction & Sale—Rockingham County Fairgrounds in Harrisonburg, Va.; See <https://shencob.org/disaster-auction-and-sale>; www.facebook.com/ShenandoahDistrictBrethrenAuction; or call 540-234-8555

Sept. 27 & 28: Brethren Disaster Relief Auction (Atlantic Northeast and Southern Pennsylvania districts)—Lebanon Valley Expo Center, Lebanon, Pa.; See www.brethrenauction.org; www.facebook.com/BrethrenDisasterRelief; or call 717-823-2745.



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Brethren Disaster Ministries

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Annual Conference Breakfast for BDM/CDS Volunteers and Supporters



Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) will hold a Volunteer and Supporter Breakfast at the 2024 Annual Conference, in Grand Rapids, Mich., on Friday, July 5, from 7:00-8:30 a.m. to celebrate and thank current and past volunteers and supporters of BDM and Children's Disaster Services (CDS).

Pre-registration by **June 10, 2024** is necessary to reserve a seat for this free event. Please contact the BDM or CDS office (800-451-4407; bdm@brethren.org; [cgs@brethren.org](mailto:cds@brethren.org)). There may be a limited number of spaces available during the conference for those who have not pre-registered, but this cannot be guaranteed due to the need to pre-order the food, so please let us know by June 10 that you will be there. We are looking forward to celebrating with you!

CDS Spring 2024 Training Workshops

For training information and to register, go to www.brethren.org/cds/training/dates

Ankeny, Iowa

April 12-13, 2024

Ankeny Christian Church
2506 SW 3rd St. Pl. Ankeny, IA 50023

La Verne, California

April 13-14, 2024

La Verne Church of the Brethren
2425 E St., La Verne, CA 91750

Freeport, Illinois

May 3-4, 2024

Freeport Church of the Brethren
777 W. Pleasant St. Freeport, IL 61032