



Brethren Disaster Ministries **BRIDGES**

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

Vol. 25, Fall 2024

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Hurricane Response 2024



Unprecedented and powerful flooding in Western North Carolina from Hurricane Helene caused immense damage that will take years to rebuild.
Photo by Layne Andreana

Hurricane Helene struck Florida as a Category 4 storm on Sept. 26, 2024, near Perry, just about 40 miles south of the area that had already been damaged in early August by Category 1 Hurricane Debby. As the strongest hurricane on record to strike the Big Bend region of Florida, Helene was a major disaster, with a high tidal surge, very heavy rains, and wind that destroyed homes, businesses, and infrastructure. After landfall, Helene traveled north wreaking havoc in five more states (Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, North Carolina, Tennessee). It slowed down over an already saturated mountain area of Western North Carolina, where it caused an unprecedented catastrophe, with historic rain-caused flooding and landslides. Every type of water channel swelled, washing away roads, bridges, and houses, sometimes with residents still inside. The search and rescue phase of the response took weeks. As of mid-October, there were still nearly 100 people missing in North Carolina, and nearly 230 US deaths had been attributed to the storm as a whole.

Just two weeks after Hurricane Helene, Florida’s west coast was hit again by Hurricane Milton, a Category 3 storm that came ashore near Siesta Key, south of Tampa, on Oct. 9. A wide storm, Milton impacted most of Florida. Ahead of landfall, its winds birthed multiple tornadoes, some of which caused devastating damage and deaths. Milton also brought a destructive storm surge, up to 18 inches of rain,

and strong winds that caused flooding, destroyed homes, and left millions of people without power. Through mid-October some areas were still flooded, some rivers were still cresting, and there were reports of over 20 deaths.

Churches, members, and communities in the Church of the Brethren Southeastern (Alabama, North & South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia) and Atlantic Southeast (Florida) districts were impacted by these destructive storms. The devastation from Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina was particularly brutal, unexpected, and unprecedented.

Responding to Needs of Survivors

A key element of the Church of the Brethren Hurricane Response has been intersecting partnerships and communication between Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) staff, district leaders, congregations, and individuals which has provided the opportunity for each actor to be aware of, and encourage, what others were doing



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



Church of the Brethren



Volunteers from Shenandoah and Virlina districts with hurricane relief items headed to Walnut Grove (Damascus, Va.) Church of the Brethren for distribution to the Taylors Valley area of Southwest Virginia.

Photo courtesy of Virlina district

separately, and to share and cooperate when appropriate. BDM has shared informational resources, contacts, and important messaging to communicate how, where, and what assistance was needed or available.

As an initial response to Hurricane Helene, Brethren Disaster Ministries focused on three missions: 1) support for the members and congregations of the Southeastern District; 2) deploying Children’s Disaster Services (CDS) volunteers to care for children impacted by the storm; and 3) collecting and sending relief supplies and kits. BDM, in collaboration with the Atlantic Southeast District, is still discerning a response to the hurricanes in Florida.

Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grants are supporting the Southeastern District. A \$20,000 grant is providing funds for the district and churches to deliver relief and support for those impacted, including church members.



as supplies and funds donated by individuals and congregations, are part of a joint relief effort with the Virlina District. Virlina took the initiative to receive and stage supplies through the month of October and to coordinate their delivery to affected Southeastern District locations, including Camp Carmel (Newland, N.C.) and Walnut Grove CoB (Damascus, Va.—for distribution in Taylors Valley in southwest Virginia.)

Children’s Disaster Services (CDS), in partnership with the Red Cross, sent three volunteer teams (a total of 13 volunteers) to North Carolina to care for children affected by Hurricane Helene. Additional teams may be sent. By October 18, these teams had 160 child contacts.

Team A served in a large shelter in the Agricultural Center in Fletcher, caring for seven children from one family over a 2-week period. The second team served in Asheville at a shelter set up in a former Gold’s Gym. Due to the state of the roads in the town, making travel difficult, that team opted to stay at the shelter during their deployment. CDS Team C was sent to a state-organized Family Assistance Center (FAC) in Asheville. It was a joy to provide a safe space for these children and to help them with the stress of living in the shelters and/or dealing with the trauma of the disaster.

Books are popular in Children’s Disaster Services care centers for children and volunteers alike. (Asheville, N.C.)

A \$10,000 grant is being used to purchase supplies, such as clean up and mold remediation items, which, along with Church World Service (CWS) Cleanup buckets and kits, as well

To find out more about CDS, go to www.brethren.org/cds or contact [cgs@brethren.org](mailto:cds@brethren.org).

Long-term Recovery

Giving people a cup of cold water or helping to shelter them temporarily is important, but it is only the beginning of their recovery. It takes time to attend to the long-term unmet needs of disaster survivors seeking a new normal. While some groups tackle immediate needs after a disaster and then move on to the next one, the BDM Rebuilding Program, which focuses on those who have been unable to recover on their own, stays until homes—and lives—are rebuilt. It may take up to a year or more before volunteer rebuilding programs can begin to assist communities. Given the scale of damage from these hurricanes, BDM is planning for long-term service to help communities rebuild, either directly or through trusted partners. Gifts to the Hurricane Response at www.brethren.org/givehurricaneresponse will support this ministry. Checks may also be sent (see the enclosed envelope) to Emergency Disaster Fund/Hurricane Response, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120.

Please also consider volunteering and supporting this ministry in other ways when the time comes. For more information contact your district disaster coordinator or BDM (bdm@brethren.org).

Join the Response: Make Church World Service Kits

CWS sent out 25,936 relief kits (cleanup buckets, hygiene kits, and period packs) in response to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The warehouse shelves at the Brethren Service Center (BSC) are nearly empty! Please help build more kits in preparation for the next disaster and send them to the BSC or your nearest depot. Find more information at cwskits.org.

CDS Updates

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) has worked to increase its connections with emergency management agencies and other non-profit partners through participation in National and State VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) calls and events. CDS also works with Church of the Brethren district disaster coordinators who advocate for its ministry and provide information and connections on the local level. Through these connections, CDS may receive requests to care for children after localized disasters, where they serve in resource centers which are typically open for a limited time period.

Resource centers have different designations depending on which government or private agency operates them. They may be called Multi-Agency Resource Centers (MARC)s, Family Assistance Centers (FACs), Local Assistance Centers (LACs), or Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs). Often referred to as "one-stop shops", these centers bring multiple government and non-profit agencies together in one location, providing an easier opportunity for disaster survivors to seek assistance to help in their recovery.

From June-September 2024, CDS volunteers cared for 119 children in resource centers during short deployments in Ohio, Iowa, Missouri, and Arkansas. For CDS' longer-term response to Hurricane Helene in October, please see the article on page 1.

- **Greenfield, Iowa tornado:** A CDS team served on June 2 at a MARC caring for five children. A volunteer with partner Child Life Disaster Relief (CLDR), who is also a trained CDS volunteer and who had advocated for CDS after the April Minden, Iowa tornado, was on the ground quickly in Greenfield and shared information about CDS with local emergency managers.
- **Sikeston, Mo. tornado:** A CDS team served 12 children on June 9 in a MARC. Project manager Jane Lindberg shared, "We all were joyful over one child's exclamation, shortly



CDS volunteers have unlimited smiles to help children in care centers feel safe and secure. (Lake Isabella, Calif.)

Photo by Janice Shaw Morgan



A child at a resource center in Greenfield, Iowa, plays with a CDS volunteer while their parents seek assistance to recover from a destructive tornado.

Photo by Judy Krase

after starting to play, that "This is my best day!"

- **Decatur and Rogers, Ark. tornadoes:** After connections made through the Missouri VOAD by Missouri/Arkansas district disaster coordinator Gary Gahm and CDS volunteer Douetta Davis, CDS responded to MARCs on June 10-11. They cared for 59 children, including many from the Marshallese and Hispanic community. First-time volunteer Jan Fisher Bachman, who speaks Spanish, helped in the recovery of children who did not know English or for whom it was a second language. (see her article, pg. 8)
- **Cuba, Ill. flash flooding:** CDS associate director Carolyn Neher traveled to a MARC on July 24, connected with the management, and gave two children a break from the stress of the event. She learned about the event from a VOAD call.
- **Lake Isabella, Calif. Borel Fire:** Three CDS volunteers served in a LAC on Aug. 9-11, caring for 20 children. CDS' Carolyn Neher connected with Kern County (Calif.) VOAD Chair, and fellow member of the NVOAD Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee, Charlene Sargent, to advocate for CDS' involvement. Aaron Duncan, Fire Chief & Director of Emergency

Services, Kern County, Calif., told CDS: "When I noticed a young girl sobbing as her family left the LAC, I went outside to offer them water and see if help was needed. Their father just smiled and said his daughter was upset because she was having so much fun that she didn't want to leave. What a wonderful expression of the safe environment your volunteers created!"

- **Lake Elsinore, Calif. airport fire:** Four CDS volunteers served 21 children at a LAC on Sept. 19-21. This invitation to deploy was a direct result of CDS' well-received response at Lake Isabella.

CDS Training

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) held three training courses across the country in September/October 2024. CDS extends its deepest gratitude to the wonderful hosts: Frederick (Md.) Church of the Brethren, Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, and St. John's (Victor, N.Y.) Lutheran Church.

CDS also extends sincere appreciation to the trainers who generously shared their time and expertise. These trainings offered a unique opportunity for participants to learn and grow as they explored the essential role of a CDS volunteer in supporting children and families during disaster recovery.

Rebuilding Updates

Dawson Springs, Ky., Tornado Recovery Resumes

Brethren Disaster Ministries' (BDM) Dawson Springs 2021 tornado rebuilding site reopened after a brief four-week break and will remain open until Nov. 23, 2024, when the project is set to close permanently after almost two years of work. Any remaining work for survivors will be completed by BDM partner, Habitat for



BDM volunteers work to complete Habitat houses for survivors who will become new homeowners in Dawson Springs, Ky.
Photo courtesy of BDM

Humanity of the Pennyrile Region.

A portion of the construction materials for four of the homes on this project were purchased through a LOWE'S Reconstruction Grant that BDM obtained through National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD).

Letcher County, Ky., Site

A dedicated moving team from the Mid-Atlantic and Southern Pennsylvania Districts spent their Labor Day weekend moving BDM vehicles, trailers, and equipment from where they were stored in Frederick, Md., to the location of the new flood (2022) recovery project in Letcher County, Ky. The housing site is located in Fleming-Neon, with work in the surrounding areas of the county. The housing consists of multiple buildings

on a property owned by BDM's new partner, HOMES Inc., including a common building where meals and lunches are packed, two bunk buildings assigned by gender, and a house for BDM leadership.

Construction work for BDM volunteers will be identified by HOMES Inc, including new builds and homes to be repaired. This project will be open at least through March 2025, with a possible extension depending on work that is available.



The moving crew worked hard to get the Letcher County, Ky. volunteer housing site up and running.
Photo courtesy of BDM



Keke Phooko, new Brethren Volunteer Service volunteer with the BDM Rebuilding Program, at the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction (Lebanon, Pa.).
Photo courtesy of BDM

New BVS Volunteer

Following the most recent Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) orientation in September 2024, the BDM Rebuilding Program welcomed new volunteer Keke (Lieketseng) Phooko, who will serve with the program through the beginning of July 2025. Keke trained in our New Windsor, Md., office for several days before arriving at the Letcher County, Ky., project site. Keke comes to BVS/BDM from her home country of Lesotho in Southern Africa, having also lived and served in multiple countries in Africa and North America. She will be filling various roles on the site, as needed, including job site support, household assistance, and office help.

New Short-Term Rebuilding Office Manager

BDM is excited to announce an answer to prayer from our summer search for a short-term office management disaster project leader for this fall. Judy Deitch has answered the call to serve on the BDM Dawson Springs site, supporting the volunteers from Sept. 15 through Nov. 23, 2024. Judy, who comes from the Southern Pennsylvania District, will cover many of the office and coordination responsibilities on site including financial reporting, coordinating with incoming groups, and volunteer support at the housing site. Lynn Evans, who previously covered these roles on the Dawson Springs site, is now serving on the Letcher County, Ky., project.

Answering the Call in York County, Pa.

by Dave Wolfe, district disaster coordinator, Southern Pennsylvania District

After making landfall in Louisiana on Aug. 29, 2021, Hurricane Ida weakened and became a post-tropical cyclone. As it moved up through the northeastern US it broke multiple rainfall records in various locations, including York County, Pa. A Federal Disaster Declaration was issued to address the damage but while many repairs were completed, several homes in York had yet to be repaired. Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) sent out an appeal to disaster project leaders and volunteers. The response has been impressive. Various teams worked on homes. Repairs on three homes are completed and one is in

progress. Thank you to the volunteers who answered the call to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our neighborhood.

Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grants supported the work in York County, Pa. A grant for \$7,500 supported disaster case management work of BDM partner The Elevated Studio, with remaining funds helping to pay for construction materials used in these homes.

An EDF grant for \$10,000 will cover additional costs of materials and may help to support meals and housing needs of volunteers serving whose district is unable to cover these expenses.



Volunteers from the Southern Pennsylvania District work on a home flooded three years earlier by the remnants of 2021's Hurricane Ida. Photo by Dave Wolfe

God Provides in the Ways Most Needed

by Lynn Evans, BDM long-term disaster project leader

God's provision is always evident on a Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) rebuilding site. For example, when a plumber is needed, God sends a plumber in the volunteer group that week. Or often when we have an issue with a van, a mechanic just happens to be on the trip.

The week of Memorial Day 2024, though, it seemed at first like God had not provided. We had no volunteers coming even though we had reached out in many different ways.

On Friday, May 24, we heard that we would experience strong storms,

with the possibility of tornadoes, on Sunday. As the time grew nearer, that became more of a certainty. On Sunday, two storms moved through, one bringing straight line winds and the other producing a tornado that closely followed the path of the 2021 tornadoes which had caused the damage that brought BDM to the area to open a rebuilding project. Had a volunteer group been scheduled to arrive that Sunday, they would have had to travel through the earlier storm and shelter during the second one.

On Monday, I found out that our partners at the Hopkins County Long Term Recovery Group needed help at the Volunteer Center getting information from survivors and helping to send out volunteers to serve those impacted by the storms. Because we did not have a BDM volunteer group, I was able to help there for the rest of the week. On Tuesday, a group doing chainsaw cleanup of

trees arrived in the area but had no place to stay. Since we had an empty facility already set up for housing volunteers, they were able to stay with us.

If we had had a weekly group of volunteers, we would not have been able to help in so many ways with the new disaster. Sometimes it looks like God is not providing, but God always knows what is needed for any given week, whether it is BDM rebuilding volunteers or other volunteers whose skills are needed more at that



Lynn Evans (r) and others serve at the Volunteer Center in Hopkins County, Ky., following the Memorial Day 2024 tornadoes that hit the area and killed at least 6 people

Photo courtesy of BDM

"The timing. The timing is brilliant. The way that you come in two years after, because all the VOADs are gone to the next thing and you're in a community like this and like everybody left. The news cycle has long forgotten you. And this is the time when actually, the investment kind of hits. And you're actually able to do some things. So, the timing couldn't be better."

Seth Long, executive director, HOMES Inc., commenting on the recent opening of the BDM Rebuilding site in Letcher County, Ky., to support recovery from summer 2022 flooding.

Global Updates

Flooding, Violence, School Kits, and a New Direction in the DR Congo

As has been reported for years, the brutal violence in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), particularly the current conflict between the Congolese army and the M23 rebel group, has left millions of people traumatized, homeless, and hungry. Through Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grants, Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) has partnered with the Eglise des Freres au Congo (Church of the Brethren in the DR Congo) to provide food, shelter supplies, and household items. Together we have met some of this need and feel called to do so much more.

Faced with the ongoing situation in the region, it takes courage and a clear plan to include a new direction to do something more than meet immediate needs. The Congolese church is doing just this with plans for a Women's Empowerment Center to provide livelihood programs for vulnerable women so they can support themselves and their families. An EDF grant of \$20,000 is providing the resources to help this project begin.

This new direction is desperately needed. The grant request stated, "Among the consequences of this war, can we mention the misery of the population, the decay of the economic

fabric, the rejection of women who are victims of sexual violence ... the existence of unmarried mothers carrying children resulting from rape very often marginalized and rejected by parents and the community, ... extreme poverty where people earn less than a dollar a day."

The Women's Center will be built in Ngovi, in South Kivu province, on property owned by the local Church of the Brethren. The budget allows for the purchasing of equipment for the classroom and training materials. Participants in the program will receive training in tailoring, basket weaving, basic computer skills, or cooking. Program graduates will be better equipped to start a small business, reclaim lost dignity, and feel empowered to rebuild their lives after much loss and trauma.

In continuation of previous responses to the violence in the



Children displaced by fighting in DR Congo's Eastern Province face many challenges. These school supplies will allow them to attend classes and bring joy and hope for the future.

Photos courtesy of L'Eglise des Freres au Congo

North Kivu province, an EDF grant of \$26,000 provided uniforms, shoes, backpacks, and school supplies for 800 children displaced by violence and living in the Kanyaruchinya camp, near the city of Goma. They include orphans; children who have been separated from their families; children with a disability; and children from the Batwa community. Helping children return to school often reduces the impact of the trauma they have experienced and gives them hope in a different future.

When natural disasters occur, providing food can be the best response possible. In May 2024, the South Kivu province, where all but one of the Church of the Brethren congregations are found, experienced the worst flooding in more than 60 years. Hundreds of people died, thousands of homes were destroyed, crops were lost, and food stores were swept away. In response, an EDF grant of \$30,000 provided emergency food aid to 950 households (7,600 people). Beneficiaries included pregnant and breastfeeding women, children, elderly, people with disabilities, members of the marginalized Batwa ethnic group, and some of the most vulnerable members of the Congolese Church.



Vulnerable survivors of the worst flooding in 60 years in South Kivu, DR Congo, receive relief supplies from the Church of the Brethren in DR Congo.

Photo courtesy of L'Eglise des Freres au Congo



Disaster Relief Management director Bitrus Duwara (c) distributing food and non-food supplies at Wuro Jabbe Internally Displaced Person camp. *Photo courtesy of EYN*

Nigeria Updates

The 2024 Majalisa (Annual Conference) of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) included the election and appointment of new leadership, due to the end of the terms of service for many EYN leaders. Newly elected leaders included Daniel Mbaya (president) and Nuhu Mutah Abba (vice president). James K. Musa was appointed as general secretary.

Bitrus Duwara, appointed as the new director of Disaster Relief Management (DRM), is now BDM's primary point of contact for coordinating the Nigeria Crisis Response. Former DRM director Yuguda Mdurwua Zibagai, who had held that position for 10 years, helped to orient Bitrus to his new role. BDM's Roy Winter will travel to Nigeria in November to work with Bitrus in planning for the 2025 response programming, and to continue the training and orientation.

For more than 10 years, violence by the extremist group Boko Haram and, more recently, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), has caused terror in Nigeria. In response to this violence, the Nigeria Crisis Response was established in 2014 as a joint EYN/US Church of the Brethren effort to provide comprehensive relief and recovery programming and to increase the capacity of the Nigerian church to lead and support disaster and crisis response.

EYN's recent response to major flooding in the northeast demonstrates that increased capacity. Heavy rains in the northeastern states of Borno and Adamawa produced flooding in Chibok, Madagali, and Michika. Flash flooding inundated Maiduguri and surrounding areas when the Alau dam on the Ngadda river was breached, displacing nearly three-fourths of the population and impacting many EYN members, congregations and several camps for internally displaced people. EYN president Daniel Mbaya quickly organized a call for prayer and for support for all impacted, asking EYN members to provide emergency assistance, relief, and help with rebuilding. EYN was able to respond to this situation without requesting additional assistance from BDM.

As reported earlier this year, there is a planned three-year phasing out of the Nigeria Crisis Response program beginning with reduced funding in 2024, with a budget of \$230,000, and continuing with further decreases planned for 2025 and 2026. After 2026, any grant requests from EYN for disaster or emergency programming will be considered as a typical Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) request on a case-by-case basis, rather than as part of a larger program.

South Sudan Mission Matching Grant and Emergency Response

BDM is assisting the Church of the Brethren South Sudan Mission with support for peace building programs; humanitarian food aid; agricultural and livelihood programs to promote self-sufficiency; and education to help children build better communities of faith. (For details, refer to the Summer 2024 edition of Bridges.) Many of these program areas are jointly funded by the Global Mission office and EDF grants.

To support BDM's humanitarian programming, use the enclosed gift envelop or give online at www.brethren.org/givebdm.

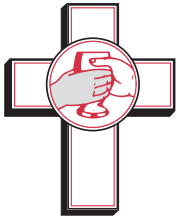
Support for the South Sudan Mission, whose main focus is on church planting and building, along with community development and peacemaking, is also needed. To encourage gifts for these purposes, an anonymous donor has committed to matching any donations made by Nov. 30, 2024. Donations may be made to the Church of the Brethren Global Mission/South Sudan Mission, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120 or online at www.brethren.org/give-south-sudan.

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Work Not Spoken

by Jan Fischer Bachman, CDS volunteer

During my first experience as a trained Children's Disaster Services (CDS) volunteer, I did not hear children discussing the disaster that had befallen them. I finished my time without learning any personal stories of tragedy—or even seeing a single fallen tree.

Nevertheless, our three days of CDS involvement in northwest Arkansas provided affirming support for dozens of children in numerous ways. Following are a few examples.

You are valuable: Providing one-on-one warm attention and focus lets children know that they matter. Careful trained listening conveys that they are heard. Kindness, gentleness, and encouragement creates a safe environment where all know that they are treasured and worthy.

Jan Fischer Bachman gives a child her full attention, showing her that she matters. (Rogers, Ark.)
Photo by Kelly Kibirige



You can do it: When people believe they can affect the world around them, a concept known in social cognitive theory as self-efficacy, they can face obstacles with more confidence and endurance. They recover more quickly from setbacks. Letting children lead activities supports their sense of self-efficacy. Creative and building materials provide concrete accomplishments.

CDS 2025 Trainings

Join a CDS training in 2025. Don't let distance deter you! Two training locations have already been identified: Creekside (Elkhart, Ind.) Church of the Brethren, March 28-29, and La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, with a date to be determined. Additional locations and registration details will be available soon at www.brethren.org/cds or by contacting cds@brethren.org.

Thinking of hosting a training? We're always looking for welcoming spaces to host future workshops. If you or your organization can offer a suitable location, please reach out to us at cds@brethren.org.



CDS volunteer training in Modesto, Calif.
Photo by David Franklin