



Brethren Disaster Ministries BRIDGES

Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally

Vol. 27, Summer 2026

INSIDE

Jeff Thomson Called as New Director of BDM2

Strengthening the Circle of Care: BDM and National VOAD.....3

District Disaster Response Auctions.....3

New Homes for Pointe-au-Chien (La.) Indian Tribe.....4

Rebuilding Updates5

CDS Updates6

CDS Welcomes Adam Lane6

Global Response Updates7

Twelve Years of the Nigeria Crisis Response9

Brethren Disaster Ministries 2025 Project Expenses10

Annual Conference and Virtual Blood Drives11

Annual Conference BDM/CDS Breakfast11

A Time for Rejoicing12

Hurricane Helene: The Slow Road to Disaster Recovery

Hurricane Helene (September 2024) brought so much destruction of homes, so much need. And yet, the Brethren Disaster Ministries' (BDM) Rebuilding Program has struggled to find long-term rebuilding sites to support recovery from the storm. Even though September 2026 will mark two years since Helene caused so much damage, many challenges continue for families trying to recover and for recovery groups trying to help.

BDM staff began connecting with a variety of partners immediately after Helene caused its extensive damage, first to assist with emergency relief, and then to begin the long process of finding both partners and locations where Rebuilding Program volunteers could serve and assist with recovery. Eager to begin, even if on a smaller scale, BDM developed a series of

shorter-term project sites to work on a few cases that were identified by local recovery groups, beginning with repairs to one house in North Carolina as early as May 2025 and then eleven houses in the fall in Tennessee. Further discussions enabled more short-term projects in 2026 (see Rebuilding Updates, page 5.)

BDM's persistence in locating areas that are ready for volunteers to serve shows a deep commitment to assisting Hurricane Helene survivors even though doing so creates challenges. Moving sites after short projects is time consuming, adds considerable stress and complexity for volunteer leaders and staff to manage, and brings additional costs. Generally, the longer BDM stays in a community, the more effective and efficient it can be in home repairs and rebuilding.

The primary barriers in finding longer-term rebuilding sites have been identifying locations with enough "hammer ready" work (i.e., ready for an immediate start) to keep volunteer teams busy and finding adequate volunteer housing options. When searching for new partnerships and rebuilding sites there are five key factors BDM considers, in addition to a myriad of smaller details.

BDM Rebuilding Site Cornerstones

- **Community-led Recovery:** A local long-term recovery group or partner is needed to lead the recovery programs.
- **Effective Case Management:** Case management involves screening and selecting survivors who are unable to recover without assistance.

In western North Carolina Hurricane Helene left a staggering toll in its wake: 107 lives lost, 125,000 homes badly damaged, over 2,000 landslides, and 12,000 people displaced. Over 8,000 roads and bridges were destroyed, and entire communities were wiped out. It is estimated that recovery from the hurricane—the deadliest storm to hit the U.S. mainland since Hurricane Katrina—will require more than \$60 billion. According to state leaders, more than 40 percent of North Carolina's population lives in one of the 39 disaster-stricken counties eligible for federal assistance.



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



Church of the Brethren

continued on page 2

- **Ample Construction Work:** Three months of hammer ready repair or rebuilding work, and a list of cases that are still being developed, is preferred.
- **Funding for Building Materials:** BDM relies on a combination of recovery group funds and homeowner funds (e.g., insurance payments, FEMA grants) for the purchase of building materials.
- **Volunteer Housing:** BDM looks for housing sites with adequate cooking facilities, dining space, lavatories, showers, and designated sleeping areas for around 22 individuals. BDM can supply cooking and household supplies, bunks, and mattresses, when needed.

The long-term recovery group and case managers also need reliable construction cost estimates to develop recovery plans for each family being served. As reported in the Winter Bridges, BDM developed a Construction Assessment Program to establish volunteer assessment teams to assist in getting homes hammer ready more quickly.

In response to the sheer number of homes destroyed and damaged during Hurricane Helene, Brethren Disaster Ministries plans to support recovery from the storm for the next several years. After volunteers complete the

Jeff Thomson Called as New Director of BDM



Jeff Thomson will start as the new Director of Brethren Disaster Ministries on June 22, 2026. He will travel to Annual Conference in Fort Wayne, Ind., and be introduced at the BDM/CDS Volunteer & Supporter Breakfast on Monday, June 29 (see page 11 for information on the breakfast). Jeff is leaving his role as Chief Housing Officer and General Contractor for Interfaith Housing and Community Services in Hutchison, Kan. He has deployed to more than 20 disaster response sites, often in a leadership role, with different faith-based response groups, including with BDM. Much more will be shared about Jeff in the Fall Bridges.

series of short-term responses noted in the updates, BDM expects to start a long-term project in the Black Mountain area of North Carolina that is intended to last a year or more.

Another short-term project in Ashe County, N.C., is also in the works. There are still details to work out and cornerstones to establish before we can announce the details of these projects.

BDM relies on partners and Long Term Recovery Groups to identify homes like this one in Johnson County, Tenn., for BDM volunteers to work on. This process can take up to a year or more to complete.

Photo courtesy BDM



This house in southwest Virginia was moved off its foundation and destroyed due to floodwaters caused by Hurricane Helene.

Photo courtesy Senator Tim Kaine



This house was one of thousands destroyed in western North Carolina during Hurricane Helene in 2024.

Photo by Layne Andreana

Strengthening the Circle of Care: BDM and National VOAD

National VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) was formed in 1970 with the vision of a coordinated approach to disaster response built on communication and cooperation. It is now a network of over 70 national organizations and 56 state and territorial VOADs, all working together to help communities recover from disasters. Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) has been an active member of National VOAD since shortly after the coalition's inception.

Coordination in Action

BDM benefits from the National VOAD network through participation in national, state, and local briefings, as well as calls regarding specific disasters, which enable staff to stay informed, identify where needs are greatest, and determine where it might collaborate with others to offer assistance. Membership also enables strategic connections which help to develop partnerships, promote BDM's ministries, and make connections that can lead to Children's Disaster Services (CDS) deployments and new Rebuilding Program project sites.

BDM at the 2026 National VOAD Conference

Each May, the National VOAD Conference serves as a vital space for members to share expertise. This year, BDM's Rebuilding and CDS programs led the following workshops on how BDM serves the most vulnerable.

Beyond Immediate Relief: Long-Term Resilience and Sustainable Housing Solutions for Low-Income Survivors.

Led by Seth Long, executive director of BDM Partner H.O.M.E.S. Inc. (HOMES), and former BDM director Jenn Dorsch-Messler, this workshop provided information on innovative building practices employed by HOMES to promote sustainability and wholistic community development in Eastern Kentucky. The BDM Rebuilding Program partnered with

HOMES to rebuild/build new homes from Sept. 2024 to March 2026 in response to flooding from a July 2022 storm. Participants were encouraged to discuss the examples provided by the presenters, as well as offer examples from their own experiences, that combined disaster response with social enterprise, community partnerships, local employment, volunteer labor, and sustainable funding.

The Power of Play: CDS and Child Life Disaster Relief

In a joint presentation with Child Life Disaster Relief (CLDR), CDS highlighted a fundamental truth: children need play to heal. When a disaster upends a child's world, play is the primary way they process stress and trauma. Using CDS' signature "Kit of Comfort," volunteers create environments where children can move from fear back to a sense of safety. The



CDS associate director Carolyn Neher discussing the importance of child-led play during a workshop at the National VOAD conference in May 2026.

Photo by Michelle Nielson

workshop demonstrated four essential areas of play: Active Play (to express energy); Imaginative Play (including role playing); Self-expression (to help move the brain's focus from the fight or flight center to the cerebral cortex); and Quiet Space (where a sense of security leads to rest and reflection). Through partnerships with National VOAD and its members, CDS finds opportunities to use these tools—and the healing they bring—to reach the children and families who need them most.

District Disaster Response Auctions

Save the Date: Sept. 25 & 26, 2026: Brethren Disaster Relief Auction (Atlantic Northeast and Southern Pennsylvania districts). This is the last of the three large disaster response auctions that support the work of Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM). BDRA will be held at the Lebanon Valley Expo Center in Lebanon, Pa. For information, please see www.brethrenauction.org or www.facebook.com/BrethrenDisasterRelief or call 717-823-2745.

Disaster response auctions were held in May 2026 by both the Mid-Atlantic (MAD) and Shenandoah Districts with great success. BDM staff attended both auctions and enjoyed interacting with many of our volunteers and leaders. Children's Disaster Services (CDS) volunteers provided child care at the MAD auction. One mother said that her daughter was always excited to go to the auction so she could play in the CDS center!

BDM is extremely grateful for everyone involved in planning, setting up, supporting/attending, and cleaning up after these auctions. It involves a lot of hard work, dedication, and faithfulness. Thank you!



Mid-Atlantic Disaster Response Auction: An annual treat for children at the CDS-sponsored child care center, organized by CDS volunteer Laurene Holsinger, is a chance to "buy" a flower from the plant sale and plant it in a mug to take home.

Photo courtesy BDM

New Homes for Pointe-au-Chien (La.) Indian Tribe

On Aug. 29, 2021, the eye of Hurricane Ida slammed into the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe Community on the Louisiana Bayou, about one and a half hour's drive south of New Orleans, leaving only twelve homes in the village that were habitable.

In August 2023, a group of seven volunteers from the Church of the Brethren South/Central Indiana district and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kansas spent one week participating in a local disaster response in Pointe-au-Chien. The team, led by BDM disaster project leaders Cliff Kindy and Floyd Pearson, worked alongside members of the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe (PACIT) and other volunteers (Baptist, Mennonite, and Presbyterian).

In the winter of 2025, Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) constructed four homes in Pointe-au-Chien as part of the Rebuild Resilient Homes in Pointe-au-Chien project. A group of BDM volunteers (organized and led by Cliff Kindy) and volunteers from Week of Compassion [Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)], traveled to Louisiana in April 2026 to serve



BDM and Week of Compassion [Disciples of Christ (Christian Church)] volunteers worked to finish this raised house in Pointe-au-Chien, La., which replaced a home that was destroyed during Hurricane Ida in 2021, nearly five years earlier.

over a three-week period to finish the fourth home and to build cistern platforms for all four homes.

Following is a reflection by BDM volunteer, Orland Foster on the experience he had in 2026 in Louisiana.

After service on Easter Sunday, BDM volunteers from Ohio, Indiana, and Virginia journeyed to the Bayou to begin work on completing the fourth home that had been started by MDS in Pointe-au-Chien. All the work on the project is being performed under the Lowlander Center, the non-profit Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG) facilitating the work for the PACIT.

We arrived at the Living Oak Baptist Church and parsonage, our home for the next three weeks. It's a fifteen-minute walk to the Pointe-au-Chien Marina and the end of the road. Therese Dardar, president of The Lowlander Center and a member of the PACIT, told us how they used to be able to go out another fifteen miles to her parents farm when she was younger.

We started work on Tuesday morning, April 7, with a crew of five. The house had been framed in, and the exterior of the home



The volunteer team serving in Pointe-au-Chien, La., in April 2026.

Photo courtesy of Zoe Nagasawa

was finished. We went to work installing insulation in the walls and ceilings and making some minor framing adjustments.

On Wednesday we were joined by two members from Week of Compassion, who drove in from Arkansas, and we began installing 5/8" thick sheetrock on all ceilings. That afternoon another group of seven from Week of Compassion flew in from Virginia Beach. Work began Thursday on the cistern platforms on the four homes that had been started by MDS around the bayou.

The Lowlander Center had received a large amount of furniture grade 3/4" plywood, which had been confiscated by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and offered free to non-profits. This was installed on all the walls of the bedrooms, hallway, living room, and kitchen, while 1/2" sheetrock was installed in all closets and bathrooms.

The group of seven from Week of Compassion flew out the following Wednesday, and the five BDM volunteers and the two from Week of Compassion remained until April 25.

In the three weeks, we also installed cabinets and a countertop with kitchen sink; flooring throughout; doors and all trim molding, including crown; and painted—all for a very deserving and grateful family.

Rebuilding Updates

Hurricane Helene Recovery: Western North Carolina

Even though it was a tropical storm by the time it reached east central Georgia in September 2024, Helene brought winds, heavy rain, and flooding to Georgia, western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and southern Virginia, leaving devastation along its path.

Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) began monitoring the storm as it made landfall in Florida, with the Rebuilding Program staff already connecting with partners regarding the huge recovery effort that would be needed. This was particularly true in western North Carolina where the storm stalled, enabling wind, water, and mudslides to destroy or badly damage an estimated 125,000 homes. BDM is often asked right after a disaster if it will be helping survivors in their recovery, but the reality is that it takes time before sites are developed to the point at which volunteers can begin to rebuild homes or build new homes in affected communities. (see the Hurricane Helene article on page 1.) A few limited opportunities became available in May and September 2025 and, after many discussions and site visits, several locations and partners were identified in western North Carolina for the spring of 2026.

Hendersonville, N.C.

BDM partnered with Transylvania Habitat for Humanity and Henderson County & Thermal Belt Habitat for Humanity to serve North Carolina residents impacted by Hurricane Helene. This collaboration ran from April 12 to June 6, 2026. Volunteers had the opportunity to build new homes and repair damaged homes as the weekly groups were divided into two teams, with one team serving with each of the Habitat affiliates.

Project leaders and volunteers were hosted at Trinity Presbyterian Church (TPC) in Hendersonville. This was the first time TPC had hosted volunteers. Their experience with BDM was so positive that they soon decided to make some upgrades to their facility so they

could continue to serve as a host site for volunteer teams. It was common to hear comments such as “we’re delighted to have your folks with us and grateful for their help in our community” and “the Brethren folks are just fabulous.”

Yancey County, N.C.

A BDM project site opened in Micaville, N.C., on June 7, 2026, in partnership with the Beacon Network and the Yancey County Long Term Recovery Group, to serve survivors in their county. The host church, Micaville Presbyterian Church, had also been impacted by the storm. A team of volunteers from Southern Ohio/Kentucky district helped to make the facility ready to receive and host volunteers. This site is scheduled to remain open until August 15.

Short-Term Project: West Jefferson (Ashe County), N.C.

A two-week project was hosted at Ashe Baptist Campground in Ashe County, N.C., as BDM partnered with the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church (WNCCUMC) to begin a new build and to repair a deck on a separate property. BDM served in this community from April 12 to April 25.



BDM volunteers work on the new house for a couple who both use wheelchairs, whose trailer home in West Jefferson, N.C., was damaged and so full of mold due to Hurricane Helene that it had to be torn down. Photo by Jim Hollen



Volunteers working on a new build in Henderson County, N.C. to bring a family home nearly two years after Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina. Photo by Ed McKimmy

Western Maryland Flood Response

Westernport, in Allegany County, Md., was affected by a flooding event in May 2025. BDM has been supporting the Western Maryland Long Term Recovery Group in various ways and had been looking for an opportunity to send volunteer teams there. That opportunity developed with a one-week response held from April 26-May 2, 2026, when volunteers served four families. Savage Mountain Youth Center, a former juvenile detention center, was the host facility. It was an unusual location that proved to be a nice and very safe place.

Future Rebuilding Site Locations

As this edition was going to press, future project sites in Western North Carolina were being finalized. Information about those sites will be available soon.



One of the four homes that BDM volunteers repaired during the one-week short-term project in Westernport, Md. These homes were damaged one year ago during a flood. Photo by Jim Hollen

CDS Updates

Responses

In January 2026, CDS was requested by American Airlines, through Red Cross, to care for children whose families were attending the first anniversary event of the crash, on Jan. 29, 2025, of an American Airlines plane and a military helicopter over the Potomac River near Washington, D.C. Sixty-seven people were killed in the mid-air collision. CDS supported the memorial event with a team of three volunteers who cared for one child.

A CDS team of four volunteers served on March 16-17 at a MARC (Multi-Agency Resource Center) in Aroma Park, Ill. (a suburb of Kankakee), caring for seven children. This was in response to a tornado that passed through the area on March 10. CDS associate director, Carolyn Neher, was part of the team and shared the following reflection.

“Seeing an elementary age child sitting by the door, I went to find his mom to offer the care of CDS. She was so grateful. You could see the relief come over her face as she could now concentrate on getting the assistance she needed for her family. Her son was autistic and had been trying so hard to sit nicely. When he was able to play with Norm, one of the CDS volunteers, he was glad to be in the space and have someone sit on the floor with him.”



The youngest child at the CDS care center in Three Rivers, Mich., is entertained by volunteer Deana Ward.

Photo by Tammy Tucker



CDS volunteer Tammy Tucker and her young friend enjoy a game of Uno at a MARC in Michigan following several destructive tornadoes in the area.

Photo by Beverly Eikenberry

On March 20-21, CDS responded with a team of five volunteers, caring for five children at MARCs in Union City and Three Rivers, Mich. Four tornadoes struck southwest Michigan on March 6, killing four people and injuring twelve, including an EF2 in Three Rivers and an EF3 in Union City, which was the strongest tornado to hit Michigan in 50 years.

CDS Volunteer Training

Two CDS volunteer trainings were held in February 2026. The Beaufort, S.C., training involved 12 participants and the training in Bradford, Ohio had 11 participants. Many of those have already submitted references and passed background checks, and are now certified CDS volunteers.

Are you or someone you know interested in learning more about CDS and supporting children after disasters? There are currently two trainings scheduled for Fall 2026 (listed below), with discussions currently ongoing in additional locations. Updated information on upcoming trainings and registration is available at www.brethren.org/cds/training.

October 9-10, 2026

Chalice Christian Church
5612 Haden Road,
Virginia Beach, VA 23455

October 16-17, 2026

Manassas Church of the Brethren
10047 Nokesville Rd.
Manassas, VA 20112

As CDS continues to expand its volunteer base, it is grateful to the hosts who share churches or other



CDS volunteer Norm Waggy delights in playing Playdough with a child whose parents were visiting a MARC in Illinois seeking help to recover from a tornado.

Photo courtesy CDS

spaces to hold volunteer trainings. As more volunteers are trained in various areas of the country, CDS is better able to respond to local disasters for shorter periods of time. If you are interested in hosting a training or have a group of people you know who would like to learn more about CDS, please contact cds@brethren.org or call 800-451-4407.

CDS Welcomes Adam Lane



Adam Lane has been hired by the Church of the Brethren as the new program assistant for Children's Disaster Services (CDS). Adam will work from the

Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md. He is a graduate of Huntington University with a Bachelor of Arts in Worship Leadership. He recently graduated from Bethany Theological Seminary with a Master of Arts in Spiritual and Social Transformation. Adam is a member of Beaver Creek Church of the Brethren in Hagerstown, Md., and brings knowledge and skills in technology, social media, communications, data management, and event planning. Adam began his service with CDS on May 27, 2026.

Global Response Updates

Ukraine

An Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grant of \$75,000 is supporting the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Now in its fifth year, the conflict has resulted in nearly 56,000 civilian casualties, 3.7 million internally displaced people, and 5.9 million refugees, with more than 10 million Ukrainians in need of humanitarian assistance.

Brethren Disaster Ministries continues to prioritize underserved populations and working with trusted partners like IOCC. Working through Orthodox church networks, IOCC has been especially effective in reaching



An EDF grant helped to fund an IOCC program providing business training and support for local and internally displaced women in Ukraine, such as this woman who created a business to produce low calorie baked goods.

Photo courtesy Dtaa Business Uzhhorod



This woman was also trained through the IOCC program and started a business that produced marshmallows and marshmallow products for sale.

Photo courtesy Dtaa Business Uzhhorod

vulnerable communities in Ukraine and neighboring countries. The 2026 programming is a continuation and expansion of the economic empowerment programming for women affected by the war in the Odesa and Mykolaiv regions. Prior grants supported similar programming with excellent results. This program will provide business and vocational training, career guidance, and small grants to help women rebuild livelihoods and support their families. The program aims to train dozens of participants and award grants to those launching businesses or pursuing vocational opportunities, building long-term resilience and contributing to local economic recovery.

Gaza

Working with IOCC and the Greek Orthodox Church, which has the largest Christian presence in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, a \$50,000 EDF grant is supporting the response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Since the war began in October 2023, more than 72,000 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 1.9 million people—over 90 percent of Gaza’s population—have been displaced, with widespread destruction of homes, infrastructure, and essential services.

The 2026 program focuses on supporting 300 conflict-affected children in Central Gaza. It will provide structured psychosocial care through 12 therapeutic sessions that include creative expression, play, and social reintegration activities to help children process trauma and rebuild emotional resilience. Participants will also learn coping techniques such as breathing and grounding exercises. Alongside these activities, children will receive nutritious snacks to improve physical health and support engagement. The program aims for at least 80 percent of participants to show reduced signs of acute distress, addressing both the psychological and nutritional needs of children in crisis.

Lebanon

An EDF grant of \$25,000 is supporting an initial relief program by the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development (LSESD) for families displaced by the escalating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Since March 2026, intensified airstrikes and ground operations have devastated communities across southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and parts of Beirut. More than 1,500 people have been killed, thousands injured, and critical infrastructure destroyed. An estimated 1.2 million people have been displaced, many living in overcrowded or inadequate shelters. In response, LSESD’s relief arm, MERATH, is coordinating with local churches and partners to assist at least 10,000 families with essential supplies, including food, clothing, and household items, while monitoring needs and collaborating with broader humanitarian efforts.

DR Congo

The ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC or DR Congo), fueled by the M23 rebel offensive and the capture of major cities, including Goma and Bukavu, has displaced millions and left communities facing severe insecurity, food shortages, and loss of livelihoods. The situation has become more complicated due to the declaration in mid-May of an outbreak in Eastern DRC of a new strain of the Ebola virus, compounding the risk for already displaced and vulnerable populations.

In February an EDF grant of \$75,000 to the Eglise des Freres au Congo (Church of the Brethren in the DRC) was approved to support a three-month relief effort for Congolese refugees in Burundi and families impacted by ongoing conflict in eastern DRC. The changing situation in the region and hopes that families might return to their homes called for the short response plan, though additional grants are planned once



Congolese refugees wait outside a temporary Brethren church (constructed near a UNHCR refugee camp in Burundi) to receive cash payments to help them purchase items they need. The payments are part of an EDF grant to the DRC Church. Photo courtesy of Eglise des Freres au Congo

longer-term planning is possible.

Building on earlier grants, the response prioritizes refugee support and basic needs for vulnerable households. Previous funding has provided emergency food, soap, and household supplies to families in conflict-affected areas and to up to 15,000 households in refugee camps in Burundi. Current programming focuses especially on refugees living in overcrowded camps such as Musenyi, where resources are severely limited. Assistance includes cash payments to support basic needs, distribution of food and essential items, and trauma healing support and gender-based violence awareness and prevention training. Additional efforts will strengthen coordination with church partners and improve delivery of aid to those most in need.

South Sudan

The Church of the Brethren's Emergency Disaster Fund has approved a \$213,000 grant to support humanitarian response efforts in South Sudan, where escalating violence is pushing the country toward widespread conflict. Fighting between government and opposition forces has intensified since late 2025, contributing to mass displacement, civilian casualties, and severe disruptions to aid delivery. Recent UN reports estimate nearly 300,000 people were displaced in early 2026 alone, while more than 10 million people—two-thirds of the population—require humanitarian assistance, and millions face acute food insecurity.

The proposed programming focuses on targeted, community-based relief through Church of the Brethren

mission staff in key areas including Mayom, Mangateen (near Juba), and Torit. Activities will prioritize emergency support for displaced families, including food assistance and basic supplies, alongside expanded efforts to address trauma caused by violence. The program will also emphasize peacebuilding by reducing intracommunity conflict and strengthening relationships in vulnerable areas where Brethren congregations are developing.

In addition, funding will support operational capacity for local staff and the establishment of a new headquarters closer to Juba, improving coordination and access to affected communities. Together, these efforts aim to provide both immediate relief and longer-term stability for families facing ongoing insecurity.



Supported through an EDF grant to the Eglise des Freres au Congo, Congolese refugees living in Burundi receive cash payments to support their basic needs. Photo courtesy of Eglise des Freres au Congo

BRIDGES is available by Email!

Would you prefer an email version of BRIDGES, instead of a paper copy? Emailed PDFs are easy to read and save, AND you can forward it on to others who may be interested in our ministry. Electronic mailings help BDM cut down on printing and postage costs and reduce paper usage which supports Creation Care. If you would like to be added to our BRIDGES email list, send an email to bdm@brethren.org or call 800-451-4407. BRIDGES is also available online at www.brethren.org/bdm/updates.



Twelve Years of the Nigeria Crisis Response: Thank you for your Support!



US Annual Conference moderator Don Fitzkee preaching to the delegates of the EYN Majalisa (annual conference), Kwarhi, Nigeria, April 2026. *Photo courtesy of BDM*

The Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria, EYN) focused on being “A Peace Church in the Prevailing Storm” as the theme during their 79th Majalisa (annual meeting). BDM executive director Roy Winter, along with Annual Conference moderator Donald Fitzkee and his wife Carolyn, represented the US Church of the Brethren during the March 2026 conference. The conference highlighted that even though there was ongoing violence in Nigeria and persecution of Christians, especially in the northeast where the majority of EYN congregations are found, EYN continues to grow and remain resilient.

The security situation has improved a great deal since 2014 when the Church of the Brethren/EYN Nigeria Crisis Response began, but many families, congregations, and entire districts still remain unsafe or under threat of attacks. When EYN President Rev. Daniel Y. C. Mbaya addressed the conference, he boldly stated that the attacks on communities are “Christian genocide” and noted that 30 more Local Church Councils (LCC, or congregations) were displaced in 2026, increasing to 70 the communities with congregations that are unsafe. These attacks are ongoing, such as in Guyaku in late April where 50 homes were burned down and

29 people killed by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Guyaku is the first community where EYN and BDM worked to repair homes in 2015. This is also an area that Winter and the Fitzkees traveled to when visiting Garkida, where the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria was founded.

Even with this ongoing violence, many EYN congregations and their surrounding communities have been able to rebuild and recover. In spite of the continued persecution, EYN has experienced growth, adding new members, new congregations, and even new districts. Since 2016, when the EYN leadership returned to the Church headquarters in Kwarhi, from which it had fled in 2014, all buildings have been repaired and new multi-story office buildings, guest houses, and a dining/conference hall have

been added. In 2023, EYN recognized the 100th anniversary of the Church in Nigeria with multiple celebrations, many in regions that would not have been safe a few years earlier. In 2025, EYN announced the creation of a new EYN university, where construction of a new gate and fencing has begun. EYN has also started a micro-finance bank and some income-generating businesses, including a commercial bakery for Crego Bread and Stover-Kulp bottled water, named after former missionaries.

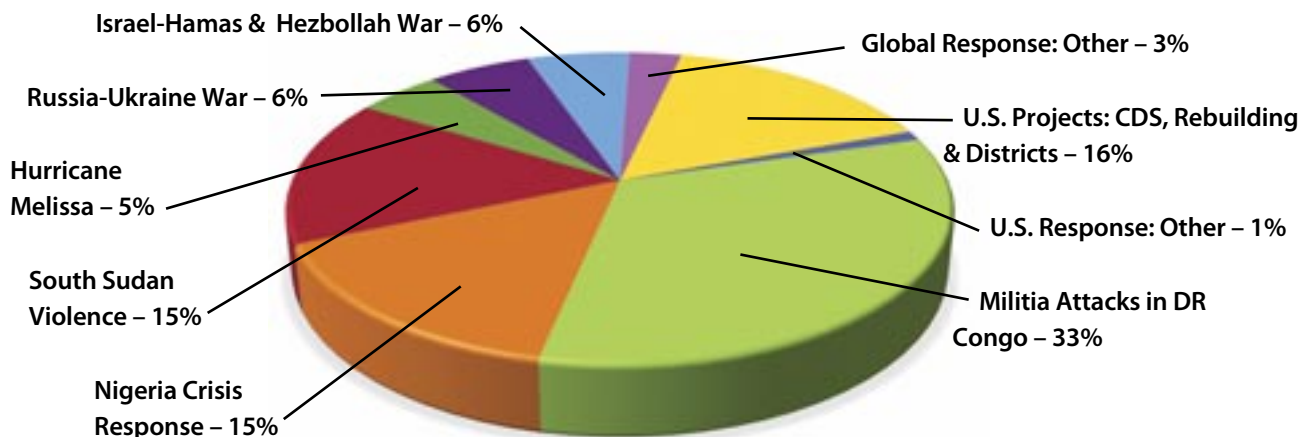
It certainly seems that EYN has mostly recovered from the forced displacement of more than half the church and headquarters in 2014. EYN has been resilient and moved beyond recovery into growing and strengthening the Church. It is also clear that the crisis and violence continues, all too often targeting the most vulnerable families, sometimes for the second or even third time in this crisis. Given this reality, BDM plans to transition away from the annually planned response with EYN (the 2026 EDF grant was \$90,000) to focus more on helping the response to new attacks and other disasters. BDM believes that EYN has much more capacity to both lead and support their own recovery programming, with this more focused support. The Nigeria Crisis Fund will continue as a way to support the ongoing response to violence in Nigeria. May we all pray for this violence to end, that Nigeria may know God’s peace.



US visitors to the 2026 EYN Majalisa in Nigeria with the members of the EYN Standing Committee and their wives. *Photo courtesy of BDM*

Brethren Disaster Ministries 2025 Project Expenses

STATUS	U.S. PROJECTS <i>(disaster information–response partner/program)</i>	AMOUNT
Active	2024 Hurricane Helene home rebuilding program–BDM Rebuilding	\$30,410
Active	2022 Letcher County, Tenn., flooding home rebuilding program–BDM Rebuilding	\$117,769
Active	Capacity building and resource development–Child Life Disaster Relief (CLDR)	\$10,000
Active	Deportation Defense Response Team–Church of the Brethren Districts	\$25,000
Completed	2025 tornadoes in Missouri and flooding in Texas and Washington–Children’s Disaster Services	\$10,223
Completed	Los Angeles County, Calif., wildfires–Children’s Disaster Services	\$3,539
Completed	2021 Tropical Storm Ida recovery programing and home repairs–York County (Pa.) Long Term Recovery Group	\$1,451
Completed	Hurricane Helene relief and clean-up in North Carolina and Virginia–Southeastern District, Church of the Brethren	\$892
U. S. TOTAL		\$199,284
STATUS	GLOBAL PROJECTS <i>(disaster information–response partner)</i>	AMOUNT
Active	Western Uganda severe storm damage recovery–Church of the Brethren in Uganda	\$19,850
Active	Hurricane Melissa recovery in Haiti–BDM/Church of the Brethren in Haiti	\$50,000
Active	Hurricane Melissa relief program with partners in Jamaica and Cuba	\$7,500
Active	Israel-Hamas war relief, Gaza–Bethlehem Bible College Shepherd Society	\$40,000
Active	Escalating violence in South Sudan recovery–Church of the Brethren South Sudan Mission	\$180,418
Active	Congolese refugee support in Burundi–Church of the Brethren in Burundi	\$15,000
Active	Israel-Hamas war relief, Gaza and the West Bank–International Orthodox Christian Charities	\$30,000
Active	Russia-Ukraine War humanitarian response and recovery–International Orthodox Christian Charities	\$70,000
Active	Militia invasion and occupation of Goma and the Eastern DR Congo response–Church of the Brethren in the DR Congo	\$355,914
Active	Nigeria Crisis Response–BDM/Church of the Brethren in Nigeria	\$180,079
Completed	Partial funding of vehicle for relief activities and church in Burundi–Church of the Brethren in Burundi	\$8,500
Completed	Storm damage recovery in Ecuador–Brethren and United Foundation	\$5,000
Completed	Flood response in Venezuela–Church of the Brethren in Venezuela	\$10,000
Completed	Militia violence at DR Congo and Rwanda border home rebuilding–Church of the Brethren Rwanda	\$8,600
GLOBAL TOTAL		\$980,861
TOTAL BDM PROJECT EXPENSES		\$1,180,145



Annual Conference and Virtual Blood Drives

The 2026 Annual Conference Blood Drive will be held on **Monday, June 29, from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, and Tuesday, June 30, from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM** in partnership with the American Red Cross. The Blood Drive will be located inside the Exhibit Hall.

There is still time to register online in order to secure a donation slot that fits into your schedule. Go to www.brethren.org/ac2026/blooddrive and choose the time that is just right for you. Registration will also be available at the conference. Look for the BDM Blood Drive table in the conference registration area or see Brenda or Ed Palsgrove. Volunteers to help with registration or at the snack/recovery area are welcome—contact Sharon (sfranz@brethren.org) before the conference or at the blood drive table during the conference.



2026ACBloodDriveFtWayne



Pam Hoppe shows that giving blood at the Annual Conference Blood Drive is not only a good thing to do—it can also be fun!

Virtual Blood Drive

If you are not attending the Annual Conference, you can still be a part of the blood donation efforts by joining the **Virtual Blood Drive** and donating in your local area between **June 1 and July 31**. It's easy—just follow the steps below. For more information or questions, contact BDM at 800-451-4407 or bdm@brethren.org.



- **PLEDGE TO PARTICIPATE** through our online campaign by following www.brethren.org/virtualblooddrive2026 (or use the QR code on this page) **OR** by contacting BDM. *Pledging is not required* but it does help us know about and follow up on your desire to donate.
- **FIND A BLOOD DRIVE** through your local blood services agency **OR** at www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/find-drive. Make an appointment between June 1 and July 31. Or take it a step further and organize a blood drive at your church!
- **REMEMBER TO GIVE BLOOD AND TO TELL BDM** that you followed through with your pledge. Use the online portal or email/call BDM. We won't know if you don't tell us!
- **TAKE A PHOTO**, if you can, and send it to us. We can share it to celebrate **AND** to encourage others to donate.

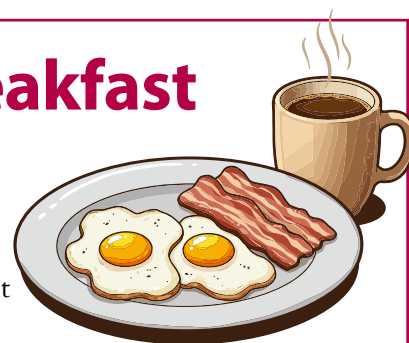
The Virtual Blood Drive and in-person Blood Drive totals will be pulled together to get a full picture of the Brethren who are saving lives this summer by putting their faith into action!

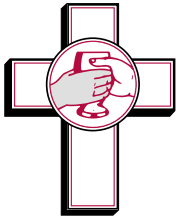


Tom Brown is a faithful participant in the Virtual Blood Drive

Annual Conference BDM/CDS Breakfast

If you have not pre-registered for the BDM/CDS Volunteer & Supporter Breakfast at Annual Conference which takes place on Monday, June 29 at 7:00 am but would like to attend, please contact the BDM office (bdm@brethren.org or 410-635-8731) before the conference, or a member of the BDM staff during the conference, to see if there are any spaces still available. Due to the fact that we had to guarantee meals, we cannot guarantee that there will be open spaces.





BRIDGES

Brethren Disaster Ministries

601 Main Street, P.O. Box 188
New Windsor, MD 21776

Address Service Requested

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Westminster, MD
Permit # 15

A Time for Rejoicing

by Lynn Evans, long-term disaster project leader

On Sept. 27, 2024, it was not the rising floodwaters from Hurricane Helene that threatened the home of Barbara and Charles. Rather, it was the volume of water rushing down the mountain, pooling in the flat area where their home sat, and continuing its destructive descent. The home where they raised their four children and one grandchild was so badly damaged that it had to be torn down. After 19 months, Barbara, Charles, and their adult grandson were still living in a camper on their land, waiting.

In April 2026, Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) partnered with Henderson County & Thermal Belt Habitat for Humanity to help build a new home for this retired couple. Each day, as BDM volunteers worked alongside local Habitat volunteers, we could see the mounting excitement as Barbara and Charles watched the

house rise before their eyes. Barbara said, "The volunteers will never know how much we appreciate all they have done for us." It was a joy to be able to rejoice with them as they saw the daily progress.

Hurricane Helene's impact on western North Carolina was staggering. The streams, rivers and creeks rose to historic heights; water and mudslides rushed down mountains; trees snapped in high winds. The scope and magnitude of the destruction from Helene can still be seen in the



Barbara was overjoyed as she watched the daily progress on her new home that replaces the house her family lost during Hurricane Helene.

mountains. So many families are still suffering from the aftermath of the catastrophe.

There is much work left to do. We cannot fix it all, but we can do the work that God has called us to, a few families at a time. So, please pray, spread the word, and come help spread hope and healing as we serve together.