



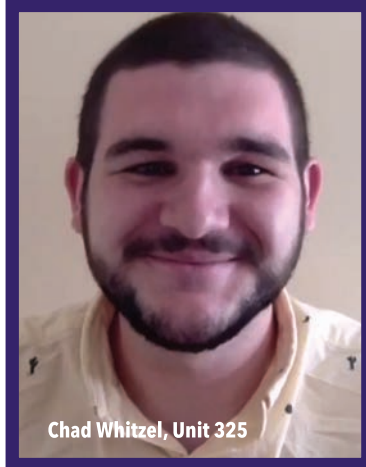
The Volunteer

Sharing God's love through acts of service

MY HOPE FOR THE FUTURE IS...

Appreciating Connections

By Chad Whitzel



Chad Whitzel, Unit 325

My hope for the future is one where we can identify positive changes within the belief systems that we all hold. Working with the Church of the Brethren FaithX Office in Elgin, Illinois has provided me with the opportunity to interact with, learn from, and foster great relationships with Church of the Brethren leadership, as well as learn from people with different backgrounds.

The Mission and Ministry Board recently developed a new Strategic Plan. There are four strategies: pursuing Christ's call to discipleship, embodying the biblical command to love our neighbors, seeking God's racial justice, and reclaiming New Testament models of giving. To embody holistic peace, we are called to "break down the racial barriers and hierarchies" in order to create more "mutually empowering communities." To create

empowered communities, we must identify the unjust realities that are present in the belief systems that remain. These unjust realities remain because of the inability to identify them, the unwillingness to change them, and the systematic benefits that are afforded by not addressing them.

One experience in Elgin that highlights my hope for the future was the privilege of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. A local mosque hosted a vaccine clinic and sent an invitation to other local faith communities to sign-up. Alongside my Muslim neighbors, I was fortunate enough to receive both doses of a vaccine that will save lives and protect others. Having this shared experience with a diverse group of people is the type of connection that should be welcomed and embraced to empower our communities. May we all continue to identify, experience, and appreciate the connections that we share with our sisters and brothers around the world. 🌿



Chad Whitzel and Alton Hipps doing outside work for the Elgin BVS House. Photo by Kara Miller.

The following contributions come from current BVS volunteers. Read about stories of optimism, community, and resiliency as volunteers share their hopes for the future and how their volunteer experience has impacted them.

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Upcoming Orientations:

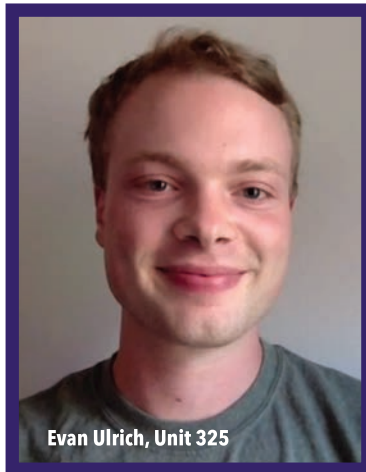
- **Summer Unit #329**
July 18-August 6, 2021
Location: Inspiration Hills Camp
Burbank, OH
- **Fall Unit #330**
September 19-October 8, 2021
Location: Camp Brethren Heights
Rodney, MI

By the Numbers:

- **Active Volunteers – 25**
18 in United States
2 in Europe
2 in Latin America
3 in Japan
- **Active Projects – 64**
44 in the United States
7 in Europe
5 Latin America
1 South America
2 in Japan
4 in Africa
1 in China

Serving with Love

By Evan Ulrich



Evan Ulrich, Unit 325

My hope for the future is a world where we can use our unique gifts together to serve our communities with love. A future where the focus is less on money and personal wealth, and more on the collective well-being of all of our sisters and brothers on the Earth we share. My time with BVS and serving with Brethren Disaster Ministries has allowed me to see the good works that we can do when we all work together. It has shown me how everyone working as a team, given the proper tools and instruction, can do just about anything. Serving with love starts with a willingness to learn, a willingness to put others before self, and a willingness to work hard for no personal gain or motive.

This mindset of service is needed now more than ever. The gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is widening. More and more people are finding themselves without a safe home and without reliable sources of food, water, or heat. I have come to see this every day while rebuilding homes in rural eastern North Carolina.

I remember a conversation I had with one of the homeowners whose house we were working on that truly opened my eyes to how I want to live my life. She was sharing her story with me that was full of loss, struggles, and hardships. Things I could not ever imagine going through. Yet with every sentence she spoke, she did not stop telling me how blessed she was. And she sincerely meant it. It made me question and realize how easy it is for me to see the things I do not have, rather than give thanks for what is abundant in my life. From the outside looking in I was the one serving her, but she gave me something even more special in return: perspective.

I hope that we can realize how exceptionally important each of our lives are. As we live in this world together, we are called to lift up our neighbors with kindness, share the burdens of the people we are intricately connected with, and serve the world in love. 🌿



Rebuilding a front porch in Bayboro, NC after Hurricane Florence. Photo by Kim Gingerich.



Drywall finishing a wall in Bayboro NC after water damage from Hurricane Florence. Photo by Kim Gingerich.



Painting trim during a wonderful winter day in Bayboro, NC. Photo by Kim Gingerich.

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

VISIT BRETHRENVOLUNTEERSERVICE.ORG OR EMAIL BVS@BRETHREN.ORG

To Be Together

By Amanda Orndorff



Amanda Orndorff, Unit 324

I've been watching life creep into this place for months, inch by inch.

God has been breathing life into this place in several ways. Nature is doing a lot of the work. First daffodils, and now hostas and all other manner of lovely green things have been peeking their leaves through the earth after a long, snowy winter. I'm doing work, too. I've learned to fix arrows and frisbee golf cages since coming here. I've painted countless walls and put artwork on chairs that were on the brink of being tossed out. The buildings are bright and cheery now, as close to looking lively as something made of wood and drywall can get.

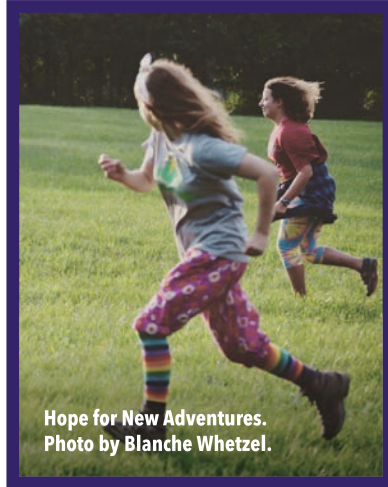
Still, there's a limit to how alive a camp can feel without people here. There's slower progress on that than on the plants or the buildings, although the progress is there. After a quiet winter, a few rental groups have stopped by, bringing music and laughter with them. From the office, we've been watching as camp registration numbers go up as covid numbers go down, which has left me with an odd, risky feeling.

Hope.

I don't want to go back to the "before times". Normal is subjective, and 2019 had its own problems. I find myself hoping for after times, ones where all the struggle and uncertainty of the last year have taught us to be a little kinder to each other. Yet, I still find myself deeply hoping that we can be together.

I've been to Brethren camp since I was in kindergarten. I know what a good week of camp can do for children and adults alike. I want to see it happen again. I want to see kids conquer new experiences, see God's creation firsthand, and have tons of fun.

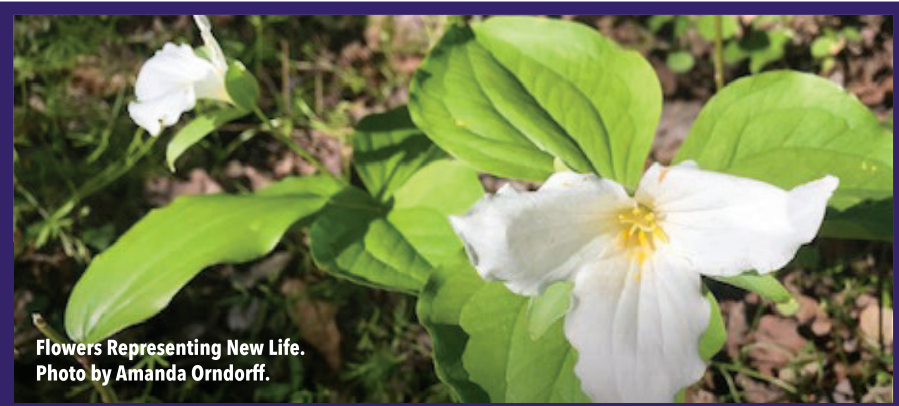
I want to see people running and playing together again, and to see if friendship and sunshine can help us shake off the stress of this pandemic.



Hope for New Adventures. Photo by Blanche Whetzel.



Chairs Amanda painted. Photo by Amanda Orndorff.



Flowers Representing New Life. Photo by Amanda Orndorff.



Group Photo, Unit 325

Resuming In-Person Orientation

By Pauline Liu

As we step into a cautiously hopeful future, BVS is resuming the in-person orientation experience. We will once again be gathering in safe and intentional community. The pandemic has taught us a lot about flexibility and grace. We hosted three virtual orientations (Summer 2020, Fall 2020, and Winter 2021), as well as a virtual mid-year retreat (Spring 2021).

We will continue to invite a diverse array of speakers to present on topics that are critical for the BVS experience and for a life changed after BVS.

We are excited for the future of service organizations and the hearts of past, present, and future generations towards seeking justice, faith, and love.

Trusting in God

By Eric Joloka



Eric Joloka, Unit 325

After my volunteer service with BVS, I hope to continue working in a church setting or some kind of ministry to keep me grounded in God's word. I look forward to building godly relationships with people in my community and wherever God might take me next. After majoring in Biblical Religious Studies, I wanted to put my major in action and continue doing God's work. My initial goal was to get involved in chaplaincy in the Military. Instead, God brought me to BVS and Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren. I know I am being equipped for whatever position God will put me in to do His will in the future. I am trusting in the process, and I look forward to it even though I do not know what the future has in store for me.

So far, I have enjoyed my time as a BVSer in Harrisburg, PA. There have been some challenging times. However, those times have helped me to grow and understand my calling. For instance, when I first got to Harrisburg, I was a little overwhelmed with living and working in a new environment. But over time, I have gotten acclimated to my community and working for my church. I have grown to enjoy helping with food distribution every Friday morning and have encountered so many people from different backgrounds and ethnic groups. Being able to briefly talk with them about God and give them food allows me to live out Jesus' teaching to love our neighbors and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

Another area I grew more comfortable in as a BVSer is preaching sermons and reading scriptures for the Sunday service. Initially, I was hesitant about giving a sermon or reading scriptures because I felt like I

was not quite ready to take on such an active role, but the church was very patient with me and guided me through it all. Their support helped alleviate any kind of fear that I had of failing, and my confidence has greatly risen because of their kindness and patience. Over these past nine months, I have grown immensely as a BVSer and as man in handling my responsibilities with the church. It took me quite a while to adjust and get comfortable with my role in Harrisburg, but I have learned so much from the supportive community here, and they are a huge blessing to me.

I am extremely grateful for my project site in Harrisburg, and I will miss my time as BVSer. I know God has a lot in store for me, and I trust that God will make a way even when it seems impossible.



Reading Books at the Social Justice Library. Photo by Harrisburg First COB.



Distributing Hand Sanitizer to Neighborhood Kids. Photo by Harrisburg First COB.

