EDF grants respond to Israel-Hamas war

Brethren Disaster Ministries has directed grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to organizations responding to the war between Israel and Hamas. A strategy has been developed to work with four partners: International Orthodox Christian Charities, Bethlehem Bible College Shepherd Society, Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, and the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development.

- **$25,000** supports projects of Bethlehem Bible College Shepherd Society including emergency food, water, fuel, and supplies for families and elderly residents in Gaza and the West Bank; construction, supply, and staffing of a medical clinic at St. Porphyrios Orthodox Church in Gaza; tutoring and support to some 100 young students living in and around church shelters in Gaza City; winterization supplies for 1,000 to 2,000 people in Gaza; and trauma counseling training.
- **$25,000** supports programing developed by Wi'am to address needs of children impacted by the war: creating safe spaces to allow children to air their stress; distribution of Christmas gifts and food packages; professional counseling and emotional support; trauma-informed care; educational programs; and community engagement.
- **$35,000** supports the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development aiding families displaced by the war in southern Lebanon. Identified priorities include food assistance and non-food items such as blankets, mattresses, pillows, diapers, feminine hygiene products, personal care items, and emergency lights.

Additional EDF grants:

- **$45,500** continues the Brethren Disaster Ministries response to the July 2022 flooding in Kentucky. The current phase of the response, in partnership with HOMES Inc., is working in Letcher County.
- **$26,000** assists the Goma congregation of l'Eglise des Frères au Congo (Church of the Brethren in the Democratic Republic of Congo) to give school kits to 800 vulnerable children.
- **$20,000** helps build and equip a Women's Empowerment Center in the city of Ngovi on the property of a Congolese Church of the Brethren.
- **$10,000** is given for l'Eglise des Freres au Congo to implement an mpox prevention program.
- **$5,000** supports construction of a new home for a retired pastor in Iglesia de los Hermanos (the Church of the Brethren in the Dominican Republic) whose home was badly damaged in multiple storms.
- **$3,000** partially funds a solar power system for Global 8235/RecycloCraftz in Zambia, a faith-based fair-trade organization providing vocational training, literacy programs, and learning centers.

Global Food Initiative grants:

- **$15,000** helps purchase farmland in Uganda to be used by the country's emerging Church of the Brethren to meet critical food needs for vulnerable children and other ministry goals.
- **$15,000** aids the Wings of Blessing and Hope Farm Poultry Project of ASIGLEH (the Church of the Brethren in Venezuela), an income and livelihood generation project.
- **$6,470** helps a well project provide drinking water for the Ngovi congregation of l'Eglise des Frères au Congo and the surrounding community.
- **$5,000** goes to the Soybean Value Chain project of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN) and the agricultural program that is part of EYN's Integrated Community Based Development Program.
- **$825** supports a farming project of the emerging Tanzania Church of the Brethren, assisting church members to improve their farming skills.

Personnel

Jeff Lennard will retire on March 28 as director of marketing and sales for Brethren Press. He has served in the position for 18 years, since November 2006. He has overseen the e-commerce site and bookstores at Church of the Brethren conferences; supervised customer service, shipping, and inventory management; marketed products on multiple platforms; played a key role in the development of new resources; and served as marketing coordinator for the Shine curriculum of Brethren Press and MennoMedia.

Hannah Nelson has begun as a Brethren Volunteer Service worker at the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy in Washington, D.C. From southern California, she recently graduated from the University of San Francisco with a bachelor's in politics.

Keke (Lieketseng) Phooko has begun as a BVS volunteer with the Brethren Disaster Ministries rebuilding project in Letcher County, Ky. She comes from the country of Lesotho in southern Africa.

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L.E.A.D. Conference gathers in Ephrata

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Dennis R. Edwards, a New Testament scholar and dean and vice president of Church Relations at North Park Theological Seminary, took on the topic of humility. He presented humility as a biblical value and a key characteristic of Christian leadership.

Keynote speaker Dennis R. Edwards of North Park Theological Seminary, along with preachers Etienne Nsanzimana of the Church of the Brethren in Rwanda and Jeff Carter of Bethany Seminary, led the main sessions at the first-ever L.E.A.D. Conference Nov. 15-17.

Some 150 people gathered at Ephrata (Pa.) Church of the Brethren including participants from around the country and members of the Ephrata congregation who helped host the event.

Twenty break-out sessions were presented by a wide variety of Church of the Brethren speakers on topics related to the four focus areas: listen, equip, adapt, and disciple. Break-out sessions were in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole, and language translation was available.

Nate Polzin, executive director of Discipleship and Leadership Formation, which sponsored the conference, announced that plans are already in the works for another L.E.A.D. Conference in 2026.

Brethren Disaster Ministries director visits area hit by Helene

The director of Brethren Disaster Ministries, Jenn Dorsch-Messler, traveled through Virginia and North Carolina last October to visit with district and congregational leaders in areas affected by Hurricane Helene. The bulk of the deaths and catastrophic damage from the storm occurred in areas that are part of Southeastern District.

The trip included two visits to Taylors Valley, Va., to meet with Southeastern District leaders and members of Walnut Grove Church of the Brethren. The church had several rooms full of supplies to distribute to those in need, many donated by Virlina District and Shenandoah District, and delivered there by Virlina members a few weeks earlier. The church parking lot was hosting shower trailers and other trailers from FEMA, the Red Cross, and other responding organizations.

Two Walnut Grove members and long-time Taylors Valley residents, Carl and Linda McMurray, were also recipients of relief supplies and help. Their house, the home in which Linda McMurray was born, had washed away in the flooding. Debris had backed up on a nearby bridge, causing the raging water to be diverted directly toward it. A tour of the area showed where the McMurray house used to be, with only the front steps remaining, and where parts of the structure had been deposited by the flood waters in a nearby field.

The McMurrays were in the house when it was being washed away. Carl McMurray was thrown from the house during the night and was rescued by a helicopter after clinging to a tree for three hours. Linda McMurray spent 16 hours trapped by trees, debris, and water in the middle room of the house. She survived with help from her faith, spending the time repeating scripture and singing hymns.

During the tour, the group met the man who found Linda the next morning. When she introduced him as the person who saved her, his response was, "I may have rescued you, but I was not the one that saved you." Despite their traumatic experience, the McMurrays were busy helping others affected by the flooding.

Dorsch-Messler also visited Southeastern District's Camp Carmel. Led by director Erica Leeds, the camp was busy supporting the community with relief supplies and other services. The kitchen and dining area were filled with a range of items, from blankets to mold remediation spray to baby supplies, that they were working to get out to those in need. The camp had hosted a community meal for around 175 people the week before, the first hot meal since the hurricane for some of those who attended.

Jenn Dorsch-Messler

Leaders of Southeastern District and members of Walnut Grove Church of the Brethren in hard-hit Taylors Valley, Va., gather on the church steps for a picture during the visit by Brethren Disaster Ministries director Jenn Dorsch-Messler.

A final stop in North Carolina was a visit with the Children's Disaster Services team that was serving at a Family Assistance Center in Asheville, N.C. Dorsch-Messler also met with Virlina District staff and leaders who had been coordinating collections of in-kind and financial donations.