



Church of the Brethren

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The late summer and fall of 2017 challenged Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) and Children's Disaster Services (CDS) with one of the most demanding disaster seasons we have ever had. Never has BDM responded to so many disasters at one time, and back-to-back, without a break. In less than two months, CDS responded to two hurricanes (Harvey and Irma), a flood in Missouri, the deadliest shooting in recent history (Las Vegas), the largest wildfires in California history and the train disaster near Olympia, Wash. BDM staff have worked with disaster-affected districts, including trips to Puerto Rico for Hurricane Maria response. Brethren volunteers have also helped with clean up and early repair work.

All members of the Puerto Rico district were impacted when Hurricane Maria struck on Sept. 20, 2017, causing extensive and widespread damage to homes, roads, the power grid, water supply and cellular communication. Although Church of the Brethren buildings received limited damage, there was damage to the volunteer housing in Castañer and Caimito and at least 35 Brethren families had major damage to their homes. In support of the Puerto Rican Brethren, emergency supplies (solar chargers, generators, canned chicken, tools, tarps and other items) were sent and grants are supporting church-based recovery. BDM is working closely with the district to develop and implement a long-term recovery program before a new hurricane season. The district recovery committee is providing permanent solutions to many of the most vulnerable hurricane survivors.

As the first response program of BDM, CDS was exceptionally busy, with a record 16 disasters responses in 2017, including two critical responses. Volunteers, including some who served more than once, cared for 2,527 children in the aftermath of tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, flash floods and a dam breach, as well as the train disaster in Washington state and the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nev. The latter two required the help of our Critical Response Childcare Team, the only national response program called to care for children in mass causality crises. The impact of CDS is illustrated by the words of a father sheltering in Florida with a CDS team as Hurricane Irma raged outside: "When you came in and started playing with our children, all the parents in this whole place just calmed right down. We knew we were going to be alright."

For most disaster survivors, the road to recovery comes to an end when their homes are restored. With this as a goal, the BDM home rebuilding program sends volunteers and leaders to support community-based disaster recovery by repairing or reconstructing homes for people like 88-year-old Dorothy Brown from Columbia, S. C., who delights in showing the many photos and notes she has received from volunteers. They not only repaired her home, they became a part of her life—and an answer to her prayers.

In 2017, the ministry of home rebuilding and restoration reached 64 families in four communities across three states. The Columbia, S.C., project finished in August, after restoring homes damaged in 2015 storms and floods with an \$88,801 grant from the United Way of the Midlands for building materials. The project then moved to Marion County, S.C., to repair homes damaged by Hurricane Matthew in 2016. A six-week rebuild project in March and April, in Clay County in West Virginia, supported homes damaged in July 2016 floods. In July, a home rebuilding site opened in Eureka,

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Mo., in response to two historic floods. BDM volunteers also served 19 families on short-term disaster responses in Florida, Illinois, Missouri, Texas and West Virginia.

In February, the Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI), a partnership of the disaster ministries of the Church of the Brethren, the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), hired its first staff (Rachel Larratt and Tim Sheaffer) to pilot a program that supports local communities in the rapid development of effective long-term recovery programming. The DRSI team supported communities in La Salle County, Ill., and Wisconsin. Following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, DRSI explored opportunities in Texas and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), resulting in a request to support local long-term recovery planning in USVI in 2018.

The greatest global need, representing 52 percent of BDM's \$1,090,818 project expenses, involved families forcibly displaced or impacted by violence. In South Sudan, funds supported food distributions and repairs to the Brethren Peace Center, which was ransacked by government forces during the ongoing civil war. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a local partner assisted villagers forced to flee their homes due to political corruption, local warlords and hungry fighters.

As the biggest operation in BDM history, the Nigeria Crisis Response continues to support Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) in response to ongoing violence in Northeast Nigeria by the terrorist group Boko Haram. This response provides relief and recovery programs including peace building and trauma activities for adults and children; support for four displaced people relocation centers; home repair; agricultural support (seeds, fertilizer, soybean project, tractors); educational support, including scholarships for orphans; business and skills training for widows; food, medical and household distributions; safe water provision; shipping a container of books for schools, including Kulp Bible College; and ongoing advocacy and peace building work by the COB Office of Public Witness. Amazingly, even with all the displacement and violence, EYN has opened new churches as families relocate and has created four new districts.

The total 2017 program expenditures were \$460,013 for U.S. responses, including the Rebuild Program and CDS, \$529,091 for the Nigeria Crisis Response and \$101,714 for all other international responses. This includes continued support for Hurricane Matthew recovery in Haiti.

After so many disasters and the hurting families trying to recover, we pray for a calmer year and a time of healing. Please pray for BDM staff and volunteers who are stretched by the extent of need in the U.S. and around the globe. Thank you for your prayers and for supporting this auction and the programs of Brethren Disaster Ministries. You are a blessing and a beacon of hope to those in need.

In Christ,



Roy Winter, Associate Executive Director

On behalf of BDM staff – Sherry Chastain, Jenn Dorsch-Messler, Sharon Franzén, Kathy Fry-Miller and Terry Goodger

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