



MDS volunteers remove fallen branches after Hurricane Michael in Marianna, Florida. MDS photo

## Mennonite Disaster Service: Where faith meets action

By KEVIN KING

**M**ennonite Disaster Service (MDS) is a volunteer network through which various constituencies of the Anabaptist church can respond to those affected by disasters in Canada and the United States. While our main focus is on clean up, repair, and rebuilding homes, this activity becomes a means of touching lives and helping people regain faith and wholeness.

### Initial Response

After the massive tornado leveled most of Greensburg, Kansas in 2007, Pastor Jeff Blackburn at Greensburg Mennonite Church was stunned by the prompt response of MDS. "I was just amazed how quickly people were ready to respond to us. [The storm hit Thursday night, and]

by Saturday MDS was here. Just the rapid response. It was just amazing how many people were here so quickly to help us."

In 2018, more than 5,500 volunteers gave their time and skills to bring more than 550 people back to their homes. But these volunteers provide more than just labor. We frequently hear about MDS volunteers praying with families who are displaced. Sometimes there are evening Bible studies that impact the neighborhoods. Many MDS volunteers see their work as a way to put their faith into action at a time when it's needed most.

Our immediate response after disaster strikes focuses on removing debris, securing partially damaged roofs, and

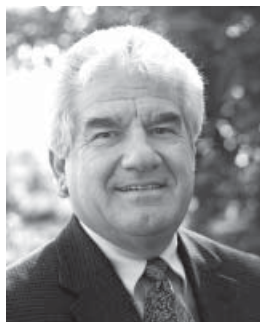
preventing further damage to homes. This includes making early response teams available to communities, families, and individuals in order to limit secondary damage and expenses.

MDS is committed to responding to the needs of people directly affected by disasters, regardless of socio-economic circumstances, racial ethnicity, gender, or church affiliation. MDS also gives priority to helping Anabaptist communities who are affected by a disaster. We provide consultants and community workers to Anabaptist congregations and conferences to assist with recovery plans and emotional, spiritual and/or pastoral care.

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# Volunteering as a spiritual discipline

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



I believe the virtues of volunteering one's efforts on behalf of another are deeply embedded in our spirit. Genesis 1:31 says, "God saw all that he had

made, and it was good."

God designed us for relationship with God and with each other. Intrinsic to our biological, relational and spiritual nature is the desire to engage in behavior with each other that has meaning for both giver and receiver. Something happens to us when we purposefully interact with the intent to worship God and to respond to the needs of others.

Dallas Willard writes in his 1998 book *The Divine Conspiracy* that the Beatitudes "...are explanations and illustrations, drawn from the immediate setting, of the present availability of the [God's] kingdom through personal relationship to Jesus. They single out cases that provide proof that, in him, the rule of God from the heavens truly is available in life circumstances that are beyond all human hope" p 106.

Even modern science is researching the personal and relational benefits of engaging in altruistic behavior. We are learning that the human body is designed to feel better when engaged in purposeful caring interaction with each other.

For example, new mothers who purposefully love their new born babies actually feel "oxytocin," a hormone that fosters bonding between mothers/babies. More recently, neuroscientist Dr. Daniel Siegel coined the term *mindsight* "...to describe our human capacity to understand our lives with more clarity, integrate the brain, and enhance our relationships with others." ([drdansiegel.com/about/mindsight/](http://drdansiegel.com/about/mindsight/))

The Apostle Paul in Romans was ahead of modern day neuroscience's learning curve when he challenges people of faith in chapter 12 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (verses 1-2).

Life in the Spirit means that we purposefully use our God-given gifts to enrich God's church and others in need, to practice hospitality, and as much as possible, live at peace with each other (v. 6, 13 and 18).

During the early 20th century and after World War II, Mennonite Church leaders created incredible opportunities for lay members of the church to engage in Christ-centered living, service and peacemaking.

Individuals over the years have been challenged to participate in:

- Sunday school programs, summer camps, MYF and lay church leadership.
- Advocacy services and care for individuals with disability and mental health challenges.
- Local church mission outreach and around the world.
- Service with Mennonite Disaster Service and Mennonite Central Committee to all kinds of disasters and to victims of war, famine, disease and disaster around the world.
- Gift and Thrift and other fund raising programs in the Mennonite church.
- Support and advocacy for victims of human trafficking, engagement in conflict reconciliation and many others.

These mission and service efforts created enormous opportunities and life changing experiences for youth and laity in our congregations. These efforts have embodied Paul's urging that we be transformed by the "renewing of the mind" into loving behaviors for others. James writes in chapter 2:26 that "...as the body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds..." May we be called to and empowered by the Holy Spirit to make volunteering a spiritual discipline.

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## Pastoral transitions

(April to June 2019)

**Jeonghi Han**, former co-pastor at CrossWay Mennonite Church, returned to South Korea.

**Micah Hurst** was appointed as campus pastor of Hesston College, Hesston, Kan., starting mid-July.

**David Lehman** will serve as Eastern District minister, effective July 15; **J. Harold Bergey** will oversee Williamsburg Mennonite Church.

**James Musser** began as co-pastor of Crossroads Mennonite Church.

**Sarah Piper** was ordained as Associate Pastor for Children and Families at Zion Mennonite Church.

**Veronica Sanchez** was licensed on June 6 for her role as co-pastor of Enciende una Luz.

**Ken Seitz** retired and transferred to Central District Conference.

**Bonnie and Ervin Stutzman** will begin serving as intentional transitional pastors at Zion Mennonite Church on August 1.

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**Correction:** In the Spring 2019 issue, the Mennonite Women article [page 9] photos and design was by Deb Pardini, not Gloria Lehman.



MDS continued from cover

## Long-Term Response

Our long-term efforts assist communities through repairing and rebuilding homes. We work with homeowners who cannot repair or rebuild their homes without volunteer assistance. This includes, but is not limited to, homeowners who are uninsured or underinsured (this frequently includes the elderly, handicapped, and single parent families). During most disasters, we work with the local Long-Term Recovery Committee (LTRC) to identify those with the greatest need. We also consider additional assistance on a case-by-case basis to other Anabaptist homeowners and to churches who have experienced disaster by linking the affected Anabaptist churches with other Anabaptist churches offering volunteers.

## History

MDS began at a Sunday School picnic in Hesston, Kansas, in 1950. As Sunday school members gathered to share ideas and food, they expressed a common desire to “seek opportunities to be engaged in peaceful, helpful activity...just where we find ourselves.”

In 1950, following significant response efforts to tornadoes in Oklahoma and flooding in Manitoba, Mennonites began to further organize their practice of mutual aid. Two Sunday school class groups from the Pennsylvania Mennonite Church and the Hesston Mennonite Church formed a joint committee in Kansas, and Mennonite Service Organization was born. Over time it expanded beyond the Midwest into all of the United States and Canada. The name changed to Mennonite Disaster Service, more accurately reflecting the type of service carried out by volunteers.

## MDS Today

Today, MDS has a network of staff and volunteers scattered throughout the US and Canada, creating a system for initial response and assessment and long-term recovery. MDS currently involves more than 4,000 Mennonite, Amish and Brethren in Christ churches and districts.

Last year, MDS volunteers responded throughout Canada and the U.S.—building 75 new homes, performing 278 home repairs, 301 cleanups, and building 14 new private access bridges.

Volunteers are our primary asset. Weekly volunteers consist of individuals, couples, families, groups, students, retir-



MDS volunteer Javin Martin nails new siding in La Grange, Texas. MDS photo

ees, friends and others working to reach out to people in need by serving with a positive and Christ-like heart. One can use their trade skills or learn new skills on the job. In return, MDS provides lodging and meals.

The weekly volunteers are led by our Leadership Volunteers. They are responsible for the day to day operations of an MDS project. They work together with local community partners and homeowners, organize the work for the weekly volunteers, and ensure that all volunteers are well fed and cared for throughout their time on the project. Leadership volunteer positions include project directors, office managers, head cooks, assistant cooks, construction supervisors, and crew leaders.

## Opportunities

As the severity, frequency and scope of disasters continue to increase in Canada and the U.S., so does the response of our hardworking volunteers. Last winter at 18 different locations, volunteers served disaster survivors affected by floods, fires, tornadoes, and hurricanes.

In light of our changing climate, MDS is putting more time and resources in mitigating against future disasters by elevating new homes, building with more resilient wind-load practices, installing storm shelters, and in some communities (especially in West Virginia and Texas) relocating entire neighborhoods.

Our climate is changing: physically, politically, and spiritually. To be the hands and feet of Jesus requires action. The actions of MDS volunteers can have a powerful impact as illustrated by this story from Bloomington, Tex., where Hurricane Harvey ravaged the town:

“We had a home dedication for John and Carol White. It was a great celebration with many of their friends, family and co-workers joining our group of 23. They were so happy and excited to have already slept in their new home one night. It was a particularly joyful celebration as John had just learned that a tumor on his kidney could not be found at a recent CAT scan. He credited this to a time of prayer the MDSers had for his healing one night after he and Carol had brought in a pot of chili to share with us. We are all giving God the glory. What an amazing show of God’s goodness to John!”

MDS volunteers continue to discover that something amazing happens when they serve—building the kingdom by being the church at work. When they show up at a disaster scene, in the midst of chaos, love and mercy breaks through in a hands-on practical way. The homeowner, in their grief and shock, meets a stranger willing to muck out their home or pick up the pieces. Love breaks through and hope is restored.

And in the process of doing that, in the process of what may seem like volunteers giving away their lives, as Jesus said, they find their lives. That’s what matters most to God. Connie, a homeowner in Pensacola, Fla., said, “You changed me more than you changed this house.”

These are the stories that carry the heartbeat of why MDS exists and where faith meets action. To God be the glory.



Kevin King is Executive Director of Mennonite Disaster Service. He lives in Lititz, Pa.

# Putting hands and feet to what we believe through MDS

By DAVID MININGER

Springdale Mennonite Church “strives to be a growing community of believers that inspires engagement by all, cultivates discipleship, and shares God’s reconciling love and healing with our neighbors and our world.” This is our vision statement that we adopted in 2016.

We are attempting to put our words into action through involvement with Mennonite Disaster Service and other service projects. The slogan for MDS is “respond, rebuild and restore.” God has blessed us with many talents and resources which we can use to put hands and feet to what we believe and bless our neighbors near and far.

I have organized service trips with MDS for about the past 15 years, when I was first able to make a week each year available in my work schedule for service. I wanted to help with the needs in Florida and the Gulf Coast after the hurricanes. We made four trips to projects after hurricane Katrina, working in Pass Christian, Miss., Long Beach, Miss., Mobile, Ala. and New Orleans. After that work was completed, we served in Tennessee, Pulaski, Va., and Crisfield, Md.

In the last couple of years we have made three trips to West Virginia, twice working at the Greenbrier project and in Clendenin. We have not been involved in the bridge project, but at Clendenin we got the opportunity to be present at a bridge dedication and see firsthand the much-needed work that MDS is doing.

I’ve found the most effective recruiting



Springdale Mennonite Church volunteers built a deck in Greenbrier County, West Virginia.  
Photo courtesy of Dave Mininger

method has been for me to reserve a week and then invite others to join me. We usu-

**God has blessed us with many talents and resources which we can use to put hands and feet to what we believe and bless our neighbors near and far.**

ally average between five and eight persons from Springdale, plus some from Staunton Mennonite and the local community. Busy schedules often prevent some who would like to serve from going, so the makeup of the group varies each time.

In West Virginia, we primarily worked on rebuilding houses destroyed by the flood. Homeowner contact was limited, but

rewarding when it happened. The owner of one house we worked on was staying in a trailer onsite and would come out to visit. One evening, he was invited, along with his son and family, to come where we were staying and share his story. He had lost his wife a few months before the flood, and then the flood destroyed his house—their home. He was very grateful for the volunteers that were rebuilding his home.

That was really touching to hear. Being able to hear the stories helped us relate to the homeowners and understand some of what they went through.

One project after Katrina was working on a home in Long Beach, Miss., that had flood damage. The couple had to climb into the attic to escape the flood waters. They were the thirteenth house from the Gulf, and all except the house next door were totally destroyed. Some other non-MDS groups had worked on the home, but some repairs hadn’t been done properly. The couple was living in the home, so we had good opportunity to interact with them as we worked to finish repairs and correct mistakes. They even arranged a shrimp boil at the end of the week. We continued some contact for a few years after that.



A team from Springdale Mennonite Church that went to Andrews, S.C.: Dave Mininger, Tammy & Steve Driver, Danny Weaver, Mary Lou Brubaker, Darrell Weaver, Alan Shenk, Glen Zendt and Nelson Driver.

Photo courtesy of Dave Mininger



The time spent traveling and working together helps us learn to know each other better. We normally travel in the MDS van, and were grateful for the shorter trips to West Virginia rather than the 15-hour Gulf Coast trips. At the work sites, we were often paired up with volunteers from other areas, quite often Canada, so we made new friends and sometimes learned new ways of doing things.

Last fall we made a three-day trip to the SWAP program in West Virginia to help with the transition to a new base of operations. One of our members, Ranita Shenk,

had previously served a term of service there and enthusiastically promoted the project. We worked on painting, framing shower stalls and laid a stone walkway to get ready for future volunteer groups.

Other non-MDS projects Springdale has been involved in include filling relief buckets for MCC, collecting newborn and school kits for MCC, helping with apple butter boiling, as well as the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale. Some members recently helped replace a roof for a local family whose children attend our church and cut wood for another individual.

I hope to continue my service with MDS in the future. As there won't be an end to natural disasters, there will be many more opportunities to serve. While the main focus is on repair and rebuilding, this service provides the opportunity to nurture hope and wholeness. MDS encourages volunteers to stop work and talk with the homeowners as the opportunity arises.



David Mininger is Springdale Mennonite Church (Lyndhurst, Va.) MDS congregational representative.

## Community Mennonite Church is no stranger to MDS

By SAM MILLER

For many years, Community Mennonite Church has participated in recovery missions of Mennonite Disaster Service. These occasions included the memorable storms of Hurricane Andrew, the effects of flooding in New Orleans, and the extreme flash floods of Greenbrier County in West Virginia.

Various persons like Terry Burkhalter spent two months in California as crew leader for new residential construction. Dwight Kaufman recently came back from two months of crew leading in south Texas. Ever since their retirement, he and Trella have spent an astounding 39 weeks with MDS, and Dwight served an additional 23 weeks at locations by himself. He also served as a bi-national board member and Region 2 co-chair for two years. Sam Miller spent many weeks in West Virginia, crew

leading construction as well as serving as project director in Moundsville, W.Va., on several bridge builds. He is now secretary of Region 1 and serves as assistant coordinator for MDS work in West Virginia. For years, a group of four or five persons from CMC volunteered somewhere with MDS. They became ambassadors, traveling by van or air to sites near and far—from Ramona, Calif., to Jamestown, Colo., to Oklahoma City to Andrews, S.C., to various places in Virginia. However, in 2018, many members of CMC found their way to Puerto Rico.

In October 2017, the Category 5 Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. Travel access to the territory was limited by the lack of gasoline and electricity; obstacles to this disaster relief effort. MDS found its way into the island by connecting with the Mennonite church and school establishments. Johann Zimmerman, Joe Yoder, and John

Murch went on early response teams.

Early on, Johann Zimmerman, a structural engineer, began to think of ways to build houses which could actually survive the next hurricane. As his plans were developed, MDS wanted someone to build a prototype house in Ponce, Puerto Rico.

Eventually John and Jennifer Murch were asked to lead that project as project directors. John, being a skilled master carpenter, also wanted to have all the training available from MDS, so they travelled to Lititz, Pa. and to Saskatoon, Sask., for a week of MDS leadership training. Jennifer and John were asked to serve for four months. They moved to the city of Ponce, P.R., and began the building project. Their efforts began to draw more members of Community Mennonite Church, some for one week and others for two weeks.

**Community** continued on page 6



After the devastating floods in West Virginia in 2016, Community Mennonite MDS volunteers built new bridges. All photos courtesy of Sam Miller



Women in Puerto Rico serve food to the Community Mennonite Church MDS volunteers rebuilding after Hurricane Maria in 2018.



A youth from CMC served as a volunteer in Puerto Rico in 2018.

Johann and Susan still relate to Puerto Rico. Susan spent a month working there last year. Johann now returns to the island as a consultant for FEMA.

Leary and Chiro, prominent church leaders in Ponce and now also MDS leaders, became our friends. They always invited volunteers to their house for one evening during the week and served us *pinchos*—chicken on a stick—with special sauces and served complete with a slice of bread on the top end of the kebab.

These nights out became the highlight of the week for the volunteers as they also invited members of the local congregation and relatives. Eventually, the conversation turned to the possibility of offering pinchos

at the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale. The plan became a reality and they were a hit at the 2018 Relief Sale.

After the devastating floods in West Virginia in 2016, with the loss of life and property, new needs came to the attention of MDS. Many small bridges connecting homes to roads in the rural hills were destroyed by flood waters. Homeowners were left to either wade the creeks to get home, or cross dangerous makeshift bridges.

Johann Zimmerman, an accomplished bridge builder, was asked to design a simple steel bridge which could certify a 7.5 load limit. Now over 60 such bridges have been constructed. Other persons from CMC have been active in this endeavor.

In the February 2019 annual meeting of MDS in Tucson, Ariz., the theme

was “Strangers No More.” Volunteering with MDS offers the opportunity to meet persons, who then become friends. The key is to listen and share stories. With the simple act of going somewhere to work as volunteers, we discover a new story in each location. Along the way, we spread the word as agents working for this particular community which has suffered.

May we always remember Jesus’ words: “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine even the least of them, you did it to me. (Matt. 25:40)



Sam Miller is MDS Secretary of Region 1. He is a member of Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.



## EMU graduates urged to be “moved to action by gratitude”

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

Retiring psychology professor Judy Mullet speaks to graduates at the 2019 commencement ceremony. EMU photo

without gratitude,” she said, “and gratitude is the only route to humility that I know.”

At the May 5 Commencement, 486 degrees were conferred.

Twenty-three graduated from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and 30 from the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.

**Nelle Zimmerman ‘19**, age 41, told her fellow graduates, especially those who enrolled in college soon after high school, that life away from the classroom is still a learning opportunity. She learned as much from the experiences of her cohort, ages 27-57, as from her coursework. “I don’t see this as a time to be exiting the classroom but rather a time to discover where your next classroom will be.”

**Tiffany Dickson MSN ‘19** was irrevocably changed in 2014 when her husband Corporal Bryon Dickson II, a Pennsylvania State Trooper, was murdered. Classmates in the MS in Nursing program helped her

realize her leadership capabilities. Dickson, mother of two, is now a stroke coordinator at Commonwealth Health Regional Hospital of Scranton.

“What we found was love ... the love that embraces us that allows us to lead,” she said, through tears. “I have heard that you don’t choose organizations, but organizations choose you. I am so proud to have been chosen by such a loving, caring and honorable organization as Eastern Mennonite University because it has enabled me to become the nurse that I once was.”

While **Tyler Goss MDiv, MA ‘19** earned dual degrees from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, he also was a residence director. His first year at EMU was also the senior class’s first year on campus. “If anyone would know you’re ready, I would,” he said, to loud cheers. “Your past years here are testament enough that you know what to do on this road ahead.”

Lauren Jefferson is Editor-In-Chief within Eastern Mennonite University’s Marketing and Communications Department.

**E**astern Mennonite University’s 2019 graduating class received a final assignment at the start of their commencement ceremony: “Raise your hand if this describes you,” said retiring psychology professor Judy Mullet, listing lengths of time in which students may have finished their degrees. At “Thirty-two years?” she raised her own hand.

In her address, Mullet highlighted gratitude, “the only soul-worthy response to the endless gifts given to us.” Gratitude is what “moves us to action,” she said, “to help others, to make healthy decisions, to persist in tough situations.” It’s also at the heart of Micah 6:8, the Bible verse that is foundational to EMU’s mission, because “there can be no justice or kindness





What was left of Frank and Mary's house after an EF3 tornado hit Amherst County, Virginia, on April 15, 2018. Photo courtesy of Rich Rhodes

## Feeling like Job: rebuilding after a disaster loss

By RICH RHODES

After they saw that tornado warnings had been rescinded in their area of Amherst County, in southwestern Virginia, Frank and Mary went to bed. When the twister hit their home in the small town of Elon, they found themselves several dozen yards away from their home in a debris field down a hill.

Miraculously, they were not seriously injured, but Frank and Mary lost everything, including two vehicles.

The April 15, 2018, storm system affected areas of the Eastern United States with severe tornadic activity. Major damage occurred in several localities in southwestern Virginia, the hardest hit community being Elon.

In this area, near Madison Heights and just east of the Blue Ridge mountains, 20 homes were destroyed or had major damage, after an EF3 tornado formed and passed through. Ten persons were injured, but thankfully no fatalities occurred.

Frank and Mary's story reminds me of the biblical story of Job (Job 1:18-19), where a mighty wind collapsed the house where they were feasting. But Job lost everything including his family, whereas Frank and Mary thankfully did not come to harm.

Following the tornado, the Amherst community formed a disaster recovery group (ADRG) to assist needy residents with housing needs. Now, more than one year later, a house is being constructed for

Frank and Mary. The Amherst Habitat for Humanity organization has been given this task, and they have asked MDS of Virginia to assist. The Mennonite Disaster Service Shenandoah Valley Unit helped with the roofing portion on Frank and Mary's new home and anticipates continuing to assist in the future, as well as on another house for a second family.

To help with these new builds, contact your church's MDS congregational contact person, who will connect you to either the Eastern Va. MDS or Shenandoah Valley MDS Unit for work site coordination.

Rich Rhodes is President of Mennonite Disaster of Virginia.



# The church in service at the Relief Sale

By MARISA CLYMER SHANK

Photo: Jim Bishop

Arriving early on a brisk fall morning to beat the breakfast rush at the annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale, I marvel at how many people were here before dawn to ensure that the donuts are fresh, pancake batter is mixed, and hundreds of chairs are set up in the auction building. Each year, as if by magic, this event gets set up and run by over 1,000 volunteers. So much happens behind the scenes in the days and months beforehand.

The relief sale board, also comprised of volunteers, meets monthly to discuss finances, publicity, food and volunteer coordination. May through September the board is joined by congregational representatives from over 35 churches in the Valley. Many congregations have taken on a booth or two at the Relief Sale. For example, one church will coordinate volunteers to dip ice cream, while another will coordinate making

potato chips. Congregational representatives are an invaluable link to the churches that encourage individuals to volunteer during the sale.

Not only do volunteers run the booths, many churches also cover the cost of whatever they are selling in order to ensure 100% profit for the Relief Sale, which in turn donates the funds to local and international projects. Every year the relief sale board picks one local agency in Harrisonburg/Rockingham Co., and one in Augusta County to receive funds and supplies. This is just part of the incredible approximately \$300,000 that is collected each year for international relief efforts through MCC.



The annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale provides an opportunity for individuals to serve in their own backyard, while benefiting people across the Valley and internationally.

If you are interested in volunteering, please email [info@vareliefsale.com](mailto:info@vareliefsale.com) or contact your congregational representative.

Marisa Clymer Shank serves on the Relief Sale Publicity Committee.



Carolyn Nowlin receives her award from VMRC.  
VMRC photo

## Annual volunteer award given at VMRC

By MAUREEN PEARSON

Carolyn Nowlin and her late husband, Pres Nowlin, were named by Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community (VMRC) as recipients of this year's Claude Hess Distinguished Service Award. The

annual award is given to the volunteer(s) who "Builds Community Spirit at VMRC through Faithful Christian Service." Carolyn shares her thoughts on volunteerism in this Q&A.

*Some of your volunteerism involves serving with children/young people like the Grand*

*Bigs program at Waterman Elementary School and as a Pen Pal to Skyline Middle School students who are new to this country.*

Carolyn: I like kids. They are so honest, fun and uninhibited. Being a pen pal with a middle school student was a different angle, especially because I'm interested in cross-cultural relationships. As a Grand Big, I've enjoyed watching my "little" grow from kindergarten to third grade. To see her blossom has been a delight.

*Where do you volunteer at VMRC?*

Early on, Pres and I accompanied residents in wheelchairs who needed assistance to their appointments. I'm enjoying being a hospitality volunteer in the café one day a week. That enables those who prepare food to do what they do. Most recently, I've started to schedule baggers and cashiers in (VMRC's) Main Street Store. The store makes a big difference for people (at VMRC) so, I felt compelled to do something to help keep it going.

*How did you get involved with those volunteer opportunities at VMRC?*

Pres and I heard right away there were lots of opportunities at VMRC. We went together to talk with Emily Young, the Volunteer Services manager, to see what was available and learn what people needed.

*What or who influenced your volunteering?*

My volunteering is permeated with gratitude and joy. It's what we do as people of faith. Jesus said that when we do these things for others, we do it for him.

*Before moving to Harrisonburg, what place did volunteerism have in your life?*

Much of my service was through church. I was involved in Bible study at a women's prison in Goochland (Virginia) where the song they always wanted to sing was 'Amazing Grace.'

*What does it mean to be honored with VMRC's Volunteer Service Award?*

I was so stunned. Truly, there are many others who deserve this award. It was such a lovely memorial for Pres; I couldn't think of a sweeter way to remember him.

Maureen Pearson is Director of Public Relations & Outreach at VMRC.



# Two reflections from the SENT 2019 Conference

By CLYDE G. KRATZ

I had the privilege of traveling to Denver with a number of church planters in Virginia Mennonite Conference, April 26-28, 2019. Mennonite Mission Network planned and hosted the event for church planters at the Beloved Community Mennonite Church, an intercultural church plant in Mountain States Mennonite Conference. Because Virginia Mennonite Conference mission statement calls us to equip leaders and others to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far, I attended this event with our church planters.

Linda Oyer, New Testament professor, former mission worker and church planter in France with Mission Network, provided two engaging Bible studies. She compared and contrasted the vision of unity and diversity in the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke. Vern Rempel, church planter of Beloved Community Mennonite Church and other musicians led worship.

Mauricio Chenlo, Minister of Church Planting, and Sandy Miller, Director of Resourcing and Engagement, made presentations on the delivery system for equipping and sustaining church planters. The curriculum includes three phases — explore, equip, and send. In addition to the online study, there will be group learning and individual coaching as needed.

I came away from this event with three takeaways. 1) Church planters need the encouragement and support of established



**Participants from Virginia Mennonite Conference** (from left): **Juan Jose Lagos**, planting a church in Winston-Salem, N.C., with hopes of receiving financial support from the TCK District, **Alfonzo Alvarado**, planting a church in Lacey Spring, Va., with financial support from Northern District congregations, **Chris and Heather Scott**, planting a church in Winchester, Va., called “the exchange,” **Veronica and Armando Sanchez**, planting a church in Waynesboro, Va., with financial support from Southern District congregations.

**Tyler & Kendra Yoder** were unable to attend this event, but are planting a church in Richmond, Va., with financial support from Eastside Church (Harrisonburg) and Eastern District congregations. Ministerial Training Trust Funds held by various districts in Virginia Mennonite Conference covered the costs. Photo courtesy of Clyde Kratz

congregations. Church planters can experience discouragement and falter under the weight of stalled initiatives that do not bear fruit fast enough for their expectations.

2) Our Latino church planters value relationships with other Latino church planters across the country. The common bond built in these settings may be similar to many of us developing lasting relationships in our Mennonite schools, mission

and voluntary service assignments, and activities. They provide a lasting impression that forges our identity as colleagues and co-workers in God’s kingdom.

3) Mennonite Mission Network’s work in equipping church planters is a vital ministry. It develops effective church planters who will forge and lead healthy congregations.

By CHRIS SCOTT

One of the great gifts for me of the SENT conference is a simple one: I appreciate the opportunity to spend time with like-minded people who share a passion for instigating new works of the Kingdom, fellow laborers in translating the good news of Christ and the community of faith into a new context.

Spending time with these dreamers inspires and renews me to follow the call of God. One challenge of church planting is a feeling of disconnection from the wider church body. But in hearing the

stories and seeing the excitement in the eyes of my sisters and brothers, I am reminded that God has placed me here.

SENT was helpful and worthwhile. I found it rewarding to be around people at all points of the planting journey. One of the most exciting conversations I had was with a woman who had recently started meeting with four or five couples in her living room in Michigan. She was asking what it means to be the people of God in her time and place, and seeking how God might be leading them. She reminded me to reflect

on God’s plan for our group in Winchester, and not simply go along the path of least resistance.

There was solid content at SENT as well. Dr. Linda Oyer brought deeply thought-provoking messages, looking at the Good News in the gospels. It was challenging to hear from her and then reflect on how the good news might be nuanced in my community.

# When the 1985 flood damaged Riverside Mennonite

By ELWOOD YODER

When the Dry Fork River in West Virginia rose to record levels in November 1985, the Riverside Mennonite Church flooded, and the church suffered much damage. Randolph County, W.Va., got over a foot of rain in two days, and the 40-50 Riverside members needed help to clean up and fix their building.

At flood stage, the meetinghouse and parking lot, three miles north of Harman, W.Va., were in danger of being swept away by the roiling river.

Water came up to the window sills, and the benches floated inside. What probably saved the building was a large number of trees that floated against the building and kept the structure intact.

The Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Disaster Service organization responded immediately once roads became passable. Volunteers began cleaning up in the area around the Riverside church, and after that, volunteers went to the Harman area to help. Students from EMHS and Eastern Mennonite College went out by the van load to help clean up and fix up. One group of EMHS students pulled piles of dead turkeys from a field, some of which had already partially decayed.

From 1932-2017, Riverside Mennonite Church was part of the Middle District (later Central District) of Virginia Mennonite Conference. The Middle District Council authorized a generous donation to help in renovating and rebuilding. The church ordered new hymnals, new pews, and a new rug; replaced some aluminum siding; and completed significant

dozer work on the parking lot. Riverside pastors Joe Mininger and Woodie Sites waited a month before calling Sunday morning services again. Volunteers Paul and Nancy Showalter spent substantial time and energy leading the renovation efforts.

By August 1987, the church's renovations were complete, with a new kitchen,

people from Harrisonburg to help Riverside Mennonite Church recover from the devastating flood of 1985.



Elwood Yoder teaches Bible and Social Studies at Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, Va.



(Clockwise from left) 1. Riverside Church in May 1985, before the flood. 2. Riverside flooded, November 1985. 3. Rebuilding the church, Fall 1986. 4. The church on Thanksgiving Day, 1986. 5. Riverside Mennonite Church after repairs, 1987.

All photos by Eleanor Mininger

Sunday school rooms, and indoor toilets. The building project was finished debt free, and a celebration service was held at the church on August 30, 1987. A church bulletin from that era carried the banner "Spared for a Purpose." It took the concerted efforts of MDS resources, local help, community volunteers, and young





# Restoring hope with Mennonite Disaster Service

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Many natural disasters occurred lately in our country: wildfires on the West Coast, tornados in the Midwest, hurricanes in the Gulf and East Coasts, and flooding along major rivers. These events occur as cycles in the media landscape. Weather reporters give us firsthand updates of disasters and some of the aftermath, but the disasters soon lose news coverage, and the events are out of sight and out of our minds.

We have perhaps become numb to the impact on the folks that have experienced the disaster, or maybe we have compassion fatigue from all of our exposure to the many needs due to the turbulence of culture and nature.

Daniel and Darla Walker are living the nightmare of losing a home to the floods in West Virginia in 2016. As West Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster reported:

"On June 23, 2016, many West Virginia residents experienced historic flooding across the state. Sadly, 23 people lost their lives in the third-deadliest flood in West Virginia history. The National Weather Service has concluded that 24 hour rainfall amounts in parts of Fayette, Nicholas, and Greenbrier Counties were a "thousand-year event," meaning there is a 0.1% chance of an event of this magnitude happening in any given year. Meteorologists have also concluded that based on the 24-hour period spanning the event, that "thousand-year" 24-hour rainfall totals were also likely met in parts of Kanawha, Roane, and Clay counties."

Daniel and Darla Walker, and their two children, Daniel Davis and Rebecca, lost their home in this flood. Since then, they have been living in the home of Darla's mother. Her mother has temporarily moved in with her sister, approximately 45 minutes away. As the Walker family navigated the loss of their home and many of their belongings, and faced the disruption of relationships, they have not lost hope in the possibility of rebuilding in their community.

On June 7, 2019, I, along with Rodney Burkholder, MDS representative, traveled to Clendenin, West Virginia, about a four hour drive from Harrisonburg, to meet the Walker family. We met Miranda Nader, Disaster Case Worker of the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church, and together we traveled to meet the Walkers at the site of their new home.

Family members recounted the story of their loss, the challenges of securing funds to rebuild their home, and the disruption this loss and three-year displacement has had on their family.

Members of Virginia Mennonite Conference, in partnership with Mennonite Disaster Service, have an opportunity to restore hope for the Walker family.

Sam Miller and Rodney Burkholder are coordinating the construction of a Partnership Home Project that will be the Walkers' new home. Construction is under way: footers and a foundation are completed, a concrete floor will be completed in the near future, and the Home Builders Guild will frame the house on the parking lot of Lindale Mennonite Church on July 19, 2019. The framed house will be transported to Clendenin via trailers and placed on the foundation. Volunteers will be needed to complete the various phases of the home's construction.

I have written a letter to each pastor in Virginia Mennonite Conference and MDS congregational representative inviting them to hold a special offering for this project.

A Partnership Home Project costs approximately \$70,000. The Walker family received a \$30,000 grant from FEMA which is applied to the cost of the home. Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations are invited to contribute to the remaining \$40,000 to pay for this house. It is my hope



The Walker family: Daniel, Darla, Rebecca, and Daniel Davis with Clyde Kratz (left) and Miranda Nader (second from left).

Photo courtesy of Clyde Kratz

that our congregations can rise to this occasion to secure the necessary funding for this project. Please consider this opportunity to restore hope for the Walker family as we partner with them to secure a home for their future.

On Friday, July 19, 2019, Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly worship service will be held at Lindale Mennonite Church at 7:00 p.m., with gathering beginning at 6:45.

Kevin King, Executive Director of MDS, will be our keynote speaker. Rodney and I have invited the Walker family and Miranda Nader to be present for this event at Lindale Mennonite Church. We hope to dedicate the framed house structure and present various gifts to them to encourage them. Mennonite Women of Virginia are providing a beautiful wall hanging and a comforter to the family.

Once the project is complete and the keys to the home are turned over to the Walkers, there will be a dedication in Clendenin, W.Va., and a memento listing all the names of donating congregations and their locations.

I look forward to the day when this celebration occurs and the Walker family experiences Thanksgiving with a renewed sense of hope and awareness that strangers became friends, and it made all the difference in the world!

Clyde G. Kratz is Executive Conference Minister of Virginia Mennonite Conference.



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VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE

## ASSEMBLY 2019

JULY 18-20 • HARRISONBURG, VA

WORSHIP AT LINDALE MENNONITE CHURCH  
THURSDAY & FRIDAY: GATHERING 6:45 P.M., SERVICE AT 7:00

DELEGATE SESSIONS AT EASTERN MENNONITE SCHOOL  
FRIDAY, 8:30-4:00, SATURDAY 8:30-12:00

# CULTIVATING GOOD SOIL

And some fell into  
**good soil** and grew,  
and **yielded a hundredfold.**

- Luke 8:8

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER:  
[VIRGINIACONFERENCE.ORG/ASSEMBLY-2019](http://VIRGINIACONFERENCE.ORG/ASSEMBLY-2019)



LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR  
ASSEMBLY MDS PROJECT:

**BUILD A HOUSE**  
FOR A FAMILY IN WEST VIRGINIA  
(DEDICATION TO TAKE PLACE AT ASSEMBLY)

