

Year in Review

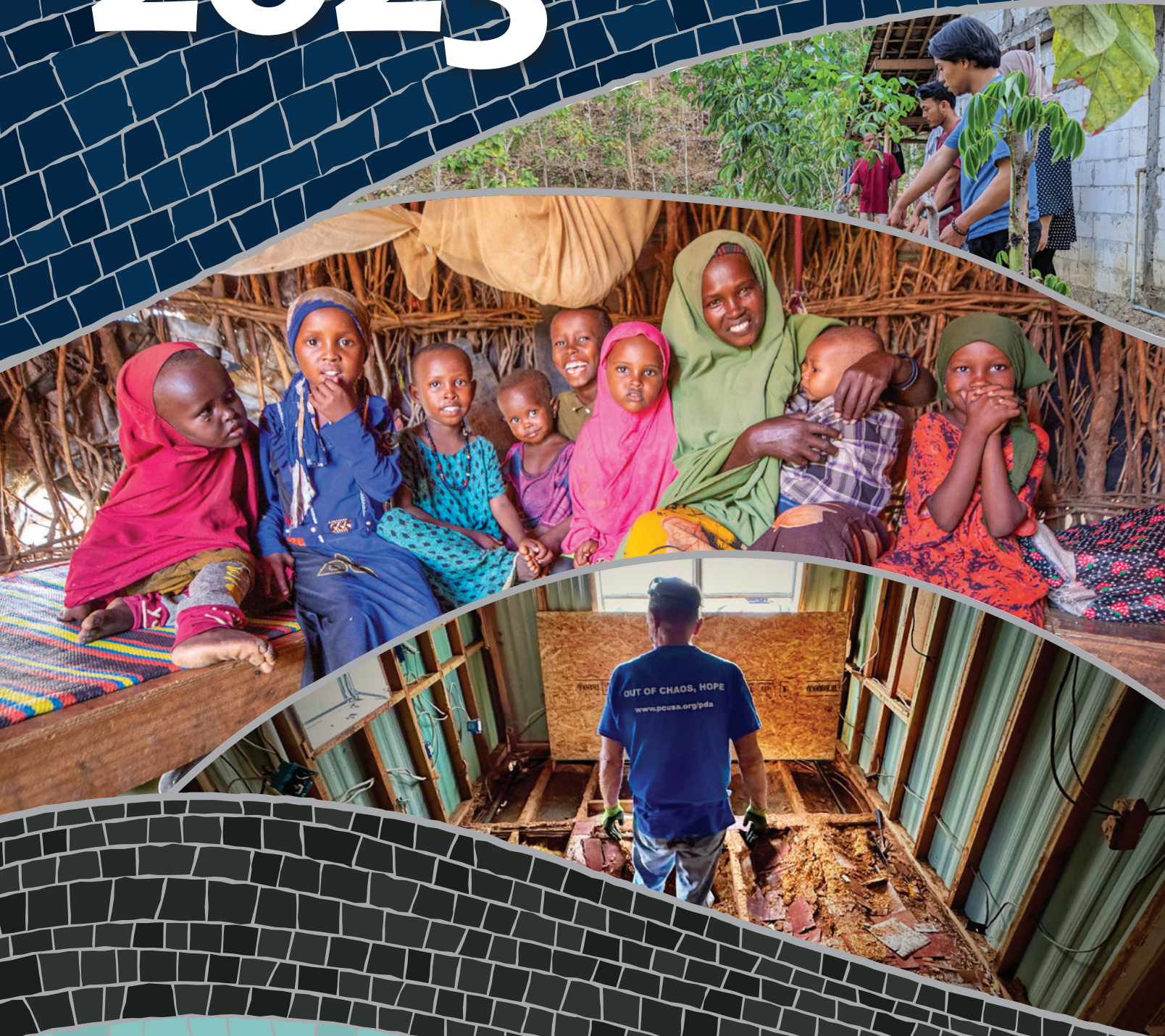
MOSAIC

2023



PRESBYTERIAN
DISASTER
ASSISTANCE

OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

Letter From the Director



Jorge Bucay tells the story of a man who planted figs, and his friend asked why, because he would never see the fruits of his labor. He answered, “I ate figs that someone else planted. I sow today so that others can eat tomorrow.” As we reflect on the previous year, the effect of our collaborative work has a greater impact than we may think.

On a recent visit to India, we met with our partner SNIRD (the Society for National Integration through Rural Development), who showed us newly built cinder block homes that are much stronger than the previous kutcha houses with mud walls and thatched roofs. Families took us to see a tree that was planted by our colleague Sheku Silah, who sadly passed away in 2022. These trees were planted at the beginning of the construction of these resilient homes. Amid the sadness, we reflected on how Sheku’s service, commitment and solidarity with these communities, years later, continue to yield beautiful fruits.

In Hawai’i and in Florida, our Emotional Spiritual Care team has been providing workshops to many who have been affected by secondhand trauma and compassion fatigue, and who, in many cases, are survivors of the hurricanes and fires themselves. These workshops provide tools to develop resilience not only for the recent disasters, but also will assist them and those who receive their care.

Our documentary “Flint” continues to be used by the EPA to educate about the effects of water contamination, and through the streaming platforms, more than 15 million people have watched this documentary. Imagine the positive effects this will have on those who decide to take action. As the time of this writing, Counter Stories Productions is working on new documentaries about gun violence, environmental racism, and eviction and homelessness. In the words of David Barnhart, “we hope these documentaries can amplify these counter stories to challenge the dominant narrative that says, “There is nothing we can do to prevent this from happening.”

Dominant narratives are also being challenged by our work with migrant communities. People from Afghanistan, Mexico, Syria, Venezuela, Haiti and more have been accompanied through collaborative work with partners who assist them as they search for a better life after being forced to leave their homes because of political unrest, war, famine and climate change. We celebrate new narratives that recognize the hard work of migrant communities, their great contributions and the positive impact their future generations will have.

We believe that we will never fully realize how much fruit the seeds we plant today will have in the future, but we all plant with hope, that God does far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. We give thanks to the amazing PDA family, our partners, mid councils and donors. Through your actions, you have not only assisted in the work to restore the lives of those affected by disaster, but also planted seeds of hope and compassion. Above all, as my dear friend from World Mission, the Rev. José Manuel Capella-Pratts, would say, “Soli Deo Gloria.”

To God the glory and our eternal gratitude,

Rev. Edwin González-Castillo



PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE

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Matthew 25:31–46 calls all of us to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities.

By accepting the Matthew 25 invitation, you can help our denomination become a more relevant presence in the world.

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
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LIVING INTO MATTHEW 25



In 2019, following the direction of the 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Presbyterian Mission Agency issued the Matthew 25 Invitation. Following Jesus Christ's direction in Matthew 25:31–46, the invitation guides ministries of the Mission Agency, along with churches and mid councils across the country, to work to eradicate systemic poverty, dismantle structural racism and build congregational vitality.

We know that the impact of natural and human-caused disasters often falls hardest on marginalized communities — people who are already hungry, oppressed and poor. These communities are often in precarious positions to begin with, located in places subject to disasters' worst impacts and least equipped to deal with the outcomes. Guided by the compassion and justice of Christ and the clear commands of Matthew 25, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance focuses its efforts on serving these communities as it responds to disasters around the world. These stories and conversations are a glimpse of what that work looks like, and how it helps strengthen the church and the world.

Two brothers' faithful journey and the gift of connections'

by Susan Krehbiel and Laura Jane Willoughby

Venezuelans are the largest displaced population in the Americas, yet they receive little media attention. In September 2023, UNHCR, the U.N. Refugee Agency, and the International Organization for Migration reported that approximately 7.7 million Venezuelans lived as migrants and refugees worldwide, with almost 3 million living in Colombia and 1.5 million in Peru. With as many as 70% struggling to meet basic daily needs, the expiration of temporary permissions across the region led to increased movement as people began to look for more permanent options.

Mateo and his brother Johan* are Venezuelan asylum seekers who arrived in the U.S. in 2023. They are men of deep faith, personal initiative and compassion for others. The trusting relationship they developed with a Presbyterian volunteer allows us to share some of Mateo's testimony:

I was in Venezuela's National Guard and refused to comply with an order from the Nicolas Maduro Moros regime, which directed me to attack fellow Venezuelans who were receiving humanitarian aid from international NGOs. I left Venezuela on Feb. 23, 2019, seeking protection in Colombia due to political persecution. The Colombian government gave me a permit to stay for two years. When that expired, my brother Johan and I chose to go to Ecuador, where we worked for a few months. Due to xenophobia against Venezuelans there, we were threatened with death. We decided to leave Ecuador for the United States with only \$150. We crossed the jungle, helping others — including children and the elderly — cross, too.



Three brothers and a childhood friend from Venezuela stand in front of the Colorado State Capitol building.

I worked at a water park in Matamoros, Mexico, while I was waiting to get my CBP ONE appointment (the only way to schedule an appointment at the U.S. border). I received threats from the cartel, so I crossed the border on Aug. 20 and turned myself in to the U.S. immigration authorities.

I was detained (by U.S. Immigration) for 59 days, but I always had faith that I would be released. There were days that I was demoralized because others would arrive and be released before those of us who were already there. I asked God why every day. Then I started to get up at 2 a.m. to pray with a forgiving heart and to ask his forgiveness, to give

him thanks for a new day, for the food I received and for others. And he gave me an answer.

Mateo was finally released in Brownsville, Texas, in mid-October, where he reunited with his brother Johan, who had crossed separately 10 days earlier. There, the brothers were befriended by Laura, a member of a PC(USA) congregation in Maryland who was volunteering at the Texas border with Mexico.

While they figured out their next move, Johan and Mateo volunteered at the Welcome Center. As they left the center on Oct. 31, they ran into a friend from their hometown, and he invited them to accompany him to Denver. The next day, the three men hopped on one of the buses organized by Gov. Greg Abbott. Upon their arrival in Denver 24 hours later, they discovered that the city's migrant shelter only serves individuals who have been in the U.S. for 30 days or less, which meant that Johan could not stay there. And, unfortunately, their friend's landlady also denied them room. Learning all of this after 9 p.m. meant the brothers were faced with sleeping on the street in the cold.

Laura had remained in contact with Johan throughout the trip, so when she learned of their dilemma, she paid for a hotel room for the night. The next morning, Laura reached out to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), hoping that we could suggest a church or group in Denver to help Johan and Mateo navigate the systems and find shelter. PDA agreed to contact Journey with Migrants (JwM), a mission partner of the Denver Presbytery, to see if they could help. A volunteer with JwM immediately responded, and within six hours, the brothers had been picked up by Pastor Lemuel Velasco. Pastor Velasco leads a new worship community in Denver that has welcomed many newcomers into their congregation.

JwM paid for several nights in a hotel for the brothers with some of the funds they had already received from a PDA emergency grant. What's more, Mateo and Johan were immediately plugged into this faith community, which also helped reunite Mateo with his 6-year-old daughter within two days. Johan and Mateo have since received legal help and have been able

to find work through the same connections. In December, another brother and childhood friend joined Mateo and Johan in Denver. And, in February, JwM paid for the security deposit and the first month's rent on an apartment for the men, enabling them to move to self-sufficiency.

Laura shares these words of gratitude:

This is a perfect example of what sanctuary really looks like. I wasn't "helping"; I was just using the connections I had to link the brothers to other people and groups. I have called PDA before, and they are always willing to connect me with other PC(USA) churches and groups that are working with the migrant response. It was such a small thing — one call and a quick email. But it got the brothers connected to a community, which provided shelter and ongoing support, things that are so critical to long-term success for asylum seekers. It also reunited a father with his daughter and immediately connected the brothers (who have their own deep faith) with a faith community. This experience also deepened my faith as I saw the many ways God and Godly timing were at work through Johan and Mateo's journey. There are so many gaps in our current immigration response. To be doing social justice in this area means helping to bridge some of those gaps.

PDA Migration Accompaniment Ministries is a ministry of relief, welcome, accompaniment and solidarity. It is made possible by the incredible connections among faith-based organizations within and across the PC(USA), the perseverance of migrants and their willingness to trust in the kindness of strangers.

**Johan and Mateo are not their real names. These have been changed for their protection.*

Emotional and spiritual care helps service providers who respond to disasters cope with stress

by Darla Carter

The Rev. Dr. Kimberly Fong and her small church in Maui, Hawai'i, have been instrumental in helping people cope with the aftermath of devastating wildfires that erupted on the island in 2023.

Though it's been God's work, it's also been a big load to carry at times for support personnel like Fong, who are trying to help residents rebuild their lives after major losses.

Listening to story after story "just drains you," said Fong, a Presbyterian pastor who leads Po'okela Church, a United Church of Christ in Maui's Upcountry.

One of the ways she and others have been able to revitalize their spirits is through resilience training, also known as emotional and spiritual care workshops, provided by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) staff and volunteers from PDA's National Response Team (NRT).

Fong was among those who participated in training that took place at Maui's J. Walter Cameron Center, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that, according to its website, "serves to incubate, support and accelerate social good."

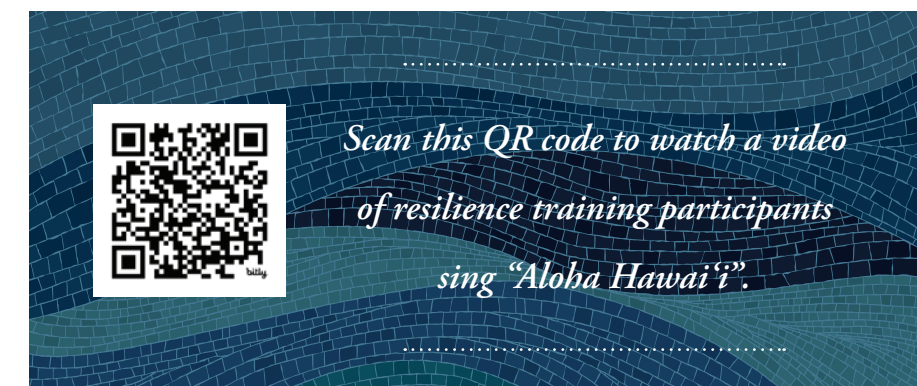
"The resilience program offered very good suggestions for how to support and care for people who are going through such a crazy disaster but (also provided tips on) the taking care of yourself as well," Fong said.

The training gives participants, such as service providers, first responders and clergy, a chance to interact with each other and receive resilience tools.

Participants get "to talk and share, build some community, learn some tools for resilience, and then also know they can take those tools and share them with people they're serving," said the Rev. Dr. Kathy Riley, PDA associate for Emotional and Spiritual Care. So, it's "not just

a day away. It's a day to be equipped for what they're doing."

The NRT has provided the training after many disasters, including Hurricane Ian, which hit Florida in September 2022, causing severe damage to structures such as Chapel by the Sea Presbyterian Church. "That was more of a shock than hurricanes sometimes are; people usually have more lead time, but there was a shift in direction late in the game, and so it took people by surprise," said the Rev. Pat Ashley, who did resilience training with various service personnel after that disaster.



The Maui wildfires, which tore through the town of Lahaina and other parts of the island, killed 100 people, displaced more than 9,800 people and destroyed nearly 4,000 properties, according to the Hawaiian government.

After such catastrophic events, communities ask PDA to come in and perform the half- or full-day training, which typically takes place six to nine months after a disaster.

"Once they're there, we thank them for their time," Ashley said. "We tell them that we know that it's not easy to carve out the time and that we appreciate their being there and that we hope it will be good for them in terms of their own

well-being moving forward in the recovery.”

The programs “are given for free because of the generous donations of people to PDA and through One Great Hour of Sharing” and are an example of reaching outside the four walls of the church to benefit various groups, from the United Way to the American Red Cross to government entities, said David Rauer, an NRT member and trained presenter in emotional and spiritual care. The training is also in keeping with Matthew 25, which stresses the importance of “helping others, connecting with others and spreading the gospel through numerous ways,” he said.

Malloy noted that some of the skills are ones that participants knew before the training but hadn’t put into practice. “We’re all helpers, and helpers tend to put others first, and we forget that we need to help ourselves,” she said. “What we do is we share different strategies to prevent or reduce the effects of the stress.”

Secondary stress can manifest in many ways, from anxiety and depression to sleeplessness and poor eating habits, Rauer said. He has been a resilience training presenter many times, including after Hurricane Ian, a disaster that brought gusty winds, a major storm surge and the loss of life.

After a while, those helping survivors after such disasters may find stress is affecting their bodies in negative ways.

“There’s loads of ways it shows in your body,” Rauer said. For instance, “their sleep habits go by the wayside. Eating habits go haywire as well. People don’t eat, or all they do is eat junk. ... If you haven’t had enough sleep, it’s tough to make a decision,” and “if you’re not eating well, your body’s not responding well,” and people can “get irritable.”

Some people realize that’s happening to them, while others come to know it as a result of the conversations that happen during resilience training. “When people start to speak with each other and listen to what each other has to say,” Malloy said, “they realize, ‘Oh, wow, I’m experiencing that, and I have that in common with you.’”

The training is generally initiated by an organization, such as FEMA or a nonprofit, after the community realizes recovery will be “a long, long haul, and we need some equipping,” Riley said. “We’ll go in as long as we see the need and we’re invited.” Mid councils also often invite PDA in to provide emotional and spiritual care following a disaster, and they are always consulted when an invitation comes from a community organization or partner.

In addition to discussion about the signs of stress and touching on burnout and compassion fatigue, participants get to do some

journaling about the season they’re in and spend time sharing in small groups.

“They also talk about relationships and how those can keep them strong and resilient,” Riley said. “We have to talk about and think about who are my emotional support people? Who are the people that bring me joy and are uplifting? How can I spend more time with those people?”

After resilience training in Maui, Fong said the advice that stuck with her the most was the need to have a person outside of the church to confide in and receive affirmation and encouragement from. “It was a good lesson,” she said.

Workshop leaders say they benefit as much from the sessions as the participants.

Ashley said, “I love doing the resilience events. It’s such a privilege to be with people who go to the trouble to show up and who want the best for the people that they’re working with.”

Malloy said she was surrounded by light and the “Aloha spirit” while in Maui to provide training.

“We really stood in awe of that spirit of Aloha,” Malloy said. “Every person that we encountered



Training participants and National Response Team members pose for a group photo.

really bent over backwards to welcome us. ... I felt like they just embraced us.”

At the end of the session, participants showed their gratitude by forming a circle and inviting all to join in a song for them.

It “brought tears to my eyes,” Malloy said, “because they sang with just such deep feeling, and the Aloha song is basically about you belong to us. We belong to Hawaii. It was that sense of belonging that they gave us. It was a gift.”

In 2023, PDA provided Emotional and Spiritual Care trainings to more than 300 participants

Strategies that are shared by facilitators include “relaxation, meditation, resilience-building tools like mindfulness and sharing our stories — how to pick the right people to listen when they need somebody to listen to them,” said Suzanne Malloy, an NRT member who was a facilitator during the Maui training. There’s also time spent helping participants remember what about their jobs brings them joy, because “sometimes when, day in and day out, you’re listening to really sad stories, one can tend to absorb some of that, and so it’s so helpful to be reminded this is why I do what I do.”

Ashley, a retired Presbyterian pastor who’s been an NRT member for about 15 years, made similar comments, adding, “There’s always an attrition of people doing this kind of work, so part of our goal is to help people continue to do what they have loved doing.”



PDA provided grants to Po'okela Church, a United Church of Christ congregation near Kula led by the Rev. Dr. Kimberly Fong, a Presbyterian Pastor. There are no PC(USA) churches on the island.

Resource and development organization brings hope to marginalized communities in India

by Darla Carter

Populations that have traditionally been disadvantaged in India are being supported and empowered by a longtime partner of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA).

The Society for National Integration through Rural Development (SNIRD) is a resource and development organization that addresses the needs of Dalits, a group of people formerly known as “untouchables,” as well as tribal communities.

“We feel proud to be a partner of PDA because this has given us the opportunity to bring light to the lives of a number of people,” said Godfrey G.P. Jawahar, executive secretary of SNIRD.

PDA has been a partner with SNIRD for several years, supporting a number of projects to help residents rebound from natural and human-caused disasters and ensure brighter futures.

SNIRD’s mission, as stated on its website, is “to build up capacities of the vulnerable communities to protect, enhance and improve their quality of life in a sustainable environment through cooperative action leading to better use of natural resources and (an) increase in their collective bargaining power.”

The organization offers support, information and resources to empower people in what’s sometimes referred to as the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes and to amplify their voices.

“These are the poorest communities in India, more marginalized communities, due to the caste system that they have,” PDA Director the Rev. Edwin González-Castillo said. Their low status “comes with, of course, discrimination, mistreatment, less opportunities to get engaged in many areas, less education, less access to government, health care and other things we believe are provided by the government.”

Over the years, SNIRD and PDA have been involved in a number of joint endeavors,

including tsunami-related projects in the Prakasam, Guntur and Nellore districts of Andhra Pradesh, India; a rehabilitation project in Kerala; Covid interventions; and climate change disaster risk reduction efforts. They’ve also found ways to provide alternative employment to individuals who were not getting wages at times when there was no agricultural activity, or after losses from disasters.

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“It was lifesaving when SNIRD came to our community to provide us with shelter and sewing machines, which I never imagined would happen,” local resident Smitha Krishnan said in a Special Offerings article about the impact of a grant from PDA, which is supported by One Great Hour of Sharing.

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González and PDA Associate for International Program Administration Dayna Oliver recently visited India to witness some of the progress made by SNIRD and those living in communities served by the organization.

With assistance from PDA and the government, SNIRD has been able to help build homes for residents who normally would live in hut-like structures that are prone to weather-related damage.



Community members in Bandaganipalle, Andhra Pradesh where SNIRD developed agriculture projects funded by PDA.

“Many of these communities lose everything they have after a climate event happens, either a flood or a cyclone,” González said. “They’re left without anything because their homes are not able to resist the winds or the damage created by the flooding,” but with SNIRD’s assistance, there are now sturdier structures for some residents who’ve acquired small pieces of land.

Along with being more weather resistant, the homes help to protect residents from unwanted pests and animals, Oliver and Gonzalez said.

The previous homes did not have doors and were not elevated, so with fields close by, there were constant issues with rats and snakes, so residents now “feel more protected and more safe,” and rat traps have been acquired, González said.

While visiting and talking with residents, the PDA staffers could see “how grateful they were,” González said. “They shared how positive” it has been to “live in a more safe, resilient home” and how impactful that has been for themselves, their families and children. “It’s a transformative situation,” he said.

González and Oliver also were able to visit communities that are learning techniques and strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Intervention is needed because the monsoon season is beginning later than usual, so the dry season is longer, so families have to contend with not being able to grow crops for longer periods, and when the monsoons come, there’s more water than the farms can handle, González said. Communities also have struggled with other agricultural issues, such as soil degradation, water scarcity and overuse of pesticides.

Thanks to SNIRD, an expert is made available to offer advice on how to plant in strategic ways, such as intercropping and organic farming.

“We’re talking about a few small acres of land ... where people can grow their own food and cultivate, and in some cases, be able to sell it in the market,” González said. And “it’s not only helping those families. It has ripple effects where they are able to hire people from the community to work in those farms.”



Community members in Dharmavaram, Andhra Pradesh display the results of the agriculture project to PDA's Associate for International Program Administration, Dayna Oliver.

There have been Climate Change Adaptation Groups formed at the village level that meet regularly to glean information.

“Efforts to develop and promote drought-resistant crops are crucial for mitigating the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities”

“These crops can help ensure food security, support sustainable agriculture practices and enhance resilience to future environmental challenges. Additionally, implementing effective water management strategies and promoting climate adaptation measures are essential for building the resilience of communities facing drought and other climate-related hazards,” according to SNIRD

The work of SNIRD aligns with the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s Matthew 25 invitation, which includes goals such as dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty.

Tackling poverty is “what we’re working to do in terms of building sustainable homes, providing livelihood assistance for the families who are involved in the agricultural work, and in one community, we are supporting fishermen who make fishing nets, so that they can fish and generate income for their families,” Oliver said.

She also noted that “a lot of the work that we’ve done in these communities is the result of disasters, whether it be cyclones or whether it be related to climate change,” and “I would dare say that the caste system, in my opinion, is a human-caused disaster in itself.”

Being able to see SNIRD’s efforts firsthand was eye-opening, González said. “They wanted to share the work that they’ve been doing” and how thankful they are for contributions from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Anytime there was an opportunity to sit down and talk with people, “we made sure they understood we are just ambassadors of the love, the care and the commitment of the church,” González said. “All around the United States, donors and people who — even though they will never see them — care for them.”





Short film on homelessness and eviction will highlight stark realities of affected children and families

by Darla Carter

They call it the Scarlet “E.” That’s shorthand for having an eviction on your housing record.

“You often can’t get that taken off your record,” said Katherine Rowell, a professor at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio. “We have laws about how criminal records can be expunged. Most communities don’t have any expungement for eviction. That follows you for life, so when a landlord wants to decide to rent to you or not, he can check and see if you have an eviction record.”

Those Scarlet Es are among the many factors that can lead to families becoming homeless, and children are often the ones taking the brunt of it, said Rowell, a sociologist who shines light on these issues.

“It’s really a traumatic event for children to have to go into shelter,” Rowell said. “They’ve already lost everything. They’ve lost all their housing. They’ve often lost all their toys, all their belongings,” and they usually wind up in a shelter where “no one’s trained to help children with their problems.”

Counter Stories Productions, a ministry of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), has been hard at work finalizing a short film on the effects of homelessness and eviction on that particularly vulnerable population — children and families.

The film, which is intended to be a resource for congregations and communities, is based on interviews with affected kids and adults, as well as a host of experts, in Dayton, where filmmaker David Barnhart of PDA has been collaborating with Rowell and other partners to amplify the voices and stories of children and families confronting homelessness and explore the root causes and systemic issues around poverty, eviction and homelessness that perpetuate this crisis.

The trauma that children endure “affects them into adulthood, which makes it harder for

them to participate in society,” Rowell said. “It lasts a very long time, and we can prevent that by looking at affordable housing and rental assistance for families and increasing that.”

The film, which will be completed by summer, is intended to spur communities and churches into action so that they will advocate for such actions and policies that make it easier for families to thrive and to create a more compassionate society.

Barnhart said, “Similar to our other documentaries, we always say that these are not just ‘films’; they are ‘resources’ for communities, congregations, schools, colleges, etc., to gather around these stories, collectively explore these issues and questions, and take concrete steps together toward building Beloved Community.”



Scan this QR code to view the work of Counter Stories Productions or visit pcusa.org/counterstoriesproductions.

Sally Dyer, a member of PDA’s National Response Team’s Story Ministry team and a production assistant for this film, was in Dayton when interviews for the film took place and anticipates that the completed film will bring home the reality that people affected by homelessness and eviction are “our neighbors.” She added, “You never know what may impact someone you know and love.”

In October 2023, the New York Times reported that the Americans at most risk of eviction are



Many cities across the state of Ohio are seeing double-digit increases in eviction filings.

babies and children and noted that housing instability before the age of 5 can lead to delays in kindergarten readiness and is associated with attention and behavior challenges and delayed cognitive skills throughout school.

Citing a study called “A comprehensive demographic profile of the US evicted population,” the Times noted that “all children, and especially the youngest, account for a disproportionate share of those threatened with eviction.” The article went on to note, “The risk is acute for Black children and their mothers, ages 20 to 35. In a given year, about a quarter of Black children under 5 in rental homes live in a household facing an eviction filing.”

Often, the families have just three days to pack up their belongings and move out and can’t afford a storage unit, said Dyer. “When you drive around, if you see a bunch of furniture and household belongings sitting on a curb, you can almost be assured that was an eviction that just happened,” and even if a new home is found, the

family doesn’t “have anything. They don’t have beds. They don’t have furniture. They don’t have dishes. That’s not cheap.”

THE FILM’S ORIGIN

Rowell brought the idea of making the film to Barnhart after they got to know each other through the Dayton Film Forum, which featured some of his prior documentaries — “Locked in a Box” and “To Breathe Free” — which were screened in venues across the city in 2017, including churches, mosques, colleges, the city library, the International Peace Museum and the Dayton Opera.

After that film forum, which Dyer was instrumental in starting, “I ended up getting a fellowship to do more public work,” Rowell said. “It’s called public sociology, where we try to bring social problems to the media and to the attention of folks. I reached out to David to see if he’d want to be part of my fellowship application,” which included working toward making a short documentary. Barnhart shared

this idea with PC(USA) colleagues who have been working together around the Matthew 25 initiative to eradicate systemic poverty, and they were supportive.

The stories of children and families will be brought to life with the help of animation, said Barnhart, PDA associate for Story Ministry.

“We are currently in post-production and are working with illustrators to develop animation for specific stories and interviews in the documentary,” he said. “We feel that the co-creation of illustrations and animation with our community partners gives us an incredible amount of creative range/freedom to more authentically embody and amplify these voices and counter stories.”

In addition to speaking with children and families, the film team has interviewed shelter staff, social workers and pediatric psychologists and physicians to further explore the root causes of poverty, eviction and homelessness, Barnhart said. Tenants’ rights organizations, housing authority officials and eviction lawyers also helped to provide insight into systemic issues that perpetuate the crisis.

“Often when we hear the words ‘homelessness’ and ‘eviction,’ we think we understand that reality and what those words mean, and there also seems to be a dominant narrative that perpetuates these systemic issues that says: ‘There is nothing we can do to prevent this from happening,’” Barnhart said. “Through amplifying the voices/counter stories of those most deeply impacted and those confronting the rising levels of eviction and homelessness in their communities, our hope is to reframe, humanize and reshape how the wider public understands the words ‘eviction’ and ‘homelessness.’”

Dayton, which is in southwestern Ohio, was chosen as the site of the film because of Counter Stories Productions’ prior relationships with community partners in that area but also to provide a different perspective.

“Often, when the news media or documentaries explore the issues of homelessness and eviction, they tend to focus on either major metropolitan

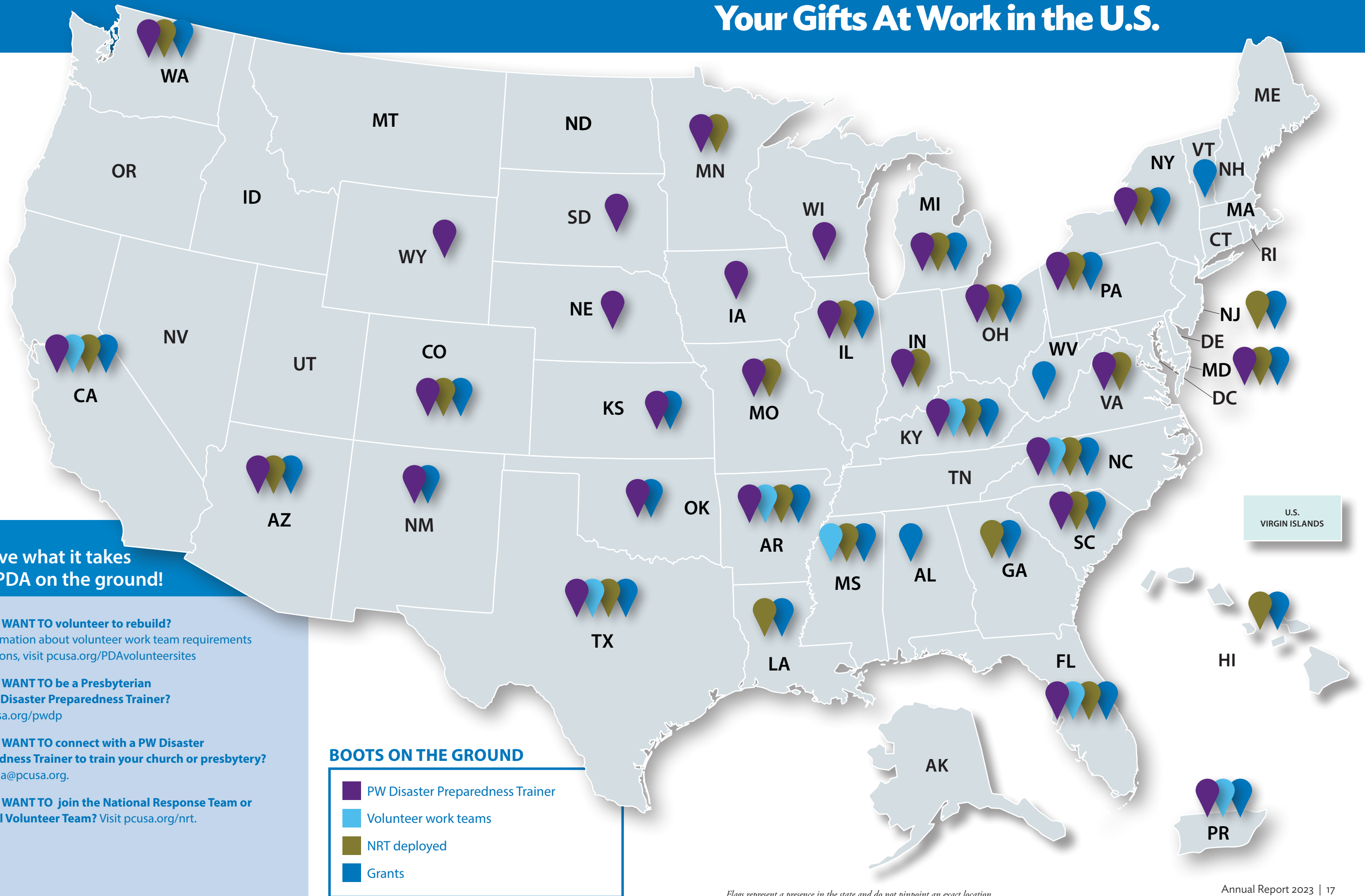
areas or rural communities,” Barnhart said. “Dayton, Ohio, was recently ranked on the list of ‘Best Places to Live’ in the U.S., and we feel that it is important to have a film that amplifies the voices and counter stories from a mid-size city in ‘Middle America’ — and that also focuses on the systems, policies and structures that perpetuate this epidemic. The systemic issues of eviction and homelessness can be seen in communities, towns and cities across the country.”

Dyer, who lives in Spartanburg, South Carolina, has been delving into the topic of homelessness in her area recently and determined that there is a dearth of services for women and children.

Without a shelter, “where are these families?” she wondered aloud, “because you know, they’re there. ... They’re in their car. They’re bunking up with family members. ... There’s a lot of families living in a single hotel room, and a lot of bad stuff can happen there, and so I’m getting involved here in Spartanburg now to try and address that issue.”

Rowell hopes that others will become active in their towns as well, especially faith communities. “I’m hoping that this (film) work would really move them,” she said. “Charity is important. We still need food donations. We still need clothing donations. We still need blankets, but we’re never going to change this without social justice work, and social justice work is hard. Trying to do this politically and changing public policy I have found to be challenging work — but possible.”

Your Gifts At Work in the U.S.



YOU have what it takes to join PDA on the ground!

DO YOU WANT TO volunteer to rebuild?
For information about volunteer work team requirements and options, visit pcusa.org/PDAvolunteersites

DO YOU WANT TO be a Presbyterian Women Disaster Preparedness Trainer?
Visit pcusa.org/pwdp

DO YOU WANT TO connect with a PW Disaster Preparedness Trainer to train your church or presbytery?
Email pda@pcusa.org.

DO YOU WANT TO join the National Response Team or National Volunteer Team? Visit pcusa.org/nrt.

Flags represent a presence in the state and do not pinpoint an exact location

U.S. Facts and Figures

Total dollars granted: **\$1,868,805**



Hurricanes

23 grants, 15 National Response Team (NRT) members deployed*



Floods

11 grants, 8 NRT deployed



Trauma & Human-Caused Disasters

4 grants, 34 NRT deployed



Tornadoes and Severe Storms

30 grants, 11 NRT deployed



Fires

10 grants, 12 NRT deployed



Migration Accompaniment Ministries

17 grants, 2 NRT deployed

* The PDA National Response Team consists of about 70 members who represent PDA and the PC(USA) in the field following a national disaster or migration accompaniment. They provide support to presbyteries and synods as they assess the impact of the disaster on both the church and the community or in support of their ministries with refugees and migrants, and they assist in connecting presbyteries to recovery resources.

Note: Categories of grants often overlap as the root causes intersect. For example, refugee grants might also be grants responding to conflict/war.

International Facts and Figures

Total dollars granted: **\$4,272,996.47**



Conflict/war

32 grants



Fire

3 grants



Cyclone/Hurricane/Typhoon

6 grants



Flooding

12 grants



Drought

2 grants



Severe storms

9 grants



Earthquake

9 grants



Refugee

8 grants



Economic crisis/political unrest

5 grants



Training

3 grants



Famine

2 grants

THIS PAGE HIGHLIGHTS
ONLY A FEW PROJECTS
FROM THIS YEAR.
Visit pcusa.org/pda
for more information

Your Gifts At Work Internationally

Total amount granted: \$4,272,996.47

In 2023, PDA responded to disasters in 46 countries outside the U.S. Dark blue indicates a country that received assistance.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL

Approximately 25,380 people impacted by grants

- Support emergency response including WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), distribution of food and non-food items (blankets, sleeping mats, etc.), shelter and medicine
- Support for community-led crisis responses and hospitals
- Psychosocial support for women and children, including drama sessions put on by a theater for schools in the Bethlehem area in addition to a refugee camp; and confidential psychosocial support services for women and child victims of gender-based violence
- Livelihood (income and opportunity) restoration
- Material support to churches and community centers hosting displaced families

Projects were done in collaboration with World Mission and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

UKRAINE AND NEARBY COUNTRIES

Approximately 543,481 people impacted by grants

Ukraine war

- Food, hygiene, medicine and household supplies for distribution centers
- Renovations and equipment for a mental health facility to accommodate the increase in occupancy, including upgrades to the sewer system and dormitory buildings
- Psychosocial support for women and children
- Legal, employment and child-care assistance for Ukrainian refugees
- Distribution of about 2,000 chickens, feed and hygiene items to 100 refugee families
- Food, medicine, accommodation and transportation for people with intellectual disabilities and capacity building of the local staff
- Economic empowerment for 100 women, including vocational training, technical capacity building, business skills development and awarding small business grants

Projects were done in collaboration with World Mission.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Approximately 2,305 people impacted by grants

Flooding, fire and systemic poverty

- Support 250 adults and 100 children with medical aid with specialists in psychiatry, pulmonology and dermatology
- Food and hygiene kits, mosquito nets and mattresses for a community of mostly Haitian immigrants
- Supporting a training of the ACT Alliance Latin America and Caribbean regional forum on human mobility, climate mobility and socioeconomic and political instability in the region through humanitarian response, development programs and advocacy strategies

MALAWI

Approximately 543,481 people impacted by grants

Cyclone Freddy and flooding

- Capacity building for a Child Protection Specialist (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe)
- Support for Zomba Theological University
- Solar System maintenance
- Restoring internet, computer lab and library equipment, buildings and roads
- Bridge the educational gap of rural and urban communities at the university
- Construction of 327 houses
- Reconstruction of 26 boreholes and 17 wells and water reservoirs
- Water testing services for potability
- Manure-making and other recommended farming technology training for 134 farmers



In an effort to center the voices of our partners and the communities they serve, we asked a few questions and are sharing the answers below. Some responses have been edited to fit; an unabridged version is available at pcusa.org/mosaic23.

What impact has your partnership with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance had in the communities in which you work?

Lowlander Center and First Peoples Conservation Council Tribes of Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe and Grand Caillou-Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe
Elder Chief Shirell: “An absolute blessing.”
Elder Theresa Dardar: “Hurricane Ida hit our community on Aug. 29, 2021, and I don’t remember exactly when Richard [Richard Williams, interim general presbyter] showed up, but I know it was not very long after. He showed up with supplies and generators. His assistance after Hurricane Ida was a great help to our community, as our community was almost totaled with only 12 homes livable. The Presbyterians are still giving assistance by helping in the rebuilding of homes in our community.”

K. Peterson: “We knew the needs were great as this hit the most at-risk communities and tribes with one of the strongest storms in history. We knew that we needed life-supporting supplies and ways of communications, cell satellite service, power and other basic necessities. Knowing PDA and our presbytery, we had confidence to move forward with these critical supplies, powered through an amazing network of people and that PDA, One Great Hour, would be standing with us.”

Wendy Gist, Immigrant Accompaniment Organizer for the Presbytery of San Gabriel
During the second half of 2023, a large number of asylum seekers were transferred from the

U.S.-Mexico border to and then released from a detention facility in the desert northeast of Los Angeles, sometimes with little notice. PDA has made it possible for us to assist our local partners in caring for these asylum seekers as they leave detention by funding immediate post-release services such as transportation to an airport and money to buy food during their journey.

Thanks in part to PDA, our presbytery has a staff member dedicated part-time to immigrant and refugee ministry. This has made it possible for us to connect and collaborate with others doing this work, including other Presbyterians within our synod and organizations serving the immigrant and refugee population in a variety of ways. It has also given us the bandwidth to organize events and educational experiences (such as border trips) for the whole synod, which have a ripple effect as realities and stories of immigrants and refugees are shared.

Bette Gebrian, Executive Director of Grand’Anse Health and Development Association (GAHDA)

We here at GAHDA in Jérémie, Haiti, appreciate the partnership that developed in response to a magnitude 7.2 earthquake on Aug. 14, 2021, that destroyed houses and roads, caused landslides, injuring many, and cutting off access to clinics in rural areas. The hospital was overwhelmed. Some critically injured were evacuated by helicopter to Port-au-Prince for trauma care.

Another earthquake magnitude 5.0 struck on June 6, 2023, shortly after a period of torrential rains. PDA responded again after this quake, and GAHDA received \$10,000 to support house repair and mobile medical clinics. A total of 1,625 people received medical consultation, on-site treatment when possible, and medication free of charge in these remote sites — some in the open, some in a school and others in a tent.

James Martin, Tucson Borderlands YAV

We work primarily in borderland communities (Douglas, Arizona/Tucson, Arizona/Agua Prieta, Sonora) where there are two challenges for our communities to meet the needs of migrants. One is that Douglas and Agua Prieta, like all border communities, are the epicenter of

migration coming to the United States and the impacts of U.S. border policies. Fortunately, we live in communities where there are many organizations and people who are committed to welcoming and accompanying migrants who arrive at the border. But it can be a challenge to find the workers and fund their salaries to operate migrant ministries in our communities. Thus, our partners like Frontera de Cristo and CAME depend on young adult volunteers (YAVs) to help provide migrant support in Douglas and Agua Prieta. The funds provided by PDA allows nonprofits like Iskashitaa Refugee Project, CAME and Frontera de Cristo to receive a young adult to work for them and support their work in migration.

Marvin Parvez, Community World Service Asia

Emergencies are all about quick and rapid response, and the support from PDA is always quick and helps us to get critical lifesaving assistance to the communities in distress.

Robb Victor, Ruling Elder at First Presbyterian Church of Douglas, Arizona

Our church was burned in an arson fire in May 2023. The fire has been investigated as a hate crime with a nexus to helping migrants who would have been released by the U.S. Border Patrol here in Douglas. Before the disaster, the Rev. James Martin communicated with the Rev. Dr. Brad Munroe about our sessions desire to provide temporary housing for people in need within our community. PDA provided \$5,000 for the upgrading of an old bathroom into a shower/bathroom, which will be ADA-equipped. We have this money in an account with plans to rebuild the 1950s-era bathroom located in our Sunday school annex.

Godfrey G.P. Jawahar, Executive Secretary of the Society for National Integration through Rural Development (SNIRD)

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance’s collaboration with SNIRD on Disaster Risk Reduction and stabilizing climate change process efforts has been enhancing disaster response capabilities, providing sustainable agricultural practices through adapting natural farming methods in intended project areas for food security and creating alternative livelihoods for resilience

building and long-term impact on climate change process. The partnership facilitates long-term sustainability helping communities to face cyclones and extreme weather conditions effecting depleting ecosystems as well as community livelihoods.

By working together, SNIRD strengthens local capacities on disaster preparedness, response and recovery, empowering communities to better withstand future disasters. Joint initiatives offer support programs to help individuals and communities cope with habituating adapting climate change through natural farming practices. The partnership could amplify promotion efforts to promote natural resource management that address underlying vulnerabilities and reduce the risk of future disasters.

What are some challenges you are facing in your work and how can the church accompany you?

Lowlander Center and First Peoples Conservation Council Tribes of Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe and Grand Caillou-Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe

Due to the vast geographic damage of the storm, most of the available contractors, inspectors and licensed/bonded folks were in easy-to-reach, larger population areas, leaving the remote and rural areas without the necessary means to file paperwork or to have adequate hospitality for volunteers. As a result of the support from PDA and PSL, we have been able to have our own case management workers and some support for the building of homes. One of our Presbyterian partners, Tim Reinhold, has been instrumental in getting the homes to “above fortified standards,” so as to meet the increased pressure climate change is bringing to the area. Through weekly calls and coordination, work is moving forward, slowly but steadily. Work teams are beginning to sign up for short and long segments of time.

Wendy Gist

In Southern California, we are facing a large influx of immigrants and refugees. Some are just passing through as they leave the border or a detention facility, but others are settling in

the area. Two of the biggest challenges for this population are housing and finding affordable legal representation. An interfaith coalition we are part of collaborates to share information and resources with migrants, but we often can't keep up with the demand. We have some churches that consider housing an asylum-seeking family, but don't move forward with it because costs to make the renovations or do the maintenance needed are too high for them or their insurance will go up. If the PC(USA) through PDA and/or other areas could assist churches with grants to cover some of the costs involved in making this dream of housing immigrants a reality, that could make a big impact. Regarding affordable legal services for asylum seekers, besides the obvious financial support, might the church find a way to involve themselves with law students/young lawyers and encourage them to keep a portion of their workload open for pro-bono work with marginalized communities?

Bette Gebrian

Current challenges we are experiencing include: lack of an elected and functional government since July 2021 when President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated; widespread food insecurity due to gang control of roads, theft of trucks and cargo, inability to send and receive food; instability of available gasoline and diesel and unreasonable prices; increased need for mental health counseling for people escaping gang-controlled areas, including support for victims of violence; transportation has halted due to roadblocks throughout the country, not just on major trucking routes.

James Martin

Some of the challenges that we find in our work is encouraging young adults in local border communities (Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Sonora) to get involved with migrant ministries in their churches and nonprofit organizations. There are many reasons for the lack of interest for young adults in working in migration and supporting these organizations in border communities that range from the lack of job opportunities, indifference and other commitments. The continued support of PDA helps us work with organizations in the borderlands that need extra staff support, but do not have the funds to pay for more

staff. Thus, with the support of PDA, they can request a YAV without having to pay \$10,000 to the Borderlands YAV program to support their work. In addition, PDA financial support helps more young adults become involved with migrant work in the borderlands as they can receive a salary and benefits for the work with migrants. The church can also accompany us in involving more young adults in working with migrants by promoting the work of the PC(USA) as a welcoming and sanctuary church for migrants so more young adults find about the work of YAVs and Presbyterian Border Ministries in the borderlands.

Marvin Parvez

Most of our challenges are about sometimes the hostile and dangerous environment of our region, and prayers from your constituents are always helpful and needed.

Robb Victor

The session continues to plan toward a rebuild of the sanctuary and upgrading the fellowship hall. The Sunday school annex will be temporarily used as a worship area and pastoral offices, as well as a space for contractors and architects to meet. We invite PDA to join us when construction is underway in mid to late 2024. We also invite PDA to share their experience in rehabilitating old church facilities into new ones, repurposed for ministry in our complex societies.

Godfrey G.P. Jawahar

Target communities have a lack of resources needed to implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures effectively. Communities do not fully understand the impacts of climate change or know how to adapt to them. Villages are often particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and cyclones, which can be exacerbated by climate change. Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns can significantly affect agriculture, which is often the primary livelihood in rural areas. Changes in climate can disrupt ecosystems, leading to loss of biodiversity. The implementation of drought and climate change projects in a project area faces several challenges, including limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent policies,

bureaucratic hurdles and lack of coordination among various government agencies.

What do you wish our constituents knew more about the communities with whom you are working?

Lowlander Center and First Peoples Conservation Council Tribes of Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe and Grand Caillou-Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe

The communities really reflect the beauty of the early church with the sharing of resources, love and compassion. The stewardship of all God's Creation is reflected in the work of the local communities, as they are a light to God's kingdom on earth.

Wendy Gist

It would be great if people in the U.S. understood and accepted that if conditions in the home countries of migrants were such that they did not feel threatened, they would not leave. The migrants we have had the opportunity to talk to make it clear they only left because they felt there was no other option. Staying in their home country meant risking tragedy for themselves and/or their loved ones.

Another area that may not be understood in the U.S. is how long it takes asylum seekers to get work permits. The U.S. system as it is makes it very hard for those seeking asylum to support themselves for many months. And once they are issued a work permit the jobs the asylum seekers get are not usually jobs that U.S. citizens are vying for. Immigrants and refugees are not taking away large numbers of jobs from U.S. citizens.

Bette Gebrian

We are working with vulnerable people. Many cannot read. Women are often considered the “post in the middle” or *poto mitan* that keep the family going. Haitians are working hard for a sense of normalcy in a chaotic time of natural and human-caused disasters. Church is an important part of their lives. People in this region appreciate all our actions to support them: helping with housing, sharing food and celebrating their lives. Rural farmers often work in groups called *konbit* or *sori* for their mutual

advantage. Women vendors, Madan Sara, are an important part of daily life — they buy from farmers, add items in demand such as brooms made from the fronds of a tree, and other items for the home, and travel a regional circuit from countryside to Port-au-Prince and back in open trucks. They have been robbed of their goods and money and now, they cannot venture out of town due to instability, roadblocks and potential kidnapping. Six religious Sisters were kidnapped in Port-au-Prince this week. When we say that the families here suffer from food insecurity, it is a matter of starvation. One grandmother told us, when delivering a \$50 family packet of locally sourced food, that all they had to eat was sweet potato and salt.

James Martin

I think it is important that constituents know that the communities that are most influenced by U.S. border policies are the border communities themselves. The majority of U.S. border policies have been focused on stopping or preventing migration, thus many young adults in border communities decide to work in border enforcement as there are good job opportunities and pay for this work, while much of the humanitarian work has little funding or a lack of job opportunities for young adults to work and develop a career in. Thus, it is important to communicate how U.S. border policies are influencing the types of jobs and perspectives on migration in border communities. But when there are more funds for young adults to work in migrant support, we have found that there is a good response in young adults who want to work to support migrants.

Marvin Parvez

We think one of the most helpful things your team and supporters can do is to visit our joint programs and meet the communities they are assisting in the most difficult times and in one of the worst humanitarian emergencies.

Robb Victor

As we assist fellow churches and nongovernment agencies in the temporary sheltering and transportation of migrants, we are considering the possibility of a church van to assist the community in transporting migrants to Tucson shelters or the airport. The van can also be used

to facilitate visits from delegations who are working with Frontera De Cristo, here on the border with Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico. Additionally, our church food bank is busy and attracting new families. This is separate from migrant sheltering. These are local Douglas and Agua Prieta individuals and families who do not have the funds for a weekly/monthly food budget.

Godfrey G.P. Jawahar

The vulnerabilities and specific needs of communities impacted by disasters and climate change. The importance of community-led approaches in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate adaptation efforts. The interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental factors shaping resilience. The significance of long-term investment in sustainable solutions over short-term fixes. The value of inclusivity, diversity and local knowledge in building resilient communities.

What is a systemic problem (e.g., human rights abuses, climate change, environmental racism, militarism, other) that is impacting your work and what are the effects?

Lowlander Center and First Peoples Conservation Council Tribes of Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe and Grand Caillou-Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe

The tribes are not federally recognized, thus do not have the resources that come with recognition. They have no staff and very little budget other than what is donated, and people work as volunteers, yet the stress of environmental racism through the extraction of the oil and gas companies, rural gentrification and the building up of ports has been the biggest contributor to the current conditions of the communities being at risk. Federal programs would use the terminology of vulnerable, underserved communities; no, we are powerful, but violated, and are the extracted communities for the benefit of others.

Wendy Gist

All of the examples of systemic problems listed in the question are impacting our work because

all of these factors are causing people to leave their homeland. In the Los Angeles area, we have refugees and immigrants from all over the world arriving to escape situations that are often life-threatening. The effects of this are as diverse as the people coming and the situations they are leaving.

Bette Gebrian

Climate change most certainly affects us, especially the coastal areas. Hurricanes will continue in the region, and the impact of tropical storms, droughts and population shifts because of these realities will test our resilience. Haiti is the “land of mountains” in Haiti’s original language.

Disaster capitalism: Haiti has been a victim of disasters caused by others, without recourse, most of the time. Cholera swept through Haiti after Tropical Storm Tomas carried it from the north, where U.N. troops were stationed and spread the disease that they had brought with them. The Grand’Anse suffered deaths in large numbers, despite valiant efforts. There is still cholera in the Grand’Anse, primarily in rural villages.

The statement that environmental equity is part of this idea, “Ideally, no one should need extreme wealth or political connections to protect the well-being of their families and communities,” is the opposite of what most Haitians experience.

James Martin

It is militarism or border militarization that most impacts our work in border communities. The great majority of government funding in border communities goes only to militarism and not to humanitarian aid, education, health care or other needs of border communities. This investment in militarism on the border then creates a culture of fear of Mexico, migrants, etc., and then reinforces the idea that more border militarism is needed. It also creates a culture of where young people (especially young men) from a young age think the best job opportunity for them is to work in border militarism. And many young men then invest their lives in working in militarism that ultimately harms migrant communities

and divides border communities. Thus, we are seeing both politically and culturally the influence of border militarism in border communities and the negative consequences of more border militarism for migrants and work with young adults.

Marvin Parvez

Right-wing and nationalist governments/leaders are taking over many parts of the world and this is resulting in more conflict, death, destruction and hate all over the world. Tolerance of people who look and sound different is rapidly declining . . . we have walls coming up in every corner of our planet.

My last input will be about the PDA team. The PDA team treats partners with dignity and respect (as true partners, not donors).

Robb Victor

We understand that the world and specifically our region of the Mexico/U.S. border (international boundary) is a complex place with various situations and circumstances that arise. We do not want to demonize or criminalize any group, such as the U.S. Border Patrol, local smuggling infrastructure, foreign nationals in travel, politicians or any other individual or group, including organized religion. We simply want to be present, in love, forgiveness, accountability and grace. A PDA grant will obviously help us do this on our own property in ways this community may not have seen yet.

Godfrey G.P. Jawahar

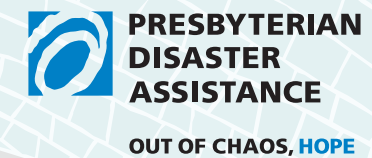
One systemic problem impacting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate change processes in our project area is environmental degradation exacerbated by unsustainable development practices. This includes deforestation, soil erosion, pollution and depletion of natural resources. Effects include increased vulnerability to natural disasters such as floods, droughts and cyclones, as well as exacerbation of climate change impacts like heat waves and erratic rainfall patterns. Additionally, marginalized communities often bear the brunt of these effects due to unequal access to resources and decision-making power, exacerbating existing social disparities.



2023 in Review

In 2023, because of your generous support, PDA was able to **grant more than \$6.1 million** across the globe; **impact more than 981,000 individuals internationally**; **support 1,837 work team volunteers** totaling more than **\$4 million in volunteer time** to help rebuild communities affected by disaster; **deploy 131 National Response Team members** to 46 presbyteries; offer **more than \$256,000 in Migration Accompaniment Ministry grants** in the U.S.; present Emotional & Spiritual Care programs to more than **300 participants**; **train 67 Presbyterian Women Disaster Preparedness Trainers** across the U.S.; reach the **15 Million Streaming Milestone** for Flint: The Poisoning of an American City; and with Church World Service, aid in the **collection and distribution of 116,273 Gift of the Heart Kits and blankets.**

THANK YOU!





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Presbyterian Mission

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