



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ministries Joining Together to Respond to Children in Need

May 2014 – Disciples Home Missions (DHM), Week of Compassion, and the National Benevolent Association (NBA) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are collaborating with the Church of the Brethren Children's Disaster Services (CDS) to create a new position and initiative that will meet the needs of children affected by disaster in the U.S.

A new memorandum of understanding outlines this partnership providing the framework for a three-year focus on expanding Children's Disaster Services in the Gulf Coast region. Funding provided by Disciples Home Missions, the National Benevolent Association, and Week of Compassion will develop a new role of a Gulf Coast coordinator. This new position will support the development and training of a larger network of volunteers in Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana. By engaging the strength and networks of Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations and their significant children's ministries we envision great potential to better meet the needs of children in this disaster prone area.

This new partnership includes the training of interested church members and others in the area as caregiving volunteers and for leadership roles supporting volunteer coordination and volunteer training. A primary goal of this initiative is to train 250 potential volunteers in the next three years. After completing a certification process – including a criminal record check – these volunteers will provide direct care to children in shelters and service centers after a disaster. The volunteers will be organized into rapid response teams to be the first caregivers responding after a disaster in their area. These volunteers will also be called to serve larger disasters outside of the region.

The regional Gulf Coast coordinator role is key for the success of this initiative. This part-time paid position will network with potential partners, engage congregations, and help facilitate new volunteer workshops. It is vital that they live in a Gulf Coast state. For more information please contact Kathy Fry-Miller at 410-635-8734 or kfry-miller@brethren.org.

“The Church of the Brethren is excited for this expanding partnership between the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Children's Disaster Services. For several years our two churches have been in conversations on how to work together as peacemakers. I can think of no better way than for our volunteers to join their gifts and talents in providing a caring service ministry for children affected by disaster. It is a ministry that seeks to reconcile the lives of some of the most vulnerable victims after disaster, the children,” shared Stanley Noffsinger, Church of the Brethren General Secretary.



“For years Disciples members have been volunteering with CDS, providing care to the smallest of disaster survivors. Together we can expand this ministry in critical disaster prone areas to better meet the needs of children and families impacted by disasters,” comments Roy Winter, Associate Executive Director of the Church of the Brethren. Winters adds, “At this critical time in the history of CDS, this partnership helps grow the program beyond the capacity of one denomination. Together we are growing the ministry in critical disaster prone areas to better meet the needs of children and families impacted by disasters.”

Kathleen Fry-Miller, Associate Director of Children’s Disaster Services, shares that, “Children have unique needs following disaster. They feel the chaos and stress of the disaster and need opportunities to express their feelings and their experience through play. Our dedicated leaders and volunteers are well-trained to provide the nurturing adult presence and open-ended play experiences that support the healing process for children. This partnership will allow us to expand our program in areas of high need.”

Leaders throughout the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) also share in the excitement about the increased connections and partnership with CDS ministries.

Rev. Brandon Gilvin, Associate Director of Week of Compassion says, “As part of our ministry as the Disaster, Development, and Refugee Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion looks for partners in our denominational and ecumenical families to respond to critical needs in the wake of disasters. The partnership between Disciples Volunteering, DHM’s Children and Family Ministries, the National Benevolent Association (NBA), and Children’s Disaster Services will provide a new avenue for volunteers to show the love of Christ to children impacted by tornados, floods, and other devastating events.”

“Disciples Volunteering is thrilled to share in this endeavor, partnering with ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Church of the Brethren in response to the needs of children, who are among the most vulnerable following disaster. Together, we look forward to expanding and enhancing the critical work of Children’s Disaster Services while equipping Disciples to offer their gifts in service to their neighbors,” reflects Rev. Josh Baird, Director of Disciples Volunteering at Disciples Home Missions.

Disciples Home Missions, Rev. Dr. Olivia Bryan Updegrave also reflected on her excitement about the emerging partnership. “The love for children and the need to care for our children at all times and in all situations flows from us as compassionate, faithful people. The Family and Children’s ministry team stands in an ecumenical relationship of both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ. This relationship opens doors for more people and congregations to be prepared to respond when disaster strikes, and God’s love is not found in a name or title, but in a response to heal the soul.”



The collective endeavor of Disciples' ministries and the Church of the Brethren supports the work of creating communities of compassion and care, a primary commitment of the ministries of the National Benevolent Association. Mark D. Anderson, NBA President and CEO, says, "this new collaborative partnership creates some significant connections among Disciples congregations and also Disciples-related health and social service agencies especially those serving families and children. This new partnership provides more opportunities for faithful Disciples to be trained and equipped to respond in times of crisis as well as to resource agencies who provide care to children each day. We are eager to nurture these increased opportunities for compassionate care."

General Minister and President for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, expresses her added support of Disciples ministries and Children Disaster Services. "As Disciples we are a movement for wholeness, God's wholeness. We respond in times of human need and disaster because we recognize our connections to one another. This partnership grows out of our call to be a faithful witness."

More information will be released shortly about a new position related to Disciples ministries and Children's Disaster Services. If you or your congregation would like to know more about Children's Disaster Services or to be trained in rapid response volunteer leadership, contact Kathy Fry-Miller at kfry-miller@brethren.org or (410) 635-8734.

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About Church of the Brethren Children's Disaster Services

Since 1980 Children's Disaster Services has been meeting the needs of children by setting up child care centers in shelters and disaster assistance centers across the nation. Specially trained volunteers arrive with a "Kit of Comfort" carefully selected toys that promote imaginative play and support the healing process. To learn more, visit www.childrensdisasterservices.org.

About Disciples Home Missions

Disciples Home Missions is committed to equipping disciples for Christ and connecting people to the life changing love of God. Disciples Home Missions is the enabling and coordinating division of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the U.S. and Canada in the areas of congregational program and mission in North America. To learn more, visit www.discipleshomemissions.org.

About the National Benevolent Association

Serving as the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the NBA partners with local congregations, regional and general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers. The NBA incubates new and emerging Disciples-related health and social service ministries, initiates ministry programs designed to establish and grow partnerships around health and social service ministries, and connects direct care providers, emerging social service ministries, local congregations and mission partners so that all may learn, collaborate and grow stronger together. To learn more, visit www.ncares.org.

About Week of Compassion

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. We seek to equip and empower disciples to alleviate the suffering of others through disaster response, humanitarian aid, sustainable development and the promotion of mission opportunities. To learn more, visit www.weekofcompassion.org.