



PRESS RELEASE

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“Bridging Together” Partnership Launched

SALISBURY - Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) and Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) have announced “Bridging Together,” a partnership to build bridges in hurricane-ravaged western North Carolina so that people can come home and thrive in their community.

LDR’s presence here in North Carolina will be managed through LDR Carolinas. After Hurricane Helene, MDS and LDR Carolinas realized that there would be a tremendous need for replacing private bridges in western North Carolina. Many families and neighborhoods need bridges that cross small creeks between the state-maintained road and their homes. It is estimated that over 5,000 bridges will need to be rebuilt.

While the details of the working agreement are still emerging, the bridges will be built using the existing MDS design already used to build more than 130 bridges in West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina. More information about this Resilient Bridge Design is available on the [Bridging Together webpage](#).

Wooden-decked steel beams are placed over concrete abutments on either side of the creek, with steel pilings driven to bedrock, carefully spanning across streams to prevent catching debris or disturbing ecology. The structures are more easily maintained, and more resilient than the bridges they replace.

These bridges are designed to be built by volunteers within about a week’s time, and both MDS and LDR Carolinas will be raising money and recruiting volunteers through the partnership.

“Volunteers from MDS and LDR Carolinas will be building bridges that will ultimately bring hundreds of people home,” said MDS Executive Director Kevin King. LDR Director Maryn Olson emphasizes that the goal of recovery is to get people back in their homes safely.

MDS and LDR Carolinas aren’t the only partners. American Red Cross and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), are at the table along with other potential partners from NC VOAD (North Carolina Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) to help with funding, permits, and more.

From Iron Station to the Mountains

This new project deepens the spirit of service and caring that already exists between MDS and LDR across the nation. LDR, LDR Carolinas, and MDS, along with other faith-based groups, partnered together to build their first bridge in North Carolina in June 2024—a bridge that withstood the high waters Hurricane Helene brought to the community of Iron Station in Lincoln County, N.C.

For the Iron Station community, the new bridge means being able to return to the day-to-day activities of life without worrying every time it rains. “Thank you is just not enough,” said Brandy Nichols, a resident of the Iron Station community. She added: “I can go home now. If it rains, it’s okay—I can go home!”

How Can You Connect?

This project will be a partnership for all of us. We will need volunteers and funding to build each of these bridges. The anticipated cost of each bridge is \$50,000. Some funding may be available from FEMA Individual Assistance or other sources, but the need for your support is great!

As part of this project, we will be working with FEMA and other VOAD partners to identify families and communities who need safe access to their homes.

Please visit our website www.ldrcarolinas.org/bridging-together/ for more information on how to donate, volunteer, or let us know that YOU need a bridge.