

Spring 2020

NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

Disaster Fund Semiannual Report

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Building Among the Rubbish

“And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.”
(Nehemiah 4:10).

The Lord uses different instruments in different places for the purpose of the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ. He Himself gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. Not all carry out the same task, but the end-purpose is the same. Labor of love such as providing aid to disaster-stricken areas where, literally, there may be rubbish ought to be done with the same purpose in mind. It is good to remember that our Disaster Fund is mandated by and managed on behalf of our General Synod. Hence it is an official church function. Funds are distributed in the Name of the King of the Church who by means of instruments shows a concern for the world, (John 3:16) but especially unto the household of faith. This makes it a solemn matter. In the Old Testament we read that Zechariah was commissioned by the Lord to encourage the people in their unfinished responsibility of rebuilding the temple. This temple had to be built, for one day Messiah's glory would inhabit it. Nehemiah, on the other hand, returned to Jerusalem to encourage his countrymen in the rebuilding of the shattered wall. The task is great and diverse, the harvest is white, and the laborers are few. And...there are often many discouragements, as is evident from the text verse.

The purpose is the same, but the tasks are diverse. The Lord used both Nehemiah and Zechariah. Their purpose was the same: that Zion may prosper, that God's Kingdom may come and that Satan's dominion be broken down. Let us examine ourselves whether our financial contribution is accompanied with the spirit of prayer for the souls of the recipients and the coming of God's Kingdom. In that sense a dollar given ought to be the same as a sermon preached.

As the purpose is the same, so the trials are the same. Satan will come against the good work of God. He will not rest until he achieves his goal. Different arrows he has at his disposal. For some he appears as a roaring lion, seeking to devour by force. For others he uses the cares of the world to distract them from duty. Still others he seeks to plague with discouragement. This is what we read in Nehemiah 4. Satan uses in Sanballat and Tobiah the very lethal weapon of mockery and ridicule. Discouragement is the aim and end result. Israel begins to look down instead of up. They behold the rubbish and the mountainous task that is ahead of them. Their strength “decays” or fails. Much rubbish is what Nehemiah encounters. *“There was no place for the beast that was under me to pass”* (2:14).

Now what is true for the work in God's Kingdom is also so applicable in the life of God's children. There are times that the Church sees more rubbish than

a finished wall—rubbish, when they look to circumstances which surround them; rubbish, when they look at their backslidings and sins. Rubbish is what remains when God’s children forsake the fountain of living waters and hew themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water—the unfruitful works of darkness. Yes, dear reader, what is of man at best may be called: rubbish. Have you learned this by grace? Rubbish is the result of sin. So it was with Jerusalem’s walls. The city was destroyed because of Israel’s sins. *That* Israel had to see and feel, when they then stood upon the ruins of their own doings. Have you been there, dear reader? Rubbish needs to be removed, and this is a discouraging work because there is so much of it! Still it is a necessary work in order for a new wall to be built.

It is our prayer that the Lord may build Zion’s walls, but it is building among the rubbish. The 19th-century missionary Robert Bruce once wrote, “*I am not*



harvesting; I can hardly say that I am sowing; nor am I plowing. I am removing stones from the field.” Thankfully, the foundation for the wall has already been laid. Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There the Lord will bring His Church at His time. Thrown off of all self-made hopes and expectations and lost and miserable in self, they will come, and He Himself will place them on the Rock that is higher than they.

For those who sigh under the rubbish in their work and life, take courage. Nehemiah was sent to *encourage* those upon the rubbish. He spoke to them of the hand of his God which was good upon him. Then they said, let us rise up

and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. Because of God’s eternal good pleasure, He remembers His own cause, and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem.

— Rev. H. Hofman
Kalamazoo, MI

Financial Report for July–December 2019

Through generous contributions from the congregations, schools, and individuals, income for the last six months of 2019 was \$114,953. May the Lord be acknowledged for providing the means and inclining the hearts to help in the relief efforts of the Disaster Fund Committee. Disbursements amounted to \$163,000 as shown in the schedule below. Printing and publication services, bank and wire transfer fees, and other expenses came to \$2,654 for the second half of the year.

Schedule of Disbursements

Come Over and Help	\$25,000
• Humanitarian Relief — Ukraine	
Confidential	\$40,000
• Humanitarian Relief	
Help Venezuela	\$25,000
• Economic collapse/food and medical shortages — Venezuela	
International Aid	\$15,000
• Hurricane damage — Bahamas	
Samaritan's Purse	\$15,000
• Hurricane damage — Bahamas	
Timotheos	\$28,000
• Food shortages — Malawi	
World Relief	\$15,000
• Hurricane damage — Bahamas	

— Stu Ekema, *Treasurer*

Come Over and Help — Ukraine Humanitarian Relief

The donation was made in December 2019. The report will be included in the next issue, the Lord willing.





Help Venezuela — Venezuela Economic Crisis

The following is an edited report we received from Help Venezuela regarding the assistance they provided to the victims of the economic disaster in Venezuela.

“The work in recent months has been very difficult, but at the same time with the Lord’s help we have been able to help many people, especially children. With grateful hearts we give all possible thanks to God, who has allowed you to help us in this work.

“The situation in Venezuela is critical; the shortage of water and gasoline and the power failures have become serious problems for the country. Adding to this suffering, hospitals without back-up generators cannot meet the needs of patients in intensive care and premature babies lacking oxygen, resulting in the loss of many lives. The situation with food is no different. Although you currently find food in supermarkets, the prices are extremely high. For example, 1 kg of chicken can exceed a worker’s minimum monthly salary. The malnutrition rate increases every day, and the most affected are children and the elderly.

“More than 60% of the population goes to bed hungry. That is why in recent months we have focused our greatest efforts on soup kitchens.

“Your donations have helped us open a new soup kitchen that operates from Monday to Friday and offers lunch for 40 school-age children. The stories we find there are moving; most of these children have only that plate of food for the day. Some of them save a part of it to eat at night because they usually cannot fall asleep since they are so hungry. In addition, we work in another soup kitchen 2 days a week, feeding about 150 children. Every Saturday we work in several different communities, providing food to more than 100 children. Weekly we distribute between 700 and 800 plates of food.

“In the period of July through December 2019, we sent from the United States and Columbia around 30 boxes of clothing, footwear, and some food supplies. Most of the food for the soup kitchens is acquired in Venezuela. Although the prices are very high for a common Venezuelan, we buy most of



Rice ready to be distributed at a soup kitchen

the food in Venezuela because it is more feasible than getting it from other countries. We have donated water to some families. Our volunteers have helped children and adults they find rummaging in the garbage looking for food.

“The gratitude of our friends in Venezuela cannot be adequately expressed. Without your help, and above all God’s blessing, thousands of people would be starving to death. Once again, thank you, and may God’s blessing be with you.”



Children enjoying a much needed meal

Special Confidential Project — Basic Living Needs

As you were informed in a previous semiannual report, we are supporting the Board of Special Needs of the NRC (GG) churches in the Netherlands, on a highly confidential project of assisting people, who are suffering in an undisclosed area of the world. The people in this region continue to experience severe food shortages. They are also suffering due to the lack of medical treatments and medications. In addition, they are feeling the effects of persecution and have been forced to worship in the underground.

Through reliable contacts our gifts have provided basic food goods, such as rice, corn, vegetables, and cooking oil. People also have been supplied with aspirin, multi-vitamins, and other medicines, as well as clothes and other items.

We are not in the position of giving you anymore details, and we cannot share any pictures. In reading about the conditions that exist in not only this area, but also many regions of the world, we have many reasons to be humbled before the many blessings the Lord has given us. May the Lord grant us love and compassion for those suffering under the bondage of oppression and natural disasters. We pray that we will remember what we read in Proverbs 3:27, “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it,” and in Proverbs 19:17, “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.”

Bahamas Hurricane Dorian Damage

In September 2019, Hurricane Dorian hit the Bahamas. Dorian is regarded as the worst and most costly natural disaster in the Bahamas. Rather than passing over quickly, Hurricane Dorian remained almost stationary for the next 2 days—causing unprecedented damage on Grand Bahama and Great Abaco islands. The chain of islands was battered by unrelenting rain, high winds which exceeded 200 MPH at times, and an intense storm



surge from the category 5 hurricane. The resulting damage was catastrophic; most structures collapsed or were swept out to sea leaving at least 70,000 people



Hurricane Dorian damage

homeless. Tens of thousands of people lacked water, food, and medical care because so much of the islands' infrastructure was severely damaged or destroyed. The staggering losses and the extensive infrastructure damage were very similar to the scene witnessed in our own country when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005.

In response to this disaster, the Disaster Fund Committee worked with three different relief agencies: International Aid, Samaritan's Purse, and World Relief. The following are excerpts from the thank you-notes we received from these organizations.

International Aid — Bahamas Hurricane Damage

“With your financial assistance and support received from others, we were able to work with our network of ministry partners and churches in that area to bring relief and recovery to those suffering from this major disaster. We recently visited the Bahamas to assist in distributing relief supplies and assess ongoing needs. Because of the generous grant and support from the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, families now have blankets to keep warm at night, access to personal care supplies helping to prevent the spread of illness and infection, and cleaning products to aid in restoring their homes.

“International Aid, and the people we serve, express our gratitude for your commitment to helping people during times of upheaval and disruption from natural disasters.”

Samaritan's Purse — Bahamas Hurricane Damage

In response to this disaster, the NRC of North America Disaster Relief Committee responded with a generous \$15,000 grant to Samaritan's Purse Canada to aid hurricane victims. The grant has contributed significantly to a global response by Samaritan's Purse that has helped the Bahamian people in important ways—including emergency water and sanitation facilities, shelter tarps, hygiene kits, kitchen kits, and vital medical care.

“We at Samaritan's Purse Canada are deeply thankful for the NRC of North America's support.”



Aid being distributed to hurricane victims

World Relief — Bahamas Hurricane Damage

World Relief joined the response effort with other key integral Alliance members to partner on the ground with local organizations and churches to tackle the challenges as a united force. Thanks to you and your call to respond, our cooperative approach allowed ground teams to work quickly.

With a team of engineers, relief specialist and volunteers, World Relief and its partners set up desalination systems to convert salt water into safe, clean drinking water. Our water systems have the capacity to provide 12,000 people with 5 gallons of safe drinking water per day. In addition, teams have supported affected school communities, serving roughly 7,600 students and staff at 14 different schools with repairs to infrastructure and safe water.



Filling Water Jugs

“We thank you for your response to serving hurting communities, and we continue to ask for prayers for those suffering from great losses and who are in the process of rebuilding their shattered lives.”

Timotheos Foundation — Malawi Food Shortage

The following is an edited report which we received from the Timotheos Foundation regarding the gift we provided to assist those suffering from flooding in Malawi.

“As discussed with you, your gift was focused on providing assistance to the elderly. The elderly in Malawi are underprivileged. They suffer but do not complain. They have hunger but they sacrifice so their grandchildren can eat. To relieve this suffering, we have provided them a 10 kg bag of corn each month. Each month we give aid to 950 of the elderly. This assistance is





Malawi family awaiting food supplies



Distributing food to flood victims

being provided from November 2019–March 2020 when the people are suffering the most.

“We work with pastors of the local churches to select the people who need help. These people are placed on a distribution list to ensure that only qualified people receive the necessary assistance. It is very evident that this assistance is needed. Because they are afraid to lose the support, the people come early in the morning to stand in line even though the truck is not expected until the afternoon. After the corn is distributed to the people on the list, any remaining bags are handed out to people who are not on the list but who are hoping to receive some help.

“The people have requested that we give their thanks to all of you who have contributed to this aid. At the time of this writing (January 2020), the situation has become worse, as the price of corn has risen 300%. Since people cannot afford to buy food, this support has provided critical help in a time of great need.”

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. E.C. Adams, *Chairman*

Rev. H. Hofman, *Vice-Chairman*

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*“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”
(Galatians 6:2).*

Church destroyed by Hurricane Dorian

