HISTORY OF MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

by

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PREFACE

In the introduction to *Day of Disaster* (a book on the Mennonite Disaster Service which emphasizes the volunteers' experiences) Senator Birch Bayh says that "it may be too early to call Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) a legend, but the descriptions of MDS volunteers recorded here can only add to its outstanding reputation. The story of MDS is as unselfish as it is amazing."

Along with the Salvation Army and Red Cross, MDS is one of three agencies recognized by the U. S. government to work in the area of disaster relief. It is the least known of the three agencies and does very little in the line of publicizing its activities. Most of the recognition which has come its way is in the form of articles in local newspapers in areas where clean up work by MDS has been done. If MDS is becoming legendary, it is going about it in a very quiet manner.

The first stop in researching this paper was the Disaster Research Center at Ohio State University where the librarian asked if the Mennonites and Mormons were the same. Since most people who have been involved with MDS feel that part of the reason for its success involves the history of the Mennonites and the teachings of the Mennonite Church, a chapter was included on Mennonite history and theology. It is hard to understand MDS without first having some idea of who the Mennonites are and what they believe.
As the research continued and a direct line was drawn between the beginning of MDS and the work done by Mennonite conscientious objectors during World War II a summary of this work was added. A short chapter on general disaster relief in America prior to the beginning of MDS in 1950 has been included.

Most of the historical research took place during a visit to the MDS headquarters at Akron, Pennsylvania. All newsletters, minutes, papers, and assorted articles relating to MDS since 1965 are in files there. All MDS materials prior to 1965 have been sent to the Mennonite archives at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana. The file at Goshen was not organized, but it did include an assortment of newsletters, minutes, and a considerable amount of correspondence involving the early MDS coordinators. Of particular interest were several letters to and from the Red Cross during the mid 1950's when MDS was first trying to organize on a nationwide level.

Two factors made the research of MDS difficult. The founders of MDS were not writers. Among the men who helped get MDS off the ground in Kansas, only John Diller has written an account of its beginnings. His pamphlet, MDS—In the Beginning, concerns only the first year of MDS activities. Other "histories" of MDS are found in newsletters and usually consist of a few pages borrowed from Diller's account. A second difficulty in researching MDS is its lack of accurate, written records. Executive Coordinator Nelson Hostetter pointed out that since MDS is a volunteer
organization, it is hard to require all the local units to keep accurate records. He estimated that about sixty percent of the local units file year-end reports so any figures listed in this paper concerning work load, or number of volunteers in the field at a given time are based on MDS estimates.

These two factors made a reliance on oral history a necessity in piecing together the MDS story. At Akron, Nelson Hostetter and Delmar Stahly were interviewed. Stahly served as national MDS coordinator from 1964 until 1971. Hostetter has served since that time. Both men answered a variety of questions concerning the MDS operation under their leadership. Peter Dyck, who was pastoring one of the Mennonite churches in Kansas which was involved in the first MDS projects, was in Akron and he talked about his memories of MDS' beginnings. William Snyder, executive secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee, the organization which oversees MDS, was also interviewed.

Paul Diener, Marvin Hostetler, and John Diller were all interviewed during a visit to the Newton, Kansas area. Diller was the secretary of the first meeting and served as Kansas coordinator for over twenty years. Hostetler and Diener have provided leadership as officers at the state level and over the years have donated hundreds of days to MDS work.

On July 14, 1980, this writer spent a morning working with MDS cleaning up in the aftermath of a tornado in Rushville, Indiana. Freeman Lambrite, Indiana-Southern Michigan unit chairman,
was in charge of the work at Rushville, and he answered many questions concerning the organization of MDS and how it functioned at the disaster scene. All those interviewed shared a common enthusiasm for MDS and were anxious to answer any questions concerning the MDS program.

When the research for this paper began there were some obvious questions about MDS which needed to be answered. Why Mennonites are the only church playing a significant role in the disaster relief field and what makes a person willing to volunteer are two such questions. A look through the MDS minutes and newsletters pointed to several issues which MDS has had to confront over the years. Was MDS remaining a grass-roots, layman-oriented organization or was it becoming institutionalized? Should MDS expand its work to involve more than just working in the aftermath of natural disasters? To what extent was disaster relief work a ministry in itself and when should it be accompanied with some type of verbal Christian witness? How should MDS relate to such organizations as the Red Cross and Civil Defense? How should MDS react when civic or government organizations presented them with awards to thank them for services rendered? This paper will try to show how MDS has dealt with these questions over the years.

It should be pointed out that all of those interviewed were Mennonites and all the newsletters and minutes were written by Mennonites. This explains why the secondary source *Torn Land*
is so widely quoted in the third chapter. This book describes the flood and clean up of Nelson County, Virginia, and is the most thorough analysis that any non-Mennonite has made of MDS on the job.

Sincerest thanks go to all those who helped in the research of this paper. This list includes librarians at the Disaster Research Center at Ohio State University, at Bluffton College, Bethel College, and Goshen College, as well as those who gave of their time to be interviewed.
DISASTER RELIEF IN AMERICA

While relief for disaster victims did not begin with MDs in 1950, it is possible to see MDs as a part of the American tradition of philanthropy with its roots in colonial times and its development in the 1800's. In a country as large and geographically diverse as the United States natural and man-made disasters have always been a common occurrence. While Americans have repeatedly demonstrated their generosity by unloading their pockets to relieve the suffering of disaster victims, they generally have been much more reluctant to get involved in the "dirty work" to which MDs has devoted itself. The Howard Associations were one exception to this nineteenth century rule of "long arm philanthropy." Described as a "time honored body of Good Samaritans" who were following the example of "the immortal philanthropist John Howard" in devoting themselves to "the succor of the sick, the relief of the suffering, and the burial of the dead," the Howards were especially visible during the dreaded yellow fever epidemic which struck the southern cities of New Orleans and Memphis. "The Howards reported cases of sickness in an assigned ward, gave out medicine, notified physicians, filled prescriptions, provided supplies for convalescents, hired nurses, and recruited doctors."2

Floods, tornadoes, and fires were also common occurrences during the 1800's. These varied in severity but all were dwarfed by the great Chicago fire of October 8-10, 1871, which cost 300 lives and $200 million in property damage and left three and a half
square miles in the heart of the city in ruins and 100,000 without homes. 

Money and goods poured into Chicago from all over as villages, cities, churches, school classes, and individual donors contributed. The cash donations totalled five million dollars and this did not include the considerable amount of gifts given in kind. All of these gifts were administered by a local Relief and Aid Society which was dominated by lawyers and businessmen.

The Civil War provided the impetus for an organization of a more permanent nature to take shape. During the war the Sanitation Commission, under the direction of Reverend Henry Bellows, had worked on the battlefields offering aid to the wounded. After the war Bellows' organization took the name of Association for the Relief of Misery on the Battlefield. It was Bellows' goal to achieve American ratification of the Geneva Convention and to see his organization become the American branch of the International Red Cross organization. But the desire to avoid entangling alliances with Europe and the belief of most Americans that few wars would take place on the North American continent resulted in little interest being shown in this organization whose sole purpose was to provide for battlefield relief. Due to "lack of exercise" Bellows' organization went out of existence in 1871.

Bellows' exit cleared the path for new leadership in the movement for American involvement with Red Cross. In 1873 Clara Barton returned to the United States from having served with the Red Cross in European battlefields and embarked on her one-woman
campaign. Unlike Bellows, she saw the main selling point of Red Cross as being the services which could be offered in peace time, specifically disaster relief. She refers to this "broadening of scope" in a pamphlet issued in 1878 in which she notes that:

Our southern coasts are periodically visited by the scourge of yellow fever; the valleys of the Mississippi are subject to inundation; the plains of the West are devastated by insects and drought, and our cities and country are swept by consuming fires. In all such cases, to gather and disperse the profuse liberality of our people, without waste of time or material, requires the wisdom that comes from experience and permanent organization."

She repeatedly pointed to the inefficiency, waste, lack of wisdom, and corruption which plagued local, temporary organizations as evidence that a nationwide organization was needed.

The emphasis on disaster relief took on the name "American Amendment" in International Red Cross circles, and with it Barton succeeded where Bellows had failed. In 1882 she secured American ratification of the Geneva Convention and the American Red Cross with its purpose to "relieve the suffering by war, pestilence, famine, flood, fires, and other calamities of sufficient magnitude to be deemed national in extent," came into existence. Red Cross became the official disaster relief agency of the United States government with the granting of its first national charter in 1900, but it did not attract national attention until the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 where its relief work was inadequate. After the clean up a Red Cross official declared that "Red Cross should be the one great source of authority in emergency relief"
in the United States. It (disaster relief) is never anticipated or prepared for and when it is necessary it is usually directed by people without training, according to crude methods created under great urgency without any intelligent idea of their adequacy or adaptability. 6

Within a few years the Red Cross and the United States government heeded this advice and most of the local relief agencies were either merged with Red Cross chapters or went out of existence. Red Cross has been the dominant force in terms of organization and administration in the disaster relief field up to the present.

With the ascent of the Red Cross and the generosity of the American people, the disaster relief field has been strong on administration and physical materials in the twentieth century. There has always been a need, however, for volunteers to do the "dirty work" of immediate clean up at the disaster scene. It was into this area of service that MDS stepped in 1950.
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER ONE

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 324.
4. Ibid.
MENNONITE HISTORY AND NONRESISTANCE IN AMERICA

Introduction

The Mennonite Church is the only North American denomination to have successfully adopted disaster relief as a major form of church ministry. As MDS has grown, several other denominations have inquired of MDS leaders concerning how they could get a similar organization started in their own churches. While these efforts have produced some limited disaster relief programs, none have approached MDS in terms of organization or lay involvement. In the meantime Mennonites, with a North American membership of 250,000 have seen MDS grow to the point where a record 57,000 volunteer days were donated in 1972. Providing voluntary disaster relief has become a second nature to those living within driving distance of areas frequently hit by "acts of God." Why has this work been so enthusiastically adopted by the Mennonites? Is there something in the Mennonites' heritage which has directed them toward disaster relief?

Modern Mennonites point to some unique features of their history and theology which provided the type of background that would lead to disaster relief work. During its first two centuries in Europe the Mennonite Church was the object of intense persecution from the government as well as Catholic and Protestant authorities. This persecution has caused Mennonites to be sensitive to all types of human need and suffering and to show special compassion for
those who are victims of circumstances they cannot control. In more modern history 5,000 Mennonite conscientious objectors chose to do "work of national importance" in place of military service during World War II. This alternative service included work in mental hospitals, agricultural projects, and fighting forest fires, and is seen by some as a predecessor of MDS. Mennonite theology has consistently emphasized an obedience to the ethical demands of the New Testament. "Being a good neighbor," "going the second mile," and "being a Good Samaritan," are commands which Mennonites have been taught to interpret literally.

Thus, Mennonite history and theology provide a large part of the answer as to why Mennonites have become involved in the disaster relief field. A general knowledge of that theology and history is therefore necessary before one can understand the origin and the success of Mennonite Disaster Service.

Mennonite History

The Mennonite Church developed out of the Anabaptist branch of the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century. While Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli led the original movement away from the Catholic Church, there were other "protesters" who felt that the break had not been sharp enough. These men objected to the Protestants becoming a state church with required membership, to the practice of infant baptism, and the lack of emphasis on upright living. Eventually these more radical reformers began to
put their belief that infant baptism had no basis in the New Testa-
ment into practice by baptizing adults (who had been baptized as
infants in other churches) a second time upon confession of faith.
This practice earned them the name "Anabaptists" (to baptize again).
As with baptism, the Anabaptists tried to base all their beliefs,
standards of individual conduct, and church practices upon a lit-
eral interpretation of the New Testament. In following such an in-
terpretation they favored a believers' church as opposed to the
state-sponsored churches with required memberships; they refused
to hold public office, to bear arms, to take oaths, and favored a
lay, rather than a professional clergy. While the Anabaptists
followed the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone, a
much greater emphasis was placed on how one lived his life after
the original salvation experience had taken place. For the
Anabaptist "the essence of Christianity was discipleship, a faith-
ful following after of Christ, and an obedience to the ethical de-
mands of the New Testament."1 With such an emphasis the Anabaptists
quickly acquired a reputation for honesty and upright living as the
following two statements from supporters of the state church verify:

Their daily walk and deportment appears to be upright, godly,
and entirely blameless. They shun costly clothes, avoid ex-
cessive eating and drinking, wear coarse clothing, and broad
felt hats. They go humbly, without weapons, neither swords
nor pikes, but with a short bread knife. They seem much more
concerned about living an upright life than the Papists.

I see more upright living among those that are called sects
than among the Lutherans."2
The most prominent early leader of Anabaptism was a former Catholic priest from Holland named Menno Simons, for whom the Mennonite Church was named. C. Henry Smith, a prominent Mennonite historian, describes the impact that the break away from the Catholic Church had on Simons' life: "Turning his back on a brilliant career, a life of ease and pleasure; he deliberately chose instead a life of uncertainty, misery, and poverty, constantly threatened with imprisonment, persecution, and death." The persecution suffered by Simons was typical of the treatment of the early Anabaptists. No other religious group in Europe received the severe persecution that was directed at them. Governments felt threatened by their refusal to join armies and take oaths, while the state churches objected to the "heresy" of adult baptism and the rejection of required church membership. The persecution is described in one Mennonite history this way:

If the pagan persecution of the early church was severe, the persecution of the Anabaptist-Mennonites by the Catholic and Protestant state churches of Reformation times was, in proportion to numbers, still more severe. In the first ten years over five thousand of the Swiss Brethren (Mennonites) were executed in Switzerland and surrounding territories, particularly in Austria and the Tyrol. Within five years most of the early leaders died at the stake, under the headsman's ax, or by drowning.6

Martyr's Mirror, a book by the Dutchman T. J. van Braught, was published in 1660 and its 1,152 pages are filled with the accounts of the torture and killing of the early Anabaptist believers.

In spite of the persecution, Mennonites from the beginning have had tendencies toward factionalism. The same spirit of freedom that allowed an individual to follow his own conscience on religious
matters also afforded ample opportunity for the development of differences. Among the divisive issues in the early period were millennialism, communialism, use of the ban (excommunication), holding public office, nonresistance, and the payment of war taxes. There are several explanations for this lack of unity. Mennonites took their religion seriously which meant that even the most minor differences could be perceived as eternally important. Church government was strictly congregational, and with each independent congregation maintaining autonomy, there was no hierarchy to impose uniformity in practice or doctrine. The fierce persecution had forced the Mennonites underground which restricted inter-church communication. All these factors led to considerable differences in interpretation, theology, and church practice. One common belief, the desire for a "pure church" of only believers led to conflicts within congregations. Attempts at "purifying," which usually meant the use of the ban, were always a matter of controversy. "Mennonites freely banned members for intemperance in drinking, extravagance in dress, the least evidence of dishonesty in business dealings, and the slightest infraction of the moral code."5

While much of the harsh persecution in Switzerland, Holland, and Germany had subsided by the end of the seventeenth century, there were still many laws on the books which discriminated against the Mennonites. Overseas exploration and political developments in Russia provided places for Mennonites to escape discrimination and
to practice their religion without interference. One such place was the New World where approximately 2,500 Mennonites settled during the colonial period, mostly in southeastern Pennsylvania. Russia became another haven for the Mennonites when Catherine the Great, hoping to increase Russia's population and at the same time acquire a large number of skilled farmers to work her newly acquired lands, offered the following conditions to the Mennonites if they would permanently settle in Russia.

The offer included...free transportation to Russia; one hundred and seventy-five acres of free land per family; a loan of $250.00 and support to each family at a cheap rate until the first harvest; complete religious freedom; complete freedom of language and schools; complete military exemption; self-government within their settlements; no taxes for ten years and only a nominal federal tax thereafter. Only one limitation was made, namely that the Mennonites do no religious work among the native Russians. These privileges were guaranteed in a special imperial decree in perpetuity, i.e. "forever."  

A large migration to Russia from Germany took place in the late 1780's, and the Russian government's provisions proved to be so far-reaching and liberal that the Mennonites soon constituted a fairly stable and self-governing state-within-a-state. Their agricultural, industrial, and social development exceeded by far that of the Russians. 

In addition to the migration to Russia, an intermittent flow of Mennonites continued to the United States. Between 1817 and 1860 about 3,000 settled in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana. 

By 1870 the ideal conditions which had been promised by Catherine "forever" were beginning to be terminated. Many Russians
were jealous of the special treatment and the prosperity enjoyed by the Mennonites and under new governmental leadership the various conditions were either modified or revoked. As a result a migration of around 10,000 Russian Mennonites to the United States began in the 1870's. Most settled on the plains of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Canada, where they could put their agricultural expertise acquired in Russia (particularly wheat growing) to use. The distance between settlements and difficulties of communication and transportation allowed these new communities to develop independently and with minimal cooperation. A major crisis would be required to bring these various Mennonite groups together.

While many Russian Mennonites immigrated to the United States in the 1870's, a much larger number (estimated at 100,000 by 1914) remained behind. They were caught in the middle of the bloody Russian civil war of 1920. Lands were being confiscated and outlaws were roaming the countryside. In desperation a small group of representatives was selected to go to the United States to appeal to the various Mennonite groups for some type of relief. It was decided that a general meeting of all the interested Mennonite groups should be called in Newton, Kansas, for the purpose of determining what the response should be. Out of this meeting was organized the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) which selected five men to go to Russia to investigate and to provide relief. These men administered a massive relief effort that included helping 20,000 refugees to
relocate in Europe, the United States, South America, and Canada. While the Mennonites had always emphasized helping one's neighbor, this marked the first time that all the major Mennonite conferences had united for a common relief effort. In 1937 MCC was formalized and became a permanent organization. Its statement of purpose was given as follows:

To function as a charitable organization in the relief of human suffering and distress, and in aiding, rehabilitating, and re-establishing Mennonite and other refugees, and generally to support, conduct, maintain, and administer relief and kindred charitable projects. It was to be on a nonprofit basis and to have perpetual existence by its corporate name.

MCC has since expanded to an organization of approximately 735 workers, most of whom are stationed overseas. In addition to its relief work, MCC has widened its ministries to include medical and other services to the underprivileged, hospitals for the mentally ill, services to delinquent youth, and a Peace Section to keep Mennonites aware of modern peace issues.

Thirty years after the 1920 expedition to Russia another Mennonite group was asked to respond to human need in a time of crisis. In this case several Kansas Mennonite churches were called on to help the victims of a flood. The organization which grew out of this response was the Mennonite Disaster Service.
Mennonite Nonresistance

The Mennonite Church has been more noted for its teachings against going to war (nonresistance) than for any of its other doctrines. For Mennonites this stand is not based on the Old Testament commandment of "Thou Shalt Not Kill," but rather on the life and teachings of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. While nonresistance has always been a part of Mennonite doctrine, the church's emphasis and compliance with the doctrine has varied considerably from country to country and from one time period to another. In the twentieth century the term "peace witness" has become popular, meaning that nonresistance should not only involve the negative of not going to war, but that the nonresistant Christian must take positive action to promote peace. Most Mennonites see BDS as a part of this positive peace witness which has evolved through several war time experiences.

Going to war was not a problem for Mennonites in the United States until the twentieth century. Only during the Civil War had the government passed a conscription act and then many Mennonites paid a $300 fee for a substitute who took their place in the military service. Since this was the first American draft law, Mennonites had done little to educate their young men on the traditional peace stand of the church. In the post-war period most Mennonites came to the conclusion that hiring a substitute was not a satisfactory solution for a person who believed that
participation in war was wrong. The teaching of nonresistance was given a high priority among Mennonite churches and when the conscription law of 1917 was passed, the response of the Mennonite young men was much more united than it had been sixty years earlier.

The 1917 law was vague concerning conscientious objectors, referring to "noncombatant service" but not clearly defining it. When it became clear that this service would involve wearing the military uniform and working in military camps, Mennonite leaders were both concerned and disappointed. Around 2,000 Mennonites were drafted of whom a few served with the military, a significant minority provided noncombatant service, and the majority reported to camp but refused to cooperate with the military. Of these, about ten percent were imprisoned (mostly in Leavenworth), thirty percent remained in the camps and had not been processed by the conclusion of the war, and sixty percent were eventually allowed to perform some type of alternative service, usually in farm or construction work.1

Those who remained in the camps were largely at the mercy of the officers who sometimes allowed abuses to take place.

In all the camps they (CO's) were subjected to ridicule and were considered fair game for any army officer or YMCA secretary who cared to take a hand in converting them. Even some of the higher officers in some of the camps, being entirely out of sympathy with the liberal policy of the War Department, permitted unnecessary abuse of those who refused to don the uniform. In Camp Punston the worst abuses prevailed, and two officers, a major and a captain, were removed for negligence in permitting rough treatment of the conscientious objectors. Some of them were brutally handled in the guard
house; they were bayoneted, beaten, and tortured by various forms of the water cure; eighteen men one night were aroused from their sleep and held under cold showers until one became hysterical. Another had the hose played upon his head until he became unconscious.2

Such treatment convinced Mennonite leaders that noncombatant military service could no longer be accepted. Some form of civilian alternative service must be available for conscientious objectors if and when a new conscription law was passed. To provide for this alternative service, an agreement with the government should be negotiated in peace time.

Interest in securing such an agreement quickly subsided as the United States drifted into isolationism in the 1920’s. Little was heard on the peace issue until Europe was on the verge of war. In 1935 a Mennonite Conference on Peace and War was held at Goshen, Indiana. Guy Hershberger spoke to the conference and he urged them to take action:

The leaders of thought in the Mennonite Church could profitably give some attention to a definite program of alternative service. If in a future war there is any satisfactory provision for exemption from military service it will probably be due to the fact that nonresistant people themselves devised the plan and succeeded in having it approved by the government.3

Four years later Hershberger’s suggestions came to fruition when the three major peace churches (Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren) sent representatives to draw up a specific plan for alternative service which was to be presented to the government authorities. In the plan that was drawn up the peace churches agreed to do work involving relief, reconstruction, reclamation,
refugee, farm, and health services. The representatives were also to suggest that the alternative service be kept in the hands of the churches. The proposals were presented to President Roosevelt, to the secretary of war, and to the attorney general, and at each stop they were congratulated for having definite proposals at hand. The draft law of 1940 provided that if a person be conscientiously opposed to participation in noncombatant service he shall "in lieu of such induction, be assigned to do work of national importance under civilian direction." The law did not clearly define the term "work of national importance" nor did it specify how the program was to be financed.

The peace churches were given considerable freedom in drawing up suggested work assignments for the conscientious objectors. They were disappointed, however, when they found out that due largely to Roosevelt's opposition, government funds would not be available to camps where churches would be in charge of the administration. Since the peace churches hoped to be able to provide and direct the religious, educational and recreational programs in the camps, they agreed on a temporary basis to finance the camps.

The alternative service program the peace churches provided was called Civilian Public Service (CPS) and it got under way in 1941 when eight Mennonite boys arrived at an old CCC camp at Grottoes, Virginia. By the end of CPS in 1947 around 5,000 Mennonites had participated in nearly 150 camps across the United
States and state and federal agencies were earnestly soliciting their services.⁵

In the first year of CPS over half of the men worked with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) branch of the Department of Agriculture. Many of the Mennonites were from rural backgrounds and the availability of old CCC camps near SCS sites made this a logical type of work. Other branches of work done by the CPS involved the Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation and Federal Security Administration, work done in agricultural and dairying experimentation, and service in public and mental health. In the public health units some of the conscientious objectors were used as guinea pigs for medical experiments involving starvation, subjection to cold temperatures, rapid weight loss, diet experimentation, tolerance of salt water, and experiments with pneumonia.⁶

Probably the most significant work in terms of its effect on the Mennonite Church and the American public involved hospitals. CPS moved cautiously into this area but by October of 1943 one out of six CPS workers was involved in a mental hospital unit.⁷ The conditions in the understaffed, overcrowded hospitals were deplorable. When one of the men working at the Western State Hospital in Staunton, Virginia was asked to be a leader, he reported that:

As he worked a 12-14 hour day seven days a week with only two afternoons off, it was impossible to give time to records and the organization of the unit. We have been here
for over two months and have not had one meeting as a group for religious, education, social, or any other purpose. There is one boy in this unit I haven't seen for at least four weeks.  

Conditions at Staunton gradually improved and while some were hardened by the experiences many others had their eyes opened to a world they did not know existed. One man wrote:

I would consider the hospital work by far the most significant of any I did while in CPS. There is something about seeing a demented person return to normalcy which raises a lump in your throat and you grope for words to express it. I had the experience several times.  

From the experience of CPS men in mental hospitals developed the movement which resulted in the Mental Health Foundation with such sponsors as Owen J. Roberts, Eleanor Roosevelt, Pearl Buck, and Harry Emerson Fosdick. Two mental health institutions were also constructed by the Mennonites as a result of this experience.

The financing of the CPS program came entirely from the peace churches with the Mennonites contributing over $4 million during the six years of the program. The CPS men received no wages for their services (Selective Service Director Hershey felt that Congress and the public would be more tolerant of CO's if they received no pay). The Mennonite camps began in 1951 giving their men $1.50 allowance per month but by late 1941 this was stopped in order to cut costs. For the next two years no allowance was given. Since many home churches sent contributions to some of the men and a few received pocket money from employers, inequities developed which were resolved on January 1, 1944 by providing a $5 allowance per month.
The CPS program is particularly significant for the impact it had on the Mennonite Church. Like nothing before or since, it brought together Mennonites from divergent geographical, theological, educational, and social backgrounds, and forced them together into a melting pot. It provided many with their first opportunity to travel any extended distance from home. Experiences like the following demonstrate the effectiveness of CPS bringing people together.

In one camp a thirty-year-old Ph.D. (a teacher with foreign study and teaching experience) bunked beside a twenty-year-old farm boy; they were the best of friends and each found in the other certain admirable traits which the other did not possess. In another dormitory in the same camp a young personnel assistant with several years' experience in chain grocery management slept beside an Amish boy who admitted freely that the first trip outside his home county came to him on the day he left for his preinduction physical.¹¹

One outgrowth of this mixing was a new awareness of the nationwide Mennonite community. Life long friendships were made and CPS camp reunions are still held. Another major impact which the CPS experience had was the emphasis it placed on service. For many of the men CPS had been a positive experience in which they had received little or no reward for valuable services rendered. They were now returning to their homes and many would continue to look for similar opportunities to serve. It would be primarily former CPS men who would provide the initiative to begin the Mennonite Disaster Service.
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER TWO

1 Guy F. Hershberger, War, Peace, and Nonresistance (Scottsdale, Pa., 1944), 119.


3 Melvin Gingerich, Service for Peace: A History of Mennonite Civilian Public Service (Akron, Pa., 1949), 41.

4 Ibid., 51.

5 Ibid., 403.

6 Ibid., 271.

7 Ibid., 214.

8 Ibid., 215.

9 Ibid., 247.

10 Ibid., 348.

11 Ibid., 375.
The concept of disaster service among Mennonites probably had its origins in the nineteenth century or earlier when Mennonites would gather for "barn raisings" whenever a member's barn burned down or someone moved into the community and needed a barn. A large number of Mennonite men would gather early in the morning and often their work was completed by nightfall. The idea of working in the disaster relief field seems to have originated in the active mind of Orrie Miller, longtime executive secretary of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Miller had already helped provide the impetus for numerous Mennonite service, relief, and educational organizations in the twentieth century. As early as 1925 he was in contact with John Payne, chairman of the American Red Cross, asking that he be kept informed of any needs that the Mennonites might be able to provide.\(^1\) The next year at Miller's suggestion the Eastern Mennonite Board appropriated $1,000 following a Florida hurricane and at that time he wrote an associate that "this would have been a splendid time to do something if the new MCC organization would have been far enough along."\(^2\) In the same year he wrote the Red Cross that "since our Mennonite people are becoming more and more interested in disaster sufferers, this interest could be accelerated if a few of our own people were enrolled in the International Relief Reserve Corps."\(^3\)

Nothing specific grew out of these early contacts. By 1947
the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (a conservative, separatist branch of Mennonites also known as Holdemans) had organized a disaster relief organization which did relief work cleaning up after a tornado in Woodward, Oklahoma.

MDS as it is known today traces its roots to a 1950 Sunday School picnic involving the young married people's class from Pennsylvania Mennonite Church near Hesston, Kansas. In the discussion that followed the picnic those who had served in Civilian Public Service during World War II expressed the conviction that "we should seek opportunities to be engaged in peaceful helpful activity in our own and surrounding communities." During the following weeks these convictions were shared with the corresponding Sunday School class of the Hesston Mennonite congregation. Both churches were looking for a positive way to express their peace witness and since Kansas was annually struck by tornados, some type of disaster relief seemed to be the most practical method. The two churches sent out a questionnaire to their members so that an inventory could be taken of available volunteers and equipment. John Diller, himself confined to a wheelchair due to a farm accident, was named coordinator. They adopted the name Mennonite Service Organization which would be changed within two years to the more appropriate Mennonite Disaster Service. The first disaster to which they were called was in May of 1951 when the Arkansas River flooded Wichita. Lyle Yost, serving as president of MSO went to Wichita to investigate the needs and
called back to John Diller around six o'clock and said that he had promised fifteen men and one truck. Diller got on the phone through the prearranged network and by eleven there were forty-five men and four trucks in Wichita building sandbag dikes.\(^5\)

John Diller was to serve in this capacity as coordinator for Kansas MDS for the next twenty-three years, and he received several commendations from MDS for the time he donated. He recalls how he did his job in the beginning years:

I'd get the call about four o'clock concerning how many men would be needed the next day. There were days when I'd be on the phone from four until nine o'clock. Operators would work with me. I'd give them four or five numbers to dial and by the time I was done talking to one they'd have another one ready. We never had a problem getting volunteers to go; I was working with a tremendous group of men.\(^6\)

There were other floods in Kansas that year which resulted in considerable damage to Topeka. MCC (perhaps unaware of KSO's existence) pledged to have twenty men in Topeka to help reconstruct five houses. In November of 1951 Diller notified MCC that KSO would be willing to provide five or six men to work on the project. No definite reply came until Diller was visited on the day before Christmas and asked if a carload of men could be available on a continual basis, preferably with each group of six staying on the job for a week at a time. Diller notified the Mennonite churches in the area and two days later a meeting was held at Hesston which resulted in the decision that the individual churches would provide six men at a time to work in Topeka. The size of the unit was doubled when Eden Mennonite Church promised to provide six men per week for six weeks. From January through April there were
almost constantly twelve men from Hesston area working in Topeka until the project was completed. It should be noted that while the Mennonites were working under one organization, volunteers were provided along a congregational basis. This system would be modified later in 1952 when a tornado struck Arkansas doing extensive damage.

Peter Dyck, well-known in Mennonite circles for his leadership in helping Mennonite refugees out of Europe after World War II, was serving as pastor of the Eden Mennonite Church in Moundridge, Kansas. His congregation had taken an active role in the Topeka housing project and he recalls approaching John Diller and asking: "What shall we do about Arkansas? We both agreed that a meeting should be called but we had a good round of negotiating trying to decide who would be in charge. Finally we agreed that he should call the meeting and I would chair it."

Diller wrote the following message to the MCC-constituent churches within a forty mile radius of Hesston:

A number of us believe that we could work more effectively in this storm area if we would work together and pool our resources instead of working as individuals. It is entirely possible that a major disaster will strike much closer before the year is past. Would it not be well for us to organize and be ready to step right into a disaster area and go to work as a unit rather than to go in as small groups, independent of each other yet under the name Mennonite? Our individual organizations should continue to function as they do now in our own communities.

The meeting was held March 31, 1952 at Hesston College, and out of this meeting was formed the Temporary Disaster Committee which was to represent and guide the churches in the work to be
done in Arkansas, and to be ready in case there would be any other disasters. Two men from each branch of the Mennonites were to be selected to form this committee and Peter Dyck was elected chairman with John Diller as secretary. There were three major guidelines set down at this meeting:

1. This committee is not to take the place of our present relief committees, brotherhoods, and service organizations.
2. In the event of a major disaster, such as the Arkansas storm, the committee shall immediately investigate the need and avenues for advice and report to each local organization. They shall coordinate the efforts of the local organizations into the total program.
3. They shall not solicit funds.  

Peter Dyck, who chaired the Hesston meeting remembers it this way:

There was a tremendous spirit there. All agreed that something must be done, it was just a question of how to do it. The following suggestions were made:

1. no paper work
2. no full time personnel
3. no need for a minister to be in charge
4. contact person or coordinator needed
5. call network of one person per church set up
6. workers bring their own shovels and tools
7. furnish own transportation and use car pools
8. men and women treated as equals

It is remarkable how closely the MDS organization of today follows the guidelines established at this meeting at Hesston.

Ninety-three volunteers went to Arkansas to work at the flood site and the enthusiasm they brought back with them was contagious. "The women who had gone were especially enthusiastic," recalls Peter Dyck. Those who did not go to the disaster scene provided baby sitting services and did farm chores for the volunteers while they were away. The work in Arkansas marks the first inter-
Mennonite disaster relief project.

It was obvious to at least one Kansan at this early date that MSO could become a nationwide organization. Within a week of the Hesston meeting, an unidentified spokesman described the highlights of the first year of work in Kansas and then concluded the presentation with these comments.

We feel that MSO should become a churchwide program of Christian service. A unit of MSO is needed in every Mennonite congregation. We also need a unification of all MSO organizations as MCC has done in its area so as to be effective on a national scale. A step in this direction was taken last Monday night when the Old Mennonite, General Conference Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Church of God in Christ, Mennonite churches met in Hesston to form a disaster committee to coordinate each of the different groups in response to the urgent need of the disaster area in Arkansas.

There were no records concerning how rapidly MSO organizations in other states developed, but by 1954 several Mennonite conferences requested that for wider coordination and counsel in the area of disaster relief that MCC appoint a Disaster Service Coordinating Committee. Its purpose was not only to help coordinate disaster relief efforts, but also to serve as a channel for liaison with the government and the Red Cross. From 1954 to 1961 Harry Martens, who had served as CPS director during World War II was the voluntary MDS coordinator on a half-time basis. In 1961 Wayne Clemens was appointed by the committee to be a half-time coordinator. He served for three years in this capacity as an alternative to military service. Delmar Stahly was appointed half-time coordinator following Clemens and he split time between MCC work and MDS
until 1971 when it was decided that a full time coordinator was needed. Nelson Hostetter was selected to be the MDS' first full-time employee and he continues to serve MDS in this capacity today. His job description calls for him to spend about fifty percent of his time on the road speaking to churches, in deputation work, and at project sites. The rest of his time is to be spent administering MDS from its headquarters in the MCC building in Akron, Pennsylvania.

MDS' work load varies from one year to the next depending on the number and extent of the disasters which occur, but it is safe to say that MDS has experienced a progressive growth since 1954. Its peak year of service came in 1972 when 57,000 volunteer days were donated. During the years of growth and development MDS has been faced with several difficult issues, some of which have been settled and others which have yet to be resolved.

The issue that has created the most tension within MDS over the years has been the concern with becoming overorganized. This seems an odd concern for an organization which has had no full-time employees during most of its thirty years of existence, but from the beginning MDS has expressed a desire to remain a grass-roots, layman-oriented ministry. At the first meeting at Hesston it was pointed out that each church should keep its own relief agencies and that the larger committee was only temporary. When MDS moved under the organizational wing of MCC there were concerns expressed about overorganization.14 In the minutes of
a 1956 MDS executive meeting the question: "How do we keep MDS from becoming overorganized?"\textsuperscript{15} was raised.

Throughout the 1960's there are repeated references to the need to keep MDS as decentralized as possible. In 1973, two years after hiring its first full-time employee, among the questions for discussion at an MDS executive committee meeting was the following: "Have we become too centrally organized? Is MDS an institution?"\textsuperscript{16}

In 1978 the executive committee of MDS in reviewing the job description of Nelson Hostetter noted that "throughout this growth and change, MDS has maintained a fairly consistent stance on remaining a 'grass roots overall ministry.' While in a sense MDS like Topaz 'just grew' there has also been a consistent deliberation on the question 'what will these new ideas, ventures, etc. do to the 'original vision' of Mennonite Disaster Service?"\textsuperscript{17}

Hostetter feels that the concern with overorganization is valid, but he points out that "there are more agencies of all kinds in the disaster relief field now and we must have a bit more organization than before to avoid duplication of services."\textsuperscript{18}

"MDS has matured," is the way Hostetter's predecessor Delmar Stahly puts it. "We may have lost some of our elasticity, but we haven't gotten away from the individual layman and the local congregation. We still are unique in that sense."\textsuperscript{19}

The year 1965 seems to be a turning point year in terms of MDS sensing the need for more organization. There were an extraordinary number of tornadoes that year, and the increased need
called for a greater organization to meet that need. Also, 1965 marked the first time that a large number of Mennonites were the victims of disasters (several Indiana and Ohio towns with large Mennonite populations were struck by tornadoes) and there was a tremendous response from MDS.

A second question which has been raised in connection with MDS relates to the possibility of expanding its scope of work from just responding to natural disasters. It is easy to see how the desire to expand MDS work on the one hand and the hopes of keeping it decentralized on the other have worked at cross-purposes.

In a speech given at Pandora, Ohio, in 1963 C. L. Graber suggested that blood banks be set up through MDS and concluded his remarks by urging that "small, well organized teams, with specific skills be set up to work outside the continental United States."20

Two years later Frank Epp called for a "redefinition" of the word disaster and suggested taxi service for the ill, family care service, and big brother programs as possible new avenues of service for MDS. He also suggested that MDS be listed in all telephone directories to make these services available to everyone.21

In the 1960's MDS wrestled with the question of getting involved with metropolitan riots. In Delmar Stahly's 1967 report he noted that:

We receive many requests for explanations of our relationship to the need in areas of race riots and demonstrations. The voice of the constituency is not clear on what we should do. You are aware of some resistance toward enlarging the role of
MDS to deal with non-natural disaster situations. Others tend to deny the helplessness of racial minorities in the face of joblessness, abject poverty, and other hopelessness existing in many of our metropolitan ghettos.\textsuperscript{22}

MDS did go ahead with a housing project in Gulfport, Mississippi, and despite some local opposition the project eventually proved to be a success. When Nelson Hostetter was hired in 1971 one of the suggestions for his expanded office was to develop an active MDS ministry in ghetto housing. There have been some other successful building projects, but Hostetter admits that "ghetto housing is not a high area of interest or skill for me, and we have been too busy with the natural disasters to focus on the ghetto housing priority."\textsuperscript{23} MDS has had some successful overseas projects (mostly in Central America with the exception of a major earthquake in Yugoslavia) but expenses, red tape, and the language barrier are cited as reasons for not pursuing this avenue more aggressively.\textsuperscript{24}

None of the suggestions for expansion made in the mid-1960's have been implemented. MDS is still most noted for its quick clean-up of natural disasters within the continental United States. It has added a "Phase two" rebuilding program to go along with its more familiar "Phase one" clean up operation. The pros and cons of the rebuilding program will be discussed in a later chapter.

Another area of occasional difficulty for MDS has been its relationship with other disaster relief agencies. If there is a
single theme that characterizes the relationship between MDS, Red Cross, and the government relief agencies, it would be one of cooperation. MDS has, however, kept a close eye on maintaining its own identity. There has also been caution concerning any involvement with these organizations which might violate or compromise the peace stand of the Mennonite Church. In the 1950's as the Cold War was increasing in its intensity, the United States government tried to prepare the public to protect itself in case of nuclear attack. The agency responsible for this "education" was the Office of Civil Devense (CD). As early as 1955 there was felt a need among MCC and MDS to open some type of dialogue with CD in hopes of developing some type of understanding. An MDS representative was selected to go to a meeting called by the head of the Department of Spiritual Affairs of CD to inform church leaders of what their function would be in case of disaster. Disturbed by what seemed to be a great concern with the "enemy," and an attempt to get preachers to "rally their flocks to the cause," the recommendation was made "that MDS remain distinct from the CD organization although coordinated as to actual services given."25

Seeing involvement in the CD program as a possible violation of its traditional peace stand the Mennonite churches began to look to MDS as an alternative to CD. To better inform the Mennonite constituency, the Peace Section of MCC issued a Statement of Guiding Principles on Civil Defense in 1956 which encouraged its readers to "render service through Mennonite channels whenever
possible," and while allowing Mennonites to cooperate with CD in time of emergency, "they were not to become an integral part of CD." 26 Five years later Elmer Neufeld, head of MCC Peace Section, re-emphasized this position in a statement entitled "A Plan of Action in This Time of Cold War." In it he points out that:

MDS is the Mennonite alternative to the CD program of the government, and with all deliberate speed steps should be taken to strengthen MDS at the national, state, and local level and to enlarge and develop its program in a manner enabling it to merit such status...It must be remembered that CD itself considers its task a twofold one:
1. saving of life in case of disaster
2. use of CD for military purposes

The fact that CD was recently transferred to the Secretary of Defense suggests the seriousness of the problem...In the event of nuclear war the Mennonite Church through MDS must give its service to the saving of life and the relief of suffering but without involvement in the military aspects of the program. 27

As the Cold War tensions subsided and the threat of required membership in CD decreased, this issue lost much of its significance. Nelson Hostetter summarizes the evolution of the CD-MDS relationship this way:

The purpose of CD was to provide civil protection in case of nuclear attack. The word 'defense' scared us first of all. Then they told us that they wanted us to help. But what does 'help' mean? The situation has now changed as the government has nuclear defense departments as well as disaster relief programs. We do work with CD on the state and local level but not on the national level. 28

On March 22, 1972, MDS and the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) signed an agreement formalizing what had been an effective and successful working agreement during the previous two years. OEP signed similar agreements with the Red
Cross and Salvation Army to insure against duplication of services and to guard against discrimination in disaster assistance. These are the only three disaster relief agencies formally recognized by the United States government.\textsuperscript{29}

For the most part the relationship between MDS and the Red Cross has been one of helpful cooperation. Peter Dyck recalls that when the first MSO volunteers went out without identification they were stopped by the Red Cross officials short of the disaster scene and being suspected looters, they were turned back.\textsuperscript{30} Relations between the two organizations, although not always warm, have improved considerably since then. In one of a series of letters written in the mid-1950's between MCC Executive Secretary William Snyder and Red Cross chairman Robert Pierpoint, Pierpoint states that: "during the past several years the Red Cross and MDS have had several excellent experiences of cooperation in times of disaster. Last fall we were again able to work closely together during the Indiana floods."\textsuperscript{31}

In the same series of letters, Snyder repeatedly makes references to "the excellent relationship between MDS and the Red Cross."\textsuperscript{32} Harry Martens, MDS voluntary coordinator, spent the summer of 1956 travelling throughout the United States trying to develop and evaluate the MDS program. He made these observations concerning the Red Cross in his report:

The Red Cross encourages the Mennonites to think of their major contributions as that of cleaning debris and especially cleaning homes of disabled and elderly people.
The Red Cross agrees that it is important to keep our group intact to make for better work and witness; they welcome our cooperation with them.33

Martens first statement summarizes what has been the working relationship between the Red Cross and MDS on the disaster scene. Red Cross provides the food, shelter, supplies, and most of the investigative work to determine where help is needed, while MDS provides manpower. When two organizations work side by side for an extended period of time it is understandable that there have been some misunderstandings. In 1956 the following statement concerning the Red Cross appeared in an MDS newsletter:

We suggest that the area MDS encourage our people to make MDS (not the Red Cross) their main channel of disaster service. Furthermore, we should continue to be mindful of the close relationship between the Red Cross and Civil Defense at various levels of their organization.34

Ten years later a similar tone of discontent is struck as some MDS volunteers felt that some areas of need were not being identified by the Red Cross.

Experiences in relating to Red Cross indicate that in some ways MDS appears to be not wanted by the Red Cross. We do not want to be limited to just doing jobs for Red Cross... The implications of our current relationship are:
1. MDS does not unquestionably accept Red Cross judgement (often made by phone) that MDS is not needed.
2. MDS will check with the Red Cross and then make independent decisions to explore a disaster scene, to evaluate needs and plan its action. We will keep Red Cross informed as to our actions.35

Although MDS still reserves the right to go beyond the Red Cross estimates of need if it is felt the estimates are not thorough enough, the few complaints mentioned above must be considered
exceptions to what in most states has become a smooth partnership. Marvin Hostetler describes the working relationship with Red Cross during his twenty-three years on the state and regional committee as excellent. "There is no way we could have functioned in Kansas without the Red Cross. If we would have to feed ourselves and provide lodging, the expenses would be prohibitive. Red Cross has always been extremely generous." 36

Indiana state chairman Freeman Lambrite made similar observations. "They (Red Cross) have always furnished us with lodging, food, and a telephone, and on a few occasions fuel for our work on the job. We have always had excellent cooperation." 37

Both Delmar Stahly and Nelson Hostettler emphasized the cooperative relationship which has existed with the Red Cross during the past fifteen years on the national level. Both indicated that the biggest area of conflict has been the difficult question of when it is time to pull out of a disaster area. "Red Cross is a humanitarian organization and we are a Christian organization. We tend to stay longer," states Hostettler. "I realize it is a difficult decision determining when to pull out. Maybe we do stay too long sometimes." 38

Stahly adds that:

Since the Red Cross normally provides the food services for HDS workers we have occasionally been left "high and dry" when they pulled out. Usually someone else would come along to foot the bill. Sometimes our people feared being dominated by outside organizations, but all those who complained were still willing to eat the Red Cross food. We
sometimes got the feeling the Red Cross resented us since they were always obligated to be there and we were there on a voluntary basis. Another possible reason for their resentment might be the considerable praise which we received while they were often on the receiving end of criticism. On the whole, though, during my years as coordinator, we have had a very good relationship with the Red Cross.39
1 Paul Erb, Orie O. Miller: The Story of a Man and an Era (Scottdale, Pa., 1969), 176.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 177.

4 The Mennonite Service Organization—We Witness Through Service," (unpublished speech, no author or date listed, contents of the speech indicate it was delivered within a week of the Hesston meeting), Mennonite Archives, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

5 John Diller, Mennonite Disaster Service—In the Beginning, unpublished article containing remarks made by John Diller on the occasion of a special recognition dinner for him on January 2, 1971, MDS files in Akron, Pa., p. 3.

6 John Diller interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Hesston, Kansas, July 5, 1980

7 Diller, MDS—In the Beginning, 15.

8 Peter Dyck, interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Akron, Pa., June 27, 1979.

9 Diller, MDS—In the Beginning, 15.

10 Ibid., 17.

11 Interview, Peter Dyck.

12 Ibid.

13 "The Mennonite Service Organization—We Witness Through Service," (unpublished speech, no author or date listed, contents of the speech indicate it was delivered within a week of the Hesston meeting), Mennonite Archives, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

14 MDS minutes from 1956 annual meeting, Mennonite Archives, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.


16 Executive Committee meeting agenda of 1973, MDS files, Akron, Pa.
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER THREE  cont.


23 Interview, Nelson Hostetter.

24 Ibid.


28 Interview, Nelson Hostetter.


30 Interview, Peter Dyck.

31 MDS correspondence located in MDS file in Mennonite Archives, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana.

32 Ibid.

33 MDS newsletter, October 2, 1956.
34 Ibid.

35 MDS minutes from meeting held October 12, 1967, MDS files, Akron, Pa.

36 Interview, Marvin Hostetler.

37 Freeman Lambrite, interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Rushville, Indiana, July, 14, 1980.

38 Interview, Nelson Hostetter.

39 Interview, Delmar Stahly.
Although the MDS organization is geared to keeping as much authority as possible at the local level, major policy decisions such as establishing a budget or beginning a new ministry (ghetto housing, for example) are made at the national level by the MDS Section of MCC. This eighteen member board (see Appendix Two) elects four officers plus a fifth member to serve as the MDS Executive Committee which becomes the national decision making body in cases where it is considered impractical for the entire MDS section to be called together.

MDS has divided the United States and Canada into five regions (see Appendix One) which in turn have been divided into fifty-eight local units. In the western part of the United States and in Canada these boundaries were set up along state and provincial lines, while in the central and eastern part of the United States the units were organized around concentrated areas of Mennonites. Pennsylvania with its large Mennonite population is part of five different units. Each unit is granted considerable autonomy in organizing itself and carrying on its own program. The chain of command illustrated in Appendix One only comes into effect when the local unit does not feel it can handle a disaster which has occurred within its boundaries.

William Snyder, Executive Secretary of MCC, observed in analyzing the success of MDS that "it is important to see it (MDS)
as decentralized as possible. There are no bottlenecks at the
top. The key to all efficient administration is that the de-
cision making be made at the lowest level possible. All our
people understand that and there is a clear definition of 'turf.'
Whenever a disaster occurs, the unit in that area is in charge. 1

When a disaster does occur, it is the duty of the local unit
chairman (terminology varies from one unit to the next with co-
ordinator and chairman used interchangeably) to make sure that the
scene is investigated as soon as possible to determine the extent
of the damage and how many MDS men will be needed. If he feels
that his local unit cannot handle the job, he immediately contacts
his regional director. The regional director must then contact
the unit or units within his region which can best offer assistance.
This choice of units is based on distance to be travelled and man-
power available. If, as in most cases, the local investigator
feels that his own unit can take care of the work, he contacts his
coordinator to notify him of the manpower needs. A prearranged
network of congregational "contact persons" is then called to line
up a work force for the next day. MDS has earned a reputation for
being the first to arrive on the disaster scene and clean up has
usually begun within two days.

In an organization of this type it is absolutely essential
that local authority be placed in the hands of capable people. A
unit leader must be able to investigate disaster sites, assess
manpower needs, and oversee the relief work. In addition to these qualifications, he must also have the type of employment which allows him to go the instant a disaster strikes.

Since no two disasters are alike, the investigative work can present some interesting difficulties. Marvin Hostetler recalls being sent to investigate a tornado site in the early years of MDS work in Kansas. "A few weeks earlier another tornado had struck in Kansas and in that city our MDS men had received all kinds of help from the mayor, so everyone was telling me to find the mayor. I found him but he turned out to be a blacksmith who had no interest at all in cleaning up the mess. I kept looking around and finally found a county road inspector who helped us out."²

Most local units have an agreement with the state Civil Defense organization and the state Red Cross which calls for MDS to be notified in case a disaster occurs. This procedure has normally been followed although it is not uncommon for MDS to be on the disaster scene before the notification from either organization has been given. Red Cross and MDS work very closely together at the disaster scene, especially during the first few days when the investigative work is being done and priorities are being established concerning where help should be sent first. MDS prefers to make a complete investigation and establish a priority list on its own, but where the damage is too extensive the two organizations pool

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their resources. Some of the friction which has existed between the Red Cross and MDS in the past has involved differences of opinion concerning where help needed to be sent.

Another matter of administration in the hands of the unit chairman is the difficult question of determining when MDS' job is done and it is time to pull out of a disaster area. "The biggest leadership problem is determining how much help you can offer," says John Diller. "It would be nice if you could put everyone back to where they were before, but you will overwork your volunteers if you do."3

MDS men are not unanimous in their opinion on how long they should stay on the job or how extensive the MDS commitment to repair and reconstruction work should be. The philosophy of the national organization is to direct reconstruction and repair efforts toward those who could not otherwise afford to hire the work done, generally the poor and elderly. This requires that the Red Cross and/or the local MDS leadership determine the financial status and the insurance coverage of the victim. Without doubt some mistakes have been made in the past. "It has really bothered me when we have sent Mennonites in to work on $60,000 homes," says Marvin Hostetler. "The longer you stay on the job and the more you try to do, the more headaches you get into...We've had situations where we have donated labor and the people would wind up complaining that our work was not of high enough quality."4
The problem of determining how much help is enough has become a more common one as NDS has tried to expand into some long term projects. Frank Friesen was head of an NDS-Mennonite Voluntary Service project in the Rapid City area when he filed this report with the national office in August of 1973:

Although there is still much to be done, the common denominator of immediate physical need present last year is not so easy to determine now. The question of whom to serve, when, and how, and when to pull out keep presenting themselves.

Wilkes Community Effort director Joe Iero continually seeks out applicants for NDS help who would like to take advantage of available free labor. In Buffalo Creek, the valley grapevine keeps informing the NDS-VSers that some people are just using them.

In Rapid City the problems are different. "These people don't all seem to be really down and out," said one VSer. "Some have thick rugs and microwave ovens."5

Similar difficulties have accompanied many of the longer term NDS projects. Freeman Lambert mentioned some of the reasons NDS has not been more anxious to get involved in the area of rebuilding. "We have to find an able, cooperative contractor to work with, and we have to get the materials to the building site. The owner usually pays for the materials or, in cases of poverty, there are government agencies which will provide them. We have had situations where we have had the men and the contractor ready to go but the government loan for the building materials hadn't come through."6 In spite of such difficulties several local units have had success with building projects, particularly in ghetto areas.
Another area of some disagreement within the MDS organization are the limits imposed by the unit boundaries. While most of the local and regional units have stayed within their jurisdiction, there have been some instances when the lines have been ignored. Delmar Stahly recalls the Palm Sunday tornadoes of 1965 which devastated Indiana:

Ham radio operators in Indiana kept calling local MDS people here in Pennsylvania and reporting on how bad the situation was and asking for help. My contact man in Indiana also reported the same bad situation, but he also said that they had enough men, so I didn't allow any local men to go. Well, a number of local people went ahead on their own, and the result was chaos. We really learned some lessons from that one.8

Freeman Lambrtite was Stahly's Indiana contact person during the Palm Sunday tornado and he has similar memories.

It's not that we weren't glad for their (Pennsylvania volunteers) coming. But we really had as many men working in the field as we could handle. The only thing that saved us that time was that we had large numbers of Mennonites living in the area who opened their doors to us...otherwise I don't know what we would have done.8

Kansas, with its large rural Mennonite population is one unit which has sometimes felt stifled by the restrictions of unit lines. "We've had Kansas guys by the busload who wanted to go," states Marvin Hostetler, describing situations when neighboring states had disasters and Kansas MDS was not invited in. "We don't like to wait for a call when we know there are people in need."9

The "eagerness" of some of the more active units has not always been appreciated by their neighbors. Lambrtite recalls supervising work at a flood site when a man from another region
phoned and announced that he was bringing in a busload of young people to work. "They weren't invited, they weren't well supervised, and we had a real mess. It is very important to be conscious of the other unit's feelings. There have been several occasions when we (Indiana and southern Michigan unit) have been invited to help out the Kentucky-Tennessee unit and we've been glad to do so. But we've always waited to be invited in by the regional director."^10

Earlier comments in this chapter indicate that it is in the area of clean up that MDS volunteers feel most comfortable. The majority of the publicity which MDS has received through newspapers, magazines, and television concerns the volunteers doing the "dirty work" at the disaster scene. Their willingness to clean up the mud, muck and debris in the immediate aftermath of floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes has made a tremendous impression on the disaster victims as the following statements by the mayor of Cambridge, Ontario indicate:

The condition of our town was unbelievable. I thought that just moving furniture out on the street would be a big help. I didn't realize the Mennonites would go right in the basements and shovel out the crud. I could use a less delicate word... The owner of the Albion Hotel here is a Jew. He told me, "You wouldn't believe the way those Mennonites worked in the synagogue—they cleaned up our synagogue! And they came to my hotel and asked if they could lift the carpet. They did. Then they asked if there wasn't something else. What about the basement? I told them that they shouldn't go down there. I couldn't stand the smell myself...the muck and sewage. You know what? They started there. These Old Order Mennonites mucked out the whole messy basement. I had offered ten
dollars an hour to get it cleaned up. No takers. They went in—the Mennonites went in—the whole bunch of them—cleaned it from end to end, because they wanted to help me."

There have been literally hundreds of similar accounts written in newspapers and magazines all across the United States and Canada. Most of the articles describe the work of the Mennonites, show some pictures, and quote expressions of gratitude from the disaster victims. Such publications as Newsweek and the National Observer have included articles on the work of MDS. Aside from the newspaper and magazine articles, most of what has been written about MDS has been for Mennonite publications. The most extensive treatment MDS has received from a non-Mennonite writer was the book Torn Land, authored by Jerry and Paige Simpson. The Simpsons were hired by a local historical society to write the story of the flood which ripped through Nelson County, Virginia in 1968. Their descriptions of the impact of the flood and the clean up and restoration after the flood help explain why MDS has been so appreciated by disaster victims throughout the United States and Canada.

Sixteen of the twenty-six chapters of Torn Land are interviews with local residents in which they express their feelings about the flood and clean up. Neither the writer nor the residents hesitated to criticize local officials or outside organizations. Red Cross, for example, is repeatedly taken to task for its lack of heart, its self-serving publicity, and its inability
to adapt to local conditions. On the other hand, the comments of
the authors and the residents were unanimous in their praise of
the work of the MDS volunteers.

Bryan Cooke, a Nelson County resident and college student was
a leader in the search for bodies which had been buried by the
flood. He described the Mennonite volunteers with which he worked
as "really excellent. They were the only ones who I took out that
really worked me to death...They'd do anything!...And nothing
seemed to bother them."\textsuperscript{12}

Dr. James Gamble, a local physician whose job it was to
identify the disintegrating bodies was also interviewed by Simp-
son. "We had some good local people at work but the Mennonite
teams were just fantastic. Those people would get right down on
their hands and knees just like squirrels. And they take these
piles of debris apart piece by piece and sift it. And if they
smell anything, they'll take the whole huge pile apart by hand
looking for the body."\textsuperscript{13}

Episcopal clergyman Wilfred Roach indicated that the visit
of MDS had had a significant impact on the spiritual life of
Nelson County. "In fulfilling the purpose of the Mennonite Dis-
aster Service, they have cleaned houses, they have repaired houses,
they have built houses; their work has been a startling illustra-
tion of a miracle of love. This has undoubtedly lightened and
given strength to our people."\textsuperscript{14}
Author Simpson is much more skeptical of this supposed impact on the spiritual attitudes of the people of Nelson County.

It has caused people to question their own faith and that of their churches, since no other church, or religious group, responded the way the Mennonites did. Many other churches sent food, clothing, and money. Some sent week end workers. But one did not find the members of other churches dropping everything and rushing to the aid of the stricken people of Nelson County. It was not even found within the county among those who were not affected by the disaster. Practically all of the cleaning up of the homes and buildings in the county was done by the Mennonites, although the Salvation Army had started the work. And quite the largest percentage of the bodies recovered, the smelly messy part of it was done by the Mennonites. The "miracle of love" of which Beoch speaks apparently has not occurred among many of the churches.15

In a chapter entitled "The Marvelous Mennonites," Simpson quotes the following reactions of Nelson County residents to the work of MDS:

If they had a disaster up in Pennsylvania, I wonder if any of us would leave our farms for a week or two weeks to go up there and help them? I doubt it.

Sacrifice? We talk about it, but they live it. That's why they have that glow. They were all saints... Try to imagine what it would have been like without them. I know that many of our people did great deeds, but who is still working to rebuild the county? Really working? So far as I can see, nobody but the Mennonites.

A clergymen added that:

My congregation read in Genesis 9:20 that after the great flood Noah got drunk. Many of my people did the same. But not the Mennonites. Cheerfully sober, they toiled to mend a torn land.16

Such comments have led to a pleasant dilemma for MDS. How does an organization which is based on the principle of Christian servanthood handle the honors and praise which come its way?
Following the clean up and rebuilding in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, MDS received letters of appreciation from Governor Archie Moore, HUD Secretary George Romney, and President Richard Nixon. Many of the states and cities which have benefitted from MDS work have passed resolutions expressing gratitude. Cautioning his MDS colleagues against the possible pride which such recognition might bring, Executive Coordinator Hostetter wrote the following in a newsletter concerning the receiving of awards.

As units and individuals decide to accept extensions of gratitude, Christian humility should be maintained. The Liberty, Pennsylvania area unit of MDS recently declined recognition at a banquet with this simple, gentle and quiet statement: "One should not be honored for merely performing his Christian responsibility." 17

Hostetter has received awards on behalf of the MDS organization but he has turned down individual awards feeling that "a true anabaptist would not allow himself to be showered with awards. It goes against the brotherhood, sisterhood idea. We feel that all members in our organization are equally important." 18

Neither Hostetter nor Stahlly could recall any outside criticism of the work of MDS. "Most of the criticism has been self-criticism," notes Hostetter. It mostly comes from attempts to improve our work and service." 19

Stahlly adds that, "We have escaped much of the criticism which Red Cross has come in for. We know that we have made lots of mistakes but I guess the volunteer nature of our organization has helped us over some rough spots." 20
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER FOUR


3 John Diller interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Hesston, Kansas, July 6, 1980.

4 Interview, Marvin Hostetler.


6 Freeman Lambrite interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Rushville, Indiana, July 14, 1980.


8 Interview, Freeman Lambrite.

9 Interview, Marvin Hostetler.

10 Interview, Freeman Lambrite.

11 Katie Funk Wiebe, Day of Disaster (Scottsdale, Pa., 1976), 58.

12 Jerry and Paige Simpson, Torn Land (Lynchburg, Va., 1970), 271.

13 Ibid., 457.

14 Ibid., 271.

15 Ibid., 372.

16 Ibid.


19 Ibid.

20 Interview, Delmar Stahly.
THE MDS VOLUNTEER

The Mennonite Disaster Service could not function without the hundreds of volunteers across the country who have given their time and effort to make MDS a success. Any history of MDS would be incomplete if it did not take a close look at these individuals who have kept it going. MDS volunteers come in both sexes, all sizes, shapes, and ages. In a housing project in Denver where Kansans were providing much of the labor, a bus load of thirty workers included a few teenagers and a seventy-eight year old woman, a former missionary. At the Rushville, Indiana tornado clean up, one day's work force consisted of three boys in their teens and three men of retirement age. With the willingness of Mennonites to serve, and the lack of "qualifications" necessary to work on the job, MDS has never had a labor shortage.

Why do they come? It is a question which volunteers have been confronted with hundreds of times since 1950. It is a question which calls for answers at two levels. As an institution, why is the Mennonite Church with a North American membership of only about 250,000 the only denomination in North America to make disaster relief a major part of its church ministry? And on an individual level, why is a person who has grown up in a materialistic society willing to leave a job to do volunteer work which is often unpleasant? These are questions to which only the
MDS workers can give a proper response.

There is a wide variety of answers among Mennonites as to why disaster relief has been a success with them. In an AP story covering MDS work in Kansas, relief worker Fred Unruh explained to a reporter that "the Mennonites know what disaster and tragedy are. They've lived with it all their lives and they want to help others out of their suffering. We believe that the strong motivation for service is basic to our Christian faith."

Peter Dyck, who witnessed the origin of MDS in Kansas and also worked with Mennonite refugees in Europe after World War II stated that the Mennonites' history and theology help to explain why MDS has been successful:

First, I think it arises right out of the middle of our theology...about helping those in need. Secondly there is the memory of our history, always being persecuted and a minority group. Thirdly, we Mennonites are a very cohesive group, for us it was just natural to call a few preachers, have a meeting...and the whole thing just takes off. We are perhaps a little more flexible than some other churches. We didn't have to ask a bishop, we didn't have to ask anybody...on second thought we did pray, we did ask God.

The World War II experiences of Mennonite conscientious objectors can also be seen as contributing to the beginning of MDS. Many Mennonites faced criticism from their neighbors for not taking part in the war. Conscientious objectors were often labelled "slackers." To counteract such charges Mennonites began looking for a positive way of expressing their peace witness. "So much of pacifism is negative," notes Delmar Stahly. "We had started a
mental health program and a voluntary service program and maybe

disaster relief was another way to reverse some of the negative
feelings we had from World War II. It made our people feel good
that they were doing something positive."³

Marvin Hostetler was affected by World War II in a different
way. "I got a deferment during World War II and I thought I was
the lucky one," he recalls. "But then when the war was over and
all the CPS men came home I realized that I had really missed out
on something. Many of them were involved in a person to person
ministry in CPS and it had had a real effect on them. I didn't
want to miss out a second time, so when MDS came along I jumped
right on."⁴

The rural lifestyle traditionally maintained by most Mennonites
has been compatible with disaster relief. Someone working
eight hours a day in a factory would have a hard time getting to
the disaster scene. Since many Mennonites were self-employed,
often in farming and carpentering, they were able to meet the
unpredictable demands of disasters.

Marvin Hostetler notes the cooperative aspects of farm life
which carry over into MDS work. "I was born in a rural community
and dad always worked with the neighbors at harvest time and the
neighbors would in turn come and help us. No one kept track of
time. In our church we were taught to help everybody...its just
part of our heritage."⁵

This heritage is apparently being successfully passed along
to the next generation. After working for a couple hours in ninety
degree heat cleaning up debris left in the wake of a tornado in
Rushville, Indiana, sixteen year old John Kuise observed that, "I
guess this is all just a part of being a Mennonite—trying to serve
and help people in need. We drive down here, (a three hour drive
from his home in Elkhart, Indiana; he had started at four o'clock
in the morning) work all day, go home dirty and tired and with no
pay, and feel good about it." 6

Mennonites have always emphasized a type of work ethic and
a simple, humble lifestyle. This emphasis on humility and hard
work has made the "dirty work" of disaster relief acceptable to
them. Freeman Lambrite, who has directed several relief projects
feels that "Mennonites work together and stick together. We are
not afraid to be Indians. Most of the church groups who have
tried to work with us all want to be chiefs...everyone wants to
give orders. Fortunately we don't have that problem. We are
not afraid to take orders and do dirty work." 7

Delmar Stahly recalls several church leaders from other de-
nominations approaching him when he was coordinator and wondering
how they could get a similar program started in their churches.
"Their problem was that they were trying to create interest from
the top down while for us the interest started at the bottom and
worked its way up." 8

These explanations all point to the conclusion that the
Mennonite Church and disaster relief are ideally suited for each
other. The Mennonites' history as a persecuted people has made them sympathetic to innocent people who are experiencing pain and loss. Their theology with its emphasis on Christian discipleship and servanthood has made them willing to cooperate and to do work which some would find demeaning. Their rural lifestyle has permitted them the freedom to go to disaster sites immediately while the work ethic has enabled them to function efficiently. The World War II experience, during which most Mennonites took a stand which was not popular with their neighbors, and the CPS work in which many Mennonite young men found that service for others could be rewarding, provided the immediate thrust which got MDS started.

From its beginnings the most vocal "advertisers" for MDS have been the individual volunteers. "The best selling job you can do on a volunteer is to get him or her there the first time. After that they don't need any selling job at all," says Syd Reimer, a Canadian MDS vice-chairman. A Vancouver psychologist, writing in a Canadian magazine article describing the MDS work at a flood site, makes the following observations concerning possible motivations:

As far as I can see the Mennonites have rediscovered one of the oldest secrets known to man. Most people are so preoccupied with taking care of number one they've really forgotten how to arrange for the basic joy of simply being well-liked by one's neighbor. The Mennonites, with their rural background and their history of cooperative living know what most farmers anywhere have always known: the simplest way to make life livable is to extend a little help to your neighbor for free. It creates more warmth than a tanker full of oil, it is better protection than a
dozen insurance policies. You feel like a million bucks every time you do it.10

Individual volunteers have many different answers when asked why they have given of their time to work at disaster sites. Paul Diener, a long time MDS volunteer and secretary for the Kansas unit said:

For me personally its (MDS volunteer work) a part of my Christian witness, and it is the acceptable part of my peace witness. If I go to the office and start talking about not registering for the draft or not paying war taxes, I am immediately turned off. But when I mention something about working with disaster relief they (other workers in his office) are interested and willing to talk about it. I also was very anxious that my children would see us sacrificing in a Christian way to do some type of service and MDS has given me that opportunity."11

"It's a relationship," says Marvin Hostetler. "If we let them know that we really care about them, even if we can't help them that much physically...we've helped to get them back on their feet again and it always makes us feel good."12 "You can put some money in a basket and you may help someone," says John Diller. "But in MDS you are rubbing shoulders with the person you are helping."13

Diener points out another significant reason why MDS has attracted many Mennonite men. "Women in the church are usually kept fairly busy," says Diener. "They're teaching Sunday School or involved in missions organizations, or in the choir. But what do the men do? If they can't preach or sing they will probably just sit there and do nothing. It is the duty of the church to develop the gifts of its members, and for many, MDS has been the
main avenue of involvement. In my mind it was God-sent."\(^{14}\)

Hostetler recalls taking an informal poll during a lunch break at an MDS project site to determine how involved the men were in their home congregations. "We found that only eight or nine out of a group of fifty-five volunteers held any office or position. I've seen guys working like troopers at the disaster scene who never said two words in church. For them this has been their major source of interest and involvement with the church."\(^{15}\)

One would be mistaken to think that all volunteers have completely pure motives. No doubt some go out of a sense of obligation or because of peer pressure. Others are curious about the amount of damage that has been done and want a first-hand view of the destruction. In the 1976 coordinator's report Nelson Hostetter noted that "there were plenty of volunteers to go to the southeastern states during the winter. It raises the question about motivation when people volunteer so freely to go to a warm climate during the winter to do 'relief' work."\(^{16}\) The evidence would indicate that the "curiosity seekers" and "snow birds" are in a distinct minority. Most people who volunteer with MDS come back again and again. The novelty of disaster relief work wears off quickly when one spends an entire day shovelling mud out of a basement or picking up sticks and boards left in the wake of a tornado. An MDS record work force of 3,300 volunteers was in the field in the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes in 1972. There have been other times when the volunteers in the field have numbered over a
thousand. Such numbers do not continue to come unless something meaningful is being provided through the MDS experience.

One matter which has bothered these volunteers and the MDS leadership over the years is how an individual should answer what has become a familiar question: "Why are you here?" Should MDS be used as a tool for evangelism? If so, should guidance be given to the volunteers concerning how they should share their personal faith? An individual who has just lost a home or a loved one through "an act of God" might present an inviting target to an evangelically zealous volunteer. As early as 1957 an MDS newsletter expressed the need for "an interpretative statement" to help the volunteer answer why he or she had come. Shortly thereafter the leaflet entitled Why We Are Here (see Appendix Four) was published and made available to all volunteers. The pamphlet is still available (under a different title) but volunteers are not required to carry them and the extent of its use seems to vary from state to state.

Most MDS workers and leaders feel that a balance needs to be struck between saying nothing at all about one's personal faith and hitting the victim over the head with a "heaven or hell make your decision now" sermon. In 1966 Fred Unruh was asked to present some guidelines for MDS workers to follow in expressing their faith to disaster victims at an MDS executive committee meeting. After beginning by saying that "a lot of people are wrong who feel that disaster action will communicate

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by itself without a verbal witness," he offered the following

guidelines regarding MDS and the evangelism issue:

1. We can confuse issues of therapy ministries and crisis
evangelism. Love suggests that we move gently in pushing
for decisions amid crises, when emotions, the search for
security, etc. are at a high level.

2. The key word in witnessing is not action, but inter-
action.

3. There can be no "hidden agendas," "bait,"...if MDS is
using disaster work as bait, we will be turned off.

4. Technique must be appropriate to the message, to the
hearer, and to the situation. 17

Marvin Hostetler recalls leading a group of Kansans to Texas
to clean up after a hurricane and hearing one of the MDS volunteers
tell a Texan that the reason he had come was because it had rained
up in Kansas. "I knew we had to have a better reason than that for
being there," says Hostetler. "On the other extreme I've seen
volunteers walking along side of a victim preaching at him. I
feel my first objective is to get them (the disaster victims) to
trust me. After that if they ask me personally I tell them that
as a Christian I am to love my neighbor and there aren't enough
neighbors around. God has loved me and I want to share it. If
they have any more questions I try to answer them." 18

"MDS is not a case of street-corner evangelism," explains
Fred Unruh. When people are in trouble they want help, not
sermons. God doesn't take a tornado by the tail and stick it in
somebody's yard because they've done wrong. Disasters have al-
ways happened and we can best show our faith by the way we react
to them. That's why we help." 19
"I have seen some very awkward situations when a volunteer tried to confront a victim with Christ," says Paul Diener. "I don't trust myself to use that (disaster) as an 'in.' I personally don't confront the victims although I will answer any questions they might have."\(^{20}\)

The person-to-person relationship summarizes the success of MDS as a ministry. Some organizations on the disaster scene have been criticized for being businesslike and brusque with the victims, but for the volunteer the victim is the center of attention. Marge Ulrich bears this out in describing her experiences while working with flood victims in Tennessee. "Just listening to people tell their stories is one of the most valuable things we're doing. These people have experienced a tremendous shock and as part of their recovery they need to have someone hear what happened to them."\(^{21}\)

"The people are just so overwhelmed that they are getting help that they become curious and doors just open," says Freeman Lambrite. "After we've told them who we are it's not uncommon for them to look at us and say, 'We never knew such people existed in the United States.' We don't try to hit people over the head but we want to answer their questions in a way they can understand."\(^{22}\)

Perhaps the most obvious example of this philosophy at work took place in the Corning-Elmira area of New York which was devastated by Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Over two years later MDS
volunteers were still on the scene building homes. During this two
year period a considerable number of contacts had been made with
the local residents, many of whom took an interest in the volun-
teers' faith and work. Eventually two Mennonite fellowships were
formed made up of volunteers and victims which are continuing to
meet.

Since Mennonites have traditionally been a rural people is
there a danger that the supply of volunteers will be choked off
as Mennonites become increasingly urbanized? MDS has slightly
altered its "look" to accommodate the new lifestyle of many
Mennonites. In 1973 the first of the MDS "travelling youth
squad" was organized. These squads are open to anyone between
eighteen and thirty with a satisfactory reference from their
pastor or congregational MDS contact person. The squads operate
from three to eight months and each youth receives a twenty-five
dollar monthly allowance along with meals and transportation.
The youth squads are normally involved in longer term repair or
reconstruction work. In addition to the youth squads, MDS is al-
so taking advantage of some of the newer developments in industry
to help stock its ranks. Hostetter points out that "we are in-
volving many retired and semi-retired people who are donating
their time. More and more people are getting four to six weeks
vacation and they don't know what to do with it all, so they are
giving it to us. City churches have had success with moonlight-
ing (disaster relief work done in the evenings and on Saturdays).
All in all we feel pretty secure about our manpower needs in the future."\(^{23}\)
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER FIVE

1MCC News Service, August 20, 1966.

2Peter Dyck interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Akron, Pa., June 27, 1979.


5Interview, Marvin Hostetler.


7Freeman Lambrine interviewed by Brice Brenneman, Rushville, Indiana, July 14, 1980.

8Interview, Delmar Stahly.


10Ibid.


12Interview, Marvin Hostetler.


14Interview, Paul Diener.

15Interview, Marvin Hostetler.

16MDS Executive Committee minutes, February 11, 1976, MDS files, Akron, Pa.

17Speech delivered by Fred Unruh to MDS Executive Committee October 9, 1966, MDS files, Akron, Pa.

18Interview, Marvin Hostetler.

20. Interview, Paul Diener.


22. Interview, Freeman Lambrity.

23. Interview, Nelson Hostetter.
CONCLUSION

Most Mennonites involved with MDS are justifiably proud of what this layman's organization has accomplished and are enthusiastically optimistic about its future. MDS has provided thousands of Mennonites with an opportunity for service and church involvement. At the same time it has made a significant contribution to the field of disaster relief. It has been the purpose of this paper to present the beginning and the development of this organization and to show the problems MDS has faced during its thirty years of existence.

While MDS has expanded beyond the imaginations of its founders, this development has not taken place without "growing pains." It has experienced the same kind of internal disagreements associated with any human organization. Most of these differences of opinion have involved the questions listed in the preface of this paper. Some of these issues have been successfully settled. The relationship with the Red Cross has improved markedly since the days when an MDS official sensed that "we (MDS) were not really wanted by the Red Cross." The two organizations have developed an effective working arrangement and now function smoothly on most disaster sites. On the other hand, the related issues of overorganization, the role of the national coordinator, and the expansion of MDS into new fields of work have not yet been resolved.

But for the most part the MDS story has been a success story. No single factor and no individual is responsible for this. It
has been the result of a combination of factors and the efforts of many. The following paragraphs explain the major factors which this research found to be responsible for MDS’ success.

Mennonite theology with its emphasis on a literal interpretation of Christ's commands concerning peacemaking, servanthood, and discipleship has provided the basis for MDS. A sincere Mennonite is looking for opportunities to do something positive to achieve peace and serve people in need. MDS has provided such opportunities. The organizing of Civilian Public Service during World War II was a direct result of the peace stand in the Mennonite Church. The throwing together of young men from all over the country broke down many barriers between Mennonites and provided a sense of unity which had previously been lacking. This unity was needed for an effort like MDS to be successful. The person-to-person work in which many CPS men were involved was rewarding and many returned to their homes with a desire to find similar opportunities to positively express their peace witness.

The "Mennonite way of life" has also been a factor in MDS' success. The traditional occupations of farming and carpentering enabled Mennonites to go as soon as a disaster struck. MDS has seldom had a shortage of volunteers. It is perhaps fortunate that MDS originated and became established at a time when the vast majority of Mennonites lived in rural areas. After thirty years of urbanization, it is doubtful if today's Mennonites could respond so enthusiastically to a movement requiring so much time and
freedom. The "work ethic" and cooperative way of life required by farm living have made Mennonites an efficient and cooperative work force on the disaster scene. The Mennonite heritage as a persecuted minority group has made them sympathetic to the "innocent victims" of disasters. The years of persecution in Europe have made Mennonites aware of what the loss of life and property means to those who are left behind.

The volunteer's involvement at the disaster scene is a final reason for the success of MDS. Work which might otherwise seem dirty or boring is perceived as meaningful by a volunteer who sees himself fulfilling Christ's command to "bear one another's burdens." The change that often takes place in the disaster victim can also make the work rewarding. One volunteer remarked that "if we can get there quick and let the person know that the situation isn't hopeless and get them to start helping themselves, we've done a big part of our job." The "good feeling" with which most volunteers leave the disaster scene after a hard day's work has brought those volunteers back again and again.

The integration of MDS into Mennonite history, theology, and "way of life," is extraordinary. The strong Biblical emphasis on service that Mennonites feel has called them into the disaster relief field and the Mennonite belief that one's faith should be put to work are expressed in this executive coordinator's report filed by Nelson Hostetter in 1972.
While eight rebuilding and community service projects were in operation; 600 homes were cleaned in Rapid City; 1,300 homes were muddied out in Wilkes-Barre, we should not be satisfied to rest on these numbers and accomplishments or we should be missing our goal. The genuine motivation of MDS is found in Galatians 6:2 where we go and we come to share burdens, to mend lives emotionally distraught, to bring family circles together again, to restore order to communities in chaos. As MDS is faithful in its commonplace traditional disaster service of clean up and restoration, temporary dwelling and reconstruction for the aged and poor, it will continue to open doors for other activities and ministries.2

This combination of "faith and works," has provided the philosophy for MDS work for the past thirty years. As long as the Mennonite Church maintains its emphasis on discipleship and servant-hood, disaster victims across the United States and Canada will continue to benefit from this unique organization.
FOOTNOTES—CONCLUSION

1Marvin Hostetler interviewed by Brice Brenneman, July 7, 1980.

APPENDIX II

MDS Service Manual Definitions

1. MDS Unit - The unit is the basic MDS organization of cooperating congregations within a given area. In some areas, particularly in the western part of the United States, the unit is organized along state lines. In Canada the organization is along provincial lines. In the central and eastern part of the United States the units are organized around concentrated areas of Mennonites; therefore, perhaps covering parts of a number of states. Each unit should involve all related congregations within its area and investigate needs in neighboring areas as called on by regional directors.

2. MDS Regions - Those areas in the United States and Canada composed of certain states or provinces or parts of states or provinces as determined by the Mennonite Disaster Service Section of the Mennonite Central Committee. The regional organization is responsible to the combined units within the region, representatives of which elect the officers and arrange, through unit support, the financing of the regional organization and its activities.

3. Executive Coordinating Office - To coordinate the programs and projects of MDS in a general way. The MDS Section defines the job descriptions of the staff in the Executive Coordinating Office and evaluate their activities. The staff relates to and negotiates with other national disaster agencies. They are to be available to investigate disaster areas and offer counsel. They are to study and develop MDS trends, philosophies and policies.

4. MDS Section - This board meets twice a year to set policy and monitor the program of MDS. Out of the eighteen members, five are elected to act as the Executive Committee, which meets four times a year. The Section is made up of the five Regional Directors, one MCC representative, nine conference representatives, one MCC (Canada) representative and two members-at-large.
APPENDIX III

MDS Local Units

Region One
1. Northern New York
2. Western New York
3. Pennsylvania-New York
4. Eastern Pennsylvania
5. Lancaster area, Pa.
7. Western Pennsylvania and Maryland
8. Delmarva Peninsula
11. North Carolina and East Tennessee
12. South Carolina
13. Alabama and Northwest Florida
14. Central and Southern Florida
15. Puerto Rico
16. New England States
17. Georgia

Region Two
1. Wisconsin
2. Michigan
3. Illinois
4. Indiana and Lower Michigan
5. Western Ohio
6. Eastern Ohio
7. Kentucky and Tennessee
8. Mississippi and Louisiana

Region Three
1. Western Montana
2. Eastern Montana
3. North Dakota
4. Northern Minnesota
5. South Dakota
6. Minnesota
7. Nebraska
8. Iowa
9. Colorado
10. Kansas
11. Missouri
12. Arkansas
13. Oklahoma
14. New Mexico
15. Texas

Region Four
1. Western Washington
2. Eastern Washington
3. Oregon
4. Idaho
5. California
6. Arizona

Region Five
1. Manitoba
2. Saskatchewan
3. Alberta
4. Ontario
5. British Columbia
APPENDIX IV

Why We Are Here

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... and thy neighbor as thyself. The Bible

We may be strangers to you but you are our neighbors. We cannot fully understand your loss but we want to share your burden. We wish to follow Christ and his teaching in all our living. We consider anyone in need our neighbor. When disaster strikes we desire to give assistance as we are able.

God sent Jesus into this world of distress and sin because He understands and wants to help those who are in need. As Christian people we want to share this love with you by helping you and reminding you that Christ died to redeem each of us.

If we can be of further assistance, whether physical or spiritual, please feel free to call on any of our volunteers.
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Archival Materials

MDS files for the years 1965 to the present are located in the MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania. They contain newsletters, minutes of meetings on the national level, correspondence, unpublished articles and reports, and newspaper clippings.

MDS files from 1950 to 1965 are in the Mennonite Archives at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana. While less complete, these files contain the same materials mentioned above.

Interviews

Paul Diener, Kansas MDS state committeeman, was interviewed in Hesston, Kansas on July 5, 1980.

John Diller, secretary of the first MSO meeting and Kansas MDS coordinator for over twenty years, interviewed in Hesston, Kansas on July 5, 1980.

Peter Dyck, pastor of the Eden Mennonite Church in Moundridge, Kansas at the time MDS was begun, interviewed in Akron, Pennsylvania on June 26, 1979.

Marvin Hostetler, former Kansas MDS state chairman, interviewed in Hillsboro, Kansas on July 6, 1980.


Freeman Lambrite, Indiana—Lower Michigan MDS unit chairman, interviewed in Rushville, Indiana on July 14, 1980.

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