

Mennonite Disaster Service Canada **REPORT**

For many Canadians today, the church is “unnoticed and unimportant.” That’s the view of Gabe and Rachel Warriner, co-pastors of River Valley Community Church in Grand Forks, B.C.

“The church is invisible,” says Gabe. “Nobody knows who we are as Christians. We’re irrelevant to people who drive past our buildings every day.”

But then a natural disaster comes along and—if Christians are paying attention to God’s leading—all that can change.

That’s what happened in Grand Forks following unprecedented flooding in spring 2018 that damaged over 400 homes in the community of 4,200 people. River Valley, a Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada congregation of about 100, responded by helping with sandbagging. But after the water receded, what could they do to help people rebuild their homes and lives?

Then Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) showed up. Working with the church and local officials, we brought in about 200 volunteers to rebuild and repair 15 homes.

The result was a new sense of appreciation for the church in the community, says Rachel.

“People were surprised when they saw the church was stepping up to help. It wasn’t what they expected. They didn’t think that’s what Christians did.” Adds Gabe: “There was a growing awareness of what the church is for. It’s a real plus for the Christian faith in Grand Forks for people to know what it means to be Christian.”

Grand Forks is just one place in Canada where MDS sought to be the hands and feet of Jesus on your behalf in 2019. Other places where we served included Ontario, where we helped people recover from flooding; Manitoba, where we built a house for a widow who lost



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**GABE WARRINER, CO-PASTOR,
RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH, GRAND FORKS**

her home in a fire; and also in Newfoundland, where we built a house for a family who lost their home in a fire. At the same time, volunteers served in locations in the U.S. in places like Texas, Florida, North and South Carolina, and California.

At the end of the project in Grand Forks, MDS project co-director Peter Thiessen handed Gabe a “baton”—an old hammer used by volunteers. “We recognize we are only in a community for a season,” Peter said as he gave Gabe the hammer.

“It’s like a relay. We are glad to do what we can to help people rebuild their homes and restore their lives. But we can only take it so far before we leave. Then we hand off the baton to the local church to follow up with the people we served.”

For Gabe and Rachel, it was an important moment. “We’re not going anywhere,” he says. “We plan to stay

engaged with MDS’s clients and our community. We intend to let people know the church is always here, always ready to help them.”

Your continued support for MDS, either as a volunteer or by donations, is greatly appreciated! With your help we can continue to work with local churches to be a witness of God’s generous love for those who have been impacted by natural disasters, and to the communities where we serve.
—Ross Penner, Director of Canadian Operations



Peter Thiessen of MDS passes the “baton” to River Valley Church pastor Gabe Warriner.



**Mennonite
Disaster
Service**

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