**Hurricane Helene’s Devastation**

R. Carter Blaisdell

The Swannanoa Valley was the epicenter of Hurricane Helene’s devastation in Southeastern US states of FL, GA, SC, NC, TN, VA. There were hundreds of deaths, mostly by drowning or mudslides. The Swannanoa Valley at the east end of Buncombe County suffered the most deaths and property losses. This is where we live.

**Swannanoa Valley was blindsided**

Most everyone went to bed Thursday, September 26, 2024, reassured from weather forecasts that Murphy, NC, 100 miles Southwest, would get the brunt of Helene’s destructive force between 2 and 6 am Friday, Sept. 27.

But when Helene met the mountains along the Georgia-North Carolina border, it shifted three counties to the east. The Swannanoa Valley’s towns of Ridgecrest, Montreat, Black Mountain and Swannanoa already had three days of rain soaking the soil.

At 2 am I woke up to the sound of 140 mph winds with rain pounding against our bedroom windows. I thought, “If it’s this bad here, I feel sorry for those poor folks in Murphy, who are getting it so much worse. I’d better pray for them,” not knowing that we, not Murphy, were in the storm’s epicenter.

**Get out now!**

Helene brought another 24 in. between 2 and 6 am. No one expected our vast forested mountains to shed their rainfall as quickly as they did. At 4 am Captain Bobby Davis, Black Mountain Fire Dept., called Jim Caro, a Volunteer Fireman, and said, “Jim, we’re concerned about the Asheville Dam (Burnett Reservoir or North Fork Reservoir) holding. Get out now!” Jim and Marilyn’s home is next to the Laurel Ridge gate.

Jim contacted their neighbors, Dr. Tate Fegley, Professor, Montreat College, and his wife, Lea, returned home to grab a few items and left per usual by way of the Left Fork Rd. off the North Fork Rd. Their destination: the parking lot of Ingles Grocery Store, Swannanoa.

As they passed homes bordering Laurel Branch past farmer Brown’s cattle acreage, they saw firemen evacuating dwellers as Laurel Branch was rising with boulders and trees.

Most of the water filling the Swannanoa River during those early morning hours came from the Dam’s spillways. Helene dumped 40 trillion gallons of water.

By 6 am the Swannanoa River had become a churning, raging monster, moving far beyond our Laurel Ridge community. Those waters were loaded with boulders, trees, homes, cars and people. Survivors were shocked, dazed, overwhelmed, yet grateful.

The height exceeded by 12 inches the previous 1916 high water mark of 21 ft. in Biltmore Village. Flood stage is four ft.

“How could this be?” “Who can survive such a Biblically-proportioned force?” Most did survive. But how many did not? How many were swept away to their deaths in the Swannanoa River that morning or were buried under mudslides between 4 am and 12 noon?

Until their bodies are found and identified by forensic professionals, they will not be counted as deceased due to Helene. But why will NC State officials not report on the number of reported missing because of Helene?

**Reclusive pioneer descendants**

Throughout the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western NC there remain several hundred descendants of the original 1793 European settlers. Mission Mules searched for reclusive mountain dwellers, who had been living in their cabins for generations. Many of them were washed away while sleeping in their isolated log cabins.

**An anecdotal impression of the death toll**

Anecdotally, “Eleven members of the Craig family drowned in ‘Craigsville’ area of Fairview. Two firemen from Garren Creek Fire Station 23 drowned while trying to rescue one of them.”

Another “Eleven people, gathered for a wedding reception, were swept away” in Swannanoa on September 27. “The grandparents escaped because they were at home with the flu.”

“The father with two children barely escaped their home when they saw it being swept away with their wife/mother inside, never to be seen again” in Swannanoa.

A long-time resident of Chimney Rock in a TV interview said, “100 of our people drowned” by the rapidly rising Rocky Broad River.

A nurse said, “I was among the first to drive into our narrow valley after the flood waters had receded. At first, I thought I was seeing Halloween skeletons caught high up in some trees. When I got closer, I realized they were dead bodies.”

A man living at the end of Moffett Branch Rd., Oteen, said, “I saw 30 bodies and trees roaring down Moffett Branch. All homes (about 12) on the road were washed away with their residents. Those homes blocked traffic at the bridge on US Hwy. 70, west of the road to Exit 55 on I-40. Many cars were swept away while driving in that area. A woman saved three people, but could not reach five others, who were taken away.”

“A man opened his front door and found five dead bodies on his front lawn” in Old Fort.

**Disruptive, deadly mudslides**

Around 10 am we heard reports of vast mudslides, including one at 101 Sugar Maple Dr. that blocked our Laurel Ridge Community’s ability to exit or enter. The mud was scooped out in a few hours by resident volunteers.

Official reports through the media, town hall meetings or unofficial news through texts, Email, grapevine, phone or ham radio – all helped report the latest news. Many national and world media took notice and sent their own reporters and cameramen to see, hear and report live.

The Cajun Navy gets their name as boat owners, but they come to search for isolated mountain dwellers. They were asked to check on Jo Jane Korbach, a 104-year-old who refused to leave her home in Laurel Ridge outside of Black Mountain.

So delighted were they to meet and visit with this feisty, opinionated Christian woman, that they returned three times. “She’s become a celebrity on Facebook and received 500 birthday cards for her 105th birthday from internet fans.”

**The irony of an expanded, improved dam**

The Asheville Dam was refurbished between 2017 and 2020 for safety and increased potable water. It cost over $38.5 million. It was raised four ft. with 2.5 million pounds of concrete re-enforcing steel. It added an extra spillway with 50’ cement sidewalls. The Dam won a National Dam Safety Award 2021.

It was built to accept 24 in. of rain in 48 hours, an event predicted to occur once every 50,000 years. The Dam only had to wait five years to have its maximum capacity tested. On Friday, September 27, Helene brought 24” of rain in 4 hours, 2 – 6 am. But did the Dam breach, go beyond “full bowl” that morning?

 “City leaders said the spillways prevented the [Asheville Dam] from failing. If the dam had failed, it would’ve unleashed six billion gallons of water.

“This would have meant complete annihilation of everything and every person between Black Mountain and Biltmore Village. 80% of the city’s water supply would have been gone.” [Footnote i]

**Utilities in Western NC were knocked out**

500,000 customers were without electrical power when Helene came through Western NC. Power was restored in two weeks, an amazing feat. Duke Energy appealed for help. Hundreds of electrical linemen answered the call in their various company trucks from other states.

Sky Runner fiberoptic Wifi restored service in two weeks. Their CEO explained it would have been sooner, but many families were grieving the loss of a family member and attending funerals.

AT&T phone lines were restored October 28 in our neighborhood. We had potable water on December 3.

The normal flow of Laurel Branch in our Laurel Ridge community, adjacent to Asheville Dam northwest of Black Mountain, is peaceful. It starts as a narrow trickle in these Blue Ridge Mountains, which are part of the Great Smoky Mountains (among the world’s oldest) within the Appalachian Mountain Range. It widens as it flows three miles south until it is absorbed by the Swannanoa River (Cherokee for Beautiful River) near the Grove Stone Quarry.

It is but one of many branches flowing into the Swannanoa River, which starts at the Continental Divide near the I-40 Mile Marker 67 and heads west 7 miles where it bends NW to flow behind Asheville Christian Academy and Warren Wilson College, then west again beside Old Farm School Rd. to Oteen.

**Rescued from the Swannanoa River**

One couple living on a cul de sac near the Asheville Christian Academy in Swannanoa woke up realizing water was filling up their bedroom. All the homes near them were flooded to or over the rooftop. They crawled out the bedroom window onto a shed roof, then reached in through the shed’s window to fetch a pair of lifejackets.

After putting them on, the Swannanoa River soon swept them away. For about two hours they floated in the dark, getting bumped and bruised by boulders and trees.

Praying, then and at daylight, a drone appeared overhead, but kept on moving. They thought they had not been seen and lost hope, thinking death was coming soon.

But the drone returned with a sign taped underneath: “I see you,” giving them hope. The drone departed and soon at their shoreline, away from the swift current, rescuers with lines pulled them to and up, out of the river bank to safety.

They found their home still standing, but full of water in 6’ of mud. Nothing was salvageable. They lost everything and do not have flood insurance. [Footnote ii]

**An Asheville East KOA death**

One tragic story along US Hwy. 70 between Black Mountain and Swannanoa is now the vacant, smoothly graded site of the Asheville East KOA Campground, which was wiped out at its peak by the 1.25 mile wide, 26 ft. deep, Swannanoa River – churning with boulders – like an out-of-control freight train. The normal width is a 36 ft.-wide (under their bridge), three ft. deep, peacefully flowing river.

Quoting summarily from the article by Ryley Ober [Footnote iii] “Lisa Plemmons, 52, had been staying with her boyfriend, Richard Neeb, 77, at the campground. She was scheduled to be at work at 6 am, November 27, as a dietary health care worker at River Bend Health and Rehab, Asheville. She never made it to work that day.

“Richard Neeb shared what happened that morning. ‘I told her, we gotta get out of here. Get into my car,’ but she was hesitant to leave her new Honda she had bought the day before. Soon a big wave of water blasted into us. After it passed, I jumped out of my car into the water. The Swannanoa River took the new Honda with her in it downstream.

 **Big trees, cars, even people, were flying down the river**

“Her sister, Bonnie Plemmons, said that she and Lisa’s two sons ‘did everything we could think of’ to find Lisa: law enforcement, making out a missing person report with multiple agencies.”

Her body was found on October 3 and later identified by the FBI through fingerprinting, according to her sister, Bonnie, who also ‘thanks God’ that they found her body, so the family could find some closure.

“Neeb was able to swim, then wade through the water and make it onto the roof of the KOA’s bathhouse. He called 911 on his cell phone.

“He saw ‘big trees, cars, even people, flying down the river.’ He was rescued from the bathhouse 12 hours later.”

As spokesperson for KOA, Kelly Self, said that the Asheville East KOA had “All employees have been accounted for and that the majority of the campers were safely removed from the property.” Does this mean that the minority of the campers have been reported missing? Until they are found, we won’t know whether they survived or not. [End note 1]

**James and Judy Dockery’s home on knoll swept away**

James Dockery, 63, and his wife, Judy, 64, lived atop a knoll in Swannanoa on land that had been in the family for decades. [Footnote iv] A small creek ran through it, barely ankle deep. Previous heavy rainfalls caused some flooding, but the water “would always go down the road and down the otherside,”said their son, Bruce.

James and Judy did not think Helene would be any different and remained in their trailer as the storm came through. “There was an aquifer at the top of the mountain that blew,” Bruce said. A geyser of water roared down toward Dockery home, unleashing a landslide that destroyed everything in its path.

Wes Barnett, who runs Satya Sanctuary – a meditation retreat next door to the Dockery’s – saw his neighbors gathering in front just after the mud settled. They had discovered James Dockery on the ground, steps from where his trailer had stood. “He couldn’t communicate,” Barnett said. “You could tell he had been crushed somehow.”

The neighbors carefully lifted Dockery out, trudging through mud and fallen trees. They fashioned a stretcher out of two-by-fours, making their way back to a truck, their only hope for finding medical attention with cell service out and no way to call 911, Barnett said.

Bruce Dockery, who lives in Black Mountain, desperately tried to reach his parents. “There was no way to get there,” he said. On U.S. 70, “there were houses in the road, literally, trailers and sheds sitting on the road.” He tried an alternate route, Davidson Road, but “all of those smaller bridges were gone, and I found some cops directing traffic. I was able to get a hold of them; they were able to use radios” to call for help.

The neighbors tending to James Dockery were also searching for his wife. One said, “They didn’t think Judy made it,” Barnett said. “And that’s when I could tell [James] kind of started letting go.” The neighbors tried CPR but could no longer detect a pulse. “They held his hand until he passed,” Bruce Dockery said.

One of the neighbors found Judy Dockery several hours later. “She was probably a quarter of a mile down, about three streets down on a rock, covered in mud,” her son said.

Bruce Dockery thought his mother was still alive and had set out on foot for a two-mile journey through the woods to reach her.

About halfway there around dusk, he received a call that she had died. “I sat on a log and cried for a few minutes and decided to turn around,” Dockery said.

The neighbors “put a blanket over her and stayed with her until help arrived” the next day. They took turns, making sure that animals did not disturb her body. Judy drowned, and James died from landslide injuries, according to their death certificates.

A truck that James and his son had been rebuilding and Judy’s car “are just completely unaccounted for. They are no where to be found,” Bruce said. His parents’ trailer was sheared in half, ending up in a road below their driveway, the other half three streets away.

James, a Buncombe County native, played guitar and enjoyed making others laugh. He was a preacher at Victory Baptist Church in Black Mountain. Judy was known as “Mama” or “Aunt Judy” and loved serving, cooking and caring for others, their obituary said. The couple would have celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary October 14.

**Kraak home swept off foundation**

Nate and Sondra Kraak’s home near Mill Creek in Old Fort was swept off its foundation when the flood waters receded midday September 27. They were able to leave with their two high-school-age children in two vehicles at 10 am. But when they returned 30 minutes later, flood waters had already filled their third vehicle.

They lost their home and all remaining furnishings, including their piano. Sondra spends hours each week practicing as her church’s pianist.

**The immediate mass of destruction**

US Hwy 70 – from A to Z – became a raging, churning water route of 22 miles, Ridgecrest all the way through Asheville, before emptying its contents into the French Broad River in Biltmore Estate.

Ingles grocery store and most all other businesses in Swannanoa have yet to reopen. U Haul and Walmart in Asheville below I-240 remain closed, but dozens are employed to restore and fill with groceries, medicine and merchandise.

Many on this route lost most everything, glad to escape alive with whatever they were wearing: pajamas or a T-shirt.

The survivors sought food, shelter, water, medicine like insulin for diabetics, Eliquis for heart and stroke patients.

Irreplaceable keepsakes were lost: birth, wedding, baptismal certificates, premarital agreements, obituaries, photos of new-born, birthdays, confirmation, graduations, academic and/or athletic honors, life insurance papers, living wills, wills, disposal and burial instructions, anniversaries – as a last public summary of a person’s unique personality, character, accomplishments and family tree.

**Asheville Christian Academy**

The Swannanoa River is the south boundary of Asheville Christian Academy’s (ACA) 55-acre campus in Swannanoa. Their grounds with athletic fields and first floor of all buildings flooded. Damage was worse than first considered. Classes re-convened elsewhere in three weeks, thanks to Biltmore Church, which allowed in-school instruction.

The leadership team, faculty and staff worked tirelessly and creatively to meet the needs of their students, who commute from five counties. The Academy believes that “Christ is everything, and God has great plans for ACA.” Students were able to return to campus January 7.

They support their hurting neighbors, many of whom lost family, loved ones, homes and everything in them, plus vehicles.

ACA cooperates with these Swannanoa agencies: Asheville Dream Center, Samaritan’s Purse, Baptists On Mission, 828 Strong, Seacoast Church, Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry, Hearts with Hands, God’s Pit Crew and First Baptist Church, Swannanoa.

**The people’s response**

The response was inspiring. Checks came from around the nation. The disaster brought out the best in nearly all people. It made no social, educational, racial or religious difference. We were and should always remain Americans.

Those who were helped had tears of gratitude for the kindness, generosity, prayers and gift of time, skill and expense of thousands of citizens who came to volunteer from out of state with their own tractors, bulldozers, 18 wheelers and dump trucks.

A couple came to Montreat and offered 800 sport coats from their manufacturing company. Lynn Gilliland took them to Jim and Peggy Williamson for sizing: Child to XXL.

Five college students came with chainsaws & sleeping bags from out of state. They slept in backyards and on floors.

Food stalls were everywhere. Hot water showers and laundry facilities were nearby.

Many families and businesses began immediately to have a well dug for themselves. Generators sold out fast. Many were donated from outside this National Disaster area.

**Time for ‘big C’ Church to step up**

**The Asheville Dream Center**, established in 2020 by Matthew & Michelle Coleman, is a Christ-centered organization dedicated to providing hope and resources throughout the region. Michelle is the Chief Operating Officer, and Matthew is President and CEO. Michelle is an Assistant Professor (Business), Montreat College. Their purpose: helping to meet the physical and spiritual needs of people who’ve been through addiction, trauma, brokenness, poverty and life-controlling issues. [Footnote v]

In partnership with Global Empowerment Mission, Convoy of Hope, World Vision, Operation Blessing and many other local churches and organizations, Matthew said, “We knew it was time for the ‘big C’ Church to step in to aid those who were in need. After Helene, they quickly jumped into action by organizing one of the first distribution sites.

“Families who have lost everything came to get supplies that were donated by individuals and organizations from all over the world. Thousands of supplies such as diapers, canned goods, formula, jackets, and more have been handed out since the day after the storm that would change so many lives in Western NC.

“Volunteers from all over have traveled with trucks and trailers to mobilize resources to communities who were devastated beyond belief.

“Transitioning to the next phase of disaster relief, we are beginning to send teams Mondays and Wednesdays to areas that have been devastated to rebuild homes. We also provide temporary housing for those who have been displaced. This will take many hands and supplies. They welcome volunteers and the donation of temporary housing.”

These are the categories of non-emergency relief provided: 1. Home re-building, 2. Relief for home cleaning, 3. Relief supplies, 4. Temporary housing.

**Black Mountain Presbyterian Church** on the evening of the storm began to offer dinner to 3,000 people. Leading the effort was the Shane & Erin Lunsford family with Kent & Alice Patton, Derek Lukasek, Pastor Mary Katherine Robinson, Brittany Williams, Katie & Phil Duvall assisting. Without electricity or clean water, they boiled water and used a gas stove.

After three weeks the meal preparation site shifted to the Red Truck Men in the Railyard, where the Lunsford family and Lukasek continued to assist 12-14 hours a day. Restaurant workers and chefs took shifts to prepare, serve and/or clean up. Donations from throughout the US were used to purchase food.

Pastor Robinson said, “We follow the teaching of Jesus. When we serve the least of these, we are serving Him.” (Matthew 25:40)

**Valley Strong Disaster Relief**, September 27 – March 1, was a major Distribution Center – think Amazon Prime, but here everything was free. Each day 150-200 cars pulled up at Silverados, Black Mountain, Wednesday—Friday, 10 am – 4 pm; Saturday-Sunday, 11 am – 5 pm, were given whatever was requested. 30-40 volunteers were on hand to fetch the items from 12 truck trailers and the stage in back.

The volunteers came from every US State, Canada. Four were from Europe.

Types of items available: food, water, propane, cleaning supplies, clothing (child to XXL), diapers, coats, blankets, sleeping bags, tents, campers, cars, hotel lodging vouchers, generators, tools, chainsaws, gas, dog food.

At Christmas, toys were given to 6,500 children over a five-day period.

Richie & Maxine Alexander came from Chattanooga to help for four days on October 7, but they never left. The gratitude, tears of thanksgiving, heart-felt thanks from the needy receiving their requests kept them here. Richie became the Volunteer Coordinator. Retired from the commercial flooring business, he helped to restore the floor at Silverados bar and entertainment venue, which had been flooded by Helene.

Valley Strong Disaster Relief is a 501c3, led by Ian Manley & Jenalee Tipton, Christen & Cory Short, Jason & Amy Ward. The ministry began the day of the hurricane in Ian Monley & Jenalee Tipton’s living room.

**Valley Hope Church**, **Swannanoa** began serving 200 dinners October 1 under the leadership of Lindsey Barnett, Amy Berry and Pastor Anthony Rodriguez. They went from five days a week to three and now host a weekly fellowship dinner to an average of 225 on Monday, 5 – 6:30 pm.

They are one of three Local Supply Stores in the Valley for food, clothing and household goods, displayed in their Fellowship Hall: Monday, 4 – 6:30 pm; Wednesday, 11 am – 1 pm; Friday, 2 – 4 pm.

The other two sites: Christian Creek Baptist Church, Swannanoa, Monday, Wednesday & Friday, 11:00 am – 3:00 pm, and Generation Church (see next)

After the home across the street from Valley Hope Church flooded, church members and others, nearby and out-of-state, restored the first floor of their home.

The parents, Bonilla Francisco & Marisol Moreles, were swept away by the roaring flood waters, but were saved when they were able to cling to a secure tree trunk. Their three children rejoiced and give thanks to God for His mercy and saving grace. A car was needed to help their son get to work. Several car keys were quickly offered.

The church created and hired a Helene Recovery staff person to help those who need assistance to restore, refurbish or build new homes for various people in the community. One family’s recently restored home next to the Buncombe County High School looked brand new and was dedicated in February with an open house and house blessing.

**Generation Church**, 210 Patton Cove Rd., Swannanoa, has been a Hurricane Relief Hub (Relief Hub) since October 3, Thursday and Saturday, Noon – 4:00 pm. After March 15, Saturday only, Noon – 4:00 pm.

Jeremy Fine is site Coordinator. Dozens of volunteers, local and out of state, help in a variety of ways. Offered [as of March 13, 2024]:

1. A hot dinner prepared by World Central Kitchen, at first 2,000/day, now 550/day.
2. Water and food supplies, e.g. canned meats, vegetables.
3. Household supplies, e.g. cleaning products, paper goods, plastic wear, generators, camping tents, sleeping bags, heaters, propane, butane.
4. Personal hygiene products, e.g. TP, diapers, wipes, toothpaste, toothbrushes, shaving cream and blades.
5. Medical supplies are available, e.g. vitamins, aspirin, alcohol, peroxide and walkers.

Thursday and Saturday, Noon – 4:00 pm. After March 15, Saturday only, noon – 4:00 pm. Donations are accepted 9:00 – 11:30 am prior to the Relief Hub opening. Generation Church’s Relief Hub rents, been given or loaned 18 trailers (20, 40 or 53 ft.) to store the supplies/products.

These items come from two central warehouses: Asheville Dream Center and Hearts with Hands.

**Christ Community Church – Montreat**, led by Associate Pastor David Taylor with his daily text messages: where to find or buy essential items, e.g. meals, potable water, pharmacies for medicine, car gas, clothing, generators, directions around blocked roads.

Also posted: where and when to gather to assist Nathaniel Guffey to help, e.g. cut and remove trees blocking a road or driveway; deliver life-saving medicine for diabetic and heart disease, clear trash from a yard; shovel up and remove mud slides; remove and replace damp insulation, floors, walls to avoid mold in a home.

A Helene Relief Fund was established. To date it has inspired over $400,000. in donations to aid valley residents to get back on their feet. Hope prevailed when people heard help was on the way. “There but by the grace of God could have been I.”

Starting Sunday, October 6, their 8:30 am worship was shifted to the White Horse, a non-profit art center in downtown Black Mountain, managed by Bob Hinkle, to connect artists and audiences. Individuals and families were drawn in from the street by the sound of music.

Pastor David preached. Musicians accompanied the singing of praise and thanksgiving songs to God. More than the usual amount of time was spent sharing experiences and praying for one another in small groups.

On October 13 a couple came to worship and asked for prayer for their young son in a stroller, who had an undiagnosed medical condition. In recent weeks he had been unable to walk. A prayer team gathered, led by Pastor Brad Long, Holy Spirit anointed, they petitioned God for His mercy and healing grace to descend and wash over the boy. (James 5:14-15)

After worship the parents were praising God for healing their son. A “miracle” touch of God’s healing grace? No, it was part of a typical day’s work for Him, for nothing is impossible for God. (Luke 1:37) Later that week Pastor Taylor said, “The family walked together along Greybeard Trail.” **Hearts with Hands** is a Christian non-denominational humanitarian 501c3 organization operated by Greg Lentz Ministries, with a warehouse at 850 Warren Wilson Rd., Swannanoa. They store and distribute non-perishable food, cleaning supplies, baby supplies, bedding, underwear and socks, pet supplies, hygiene kits and medical supplies. Visit [www.heartswithhands.org](http://www.heartswithhands.org)

They processed 5,000 meals a day to feed first responders and other emergency workers. Hundreds of volunteers came each day to help sort supplies in their warehouse and assemble food boxes, hygiene kits, cleaning kits, water, diapers, wipes, pet food. They provided comfort stations in the Swannanoa Ingles grocery lot with showers, water, bathrooms and laundry services.

**World Central Kitchen** (WCK) contracted with Bear’s Smokehouse BBQ, Asheville, to provide as many as 20,000 meals/day, 2,000 of them to Generation Church, Swannanoa, 2,000 to Blunt Pretzels, Swannanoa and 1,200 to Ingles Grocery lot, Black Mountain, for distribution. Over 1,000,000 have been prepared since September 30.

WCK is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that provides food relief. Begun in 2010 by Jose & Patricia Andres in partnership with Rob & Robin Wilder after the earthquake in Haiti, they go to disaster (e.g. Hurricane Helene, LA fires) and war-torn areas of the world (e.g. Gaza, Ukraine). We “fulfill the words of John Steinbeck, ‘Wherever there’s a fight so that hungry people may eat…we’ll be there,’” Andres states on their website.

**Food Connection** (FC)has prepared over 485,000 fresh meals to feed those in need since its founding December 2014 by co-founder Flori Pate, Pack Tavern, in partnership with Buzz Durham, Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church; Woody McKee, Asheville Ride; and Amy Cantrell, BeLoved Asheville. 205 tons of fresh, healthy food has been kept out of the Buncombe Co. Landfill. There are 29 Food Donor Partners. The food is donated by restaurants, caterers, conference and event centers, retirement communities, schools/colleges, breweries and taverns. [Endnote 2]

Marisha MacMorran, Executive Director, has overseen the expansion to Leicester, Swannanoa, Black Mountain, Madison County, and said, “We’re making a dent, but we have miles to go.”

A donor like Ridgecrest Conference Center provides the food, which is brought to St. George’s Episcopal Church’s kitchen, where the meals are prepared and packed. FC’s Mobile Meals truck with Jerry Davis picks up and brings the meals to these locations [as of March 13, 2024]:

Monday: behind Owen Middle School.

Tuesday: UNETE, 55 Adams Hill Rd., Asheville, 3:30 – 5:00 pm.

Wednesday: Community Center, 216 Whitson, Swannanoa, 3:30 – 5:00 pm.

Thursday: Collins Daycare, Black Mountain; Veterans Restoration,

 Quality Inn, Oteen; Blue Ridge Apartments, Black Mountain,

 Alan Campos Community, Swannanoa; Hope for Tomorrow, Black

 Mountain; Bi Lo lot, Black Mountain, 4:00 – 5:30 pm.

Friday: Rock Hill Baptist Church, Asheville, 10:30 – 12:00 Noon.

Saturday: Art Space Charter School, Swannanoa, 10 am – 12:00 Noon.

**Mercy Chefs** (MC), operating out of Christmount Christian Assembly’s (CCA) commercial kitchen, Black Mountain, since mid-January, prepares 5 – 6,000 free lunches and dinners/week for 17 meal sites. Three of them serve the public a free meal [as of March 13, 2024]:

Grove Stone Baptist Church, Monday 5:00 – 7:00 pm.

Loving Hearts Bear Closet, Marion, Wednesday 1:00 – 3:00 pm.

First Baptist Church, Asheville, Thursday 12:30 – 2:30 pm.

MC is a 501c3 charitable nonprofit, was founded in Virginia in 2006 after Hurricane Katrina, focusing on disaster relief both in the U.S. and globally. With kitchens in Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina, the organization has grown to a dedicated team of 70 staff members, including 25 chefs, interns and volunteers – all working together to fulfill its mission to “just go feed people.”

At CCA there are four staff chefs and on average five volunteers from the area. MC has hired local chefs from the area to prepare meals for their neighbors in need.

They depend on donations, volunteer chefs and other volunteers. MC has served over 329,770 meals in and around Buncombe County.

**Bounty and Soul** (B&S), Ali Casparian, Executive Director and Founder (2014), Black Mountain, “to provide a place where people can gather, feel valued and be inspired to make healthy choices, no matter where they are in life…We are a community-driven organization, working at the intersection of food, farms and health. We address the root causes of food insecurity.”

They post on their website: Food is love. Food is medicine. Food is justice. We welcome you. We value you as a whole person. We will greet you by name. We choose love.

Fresh vegetables and fruit are delivered each week [as of March 13, 2024]:

Monday, Blunt Pretzels, Swannanoa, 12 noon to 1:30 pm.

 Latino Center, 216 Whitson, Swannanoa, 5:30 – 6:30 pm.

Tuesday, Produce Market, Fairview, 3:00 – 4:30 pm.

 Produce Market, 55 Adams Hill Rd., Asheville, 3:30 – 5:00 pm.

Wednesday, Community Center, 216 Whitson, Swannanoa, 4:00 – 5:00 pm.

Thursday, Produce Market, BiLo Lot, Black Mountain, 3:30 – 5:00 pm.

Friday, Rock Hill Baptist Church, Asheville, 10:30 am – 12 Noon.

Saturday, Art Space Charter School, Swannanoa, 10:00 – 11:30 am.

**Blunt Pretzels**, Swannanoa, began September 30 to serve 2,000 dinners, prepared by World Central Kitchen, under the leadership of Christopher Smith. By Thanksgiving they were serving 1,000 a day and now serve 450-500 dinners daily, 4:00 – 7:00 pm.

**Baptists on Mission** (BOM) **s**erved nearly 500,000 hot meals in cooperation with NC Emergency Management, Red Cross and Salvation Army last fall. Next came chainsaw jobs, mud-outs and tear outs of floors and drywalls in flooded homes to stop mold from spreading. In Western NC (WNC) 5,000 jobs were completed.

Now is the rebuilding phase of homes at a cost of $20,000 per home for the basics: insulation, flooring, sheetrock, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, kitchen, appliances and bathroom. The goal is 1,000 homes this year and 2,000 over the next few years. Labor is donated. Donations cover the cost of materials.

BOM has purchased Nana’s Assisted Living, 1114 Montreat Rd., Black Mountain, and is expanding its capacity to lodge and feed 100 volunteers, who will come on a weekly basis to restore homes.

BOM has made a ten-year commitment to restore homes in WNC from six permanent Rebuild Sites, which can host 600 volunteers: Black Mountain, Burnsville, Spruce Pine, East Flat Rock, Canton and Boone. These volunteers give encouragement with conversations, smiles, prayers, giving hope to families affected by Helene.

**NC’s Cooperative Baptist Fellowship** provided the public with cleaning supplies: buckets, disinfectants, diapers.

**Mennonite Disaster Service** (MDS) recruited, organized and empowered volunteers to repair and rebuild home of those impacted by Helene. By responding in Christian love they serve people who would not otherwise have the means to recover, thus they restore hope and “bring people home.”

Their early response was to clear roadways and debris, assist emergency personnel with plans to repair and rebuild homes and private access bridges. Their Community Care Station in Swannanoa was at 2319 US Hwy. 70, provided showers, bathrooms, access to cell towers, WiFi, potable and non-potable water, and counseling 7 am to 7 pm.

**Other churches continue to distribute meals and/or supplies** [as of March 13, 2024]**:**

**Eagle Rock Church**, Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

**One Focus Church**, Monday – Friday, 1:00 – 4:00 pm.

**Grove Stone Baptist Church**, Pastor Michael Long, is a drop-off site for donated items, has hosted over time about 100 Samaritan’s Purse volunteers. They serve on average 250 Mercy Chefs dinners, Monday, 5:00 – 7::00 pm.

**First Slavic Baptist Church, Swannanoa**, served 200 breakfasts September 29 – November 2. Olesya Karpenko greeted each person with a warm hug, took a photo for her book on which a note of appreciation was written. Now she prays for each person as she goes through her book.

**Emmanuel Community Church**, Guyton, GA, led by Pastor Brad Formby, brought volunteers with enough groceries to serve 7,400 meals in two days in the parking lot of Ingles, Swannanoa, in January, where they camped out. A month later he and another group of volunteers brought 4,000 pounds of chicken, which they prepared and served to folks in Burnsville.

**First Baptist Church**’s mission teamsin **Black Mountain**, led by Dr. T. David Phillips, Pastor, established a medical clinic for five weeks before transitioning to Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry with seven Nurse Practitioners, 40 Medical professional and 30 Counselor volunteers to assure each shift was covered. A mission need/disbursement team with seven members had been set up for ongoing rebuild/support needs.

Red Truck Men provided about 100 breakfasts and 20 lunches after October 19. The Church continues to support Portman Villa Community with repairs and needed supplies.

**Montreat Presbyterian Church** received donations from throughout the nation. Pastor Keith Grogg said the church leaders decided to use these donations to meet local ministries’ human needs. These four ministries are among those benefited:

1. Mountain Retreat Association’s Employee Assistance Fund. Many who lived in Swannanoa had lost homes, family members and vehicles.

2. Collins Early Learning Center for a potable water tank.

3. The Town of Montreat to pay emergency contractors and their own employees.

4. Black Mountain Counseling Center.

**Black Mountain United Methodist Church** “donated to their District’s Fund to support W. D. Williams Elementary’s After School Program for Hispanic children,” stated Lynn Brunner.

Their church, led by Pastor Chandler Ragland, also helped to restore the homes in a large Hispanic community in Swannanoa. They stockpiled relief supplies, e.g. food in bulk, paper and cleaning supplies. They continue to help by donation and time to the needy through Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry.

A Wednesday dinner, 11:30 am – 12:45 pm, on a donation basis, has benefitted about 100 people per week in their Fellowship Hall.

**St. James Episcopal Church**, Black Mountain, volunteers help to restore the homes in Alan Campos Community on Wednesday and Saturday. Food Connection uses their freezers to preserve extra meals.

**First Baptist Church, Swannanoa**, led by Pastor Jeff Dowdy, has received and given away clothing and supplies to any who had a need. They’ve also hosted individuals and groups who’ve come as volunteers to help in the recovery effort.

**Cabins 4 Christ**

Cabins 4 Christ was established by Devin Taylor when he saw the damage to hundreds of homes in Swannanoa and Black Mountain. He woke up in the morning, “The Lord placed on my heart to use wood just like Noah did to build an ark.” He and a friend designed an 8 x 16 ft. cabin, powered with solar panels, a composting toilet, shelves, windows, a large mattress, and fully stocked shelves to sustain life in the cold winter months.

The first 75 homes were built in Pittsylvania Co., VA, and shipped to Swannanoa Valley. The building site moved to Camp Cedar Cliff at the Cove with 100-125 volunteers/day, over time 1,200 total, to assemble and deliver. By December 200 cabins had been built and delivered. A team made periodic checkups to see how well the inhabitants have been adapting. Many will remain for a year or two.

Since January 1, they have turned to repairing/rebuilding damaged homes. Material is paid for by donations; it is 501c3 charitable, non-profit. Each cabin costs $5,000 to build and outfit.

“The end goal is more than shelter; it’s also to spread faith, the Gospel, encouragement and positivity for the future,” Taylor said.

**Black Mountain Mental Health Center**

The Black Mountain Mental Health Center’s 11 professional counselors kept in touch with their clients virtually until they could see them in person. First Baptist Church, Black Mountain, provided space for one counselor, Michael Kirtley, and an intern, Hannah Webber, who both remained on site for three solid days after Helene passed through. They met with and gave counsel to all who called or came to them.

Ellen Begley, Director, explained that the mental health stages: Pre-disaster, Disaster Heroics, Honeymoon Cohesion, Disillusionment, Gradual Reconstruction into a New Normal.

Since January, 2025, 106 new people have received counsel; 28 more were placed on a waiting. Seven additional counselors and two English-Spanish translators have been contracted.

Dr. Neill Payne, Chiropractor, volunteered a full month, October 15-November 15, to give exams and adjustments.

**Black Mountain Home for Children** had to scratch their heads to find space to store all the donations that came streaming in from all directions. So immense was the desire to help the least of these, the orphans and foster care children, who live there as families in four, family-designed homes.

**The Cove: Billy Graham Training Center**, west of Swannanoa, became a bustling hub of activity after they cancelled week-long Bible seminars to house and feed, by generators, NC State Highway Patrolmen, Billy Graham Rapid Response Team’s female and male Chaplains, and Samaritan’s Purse volunteers’ disaster relief efforts for survivors of the storm. [Footnote vi]

“For the Patrol Officers at the end of a long day’s work, those moments have brought unexpected joy. The [Troopers] that are getting to come here, they’re seeing positivity, positivity, positivity.

“Whenever [Patrol Officers] go out, they’re seeing bad things. It’s so easy to get a hard heart,” Highway Patrolman Daniel Hall explained. But hearing the stories of faith in the midst of tragedy really has affected me.

“I’ll tell you what. This place right here is softening [my heart] up a little.” The evening before, he had called his wife from the Cove’s balcony that overlooks the Blue Ridge Mountains.

“I told her, ‘Yeah, I’m away from home. I’m away for work, but I’ll probably go home a better person.’” The experience has helped remind officers like Hall to make God a priority.

“Our jobs are tough, and I hope that we can one day be as happy as [the staff and volunteers] are here,” Hall continued.

“Tomorrow morning, they said that devotionals will be out here. I told the guys, ‘I’m not going to come in in the morning. I’m going to go get a little of Jesus to try to start my day off better.”

Camp Cedar Cliff at the Cove also hosted Cabins 4 Christ.

**Red Truck Men**, established in 2021, came to Black Mountain for Buncombe Co. in October for the purpose of “creating a culture of honor: rescue,

recover, rebuild.”

They began in November to host a free monthly men’s breakfast, the first Saturday of the month, 7:30-9:00 am, now across the street from the Black Mountain Post Office on Richardson Blvd., Black Mountain. The breakfast “is designed to be a safe place for men to have dangerous conversations – equipping and challenging one another to live as men of honor,” as stated on their website.

**Laurel Ridge Community’s recovery plan**

Our Laurel Ridge Community has currently 100 homes. We border the Asheville Dam six miles from downtown Black Mountain to the NW and seven miles from Swannanoa to the NE.

Our Board of Directors’ President Mark Looney said, “Our recovery was primarily on the shoulders of the first responders and volunteers: Laurie Looney, Bill Volz, Bob & Laura Williamson, Dave Caswell, Richard Hammett and Larry Harrelson. The First Responders for our Emergency Evacuation Plan were Larry Avery, Kathleen & John Perry, Mike Nolan, Cole Young and Mark Looney.

“We greatly appreciate the outside support, but living the experience is different than visiting it,” he reflected.

The Board members assessed damage to roads and culverts, prioritized repair and removal, received bids, and authorized $1.2 M, contracted primarily to Harden Heavy Equipment Services, Statesville, NC. James Harden, assisted by Steve Holcomb, Mooresville, NC, began work February 1, 2025. They plan to complete the irrigation, infrastructure and culvert repair before July 31, 2025.

As of May 31, 2025 Laurel Ridge has received little or no Federal or State assistance. “As typical mountain folks, we are Mountain Strong. We will accept all possible forms of help, but we have not received it from the organizations that we thought would help,” Looney said.

Board members have taken various responsibilities by keeping our relationships fresh with these leaders: Asheville Dam, Grove Stone Quarry, Presbyterian Reformed Ministries’ Community of the Cross, Ridgecrest Conference Center, the towns of Black Mountain and Montreat’s staff and elected leaders.

After the Board of Directors meets monthly, President Looney follows up by written correspondence, called the “BOD Briefs” with essential information to the residents. All home owners are welcome to attend in-person meetings at our Lodge above the Fire Station.

Residents who remained to help were the Looneys, the Adams, Bill Volz, David Sells and Phil Cunningham.

Laurel Ridge residents who could not help with the restoration effort were asked to leave September 30 by FEMA and Buncombe County officials to allow the heavy equipment operators restore irrigation, infrastructure and culvert repair. 85% of the residents left. Nearly all residents were back by the end of November. One of Laurel Ridge’s homes was beyond repair; it was due to a mudslide.

**Government leaders stepped forward** Citizens and employees were called to action in various ways throughout the Valley. Town Councils, Mayors, staff, citizens – all stepped up to the plate to clear debris, cut and remove tree, rebuild bridges, gather and haul away boulders blocking driveways and streets.

Montreat’s softball field was piled 15 ft. high with huge tree trunks and branches. That was all gathered by forklift and driven away in huge dump trucks.

Other Western NC towns hit hard by Helene were Marshall, Hot Springs, Burnsville, Spruce Pine and Bakersville.

**Montreat** banded together – Police, Maintenance, Mountain Retreat Assoc., Montreat College’s faculty and administrators, Christ Community Church - Montreat, Montreat Presbyterian Church and citizens – to help restore order to the college. With the town’s well water, the College was able to return to virtual instruction in two weeks and to classroom instruction in three weeks. Christian love and divine favor were on display.

**Retreated to a slower pace…edified, inspired, refreshed**

We stayed in our home four days with a butane camp stove and creek water. A hot brisket sandwich and water were dropped by helicopter, then hand-delivered by our POA President, Mark Looney.

We left October 1 and stayed in a secluded rental home outside of Hayesville, NC, 100 miles SW of Black Mountain.

We worshipped Sunday morning and evening, attended a Monday evening Bible study, joined a packed-out sanctuary when the church hosted their annual revival. We read and discussed several books, had daily morning devotions, prepared meals, fed a wood-burning stove, and took long walks. We were blessed to see the Fall colors come and go.

The folks where we worshipped were joyful, generous, prayer warriors for any who had an expressed need. They’re walking the talk, confessing when they mess up (sin), and believing in God’s mercy and authority to do the miraculous.

Ironically, this was the area near Murphy, NC, which was to have been the epicenter of Helene before her sudden eastward shift. Their September 29 worship offering was sent to aid our Swannanoa Valley.

We returned November 26, found a 12’ ditch on our east boundary, replaced most of our water line, had our furnace fixed. A tornado had taken out five of our trees, 30 yards from our house. A sign of God’s mercy. We found refuge with Sam and Joy Boatwright for four nights. O happy day when the water flowed clear and the furnace warmed the chill.

**Who is prepared for death?**

Who was prepared for death when they retired for the night on Thursday, September 26, 2024? If we knew death was coming for us and hundreds of others, what would we have thought and done to prepare?

**The Holy Bible**

Some might have called a friend or a pastor, who may have advised the counsel of the sacred writings in the Bible wherein God speaks, instructs, promises and warns how to be ready. That’s why it’s called the Holy Bible.

Here are some Holy Bible texts for your consideration. With God as Holy Spirit assisting, you will find help in time of need. You will know the truth, and the truth about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit can unlock the mystery, provide clarity and set the seeker free with peace.

God promises, “If with all your heart you truly seek Me, you shall surely find Me.” (I Chronicles 28:9; Isaiah 55:6-7; Jeremiah 29:13-14) When the pupil is ready, the Teacher will be there.

**Prophecy of the Messiah**: Isaiah 7:6-7, 52:13-53:12; Daniel 7:13-14; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:20-25; Luke 1:26-35, 2:4-7, 4-20; Mark 8:31-38; 2:25-35; Luke 1:26-35, 2:2:4-7, 4-20, 18:26-27, 31-33; John 12:23-33, 13:18-30, 14:10-27, 30-31, 15:5, 7, 9-10, 12.

**Birth of the Messiah**: Matthew 2:1-6,9-12; Luke 2:4-20; John 1:1-18.

**Deeds of the Messiah**: Mathew 10:32-33; Mark 1:21-24, 40-42, 2:1-12, 4:35-41, 5:1-43, 5:30-56, 9:14-32, 10:46-52; Luke 4:31-44, 5:12-26, 7:1-10, 8:22-56, 9:5, 37-43, 13:10-17, 17:11-19; John 3:1-21, 14:6; Romans 10:9.

**What the Messiah Claims of Himself**: Luke 20:41-47, 22:66-71, John 3:5-8, 13-21, 4:25-26, 5:16-30, 6:22, 35, 44-51, 53-58, 7:28-31, 33-39, 8:12-20, 28-31, 9:5, 37, 10:7, 10-11, 27-30, 11:25-26, 16:7-15, 20:6-31.

**Warnings of disbelief in Jesus as Messiah**: Matthew 10:32-33, Luke 13:1-5, 16:19-31, 22:39-46, 24:13-53; John 3:18-20, 5:23, 6:29, 36, 53-58, 8:21-24, 25-26, 37-47, 9:22, 30-33, 39-41, 10:31-33, 37-38, 12:27-33, 13:18-30, 15:6, 18-25, Rev. 20:7-15.

**Jesus as Messiah in the Spirit realm**: Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:22-29, 21-27, 5:1-20, 9:14-29; Luke 4:1-13, 31-36, 6:17-26, 8:26-38, 9:37-42, 11:14-26, 12:1-12; John 8:42-47, 14:15-18; Ephesians 1:19-23, 3:10-11, 4:26-27, 6:10-18, I Peter 3:22, I John 3:8, 4:4; Jude 9; Revelation 4:8, 12:1, 20:7-15.

**The Heidelberg Catechism** [Footnote vii]

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul,

both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood,

and has set me free from all the power of the devil.

He also preserves me in such a way that

without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from

my head;

Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation.

Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me

of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready

from now on to live for Him.

I Corinthians 6:19, 20, Romans 14:7-9; I Cor. 3:23; Titus2:14; I Peter 1:18, 19; I John 1:7, 2:2; John 8:34-36;Hebrews 2:14, 15; I John 3:8, 8:39, 40, 10:27-30; II Thessalonians 3:3; I Peter 1:5; Matthew 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18; Romans 8:14, 15, 16, 28; II Corinthians 1:21, 22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:13, 14.

 Q. What do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this

comfort?

1. First, how great my sins and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to be thankful to God for such a deliverance.

Romans 3:9, 10, 6:13; I John 1:10; John 17:3; Acts 4:12, 10:43;

Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 5:8-10; I Peter 2:9, 10.

**Summary**

After experiencing catastrophic loss of Biblical-proportions by Hurricane Helene Friday, September 27, 2024, my cousin Rev. Ev Curry from Oregon asked me in early February to write up how Helene affected us. He was glued daily to the tragedy via his ham radio operator buddies.

The beauty was how the people of the valley came together in a loving, cooperative, generous manner to mourn and pray with one another, help those who’ll never get over their grief from such devastating loss.

Restoration of home and personal property will take a few months for some and up to 20 years for many. We say to ourselves, “We are valley strong,” meaning “Let’s stick together and we’ll make it through.”

How? Well, a host of angels showed up from throughout the valley and US to help feed, clear property of downed trees and mud, repair and rebuild moldy homes, counsel and pray with those who’d lost loved ones, homes, vehicles, work tools.

Those fed and rescued by these angels responded with tears and words of gratitude. It was pure agape love, given graciously as a gift.

Checks and wire transfers came pouring in from throughout the US to valley churches, who’d established a Helene Relief Fund.

Regardless of our political, social, educational, racial or religious background or situation, we banded together as Americans to help each other. We did not rationalize, “Someone else will help” or “That’s the government’s job.”

No, we went to work, rolled up our sleeves, put on our work clothes, checked to see if our neighbors were OK, shared our home if we had a generator, cooked on a gas camping stove, dipped up water from a nearby stream to flush a toilet, gathered with neighbors to have a meal or morning coffee, using up or giving away our food in our refrigerators and freezers.

We called family by finding a signal for our cell phones to let them know we were OK or to describe the damage and loss of life and property after they saw and heard on national TV about Helene’s devastation. The Dam’s improvements were designed to handle 24” of rain in a 48-hour period. Helene dropped 24” of rain in 4 hours.

We realized how spoiled we’d become after a couple of days or weeks without electricity, WiFi, phone, water, propane and gas.

The heroes are those who stayed behind to work in so many ways: assess, prioritize and help clear roads and property of fallen trees, boulders, mud and deliver lifesaving medicine. Many worked for a few days or weeks.

A few are still working as volunteers, weary, exhausted, still giving their time to help oversee the repair and restoration of irrigation, infrastructure and culvert repair. Those who could grabbed a chain saw, garden tool and went to work cutting and clearing trees or scooped mud to let ourselves and neighbors navigate.

How grateful we were when someone came by and gave us food and water. How encouraged when we heard helicopters rescuing or dropping food or equipment. Or when we heard about the Cajun Navy traveling to isolated mountain homes. How thankful we were to find a gas station with gas. Or when we were given a quality meal prepared by World Kitchen at our Ingles Grocery Store parking lot.

Some had to (or chose to) leave town for a few months. Others were too shocked, traumatized, or too old to help.

We also comforted, wept and prayed with neighbors and strangers. We shared our stories over a drink or a bite to eat. Some met their neighbors for the first time. “There but by the grace of God could have been I,” was a common thought. Sobering, gripping, heart wrenching.

Many volunteers intended to stay a few days to a week, but extended their stay after observing the recipient’s tears of gratitude and heartfelt words of thanks.

Emotional, physical, mental and spiritual healing at various levels have been ongoing.

I was told, “Grief doesn’t have a time limit. The rest of us are grieving the loss of favorite places, shops or restaurants that are reduced to rubble. We have constant reminders of those losses when we drive around town. Many people still have anxiety when we get heavy rains due to the trauma of the flooding and so many trees falling during the hurricane.”

Many are those who struggle quietly, out of or in plain sight. When so nudged, reach out with a kind word or deed, however great or small. That gesture may well be what it takes for someone not to give up on themselves or God.

Let’s consider each day as a gift. Let’s not take God, our family or friends for granted. Let’s give thanks and keep the spirit of a loving, giving community alive.

Carter Blaisdell is a retired Presbyterian pastor, living in Black Mountain, NC. He has continued to add and improve on this paper since February. The Christ Community Church – Montreat midweek Enews published the March 13, 2024 edition. A correction has been on June 11: the Asheville Dam did not breach, because the spillways did their job to keep from going “over the top.” The Swannanoa couple rescued from the Swannanoa River is a new addition. Stay tuned for more details. We tried to fact check every report. If you catch any error or want to provide feedback, let me know to correct, apologize and record impressions. Appreciation is extended to all who took the time to share what they experienced and how they – with others – responded, many heroically, especially in the first few days and weeks as volunteers. We praise our Savior Jesus for the gift of His life for us now and forever.

**Footnotes**

i Fox Carolina TV, October 28, 2024, “Asheville City Leaders Dispel Rumors that the North Fork Reservoir failed during Hurricane Helene.”

ii Ryley Ober, *Black Mountain New*s, December 2, 2024, “Family Mourns caring Asheville nursing home worker.”

iii Sally Kestin, Asheville Watchdog, October 19, 2024, “The lives we lost: Helene took entire families, couples, children.”

iv Carter Blaisdell heard this account second hand from the neighbors of the rescued couple.

v Montreat College, “From the Classroom to Crisis Response: Montreat College Professor Leads Asheville Dream Center.”

vi Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s website article entitled “The Cove serves as Hub for Hurricane Relief Activity in Western NC.”

vii Commissioned by Elector Frederick III, Heidelberg, Germany, 1563.

**Endnotes**

1. Buncombe County had the highest with 43 number of the NC state’s 95 total of verified Helene-related deaths [as of February 7, 2025]; Henderson Co. was next with 12, then Yancey Co. with 11. As a team of trained Forensic Pathologists determine the cause of each death, the number of Unknown Circumstances will decrease. The number of reported Helene-related missing persons has not yet been released by NC’s Dept. of Health and Human Services. The cause and number of deaths is officially as follows: Unknown circumstances – 34, Drowning – 20, Landslide – 11, Blunt force injuries – 11, Wind/tree trauma – 6, Other – 5, Motor vehicle drownings – 4, Motor vehicle – 3, Environmental exposure – 1.
2. Food Donor Partners: Celine & Co., UNCA, The Omni-Grove Park Inn, Deerfield Retirement Center, Ridgecrest Conference Center, Givens Highland Farms, Christmount, Montreat Conference Center, YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly, The Great Center/M 7 Solutions, The Collider, Mars Hill Univ., Sierra Nevada, Bouchon, Smash Events, Inc., Twisted Laurel, The Capital Club, Dining Innovations, The Funkatorium, The Wedge at Foundation, 12 Bones, Rocky’s Hot Chicken Shack, U. S. Cellular Center, Cooking with Comedy Caterings, 67 Biltmore, Taco Jalisco, Grind Asheville, Carrasco Catering, Asheville School.

As of June 16, 2025