

# in touch

## Harold Wampler: Faith in action

In 1972 a dam broke above the small town of Mann, W. Va., bringing a wall of destructive muddy water down upon the defenseless people. The event was but another of those "that's too bad" headlines to Harold Wampler, a Bridgewater, Va., farmer, until a fellow member at the Mill Creek Church of the Brethren tapped him on the shoulder.

"Let's go back there and see if we can help," he said," Harold recalls. "And we went. It was my first experience helping where there was a disaster."

Some 10 years later, Harold Wampler is noted as one of the pioneers and leaders of the Brethren Disaster ministry. As disaster ministry coordinator for Shenandoah District, 1975-1981, he led relief teams to nine different states. Over 100 people were involved over the course of those trips, Harold remembers, and he was responsible for coordinating travel, lodging, food, and work assignments. The trips were usually a week long.

Harold learned early that transportation for disaster relief volunteers was the hardest part of his assignment. At first he rented station wagons; but when that became impractical Harold led a one-man campaign to secure a van for Shenandoah District disaster teams. "Fourteen couples helped with that project," he adds. "And when the van was purchased, I took them all out to Sunday dinner!"

But Harold prefers to talk about the real joy of the disaster ministry—helping people who are desperately in need. There is more to it than cleaning up debris and shoring up joists—tasks he calls "footwashing-like experiences."

"The ministry of listening is just as important when disaster workers

serve in a community," he notes, substantiating the observation with the stories of young and old alike finding comfort and encouragement from their dedicated servants. The words "Church of the Brethren" painted on the van's sides have provided moments to witness to the



church and the Brethren conviction to peace and service.

Harold remembers a high moment in Phillips, Ky., where the congregation in whose church the disaster workers were housed concluded a week of revival meetings with a communion service celebrating the work the team had done. The sharing of the bread and the cup epitomized the special kinship in Christ which had united workers, worshipers, and disaster victims during the week.

Major surgery two years ago has limited Harold's capacity to lead or accompany the disaster teams. But he is still a sought-after speaker for pulpit and group meetings, and he stays ready to help recruit volunteers whenever the call from New Windsor comes. Harold Wampler has an exciting story to tell—a story of faith in action.—F.W.S