

2019 PLANNING AND RESOURCE GUIDE

Week of Compassion Special Offering | February 17–24



**More
than
we can
imagine**



Now to God be the glory, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. *Ephesians 3:20*

weekofcompassion.org



Romzima Begom, 25, grades the earth in front of her makeshift shelter in the Chakmarkul Refugee Camp near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where Week of Compassion partners through ACT Alliance provide humanitarian support for the refugees. [photo credit: Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance]

MISSION

As the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion works with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world.

VISION

A world where God's people transform suffering into hope.

CORE VALUES

CONNECTION Partner with individuals, congregations, and organizations to serve the needs of the world.

INTEGRITY Honor the commitment to faithful stewardship, ensuring gifts entrusted to Week of Compassion are making the most impact.

ACCOMPANIMENT Embody God's grace by committing to a long-term presence with communities in need.

FRONT COVER PHOTO: Disciples in Puerto Rico are helping rebuild Mrs. Trinidad's home, which was destroyed during Hurricane Maria. [photo credit: Craig Thompson]

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More than 600,000 Rohingya have fled government-sanctioned violence in Myanmar for safety in Bangladesh, where Week of Compassion is helping provide humanitarian aid. *[photo credit: Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance]*



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR Executive Director

Everywhere we turn, it seems there are communities in conflict and chaos around our world. We hear of families being separated from their homes or each other because of disasters. Maybe it is because of a volcanic eruption in Indonesia, or because of wars and political turmoil in Syria and East Africa, or because of violence in Central America. We hear of spouses being separated from one another and of children being torn away from their parents; it is happening far away in regions many of us have never visited and also right here along our own borders.

Daily we hear of such news and our hearts pull us toward God. And, each day, God pulls us toward compassion.

In the midst of so much suffering and uncertainty, God pulls us, calls us, uses us to be compassion. We, the Church, are called to be God's compassion at work in the world, helping to rebuild and create a better world for all.

The world we are being called to create may seem beyond what we can imagine. But it is a world that God can imagine. God does imagine this world and is calling us to help make it reality.

As your Executive Director of Week of Compassion, I see glimpses of what God imagines for the world when I meet families and visit communities where our church is making a significant difference. We are creating, together, a world where children have access to clean water in Cambodia and Vietnam, where girls have access to education and medical needs in the Republic of Georgia and Serbia. We are creating a world where families can find new homes without persecution; it is a world where there is shalom.

Our vision is for a world where God's people transform suffering into hope. Because right now, the world needs hope more than ever, and you are doing that through Week of Compassion.

Your Week of Compassion has been hard at work. **As the relief, refugee, and development mission fund for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion works with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world.** This means you play a major role in bringing compassion and hope into the lives of our brothers and sisters across the world. Because of your gifts and prayers, we continue to work with faith-based partners all over the world to respond when communities are hurting.

We know that this work is hard and long. And the Church is there for the whole journey. We are with our family in Puerto Rico as they recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria; we are in Myanmar working with Rohingya refugees to settle in a new land after fleeing from genocide; we, through our partners, are in countless other places sitting, listening, praying, comforting, and working with our sisters and brothers in need. Our presence is an act of compassion.

Building peace and healing is the work we are called to do, and the Church continues to do that as disasters - both natural and human-made - arise.

I am grateful for your support and partnership throughout the year, especially during the special offering, as you make financial gifts to our shared work and lift this ministry in your prayers. Your gifts are changing lives. On behalf of the staff and the Week of Compassion Committee, thank you for being an important partner in helping to transform a world in ways that are more than we can imagine.



GRACE AND PEACE,
Rev. Vy T. Nguyen,
Executive Director
Week of Compassion

Volunteer teams at the Disciples
Volunteering Mission Station in Texas
City are repairing homes damaged by
Hurricane Harvey in Galveston County, TX.
[photo credit: Disciples Volunteering]



MORE THAN WE CAN IMAGINE

INTERPRETING THE 2019 SPECIAL OFFERING THEME

IMAGINATION.

It may seem a weak word when compared with all the need that we see daily in the world. We hear the word “imagination” and we may think to ourselves “fantasy” (“Imagine you are on a beach somewhere”) that escapes from the reality of the world as it is. We hear the word “imagination” and we wonder if it is truly helpful in a world where some would say clear-eyed “realism” about the challenges that we face is what is needed.

IMAGINATION.

Yet far from being a light or weak thing, far from being a superfluous or escapist thing, far from being an un-real thing, imagination is actually one of the most powerful engines for change that human beings have! Long ago, the philosopher Aristotle said that “Thinking itself begins in wonder, begins in imagination,” and he was right – imagination, particularly when it is fueled by a vision of God’s hopes for all humankind, can keep us energized, keep us seeking to do the good that is possible, seeking to better the lives of those who have been battered by circumstance.

“We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must
complete its gesture,

so much is in bud.”

excerpt from “Beginners” by Denise Levertov

IMAGINATION.

The theme for the 2019 Special Offering for Week of Compassion is “More than we can imagine!” That theme, based on Ephesians 3:20, reminds us that we are not alone in our imagining a better world for all God’s children, for it is God’s imagination that fuels and empowers ours! You see, God imagines a world where:

- No one is left to face the ravages of natural disaster alone - neighbor helps neighbor, stranger helps stranger - for we are the church together!
- Even if things will never quite be the same after a disaster, God can work through all events to bring new life, new hope, and even more resilience;
- Clean and abundant water and ample sanitation facilities are available to every person;
- Work brings security from hunger and the land is treated with respect;
- Families displaced from their homes are able to build new lives;
- Women are no longer subject to discrimination and gender-based violence.

And God also imagines Christians of many traditions, coming together to help make these things ever more a reality for more and more people!

For you see, our imagination of what might be is founded and grounded in what God envisions and hopes for. And we can help – through our gifts of treasure and talent, prayer, and presence, we can make this world ever more like the way God would wish it, ever more the way that God would imagine it!

Give generously to the Week of Compassion special offering, so that your imagination might indeed be ever more joined with God’s!

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

What do these words have to teach us about our opportunity in 2019 for the Week of Compassion special offering? Just this: when we put aside the things that we let divide us, we will be able to do more than we can imagine. By God's grace, our gifts will help the hurting; by God's power, our efforts shall be multiplied; by God's hope, our endeavors will bear more fruit than we ever expected!

Let us, therefore, explore the scripture a little further. Whether the Apostle Paul himself wrote the Letter to the Ephesians, or whether it was written later by one who admired Paul and was schooled in his thought, matters little for our purposes, for the words clearly express God's vision for God's people!

The earliest manuscripts of the letter did not carry the ascription in verse 1:1 "to the saints who are in Ephesus." From this lack, one can argue the letter of Ephesians was originally a "round-robin" letter, which was copied and circulated with different church names as the "addressees." If this is true, then we can say that the author believed the words that he or she was writing were worthy for any church's or Christian's consideration. And indeed that is why 3:20-21 is such an apt theme scripture for the 2019 Week of Compassion offering: these are words (unlike the sometimes ultra-specific advice and counsel the Apostle Paul gave regarding particular situations in particular congregations) are worthy of consideration by ALL who bear the name Christian. That is as true in our day as it was in the first century. God's imagination is broader, deeper, more profound than ours and therefore we should never find ourselves limiting what we think might be possible.

In verse 3:20, the word that the NRSV renders "imagine" is translated from the Greek νοέω (noeo). This word carries a strong connotation of something that is completely understood, settled, unquestioned. Thus, the way the writer is using it here is meant to undercut the human tendency

to prematurely (and therefore often inaccurately) come to understand something. In Mark and Matthew, the word is found on Jesus' lips when he wants to strongly make the point that the disciples have misunderstood Him or His teachings; the frustrated formulation "Do you not yet νοέω [understand]?" can be found in Matthew 15:17, 16:9, 16:11. An instance in Mark is even stronger: "Are you so without understanding also?" (Mark 7:18).

In other words, the epistle writer's usage of this strong word for "understanding" or "imagining" is meant as a kind of reversal: with God, what is understood or understandable or imaginable is far more, far different than what unaided human understanding or imagination might perceive.

This, then, also ties in with a key theme in Ephesians: Christians should not be divided by things that do not matter to God. The writer is imploring the likely multi-cultural, multi-linguistic audiences to transcend the particular foibles and failings of their particular situations and "understand" and "imagine" that the grace of God is not limited by those cultural or other particularities. Divisiveness over such things is not the will of God. That which separates humans is relative, never absolute, and the grace of God would seek – as non-"understandable" or unimaginable as it may seem! – for Christians to learn how to be at peace with one another that they might be better witnesses to a hurting, suffering, and needy world. Perhaps the most remarkable line in what leads up to the doxology of 3:20-21 is when the writer asserts that God has "made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:5).

Indeed, then and now, we are in this together and we are made alive together. And together we can do more for the world than we ever could if we remained separate, while a hurting world desperately needs us to be the bearers of God's grace.

Reflections for the **PREACHER AND THE PEOPLE**

Employ your imagination to make use of and adapt these! The preacher might use these as part of or inspiration for a sermon, or they could serve as offering meditations or be employed as “teasers” in the worship bulletin in the weeks leading up to the offering.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Too many of God’s children live in hellish conditions. The Week of Compassion offering invites us to use our imaginations towards a world where fewer of God’s children must live this way. Yet, to our ears, the word “imagine” may sound too weak, too puny. Or maybe what comes to our minds is John Lennon’s now-iconic song of the same name. *[If the preacher has audio capability, the song could be played. Or the tune could simply be played on the piano or the preacher say the lines from the song].* A way into the theme “more than we can imagine” could be to talk about why Lennon was likely disheartened and discouraged by religion: *“Imagine there’s no heaven; it’s easy if you try. No hell below us; above us only sky.”* While it is, of course, true -- thanks be to God! -- that millions of Christians have found their inspiration in their religion to help their fellow human beings, we must admit that it is also indeed true that religion has too often been the source not of peace and reconciliation, but of strife and even injustice. “Hell” has too often been used as a weapon, and “heaven” too often used to dismiss the importance of earthly suffering. But God’s understanding of “imagine” is different: it is God’s hope that Christians will imagine – and work for! – a world where peace, freedom, and justice are more and more a reality for all people. The Week of Compassion offering gives us the opportunity to give generously and participate in God’s imagination.

Be sure your congregation has the appropriate licensing to play the recorded song.

WORD-PLAY

In much of common English usage, the word “imagine” (and its variants) usually connotes something not really real. *“Oh, that’s just your imagination.” “You’re imagining that.”* The preacher has an opportunity here to contrast that ordinary usage with what we see as “God’s usage” -- God imagines a world where all might live in peace – and created such, according to Genesis. Paul imagines a world where through Christ all are reconciled to God and one another (2 Corinthians 5:19). John of Patmos imagines a world where there are no more tears, and pain shall be banished (Revelation 21). The way “imagination” is commonly used is often a dead-end – nothing comes from it. But **God’s** imagination always moves towards creation and re-creation. And God’s imagination always invites us to join God as co-creators of a vision of what can yet be: a world where there is less violence, where all people have clean water and decent hygiene, where no one is hungry. Through our gifts, we can join God in imagining these things and more!



Sihan Jalal (10) cares for chicks as part of educational programs Week of Compassion supports in a displaced persons camp in Northern Iraq. *[photo credit: ACT Alliance/ Håvard Bjelland/Kirkens Nødhjelp]*

WORSHIP MATERIALS

CALL TO WORSHIP (inspired by Psalm 46)

LEADER: God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble.

PEOPLE: Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

LEADER: This morning we enlarge our hearts; we offer our prayers; we share our treasure with those siblings in our world who are dealing with tumult and disaster and injustice.

PEOPLE: We will not be discouraged. We shall remember that God's steadfast love is always with us and the whole world, that God's compassion is for each and all.

LEADER: We will celebrate that love and compassion can do far more than "we can ask or imagine"!

PEOPLE: May we join our imaginations to God's imagination as we live in hope!

"Lord: Help us to see in the groaning of creation not death throes but birth pangs; help us to see in suffering a promise for the future, because it is a cry against the inhumanity of the present. Help us to glimpse in protest the dawn of justice, in the Cross the pathway to resurrection, and in suffering the seeds of joy."

Rubem Alves

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & WORDS OF ASSURANCE (inspired by Mark 9:24)

LEADER: Let us confess our sins before our God, who is slow to anger and keen to show mercy.

PEOPLE: We believe; O Lord, help our unbelief.

LEADER: We confess, O God, that instead of believing in your goodness and mercy and love for all people, we have fallen prey to cynicism; we have looked for the worst in others instead of presuming the best; we have spoken words which demeaned instead of dignified.

PEOPLE: We believe; O Lord, help our unbelief.

LEADER: We confess that we have presumed to draw the circle of your grace much more narrowly than you do, treating some as "the other," not deeming them our brothers and sisters in Christ.

PEOPLE: We believe; O Lord, help our unbelief.

LEADER: We confess that our attention has been too short-lived when tragedy has come to those you love in any part of the world, forgetting that you call us to be there for them in word and deed over the months and years.

PEOPLE: We believe; O Lord, help our unbelief.

LEADER: We confess that we have sometimes allowed compassion fatigue to take root in our souls, closing our hearts to those who need our help.

PEOPLE: We believe; O Lord, help our unbelief.

LEADER: Hear these words of assurance and pardon and hope: Our God, whose imagination for the good of all people is always wider than our own prejudices, seeks to forgive, empower, and transform us – that our unbelief might be turned into faith, that our self-serving cynicism might be changed into a passion for "the least of these." Our God who is faithful, merciful, and just will do these things. And for that good news we say,

PEOPLE: Thanks be to God! Amen.



This bridge in Myanmar, constructed with support from Week of Compassion, connects a once isolated community with neighbors, schools, doctors, and markets. [photo credit: Week of Compassion]

RESPONSIVE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND HOPE

LEADER: God of grace and wonder,

PEOPLE: be with us in this place.

LEADER: We love you, Holy God. We love you for the feast that is life: for friendships and laughter, intimacy and trust, moments of discovering deep truth, hidden potentials we never knew we had; for beauty-- serene beauty and rugged beauty, the world you have crafted; and for the words, sounds, and colors with which people reflect and explore life. God of grace and wonder,

PEOPLE: be with us in this place.

LEADER: We love you, holy God. We love you for the challenges of community: for moments of joy and celebration, for times of anxiety and questioning, for opportunities to listen deeply, for moments to start anew, for possibilities of reconciliation, for partnerships to work for peace and hope, for commitments to join hands for justice. God of grace and wonder,

PEOPLE: be with us in this place.

LEADER: Gathering God, we give thanks for the vision, adventure, and passion that have brought us together in this holy place. Help us to be open today: grateful to meet Jesus in each other and in our neighbors near and far; happy to do a new thing; thankful to be your church together, to do that which by your design cannot be done apart. Challenge us, inspire us, strengthen and renew us. God of grace and wonder,

PEOPLE: Be with us in this place; may our worship today strengthen us to do more than we can imagine, that your world might be healed, that your justice might come, that your hope might be spread. May it be so! Amen.


OFFERING

CALL TO OFFERING

In a world so filled with brokenness and sorrow, it would be easy to lose ourselves in never ending grief, to be choked by our outrage, to be paralyzed by the enormity of suffering, to feel our hearts squeeze tight with hopelessness. Instead, this morning, let us simply breathe together as we hold our hearts open. Breathing in as our hearts fill with compassion. Breathing out as we pray for healing in our world and in our lives. Breathing in, opening ourselves to the transforming power of love. Breathing out as we pray for peace in our world and in our lives. Breathing in as we hold hope in our hearts. Breathing out as we pray for justice in our world and in our lives. May we know our strength, may we be filled with courage, may our love flow from us into this world. Through our gifts to Week of Compassion may our love indeed flow into the whole world, helping to bring hope and healing to those facing disaster, showing God's care near and far.

OFFERING DEDICATION PRAYER

We offer these gifts, O God of all people, in the hope and trust that You will use them to bring healing and hope where there is need. Where natural disaster has befallen, may these gifts help build new life. Where refugees seek safety from violence and fear, may these gifts enable caring and welcoming hearts and hands. Where hatred sullies Your hope for your human family, may our gifts be a sign and instrument of reconciliation. Thank you, God, for the privilege of this offering. May it indeed do more than we can imagine! In the name of Jesus Christ and for the sake of this world which He loves. Amen.



Even though Hurricane Maria blew the roof off of Iglesia Cristiana La Grama in Ciales, Puerto Rico, Pastora Milly Cortes and her congregation are leaders in recovery for their community. Week of Compassion provided assistance for the repairs at the church and for rebuilding homes in the neighborhood. [photo credit: Craig Thompson]

HOLY COMMUNION

RESPONSIVE CALL TO COMMUNION

LEADER: This is the feast of our Lord Jesus Christ!

PEOPLE: As it says in holy scripture, “people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.”

LEADER: We come, not because we must but because we may.

PEOPLE: We come to be nourished by grace that we might go forth to share the grace, the love, the justice of God with the whole world.

LEADER: We come with thanksgiving, grateful for who we are and whose we are.

PEOPLE: For we are God’s own people, called, fed, commissioned, and sent!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

We recall that on the night that would be our Lord and Savior’s last earthly night, he gathered his disciples around him to break bread together. They surrounded him at that table – both the disciple whom he loved and the disciple who would betray him, along with all those disciples who had been with him through his ministry, witness to his teachings, bearers of his grace, ones who saw how he broke down the barriers that separated us from them, friend from enemy, neighbor from stranger. And as they were eating, he took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them, saying “This is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me.” Do this and be reminded that life is in too many places broken and hurting, and you are my witnesses and ambassadors to bring the news of help and wholeness from a loving

God. In the same manner, following their meal, he took the cup and blessed it and poured it out for each one of them and said “This is the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood, given for you and for all for the forgiveness of your sins,” for the transformation of your lives and the lives of all who hunger and thirst. “As often, then, as you eat this bread and drink this cup, do so in memory of me.” Do so in hope. Do so knowing that God will feed you and this whole world in ways that you cannot begin to imagine. For that good news, thanks be to God! The gifts of God for all the people of God!

PRAYER FOR BREAD AND CUP

Gracious God of every time and place, every people and nation, every race and clime, we come to this Table to receive these symbols of your grace, your hope, your sustenance. We come, grateful that you feed us and call on us to help you feed the whole world—body, mind, and soul—with good works of justice and healing. Thank you for that opportunity. We pray, then, that you would bless indeed these elements to our good that we might join you in doing good for this world that you love, this world that yet knows too much pain and hunger and violence. May we go from this Table refreshed and renewed, having drunk deeply from the cup of courage that we might confront all those things that hurt and maim those whom you love. In the holy name of Christ we pray. Amen.

PRAYER FOLLOWING COMMUNION

We eat and we drink in hope that one day, none will know hurt or hunger or hopelessness. We thank you, God, for the opportunity to be fed and for the commission to go forth into all the world, seeking to be bearers of your Good News for all people. Amen.

RESPONSIVE BENEDICTION

LEADER: We go from this place, refreshed, renewed, and inspired to be about God's work in the world.

PEOPLE: **We go, knowing that God goes with us to help, to heal, to hope.**

LEADER: We go, celebrating that God's creation and God's household knows every land and every tongue.

PEOPLE: **We go, committed to the work of God around the world, sent by the One who can indeed inspire us to do more than we can imagine! Thanks be to God! Amen.**

HYMN AND SONG SUGGESTIONS

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

"They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love"

"Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"

"He's Got the Whole World in His Hands"

"We Sing Your Mighty Power O God"

"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"

"Way Maker" by *Sinach*

"Break Every Chain" by *Tasha Cobbs*

"Arise (You Are Good)" by *William Murphy*

"Build My Life" by *Housefires*



Dau Chol Thuc works on the roof of his new house in Dong Boma, a village in South Sudan after finally returning home after being displaced by rebel soldiers in 2013. Week of Compassion partners are helping the village rebuild. [photo credit: Paul Jeffrey/ACT Alliance]

Offering

REMINDER OR INVITATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: *Blocks (LEGO and DUPLO work well, but any blocks will do)*

BLOCKS MAY BE DISTRIBUTED IN DIFFERENT METHODS:

Passed out with bulletins

Passed around in baskets

Placed on pews or seats

Set out at a prayer station

Distribute blocks to the congregation or invite them to find and hold the block they received at an earlier point in the service.

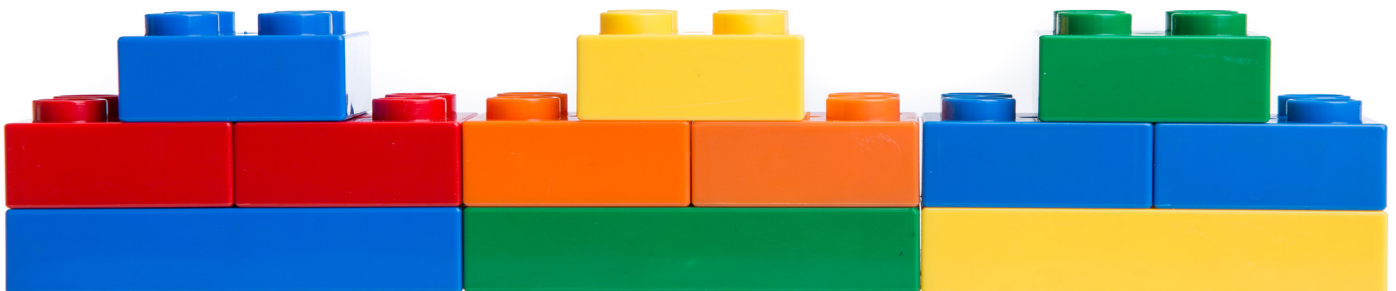
Today you were given a block. It may look like a simple block, but it represents so much more. Though small compared to the palm of your hand, it has the power to be part of something amazing. Collectively, all of the pieces together could become something beautiful, something you might not be able to imagine when you look at your piece alone. Next Sunday, we will receive our special offering for Week of Compassion. Like the blocks, which come together to create something new, the prayers and financial gifts we offer through Week of Compassion become part of something much bigger. Through our gifts, God creates new possibilities for people in the midst of crisis.

As you hold your block, take a moment to say a prayer for the work of Week of Compassion and consider what offering you can give next week.

During our time of prayer/communion/offering, bring your piece forward and connect it to another piece. Let the structure we build together this morning serve as a reminder of the new churches and homes that are built after storms, of new lives built with refugees, of new possibilities built with our gifts to Week of Compassion.

You may also want to share a story to illustrate the work of Week of Compassion. See the Mission Moment stories on pages 26-27 of the Resource Guide for examples of the work of Week of Compassion. Stories and videos are also available for download at

www.weekofcompassion.org/impact and www.weekofcompassion.org/special-offering



Children's Sermon: **BEAUTY IN THE BROKEN PLACES**

THEME: *Even in places that are broken and hurting, Jesus can do more than we can imagine.*

INTENTION: *Kids will think about how God uses the Week of Compassion offering to create new and beautiful things out of situations of destruction and pain, like the broken pieces in a kaleidoscope turn and reflect into beautiful images.*

SUPPLIES: *a kaleidoscope; you can have one as an example, or you can have smaller party-favor kaleidoscopes, so each child can have one. [OPTIONAL: to use this lesson as an extended activity, have the children create their own kaleidoscopes—instructional available in the Online Resources.]*

SCRIPTURE: *Ephesians 3:20 (International Children's Bible Version)*

SCRIPT

Gather the children and show them the kaleidoscope.

Who can name what this is I have in my hand?

Accept a few answers, until someone identifies it correctly or the answers slow down.

Yes! This is called a kaleidoscope. Who knows what we do with it?

Accept answers, affirming correct answers.

LEADER: **A kaleidoscope is a toy that some of us have played with, and it's really cool. I'll pass it around in a few moments. First, let me show you the funny thing about how it works. If you look at it from the outside lens, it looks like you just have a bunch of pieces everywhere. Sometimes those pieces look broken! But here's the trick! If you look at it through the proper eye lens and twist it, all of those shattered pieces turn into beautiful shapes and a new picture.**

Pass around the kaleidoscope, or pass out the individual ones to each child.

Before you looked into the kaleidoscope, could any of you imagine what the picture could look like? Could you imagine how beautiful it would be?

Accept a few answers, as children keep passing the kaleidoscope.

As you twisted it, did you notice how the picture changed to a new shape? Did you have any idea beforehand what that shape would look like?

Accept a few answers, as the children keep passing the kaleidoscope.

This kaleidoscope reminds me of our scripture verse today. The verse comes from our friend the Apostle Paul. Do you remember Paul? A long, long time ago, he wrote letters encouraging people to follow and trust Jesus. Let's listen to something that Paul wrote in his letter to members of the church in a place called Ephesus.

Why don't we settle our hands and our eyes and open our ears to hear the what Paul wrote? "With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or think of!"

You can repeat the scripture a couple of times, if you want.

Today I want us to think of ourselves as God's kaleidoscopes.

When we first looked at all the scattered beads, it seemed like it was a mess, but when we turned the kaleidoscope, we saw beautiful pictures. This is what God's power does with us! Sometimes the world can seem like a mess! There are people who feel broken because of disasters, because of wars, or because they don't have enough to eat. It can look like there is nothing good.

But God can make beautiful things, even where the world seems scary or broken. And our scripture verse today says God does that by working through us! When we used the power of our hands to turn the kaleidoscope, we saw a new picture. God's power can help us be a part of a new picture for people who are in need of help.

Today is a special time in our church where we give money to help families and communities around the world whose lives have broken pieces. Our Week of Compassion offering helps people rebuild their houses and churches after floods and fires and earthquakes. It helps people create new homes when they have had to leave their homes because they weren't safe. And it helps communities have clean water, and healthy food, and schools for their children.

This offering helps us to do more than we can ever imagine to create a new picture for our neighbors around the world-- all through the power of God!

Can you imagine how God might use YOU in a new picture for those who are in need?

Let's close with a prayer-

Amazing God! Help us to be part of the beautiful world you imagine. When people are hurting, scared, or lost, use your power in us to help them. Amen.

Hurricane Irma devastated the town of "Cojímar," east of Havana in the north coast of the province. Week of Compassion is helping the community rebuild. [photo credit: Erick Coll/ACT Alliance]



Children's Activity:

I-M-A-G-I-N-E

AGE RANGE

Elementary (opening activity will require modification if children are too young to spell "imagine")

INTENTION

Children will consider God's power to use us to help others.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

PRECUT PAPER CLOUDS: 1-2 per child, plus 7 extras for the opening activity

On 6 clouds, write in big letters (one letter per cloud) I-M-A-G-I-N-E. Hide these clouds, along with some of the blank clouds in your meeting space.

ART SUPPLIES: markers, crayons, or paints; decorative items like stickers or sequins (optional)

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 3:20-21 (International Children's Bible)

OPENING ACTIVITY

Gather the children in the space and welcome them.

LEADER: Let's start with a game. Around the room are hidden some paper clouds. These are very special, and we need to find them and gather them in this spot! Can you help me?

Encourage the children to search the room, bringing the clouds back to a designated spot.

LEADER: What do you notice about these clouds?

Accept answers until the children notice that some have letters on them.

LEADER: Yes! Some of these DO have letters on them. I wonder what the letters might spell!

You can have a child hold each letter in a line, having the rest of the class shuffle the order of the line until they are correct, OR you can put the clouds out on the floor or a table.

LEADER: These clouds spell "imagine." What does the word "imagine" mean?

Accept responses.

LEADER: Well it appears that we have a pretty good idea of what the word imagine means, so for now let's say to imagine is to think or create something in your mind. You can see it in your head, perhaps when you close your eyes. Let's give it a try. Let's all close our eyes and think or dream of something. When I count to three, we'll open our eyes and you can share what you imagined.

Invite responses from a few children.

LEADER: Those are some amazing things you visualized and imagined! I noticed that some of you dreamed or imagined something positive and happy. Some of you imagined something [make other observations about their answers]. Some of you imagined something most people would say is impossible.

Raise your hand if you think what you imagined can really happen.

Those of you who didn't raise your hands, why do you think what you imagined could not really happen?

Listen to responses

LEADER: I have a story to share from the Bible about a guy named Paul who prays and tells us that God can do more than anything we can ever imagine.

A long time ago, when the church was first beginning, people like Paul, who we called Apostles, shared the good news about Jesus and how we should put our faith in God. Paul liked to write letters to encourage people to be kind, and to put their trust in God. In one letter Paul wrote to the church in the city of Ephesus, Paul chose to add a special prayer to encourage people to trust in God. The prayer ends: *“With God’s power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or think of. 21 To [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever. Amen”* (International Children’s Bible)

That sounds amazing to learn that if we trust in God’s power, God can do more than we can do on our own. More than we can imagine, kind of like some of those things we imagined earlier.

I want you to keep that thought and imagine what amazing things God can do when God’s power is working in us to help others.

Each of you is going to get a cloud and on this cloud I want you to draw a picture of a sad or scary situation-- it might be a storm or a farm where there isn’t any food growing.

Give each child a cloud and give time for them to create.

LEADER: When you’re done flip your cloud over. Now let’s close our eyes and imagine how God’s power could help the people in that situation. Imagine how God could use YOU to do something to help them. I wonder how God’s power in you could do more for those people than they could ever imagine or ask for.

Give some time for thinking.

LEADER: After you’ve thought about it let’s draw some amazing things that can happen when God’s power is working in you.

Allow children time to draw. Once many are completed, invite them to share with the class the side of the cloud that has been affected by damage and then turn to the side where the children have thought of ways that God can use them. You might display the clouds in a prominent area in your church for adults to see how children can show the possibilities of God’s power working through them.

As the children are drawing, or after they have shared their pictures, share some Week of Compassion stories (see Mission Moments on pages 26-27 or the website for examples www.weekofcompassion.org/impact)

Close with a simple prayer

LEADER: God you are great at helping us imagine new ways to help others. Thank you for giving us the power to change lives when we trust and believe in you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Youth Activity

IMAGINE WITH EMOJI

AGE RANGE AND SETTING

6th-9th grade; Sunday school, Bible study, or youth group

INTENTION

Youth will consider what it means to empathize with others and how we can help transform sadness into hope through the Week of Compassion offering.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Have a variety of emoji printed large and placed around the room.
- Paper and writing utensils for writing stories.
- Props, poster-board, and markers (optional--for use if groups want to act out their emoji stories)
- A story about the work of Week of Compassion [for stories, see pgs.26-27 of the Resource Guide or www.weekofcompassion.org/impact or www.weekofcompassion.org/special-offering]
- ART SUPPLIES: markers, crayons, or paints; decorative items like stickers or sequins (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

Welcome students and invite them to pick an emoji from around the room.

LEADER: Now that each of you has selected an emoji, I want you to think about what your emoji means. What it communicates. When you see this emoji what comes to mind? What emotions does that emoji represent? If you used this emoji when texting someone, what are some of the reasons why you would use this specific one?

Accept responses and encourage conversation. Explore differences of opinion about what the emoji mean and when you would use them.

LEADER: So, it sounds like some of you use emoji as a way to respond to emotional situations. You might use them to celebrate good things or to react to a situation that sounds sad or scary. Emoji can be a way to express

empathy. They communicate that you understand and share another person's feelings.

When you express empathy, not only do you want people to see that you acknowledge the way they feel, but you also want them to know that you are with them in what they're going through. Have you ever experienced something like that? A time when you expressed empathy for a friend? Or a time when someone shared empathy for you?

When everyone who wants to share has had a chance to speak, split the group into teams of 3-4, making sure each group has a variety of emoji.

LEADER: Each of your teams has a set of emoji, representing a variety of emotions or situations. For the next few minutes, you are going to work together to create a story with those emoji. You can put them in any order, and you can use each one multiple times, as

long as you use all of them at least once. Your emoji can be the characters of your story, be sent as messages by other characters, or be symbols of the emotions or events in your story--get creative! When each team is finished, you will share your story with the whole group.

Give time for groups to create their stories, encouraging groups with some example situations if they seem stuck. Have each group share their story by reading it aloud or acting it out. Celebrate the creativity of each group!

LEADER: I really like your stories! I noticed [name of the themes you noticed in the stories the teams wrote, some of the creative ways they used emoji, and how their stories related to the opening discussion about the meaning of the emoji.] In several of your stories, I noticed a change from sadness to happiness or hope. That makes me think of the special offering we are receiving in church this week--the Week of Compassion offering!

The money that we give through this offering helps families and communities around the globe who are impacted by storms, fires, and other disasters; who have had to leave their homes because of war; and who experience extreme poverty. Our offerings are a way of expressing our empathy--of sharing in the emotions of our neighbors. Our offerings also help people transform tragic and difficult situations into hopeful futures!

Here's a story about the work Week of Compassion does. As I go, hold up the emoji that fits each part of the story.

Gather the printed emoji and spread them out so the group can select appropriate emoji as you read or tell a story about the work of Week of Compassion.

LEADER: The offerings we will receive this week make some some amazing things possible! Things that you might not even imagine. Let's read together our scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21. This is a prayer for the church in Ephesus and for our church today.

Read **Ephesians 3:14-21**.

LEADER: What stands out to you in this scripture?

Receive answers.

LEADER: One thing that stands out to me is that if we allow God's power to work through us collectively as a church family, we can do more than we could ever imagine doing on our own. We can help transform suffering into hope. Let's think about what that could mean for a community in need. What could you do for a church that was damaged and has no place to worship? What could you do for a community that lacks food? Today I want you to imagine how God could use you and your sisters and brothers in Christ to help these communities and improve these situations.

Give some time for reflection and discussion.

LEADER: Let's close by writing prayers of encouragement for those communities, prayers that you can say for them as you imagine how we can help improve their situations through our Week of Compassion offerings. As you write your prayer include an emoji or two to express yourself--or create your prayer entirely with emoji!

EXAMPLE EMOJI PRAYER

Dear God,

Help us to be aware that when we rely on you we are able to turn 😞 into amazing possibilities. Let us be like Paul and 👍 those impacted by tragic events. Together with you, we can do more than we could ever 🤔 on our own.

In Jesus name we 🙏 . Amen

High School Activity

“BUILD A STORY”

AGE RANGE AND SETTING

High School or Mixed-Age Youth

INTENTION

By spurring the imagination of the youth, this activity provides an opportunity to picture hopeful futures for places dealing with crises. Using stories from places receiving support from the one Week of Compassion offering, youth feel connected to the work of the offering and consider how God is working through them to provide hope.

MATERIALS

- Pails or Jars
- Popsicle sticks with nursery rhyme lines (roughly equal to the size of your group; duplicates are fine) [see below for samples]
- 2-3 Popsicle sticks with Build-A-Story prompts (keep these separate) [see below for samples]

OPENING ACTIVITY

As participants arrive, invite them to gather in one circle if there are a few high schoolers or groups of three or four if there is a larger group. Once participants are gathered in groups, place a pail or container in the center of each group.

LEADER: Inside this pail I have a few popsicle sticks. Each popsicle stick has the beginning words of a famous nursery rhyme. We will take turns picking popsicle sticks and finishing the sayings. Your challenge is to finish the saying with a new ending.

For example, if my stick says “There was an old lady who....” instead of continuing with the usual ending: “...lived in a shoe she had so many children she didn’t know what to do,” I might say: “...floated in space, she texted so much it gave her the shakes!”

Now it’s your turn. Let’s give these stories a new twist.

After you’ve played a few rounds ask participants about the experience.

LEADER: What did you notice about the new stories we created? How did it feel to change the end of these classic tales? Did it make the stories better, worse, or just different?

DISCUSSION AND BIBLE REFLECTION

In this opening time together we used our imaginations to change those stories. Sometimes in real life, our reality is changed through events beyond our control. I want you to begin to think of an instance where you or someone you know experienced change beyond your/their control. In those moments, how did you/they imagine a different future? Hold your thoughts we’ll share them later.

NURSERY RHYMES

“Three blind mice. Three blind mice. See how they run. See how they run. They all ran...”

“Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder...”

“The wheels on the bus go...”

“Diddle diddle dumplin’, my son John, went to bed with...”

“Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night...”

“Wee Willie Winkie runs through the town...”

“All around the mulberry bush, the monkey...”

“Do you know the muffin man, the muffin man, the muffin man. Do you know the muffin man who...”

“Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I might...”

“Roses are red; violets are blue...”

“Row, row, row your boat...”

“Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard, to...”

“Pattycake, pattycake, baker’s man, bake me...”

Invite the group to ponder these questions:

LEADER: How might imagination be part of our faith journeys? How might imagination be part of how God responds in our life’s stories? Do you see imagination working in your faith?

Accept and affirm answers. Help guide youth to connect themes to lead into the scripture.

LEADER: Those are some awesome ideas and insights. In Ephesians Paul teaches us that through the power of God we can accomplish more together than we could ever imagine doing on our own. Let’s partner up and read the verse together

Have students connect in groups of two or three and read the passage Ephesians 3:14-21.

After reading the scripture, have participants gather back together. Reflect on how Paul’s prayer is a way to encourage the people of God to rely on God’s power and have faith that when God is working through us we can accomplish more than what we could when relying on our strength alone. See page 8 in the Resources Guide for a commentary on the scripture.

Some possible questions for discussion:

- Would anyone like to share the experience of change they thought about earlier?
- Would anyone like to share about a time when they saw something positive in a negative situation? Where did you see God in that situation?
- What does the prayer in Ephesians tell us about what God imagines for God’s people?
- After a few students share, engage students by sharing about how our church responds to difficult situations around the world.

LEADER: When we work together collectively as a church we’re able to respond to people in need to imagine better futures. We do that through Week of Compassion.

Week of Compassion is part of our church that responds to communities in need that are affected by natural disasters, war and persecution, and extreme poverty. Our gifts to Week of Compassion help churches and communities rebuild after fires and floods; they help provide emergency supplies, education, and emotional support to refugees who have had to flee their homes; and they help people develop skills like farming or sewing so they can provide for their families. This month we are receiving offerings that will help us respond to those in need in a way that can only be done through the power of God working in us.

When communities are in a crisis, it can be difficult to imagine how to help or how things could ever get better. Through partnerships, though, Week of Compassion helps us imagine and see in real life how God can use our offerings to transform devastated communities in ways beyond what they could ever imagine. For examples, see the Mission Moments on pages 26-27 of the Resource Guide or at www.weekofcompassion.org/impact and www.weekofcompassion.org/special-offering

BUILD-A-STORY

To imagine some ways we could respond to those communities, let's do an activity called "Build a Story." This activity is similar to our opening activity, but we will build on each other's stories. The first person will provide the opening statement, found on these popsicle sticks. Once they're done they'll pass the popsicle stick to the person to their right, who will add to the story. When that person is done, they'll pass the popsicle stick to the person to their right and we'll continue to add to our story all the way around the circle.

We'll build a story based on some of the real life scenarios from Week of Compassion. As we build the story, remember the goal is for us to think of and include ways that we can empower and help restore the needs of the people in these communities.

I will begin our first story by saying: "When the city of Houston was flooded by Hurricane Harvey," Then the person to my right will extend the story, perhaps saying something like: "many churches and residents lost a place to live and worship." Let's imagine what it was like to go through the flood and imagine a hopeful future!

Let's explore what the people of God can do when we work collectively through the power of God. Ready, Set, Imagine!

"When the city of Houston was flooded by Hurricane Harvey..."

When the story is finished, give a moment of silence

for the group to think about the whole story. Reflect on the story with some discussion. Possible discussion questions are below.

LEADER: What were some hopeful possibilities you heard in our story? Where did you notice the power of God at work in the story? How could our church be part of what you imagined?

CLOSING PRAYER

LEADER: Loving God, thank you for giving us strength to restore and make new realities for communities experiencing devastation. Teach us to always build stories of hope beyond our imagination as you work through us. This is our prayer, in Christ's name. Amen.

BUILD-A-STORY PROMPTS

NOTE: These prompts are based on actual situations where Week of Compassion is working. For details, check out the stories on pages 26-27 of the Resource Guide or at www.weekofcompassion.org/impact and www.weekofcompassion.org/special-offering

In Kenya, it is often dry, but for years now, there has been a terrible drought. When the rains stopped coming...

When families had to flee from Syria because of the civil war...

When Fatima was little, her family did not have the money to send her to school, so when she got older she...

When Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused devastation across Puerto Rico...

When Hector learned a new way to irrigate his crops...

All-Ages Activity:

THIS IS NOT.../THIS IS...

AGE RANGE AND SETTING

Anyone with a willing spirit! This could be done during fellowship hour, in an intergenerational or age-specific Sunday School class

INTENTION

Participants will stretch their imaginations with an improvisational game and consider how the work we do through Week of Compassion can transform situations into new possibilities.

MATERIALS

a collection of random items (pool noodles, hats, home decor, etc.)

OPENING ACTIVITY

Divide participants into groups of 5-10 and have them stand or sit in circles (if you have an intergenerational gathering, try to mix the ages in each group). Place a collection of random items in the center of the circle.

Choose a person in each group to start the game. The starting player in each circle will select an item from the pile. They will begin by saying "This is not [what the object is]. This is [something completely different]," using facial expressions and pantomime to justify their statement. Then that person passes the object to the next in the circle, who continues: "No, this is not [whatever person 1 said]. This is..."

For example, if the first player selects a salad bowl from the pile, she might start by saying:

"This is not a salad bowl. This is an astronaut's helmet!" and she would put the bowl on her head and mime being an astronaut in space. Then, she would pass the bowl to the next person. He would say, "This is not an astronaut's helmet. This is a boat for kittens!" and he

would move the bowl like a boat at sea and meow. Then he would pass the bowl to the next person, on around the circle.

DISCUSSION AND BIBLE REFLECTION:

LEADER: Our offerings to Week of Compassion are a kind of real-life version of this game. Our dollars do not stay as dollars! They become radios and glasses of clean water and sewing supplies and new buildings. Then even those things do not remain as JUST those things.

Pull out a walkie talkie or HAM radio:

LEADER (OR ANOTHER VOLUNTEER): This is not just a Radio. It is a vital communication link between churches on Puerto Rico, so that if cell towers go down during a hurricane, people will still be able to communicate. In an emergency, communication is not just communication; it can mean a sick person getting needed medication and a town cut off from the grocery getting supplies of food! It can be comfort and encouragement when people are scared.

Pull out a glass of water:

LEADER (OR ANOTHER VOLUNTEER): This is not just a glass of water, it is a source of good health for families in Haiti! Access to clean water and enough water for washing means lower likelihood of illness from water-borne diseases. That means better mental and physical development. It means missing fewer days of school. And that means greater opportunities for the future.

Pull out a needle and thread, a basket of sewing supplies, or a sewing machine.

LEADER (OR ANOTHER VOLUNTEER): These are not just sewing supplies, they are the tools for a woman who is taking vocational classes to start her own small business in Iraq. They become a job that helps this woman support her family. They become the opportunity for education for her and her children. They become a support system of other women who have had similar struggles.

Pull out the poster for the special offering.

LEADER (OR ANOTHER VOLUNTEER): This is not just a new house/church... [show the video that tells the story of Mrs. Trinidad, who is featured on the 2019 special offering poster]

LEADER: The work of Week of Compassion creates transformations beyond what we can imagine. In your groups, read together the theme scripture for the Week of Compassion special offering: Ephesians 3:14-21.

Invite groups to discuss the scripture. Some discussion questions are provided below.

- What stood out to you in the scripture?
- Think about the “This is not / This is” activity and the stories we have heard about Week of Compassion. How do they change the way you hear this scripture?
- Verse 20 says God is able to do amazing things “by the power at work within us.” What is that power? How is God working through you?
- How might being “rooted and grounded in love” (verse 17) help us understand the full measure of Christ and join in God’s imagination?
- How does our church (locally and denominationally) bring glory to God (verse 21)?



A women’s co-op in Guatemala uses greenhouses to grow produce to eat and sell; the co-op also provides an organization for promoting education, healthcare, and rights for women and indigenous communities. [photo credit: Foods Resource Bank]

Mission **MOMENT**

IMAGINING FUTURES AT INFO PARK

Imagine a 12-year-old girl or boy whom you might know. Maybe this is a neighborhood child, or perhaps one of your own children or grandchildren. In your mind, what is this child doing on a normal day? Going to school? Eating lunch with friends? Arguing with a sibling about what tablet game they will play after school?

Today I would like to introduce you to another 12-year-old girl. Her life is a little different than the one you might have just imagined for the student you know.

We're going to call her Z, which is the first letter of her name. She was born in Iran, but her family had fled from Afghanistan and was never fully accepted into Iranian society. So, like millions of other refugee and immigrant families, Z's family began the long journey towards a better life. They came through Serbia, hoping to eventually get to Germany.

As they had been for many weeks, Z's days were filled with walking. One day, Z and her family were walking through a park, looking and feeling out of place and afraid, when staff members from an organization called Info Park noticed them. The aid workers offered them

hope in the form of a safe space to rest and a bowl of warm noodles, which Z described as "the sweetest food she has tasted in years."

"O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in God," the Psalmist sings (Psalm 34:8) By your gifts to Week of Compassion, Info Park is able to assist refugees to find a place of respite and a bite to eat when they are hungry.

They also help young girls like Z inch closer and closer to the goals that seemed impossible as they navigated borders, checkpoints, and life as exiles. Your gifts provide for learning centers where girls and boys can escape the life of refugee camps and experience the normalcy that children in many parts of the world take for granted.

Assisted by your generosity, Z embarked on a path towards education that she and her mother had dreamed of. Her days became filled with learning--first at Info Park, then at a German school in Hamburg.

Just one month after enrolling in school, she won the Hamburg regional competition for best writing skills among newcomers to Germany. Two years earlier, she didn't know a word of the language, but now Z is excelling in school and dreaming for a future that is more than we can imagine.



[photo credit: CWS]

**Since July 2016, nearly 170 women and girls have attended German classes at Info Park with support from Week of Compassion partner, Church World Service. Teachers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland inspire students to gain confidence, knowing that if they work hard they will have more opportunities.*

Mission **MOMENT**

SIGNS OF HOPE

Each disaster recovery has some particular uniqueness about it—a slogan that galvanizes the community, a practice of welcoming people home, a way of lifting people’s spirits. The recovery from Hurricane Harvey is no different. In one community among the many affected, that unique element comes in the form of lawn signs.

Week of Compassion has been working with Disciples Volunteering to host a volunteer Mission Station at First Christian Church in Texas City, TX. Teams from across the country have come to work with homeowners in Galveston County whose homes were damaged during the storm in Aug. 2017.

One of the other churches in Galveston County leads a program called “Signs of Hope.” People of all ages can come to the church and make signs that simply say HOPE. These signs are distributed among the organizations that are helping people rebuild, to be placed at each job site. Some of the signs are a bit more elaborate, while others are quite simple. Steve Huston, the long-term volunteer who manages the Mission Station, says, “I derive much pleasure in presenting these signs to our clients and asking, ‘May we put this in your yard or on your home?’”

One of those clients was Mr. “H,” an older gentleman, who lives in LaMarque, Texas. Hurricane Harvey destroyed Mr. H’s roof. He received some recovery funds from FEMA, which he used to hire a contractor to do the needed repairs. The contractor started the job, but never came back to finish. Mr. H waited almost a year and still the job was not finished. In the late summer of 2018, Mr. H connected with Disciples Volunteering. Huston describes it this way: “We brought in a volunteer group who finished the roof. Problem solved – not quite. We found that Mr. H needed more than roofing.” With additional funding from Week of Compassion, the teams were



[photo credit: Danielle Cox]

able to fix some plumbing issues discovered during the course of the repairs. With a now-functional bathroom, the job was nearly complete.

The final project was to fix the exterior of the house, which was in dire need of a paint job. In order to complete the job, the team had to remove the HOPE sign, which had been attached to the porch. Mr. H was quite adamant about the sign. “Where’s my sign?” He questioned. “I want it put back.” The team assured him it would be. The sign now hangs on Mr. H’s porch for all who pass by to see.

A small thing: A Sign of Hope, but when we bring HOPE we can change lives.

Your gifts to Week of Compassion help those affected by disasters to rebuild their homes, their lives, and their communities by providing more than just building supplies and volunteer labor. Your gifts bring hope.

Additional **RESOURCES**

can be found at
weekofcompassion.org/special-offering

Prayer Station

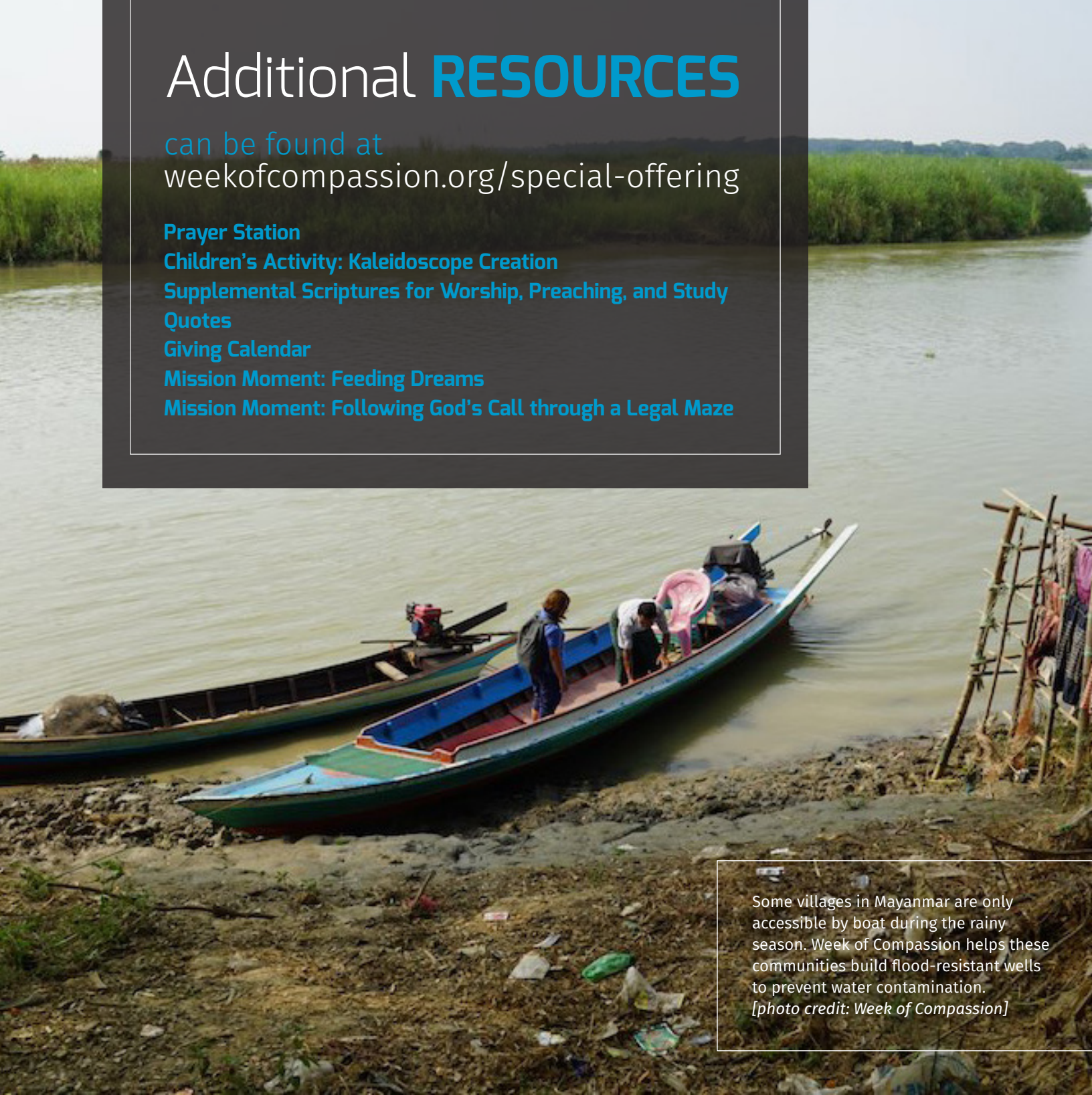
Children's Activity: Kaleidoscope Creation

**Supplemental Scriptures for Worship, Preaching, and Study
Quotes**

Giving Calendar

Mission Moment: Feeding Dreams

Mission Moment: Following God's Call through a Legal Maze



Some villages in Myanmar are only accessible by boat during the rainy season. Week of Compassion helps these communities build flood-resistant wells to prevent water contamination.
[photo credit: Week of Compassion]



Now to God be the glory, who by the power
at work within us is able to accomplish
abundantly far more than all we can ask
or imagine. ***Ephesians 3:20***

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