

FEBRUARY 19–26
SPECIAL OFFERING
2023 PLANNING &
RESOURCE GUIDE

RISE UP ANEW

photo credit: Farid Ershad, Kabul, Afghanistan



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A wide variety of resources are available online:
weekofcompassion.org/2023

- Children’s Sermon & Activities
- Coloring Pages
- Youth Activities
- Intergenerational Activity
- Theme Video
- Giving Calendar
- Mission Moments
- Additional Worship Resources
- Text to Give Info
- Video Sermons from Week of Compassion Staff



Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. For nearly 80 years, Week of Compassion has pursued its mission, working with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world, toward the vision of a world where God’s people transform suffering into hope.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



This past year has continued to witness the ravages of COVID-19 across the globe. War in Ukraine persists, and recovery for that nation's people will be extensive and long-lasting. Communities from Kentucky to Puerto Rico to Newfoundland are in the throes of long-term recovery from tornadoes, massive floods, and hurricanes. Wildfires continue to imperil western U.S. states and Canadian provinces, and drought affects the world's farmers, ranchers, and tribal communities alike. Unfathomable floods in Pakistan and the Philippines have left indelible images of destruction and tragedy, while the simplest needs—nutrition, shelter, work—seem out of reach for far too many people in far too many places.

In the middle of it all, Week of Compassion calls on God's mercy and speaks boldly of the Divine goodness made new each day. When it seems that tragedy and hardship is all that rises up, the people of God trust in a holy word, and proclaim with their work, their witness, and their generous giving, that God's faithfulness will rise up anew, too.

Because God's compassion never fails, we have seen an abundance of compassion in the face of fatigue. Because God's compassion never fails, we have seen partnerships forged, communities strengthened, and opportunities blossoming—concrete and tangible ways that Week of Compassion, serving with and on behalf of the whole Disciples church, is part of what God is doing to make things new.

It is about so much more than dollars and cents. Week of Compassion is where Disciples respond to the challenges and the blessings they see and experience in the world. Week of Compassion is a full-body-of-Christ response. As our General Minister and President, Rev. Terri Hord Owens has often said, "When Week of Compassion is there, the whole church is there"—to bring immediate relief and long-term recovery after disasters; equip churches and leaders for disaster preparedness; respond to assist refugees; and support global development projects that empower communities.

As Disciples, we gather at the table of thanksgiving, where we remember Christ's very life poured out lavishly for everyone without exception. This abundance and blessing is what we receive, who we are, and who God calls us to be. In the midst of pain that seems too great and challenges that seem too many, God's great faithfulness remains, and we rise up anew, again and again, to give, serve, and live with compassionate generosity. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership, throughout the year, throughout the world.

In gratitude,

Rev. Vy Nguyen
Executive Director, Week of Compassion



THEME INTRODUCTION

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and sustainable development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. For nearly 80 years, Week of Compassion has pursued its mission, working with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world, with a vision of a world where God's people transform suffering into hope.

Hope and transformation, alleviation and relief—things that have been sorely lacking in our nations and world these last few years. Our neighbors, our churches, our families, our own individual spirits, still carry the fatigue of a global pandemic that saw millions of deaths and continues to be of wearying concern. International conflicts and a global climate crisis seem too huge to grasp and leave us feeling helpless, while local communities sag under the strain of bitter politics, pervasive violence, and economic challenge.

In the midst of all this? Week of Compassion says **'RISE UP ANEW'?! HOW?!**

As people of faith, as followers on the Way, who proclaim the centrality of a welcome table and the power of an empty tomb, yes, somehow we still say 'Rise Up Anew'.

We come to this intersection of history, carrying the weight of our concerns. In the language of worship and the church, it's called lament. We sit in our lament, and we wait for what's next. In the Hebrew Scriptures, an entire book of wisdom - Lamentations - shows us this has always been true. Alongside many other scriptures where people tell of their heartbreak, worry, pain, and suffering, Lamentations reflects where we find ourselves right now ... fatigued, stumbling, uncertain.

AND the writer says that somehow, still, God is with us.

*3:21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*

*:22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;*

*:23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. (NRSVUE)*

God's mercies are new every morning. To many of us, a simple reminder, perhaps even a glimmer of breath, new life, and hope.

When unseasonable winter tornadoes struck western Kentucky, relief funds came immediately and volunteers would later follow, preparing for the long-term recovery. Less than a year later, when torrential downpours brought devastating flooding to already hard-hit eastern Kentucky and Missouri, a special gift quickly arrived - from a church who had received tornado assistance and volunteers just months before. Whether in domestic disaster response in familiar communities, refugee response in the aftermath of wars, or ecumenical partnership that supports shelter, food, education, and livelihoods - Week of Compassion is witness to the truth that God's mercies **RISE UP ANEW** each day.

And yet we also know that for many people in the world, every morning still means struggle. Every morning still means worry. Every morning still means disease, fear, and lament that will not end.

In another translation, there is an insightful turn of phrase:

*Yet it is **because** I remember all this that I have hope.*

*YHWH's favor is not exhausted, **nor has God's compassion failed.***

***They rise up anew each morning,** so great is God's faithfulness. (The Inclusive Bible)*

We are exhausted. God never is.

We are fatigued. God's compassion never fails.

We know everything that has led us here. And because of that we hope. And we **RISE UP ANEW** each morning.

We do. Because God does.

So we recommit to the work of hope—borne out of suffering, and uncertainty, it is hope just the same. God's compassion has not failed. Week of Compassion is committed to that great faithfulness, too.



photo credit: Week of Compassion Special Offering short film 2022



SERMON STARTER & SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

by Rev. Dr. Casey Thornburgh Sigmon

- 21 Yet it is because I remember all this that I have hope.
- 22 YHWH's favor is not exhausted, nor has God's compassion failed.
- 23 They rise up anew each morning, so great is God's faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:21-23 (The Inclusive Bible)

When lifted from the original context, we might take these three verses of praise for granted. Perhaps when you read them you hear the words in song, the tune breezy and light: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, God’s mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning, new every morning...”

Yet read these verses and sing this song within the book of Lamentations, and something shifts, as you realize that these words of hope are embedded in the eye of a grief storm. These verses of praise do not come out of sunshine and collective joy. Rather they come from communal poetry born out of collective grief and sorrow.

What are these verses about God’s steadfast love doing in the middle of persistent grief? Read in certain tones,

these verses might feel a bit like Job’s friends seeking answers to senseless suffering. Read in another tone, these verses come off as toxic positivity in the face of great destruction. But read within the collection of grief poems, these verses remind us of God’s compassion and justice—of One who acknowledges our suffering and meets us in the midst of devastation with steadfast love and mercy.

As oppositional as it may seem at first glance, **lament is a necessary component of hope and a key part of the movement from empathy to compassion.** For this reason, I lifted reflection questions that help the preacher dig deeply into the pain underlying our individual and collective selves. Lament is acknowledgement of pain and the first step toward hope.

In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Lamentations is known by the first word of the book - How? or 'ekah? That makes perfect sense for anyone who has ever experienced the loss and destruction that gives birth to lament. When facing such tragedies, our first word is often a question like "How?" or "Why?" or even in keeping with the psalmist and the author(s) of these grief poems in Lamentations, "Where were you, God?"

We've been living through a prolonged season of lament, of 'ekah, of 'how.' And if we are being honest with our full selves, many of us are walking through our days with a heaviness and weariness of heart that makes it hard to rise up out of bed each morning.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What signs or symptoms of compassion fatigue have you observed in your body in recent months? How did you come to recognize the symptom(s)? How did you meet and listen to the symptom(s), or how might you intentionally listen, name, and lament the pain (its existence and cause)?

In 2023, it honestly feels more like devastation is steadfast and compassion in short supply. We are approaching the three-year anniversary of the start of the pandemic. As a human race, we are collectively marked by grief over the millions of deaths and millions of losses resulting from COVID's impact. Add to that the crises of climate change and white supremacy, and the fatigue amplifies. As much as our western culture may want us to move on, the symptoms of compassion fatigue are still present at all levels of society.

My mind reflects on and recounts these tragedies and I am overcome, exhausted, frozen. So, I can either turn the TV off, or teach the algorithms that feed me news to only offer puppies and baking ideas, or find other means to cultivate and perpetuate apathy instead ('a'-meaning lack or absence plus 'pathy'- meaning feeling).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What patterns have you accumulated in your life to cope with tragedy? What about communal patterns in the congregation? How have they served you and your community? Not served you and your community?

Preachers, have you heard the chorus of 'How?' amid your congregation? Or within your own heart? Such whispers are not a surprise. We are living through so many disasters and all of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ and seek to follow in his ways of compassion have felt scarcity creep in as fatigue creeps in.

How can we live into Jesus' way of open-hearted responsiveness during so much exhausting devastation? The text offers a clue in the transition between verses 19 and 23 (Inclusive Bible):

- 19 *I remember my woes and wanderings—the wormwood and the gall.*
- 20 *Those memories are so clear to me, and they fill me with despair.*
- 21 *Yet it is because I remember all this that I have hope.*
- 22 *YHWH's favor is not exhausted, nor has God's compassion failed.*
- 23 ***They rise up anew each morning, so great is God's faithfulness.***

Christian hope is rooted and nourished by God's steadfast, abundant, enduring, ever-in-supply and in season compassion. Remembering the compassion of God can ease the pain of what seems like a never-ending news cycle of devastation (wormwood and gall). This promise can give us the strength of heart to **RISE UP ANEW** when our hearts are weary from the work of caring about and for all those in need in this beautiful and broken world.

Week of Compassion meets people and communities amid their/our grief poems, their/our deepest moment of "How could this happen?" with God's unfailing compassion.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Where has your congregation shared in the work of Week of Compassion? When have you, or a church you know, been a recipient of solidarity grants, trainings, or other assistance? In reflecting on those instances, or after reading through some of the Mission Moments/stories on the Week of Compassion website, where do you see God's mercies? Where do you see hope blooming in the midst of lament?

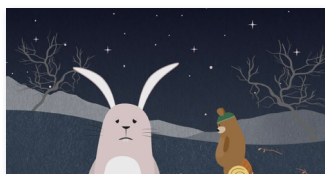
In *Worship Comes to Its Senses*, liturgical scholar Don Saliers claims that hope is what underlies the very act of lament. Hope is differentiated from optimism, in that optimism ignores and refuses to acknowledge suffering. Some call this sort of behavior “toxic positivity.” It is rampant in our culture, including praise and worship culture.

So perhaps as you mark the Week of Compassion Special Offering, or as you move through this season of Lent, you will set aside intentional space for lament in worship, especially if exercising that muscle is new for your ministry. Why? Because lament helps bring forth hope that is, like God’s heart, resilient and inexhaustible. Lament closes the gap between life as we live it and the church’s liturgy. Lament is the cry of the faithful from what is, while summoning forth actions that build what should be. Lament and

compassion and justice are partners. When lament is given space in worship, we grow our hearts and cultivate resiliency for the long road of partnering with God in healing and justice ministries.

Week of Compassion is the presence of the Body of Christ in the midst of today's grief poems: when families seek refuge from wars at home and find welcome in a new and strange land; when those with few opportunities now have the chance to develop businesses and engage their communities; and when children whose homes were damaged by tornadoes find normalcy and joy in day camp on a sunny afternoon. Whenever and wherever in the world a community cries out with ‘How could this happen?’, Week of Compassion shows up with incarnate hope in the eye of the storm, so God’s people can **RISE UP ANEW**, together.

MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT



HOW DO YOU HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND?

Video by Megan Devine

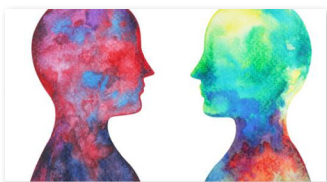
A short, animated video that speaks to the gift of acknowledgement in the experience of grief and pain.



THE GIFT AND POWER OF EMOTIONAL COURAGE

Video, TEDTalk by Susan David

The psychologist integrates her story of moving beyond ‘toxic positivity’ with studies on how resilience is built by holding space for emotional truth.



FOUR REASONS WHY COMPASSION IS BETTER FOR HUMANITY THAN EMPATHY

by Rasmus Hougaard

A brief but resourceful article on the distinction between empathy and compassion and how to make a shift toward compassionate leadership, including the difference it makes for our resiliency and tangible care for people beyond our in-group.



REMEMBER WHEN

Music Video by The Many

The Many are a collective of musicians creating music and liturgy that acknowledges pain. Their songs balance lament and hope and could be a resource to you and your congregation as you stretch the lament muscle in worship. Find more resources on [their site](#).





MISSION MOMENT: UKRAINE

“I was living a normal life,” eighteen-year-old Dmitry recalled. “I was studying logistics and marketing and playing football. I wanted to be a professional footballer, and had a contract with the Mariupol junior football team.”

Anna, also 18, is from Donetsk, and had already moved because of the earlier war (2014, when Russia annexed Crimea). Now in Mariupol with Dmitry, “I was studying law, wanting to become a lawyer.”

The young couple’s dreams of football and law were interrupted when they woke to a call from Dmitry’s parents telling them that the war had started. They quickly made sure they had cash on hand in the first few days. Battles started in the suburbs of Mariupol; Dmitry and Anna lived near the city center, but days later, fighting started near their flat, and for the next month, they stayed in the middle of the war zone, afraid to leave the city.

As the violence escalated, it became almost impossible to safely move around Mariupol, or even to be in touch with friends like Kristina, who lived just in the next yard.

“We had no electricity, no information, no internet,” Dmitry said. “The only information we could get was from Russian soldiers, who told us Kyiv, Mariupol, and Odessa were all under Russian control.”

Eventually, Dmitry and Anna decided that the risk of fleeing was less than the risk of staying. “Mariupol was on the front lines,” Dmitry said. “Donetsk was under Russian control. The only way to escape was through Russia.”

So the two left together for the Russian border. After hours of security checks of their phones and few belongings, Dmitry and Anna were finally able to purchase train tickets to St. Petersburg. Their plan was to go to Hungary, where a friend was living. A Russian vlogger, supportive of Ukrainian refugees, gave them the phone number of a staff member at Hungarian Interchurch Aid (a Week of Compassion partner).

As part of the relief and transition stations established at the borders, Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA) supported Dmitry and Anna as they came through their five-day journey to Budapest. Since then, HIA



photo credits and story:
Simon Chambers/ACT Alliance

Partnerships and generosity make it possible to see God’s mercies made real every day.

Soon after arriving in Budapest, Dmitry and Anna were able to get in touch with their friend Kristina. A rocket had landed in their yard, wounding a woman. “We went to shelter in a school, but after an unexploded bomb was near the school, we went back to the flat. We were so scared we could not sleep.” The next day, she lost her phone connection, the day after that, they lost power.

Eventually, bringing Anna’s mother with her, Kristina drove to Donetsk, and from there the two repeated Dmitry’s and Anna’s journey across Russia, and the friends finally reunited in Budapest.

Happy to be in Europe now, the teenagers worry about their family at home. They want to see their families reunited, but “I don’t see a way back to Mariupol,” Dmitry said. “The city is ruined, it will take a long time to rebuild.” Anna agreed, “I can’t see going back.”

has helped them find shelter, food, connections with a local football club, and help in finding jobs.

This is where suffering is alleviated and transformed. This is how, in the midst of grief and anxiety, hope can rise up anew. Giving to Week of Compassion means providing new possibilities in desperate times.

“If I can organize my life here, I will stay,” Kristina said; her friends agreed. They don’t know if Budapest will be their permanent home, but your offerings to Week of Compassion, when shared through partners like ACT Alliance and HIA, mean that Dmitry, Anna, and Kristina have choices, opportunities, and hope - to rise up anew and rebuild their lives.



WORSHIP RESOURCES

by Rev. Dr. Casey Thornburgh Sigmon

INVOCATION

God who is ever close to the broken hearted,
the anxious and exhausted, the devastated and numb—

Awaken us to Your Presence now!

Dissolve our exhaustion in Your inexhaustible
faithfulness.

Meet our worries (that seem to multiply every
morning) with Your mercy,

So that we can continue the movement for healing
and wholeness in our fragmented world

In the name of Jesus

And in the power of Your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

COMMUNION MEDITATION

Jesus knew the journey of living with compassion is
wearying

Long before his sleepless night in Gethsemane.

And so, he prepared a meal in the company of his
friends,

And he told them, “Do this, as often as you gather for
this Love work, in remembrance of me.”

And so, they did

and so we do

Come to this Table

Not only to remember Jesus

But to meet with him, to allow him to nourish us
for our wearying work of Loving our world into
wholeness.

When we break this bread, we are energized to rise up
anew and continue the work of meeting others and
in their hunger and their hunger for justice.

When we share this cup, we are energized to rise up
anew and continue the work of quenching others
and in their thirst and their
thirst for righteousness.



Come, all are welcome at
Jesus' Table,
For the resources of God's
Love never run out.

COMMUNION PRAYER

Giver of Life, Parent of us all -

You created all that is seen and hidden,
From the tiniest molecules to vast galaxies,
You created and called all of it “good.”

You wove human beings into the goodness of creation,
Formed us from star dust and soil,
Gave us your breath and proclaimed us
“very good.”

Yet we did not fully trust in your goodness and mercy.
We misunderstood what it meant to be made in your image,
And began to question the goodness of others,
To horde power,
To satisfy our hunger for you with lesser gods.

You sent prophets to bring us back to you.
We did not understand.

So, you sent your Word and wisdom to dwell among us,
in all of our fleshiness, vulnerability, and beauty.
Jesus Christ showed us the way of compassion
and how inexhaustible your love is—not even death by
powers of the state could extinguish it!

After Jesus' tomb became a womb,
he rose up anew and emboldened the disciples as their
despair turned to joy!

Jesus ascended into heaven, but gifted us with an
advocate to accompany the church
until Christ comes again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on
these gifts on the Table.

Bless this bread we break, that it may be to us the
body of Christ,
broken so that we may be made whole.

Bless this Cup, that it may be for us the cup of
compassion poured out for all to bring salvation to
the world.

With this holy meal make us rise up anew in the power
of our baptism

And in unity with Christ and one another, in ministry
to all the world.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

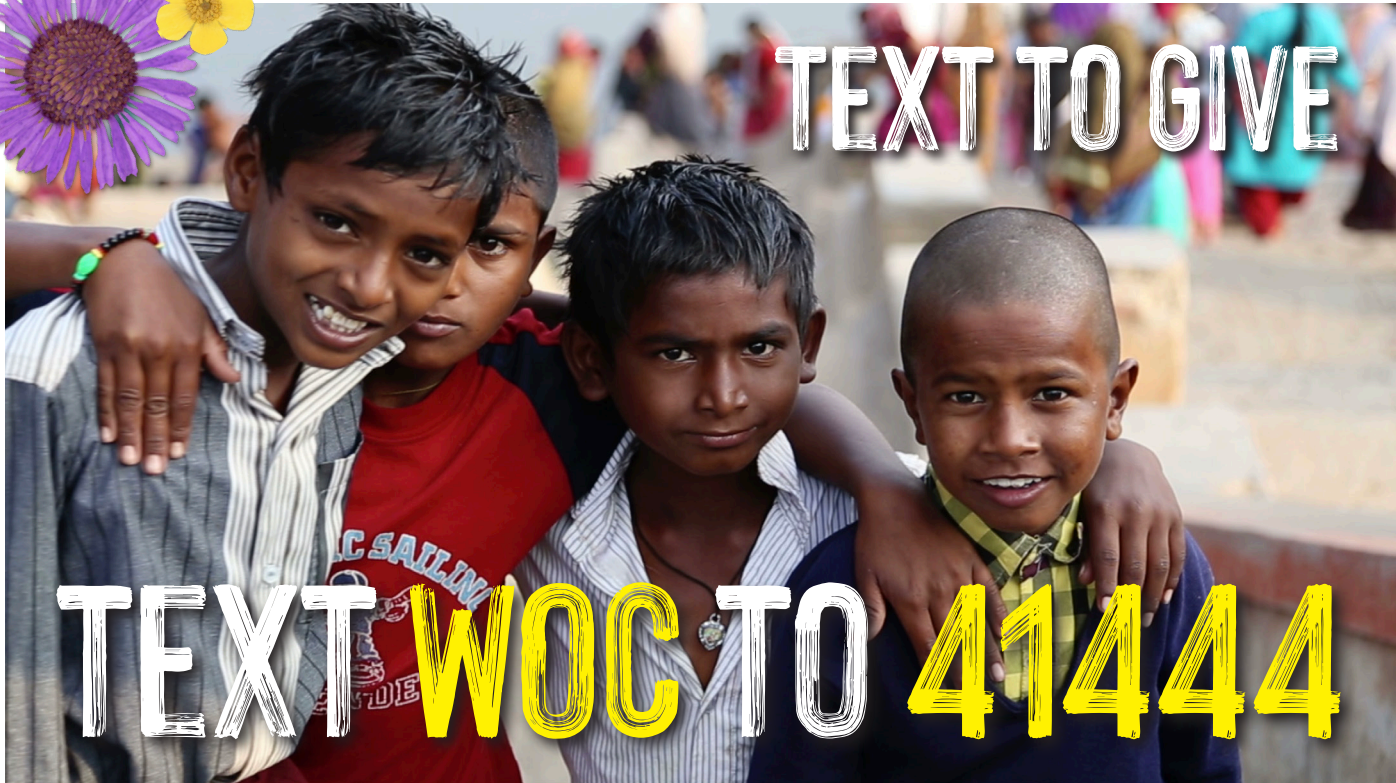


photo credit: Week of Compassion Special Offering short film 2022

SHARE THIS TEXT CODE with your congregation on worship slides, social media, church newsletters, or any other platform to invite members to give.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



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