



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF STEWARDS FOR
WEEK OF COMPASSION**

Spring 2022

Submitted by Vy Nguyen

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

Recently, Week of Compassion staff gathered in person for the first time in 2 years at Northway Christian Church in Dallas, TX, to strategize, plan, pray, and dream about the vision and mission of Week of Compassion. The time allowed the team to reflect on the important work of this ministry and how to do this work moving forward, with so much change happening within Week of Compassion in the last 6 months and with our world continuing to change in the areas of disaster relief and refugee work.

As the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion continues to respond to communities in need on behalf of the entire church, as domestic and global situations continue to call us more deeply into this mission. Since the last Board of Stewards meeting this past October, the number of displaced people worldwide continues to grow, especially with Afghans and conflicts around the world, like the current situation in Ukraine. Additionally, major storms have destroyed many homes and communities, such as in Kentucky over this past winter. These are just a few to name, as there were other less-publicized disasters that impacted many.

The most urgent concern currently is the situation in Ukraine and the surrounding countries due to the early stages of what is predicted to be a long situation that will require many years of response and rebuilding. Since the conflict began in February, many of our ecumenical partners have been focusing on both the immediate response and planning for the long-term implications. One of our primary partners, ACT Alliance, put out the largest appeal in its history and has received tremendous support from global partners. Week of Compassion supported this ACT appeal, as well as appeals from our partners with International Orthodox Christian Charities, European Baptist Alliance, and Global Ministries, to the amount of over \$350,000. This is just the initial response that includes transporting Ukrainians out of the country and safely into Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Moldova while providing shelter, social and psycho support, and medical care when they safely arrive. Our long-term partner, Church World Service, is also working on a long-term appeal that will focus on doing work in Moldova. Additionally, our Global Ministries partners in Italy and Greece are looking at welcoming Ukrainians into their respective countries, building on their experience of helping to welcome Syrians.

The situation in Ukraine, along with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, is producing a downward spiral effect for developing countries regarding food security, with the world's most vulnerable people becoming most impacted. The climate crisis continues to affect food production in many communities as families see more drought and have difficulty growing their own food. Food prices are currently at their highest since records began 60 years ago, and many of our partners are beginning to see the negative effects on local communities

surrounding access to food and food security. While many of us see the conflict in Ukraine right before us, it's also important that we focus on how the global food prices and production will affect many of the sustainable development programs that we have been supporting. Week of Compassion is already engaging with our partners to come up with a strategy that will help reduce the burden on so many communities affected by the rise in food costs.

As the needs of the world continue to shift, Week of Compassion continues to adjust in order to align its structure and personnel with the changing needs of ministry. With increased and intensified natural disasters, and an unprecedented global refugee crisis, it has been necessary for Week of Compassion, as the disaster response arm of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to grow to more fully meet these needs. Since the last Board of Stewards meeting last fall, Week of Compassion has expanded its staff to include two new positions and has worked to align its current staff roles to more effectively support and equip congregations as they engage in disaster, refugee, and immigration response work.

Rev. Alan Dicken was hired as the Associate Director of Immigrant and Refugee Response and began his work on February 14, 2022. Since starting, he has been engaging with congregations that have existing refugee ministries and with refugee resettlement centers across the country with whom we partner in the work of resettlement. Shortly after he started, Russia invaded Ukraine, which has prompted many contacts from across the country, as congregations seek to engage in refugee resettlement work with guidance and support from Week of Compassion. Looking ahead, Rev. Dicken will continue to develop relationships with refugee resettlement centers across the country so that any Disciples congregation that may be interested can easily find and access ways to do resettlement work. Another priority for him is to find ways for congregations that may not be physically close to resettlement offices, or who may be unable to take on the ministry of resettlement on their own, to partner with other Disciples congregations so that all congregations can fulfill their ministry visions and goals.

Week of Compassion continues to build on two of its domestic priorities that were set last year:

1. Strengthen our relationship with racial-ethnic ministries and people of color communities and congregations
2. Work with regions and congregations to increase disaster preparedness and response work

With so many specific crises needing individualized responses all over the US and Canada, it was essential to hire an organizer who could support the congregational infrastructure of both refugee and disaster response work. Raiza Spratt was hired as the Disaster Response Organizer and began her work on March 1, 2022.

Ms. Spratt has been working with both Rev. Dicken and Rev. Hamilton-Arnold in the work of developing relationships and strategies for domestic response that will benefit the whole church. She works with Rev. Dicken to prepare congregations for the expectations of the local resettlement agencies and to support them as they go through the process of resettlement work. She also is working with Rev. Hamilton-Arnold to connect and resource congregations for disaster response, including mapping the assets of our congregations for disaster preparedness and response and building Week of Compassion's disaster volunteer infrastructure.

Ms. Spratt is taking a primary role in the utilization of [Willing to Respond](#). This ecumenical initiative, which Rev. Hamilton-Arnold helped develop, provides a platform for networking congregations for disaster preparedness and response, through training, relationships, and informational resources. As of April 23, 15 Disciples congregations had registered, with several other congregations and regions expressing interest. We hope this platform will help Week of Compassion build relationships with congregations, provide them with resources for future disasters, and connect them with other churches and organizations. We also hope it will provide an additional entry point for church teams to serve on our disaster recovery sites.

Currently, Week of Compassion has 4 active opportunities for disaster recovery volunteering: one is a straight referral to a Long-Term Recovery Group serving survivors of Hurricane Florence in Eastern North Carolina; two are partnership-referrals with Fuller Center Disaster Rebuilders, where teams are housed in Disciples churches (Madisonville, KY - recovering from the Dec. 2021 tornadoes and Hammond, LA - recovering from Hurricane Ida); the fourth is a site Week of Compassion is operating in collaboration with the United Church of Christ Heartlands Conference and the Tornado Survivors Pathways to Homeownership Project in Dayton, OH (an affordable housing, new homeownership project in response to the 2019 tornado outbreak). Rev. Hamilton-Arnold has submitted an application for a grant through National VOAD to support ongoing work in Dayton. The Dayton, OH project has revealed areas of needed growth and refinement of processes as Week of Compassion lives into the role of coordinating volunteer teams. Since the fall, we have added 1 long-term volunteer to our roster, and we continue to think about how to expand the list of available volunteers to lead recovery sites and engage in supporting recovery in other ways. Recruiting volunteer teams continues to be a challenge.

We have several ongoing and developing recovery efforts with significant Disciples involvement. Rev. Hamilton-Arnold continues to work with local congregations, ecumenical and local partners to support these recovery efforts. She would welcome the opportunity to talk with you in more detail about specifics!

Western KY - Dec. 2021 Tornadoes

Southern OR - 2020 Wildfires (with particular gratitude to Rebecca Smith for her involvement and leadership in this recovery!)
Boulder, CO - 2022 Wildfires
Reno County, KS - 2022 Wildfires
Louisiana - Hurricanes Laura, Delta, and Ida (2020 and 2021)
Jacksboro, TX - March 2022 Tornado

The Iglesia Cristiana (Discipulos de Cristo) en Puerto Rico has determined they do not have the ability to restart volunteer operations for recovery from Hurricane Maria, as their staff capacity is needed to manage the remaining repairs on several dozen congregations, most of whom are receiving significant federal assistance for repairs thanks to a FEMA grant program. Week of Compassion is currently assessing potential paths forward for supporting community-wide recovery efforts in Puerto Rico - through local congregations or through ecumenical/VOAD partnerships.

Week of Compassion also continues to support recovery efforts in areas where local Disciples are not engaged with recovery. Recovery from Hurricane Harvey in Southeast Texas continues with compounding needs from subsequent named and unnamed storms and the deep freeze of Feb. 2021. In Florida, the Immokalee Fair Housing Alliance broke ground this winter on an affordable housing rental complex that will primarily serve farmworkers living in housing still damaged from Hurricane Irma. In the Fall report, we noted a grant awarded by National VOAD/UPS to support volunteer work in Eastwick, PA. Due to challenges with long-term volunteer availability, we redirected those funds to support construction management and volunteer coordination services through NVOAD Partner, The Elevated Studio, and United Church of Christ Disaster Ministries. As we consider the limitations of Disciples congregations (in terms of geography, capacity, etc.) and the implications of our denominational demographics on the diversity and equity of our domestic responses, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold is also considering how to identify and build ecumenical and local partnerships in strategic locations.

In the areas of fund development and fundraising, we continue to see strong support from many of our donors and churches. We are grateful to so many of our donors who believe in Week of Compassion's mission and support this ministry on a regular basis. Rev. Courtney Richards came on staff in January as our Interim Communications and Development Manager and became our permanent staff on May 1. She continues to work with local congregations and individual donors to share stories and the impact of Week of Compassion. She is also helping to add congregations into the Circle of Compassion—churches who have made a commitment to begin a named endowment fund for Week of Compassion with the Christian Church Foundation (CCF) with a goal of getting to \$10,000 for the named fund. So far, we have a total of 75 Circle

of Compassion congregations. Our overall endowment with CCF continues to grow, and the return continues to increase year over year. Recently, we received the largest gift in our history from a single individual donor toward our Ukraine appeal, which was \$1 million. In addition, we have been in a conversation with our lawyers to help us receive an estate gift from a donor that is estimated to be between \$10–\$20 million that Week of Compassion would receive in the future.

This year's special offering in February was strong, and we are slowly seeing an increase in revenue. We attribute this increase to the tornado in Kentucky this past December that carried over to the new year as well as the current Ukraine crisis. Both of these disasters put Week of Compassion on local churches' minds in ways that helped the special offering. As churches begin to come back to in-person worship, we are also exploring various ways to promote and lift up the annual special offering, especially looking at the 2023 special offering. In the past, Week of Compassion worked with the ecumenical table (One Great Hour of Sharing) that included other denominations to develop shared resources and guides for the special offering. This year, we decided to approach it differently and try to create the 2023 resources away from the table to give us an opportunity to think creatively and help us imagine ways to create resources that are really helpful to local churches. We plan to come back to the OGHS table at the end of this year to share our experiences with the table and help to make some improvements for the future.

Caroline and I have heavily engaged with our DEI consultants, Rev. Jha and Rev. Adams, this past year. The conversation and review process has been helpful in looking at our overall ministry, specifically our work in the areas of domestic disaster, where it involves natural disaster and human displacement, and how local churches and communities in the United States engage Week of Compassion in this work. Our work in domestic disasters is only expanding, not just in additional staff capacity, but in how we engage with local Disciples. The recommendations that we will receive from our consultants will play a major role in shaping the future of this ministry in how we do this work and how we speak and communicate this work. I am grateful to this board for pushing Week of Compassion to do this important analysis and helping this ministry ask important questions regarding power and systems that impact our work in ways that might not help serve the most vulnerable people.

In all that we do, we are working toward responses, whether they are for natural disasters or humanitarian crises, that can be sustainable, accessible, and visible. It is our prayer that as we expand the staff and capacity of Week of Compassion, we also help broaden and deepen the denomination's understanding of itself as a church committed to loving our neighbors, especially in times of deepest need and vulnerability.