



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF STEWARDS FOR

WEEK OF COMPASSION

Fall 2021

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

I want to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to the board and the staff for giving me the opportunity to step away for a time of renewal and rest this past summer. The timing of the mini-sabbatical was much needed and allowed me to come back feeling refreshed and more engaged in the work of Week of Compassion and the wider church. While I was away, I really missed the work of Week of Compassion, and toward the end, I was really itching to come back again. While away, I was reminded daily of the work Week of Compassion continues to do and how it is still as important as ever—this ministry has a profound effect on many communities all over the world. In July, my family and I got into our car and drove 7,000 miles to explore the western parts of the US. We didn't have concrete plans, but several times, wildfires or smoke dictated our travel plans, and we had to make changes. Each time, it made me think of the work we do at Week of Compassion and how it enables us, the wider church, to respond with compassion in times of disaster. And as things have shown in the last few months—wildfires, earthquakes in Haiti, Afghans arriving in the US, just to name a few—our responses as a church enable us to come together and share our compassion to many who need it.

The last several months have been another season full of extreme disasters. This continues to be a recurring theme for Week of Compassion's work, one that will only get worse in the future due to climate change. Week of Compassion continues to emphasize and expand our disaster preparedness work as we see Disciple churches and Regions playing a more vital role in their local communities after a disaster. The work of domestic disaster response and recovery continues to be busy and crucial, as you will see at the bottom of this report by the list of responses and long-term recoveries that this ministry does.

Domestic disaster is changing rapidly, and we continue to evaluate our domestic disaster work in order to strengthen and expand this work. For the last year, the board and staff have recognized the need for additional staff to help better serve local communities. Further, with the addition of taking on some components of Disciples Volunteering within Week of Compassion, it really required us to think bigger and holistically in how we do disaster work. A month ago, we posted a new position for a Disaster Response Organizer to work along with our local and regional churches in the areas of disaster preparedness and long-term recovery. We hope to have the new person come onto staff in the early part of 2022.

One of the priorities we set for Week of Compassion this year, especially around the domestic disaster work, is to bridge stronger ties with our racial-ethnic communities. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold continues to reach out to many of these churches throughout the year, working closely with our ethnic General Ministry partners to coordinate and help expand our outreach to communities that we have not reached out to much in the past. In addition, since our last meeting in the spring, Week of Compassion, as a result of receiving the Oreon Scott Foundation grant, started doing racial equity analysis on our domestic disaster work. At this meeting, you will receive an initial report from our consultants, Rev. Jha and Rev. Adams, on how we might begin to think about, communicate, and fundraise for our domestic disaster work. The full and final report of this equity study will be shared with the board at the spring 2022 board meeting.

Turning a little bit to the global community, our support for our partners in areas of sustainable development continues to be affected due to the ongoing global pandemic and the strict restrictions in many of the countries we work with. Through our partners, we continue to see the pandemic's impact on many communities that we serve. Progress from our efforts over the last several decades continues to take several steps back, further harming communities and their ability to come out of this pandemic with much success. In countries where local staff and partners can travel and implement programs—clean water, education, food security support—those communities are benefiting greatly or as best they can due to the current challenges. But, in the most vulnerable communities, where COVID-19 is hitting the hardest, local partners are not able to engage with these communities to help move them forward toward sustained livelihood. On top of the difficulty from this pandemic, various global disasters continue to impact many of these countries, making it more difficult and longer for our partners to respond. For example, the assessment in Haiti after the recent earthquake is taking much longer than we anticipated due to the pandemic as well as the political tension in the country, making the full recovery and rebuilding process longer. Week of Compassion will continue to engage our partners and explore ways to best support these communities post-pandemic.

Another priority of Week of Compassion this year is to advocate on behalf of the developing countries to have greater access to the COVID-19 vaccine. As Europe and North America see the increase in vaccination rates, most developing nations where we work have only vaccinated less than 10% of their entire population. Our work with ACT Alliance in the area of advocacy and distribution of vaccines continues to be ongoing and has shown some modest success, even though the road ahead will be long. In order for the world to get out of this pandemic, all of us, the entire global community, need to have access to the vaccine.

The recent situation surrounding Afghanistan and thousands of Afghan families arriving into the US has shown us that the work of forced migration and resettlement in the US will continue to be a high priority for Week of Compassion. Our longtime partners worldwide continue to work with refugees and internally displaced families despite the challenges and difficulties of the situation. While the news media have not focused much on conflicts in many parts of the world, we continue to engage and provide support to refugees and internally displaced people in Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, and East Africa, just to name a few.

Here in the United States, our work and support for refugee resettlement is as crucial as ever. The influx of Afghans coming to the US has created a high interest in our local churches in wanting to be a part of welcoming families. Currently, the resettlement infrastructure that was crumbled by the last US administration is making it extremely difficult for many of the local resettlement agencies to take on the high number of Afghan families. In addition, the Biden administration has temporarily set the refugee ceiling number to 125,000 for the new Fiscal Year 2022, which is almost 10 times more than the last few years. The 9 resettlement agencies are not equipped to take on this many refugees, but are currently rushing to open additional local offices throughout the US. This will take time and will require the faith communities to be fully engaged in this work for months and years to come. Many of our churches will play an important role in helping to welcome these families.

The work and support by Week of Compassion surrounding refugee resettlement with our local churches is not enough and not sustainable. Having local Disciples churches, along with other local ecumenical churches, engage in refugee resettlement is a high priority for Week of Compassion due to the high urgency at the moment. The situation with the influx of Afghans, along with thousands of other refugees from other parts of the world, has exposed the weakness in our current structure in how we do refugee work. Many Disciple churches have been engaging with local refugee resettlement without the connection or relationship of our national office. Some Disciple churches are having conversations about wanting to help welcome Afghans but do not know how to connect or who to talk to within our denomination. The influx of Afghans coming to the US and the local infrastructure being rebuilt as we speak called for additional Refugee and Immigration Ministries personnel to help with the increased workload. Week of Compassion hired a part-time, 3-month contract person to work solely with Refugee and Immigration Ministries to better outreach with local Disciple churches and help organize, mobilize, and strengthen our local church response for welcoming Afghan families. This 3-month position is being funded through the Compassion In Action fund and is only a band-aid for the current situation and is not sustainable.

Refugee work is a priority for Week of Compassion, and it's within our mission to make sure that the wider church is engaging in this work throughout the year, especially in the next several years as the number of refugees arriving into the US will increase. Currently, Week of Compassion supports CWS in their refugee resettlement and advocacy work. We support Refugee and Immigration Ministries and Legal Counsel at DHM. Our financial support for Legal Counsel at DHM will remain the same, and we have expressed to DHM that we are open to providing additional support if there is a plan to increase and expand this crucial work. In order to prepare and position Week of Compassion to better implement its mission and serve our refugee partners and local Disciple churches, Week of Compassion will need to invest more financially and with additional resources in our refugee work starting in 2022. We will double the budget for refugee work to over \$100,000 and create a program within our own ministry to do this work. In order to make this sustainable with greater impact, Week of Compassion will have to redirect our current funding to RIM and create a new position within Week of Compassion for someone to engage and help build sustainable work with our local and regional churches around refugees. The current resources at DHM surrounding RIM are not sufficient and do not allow RIM to fully do its work. Adding someone in Week of Compassion to do this work will strengthen our local churches toward refugee resettlement, educate our churches on various issues around refugees, and advocate on behalf of refugees and the various impacts that will happen in the next several years.

Domestic Disaster

Despite continued challenges to long-term recovery posed by COVID-19, Caroline has been supporting partners in several communities, including TX (Hurricane Harvey), FL (Hurricane Irma), NC (Hurricane Florence), PR (Hurricanes Irma and Maria), CA (multiple wildfires), LA (Hurricanes Laura and Delta) and OR (multiple wildfires). She also continues in her roles as Chair of the National VOAD Community

Preparedness Committee and the CWS DHA Advisory Group. A few areas of development are of note for this reporting period.

Volunteer Opportunities

- We have two active partnerships, in what we refer to as high-touch referral mode. Our partner, Fuller Center Disaster Rebuilders, coordinates housing, work, and registration through a co-branded page; we provide some of the pre-trim communication for Disciples groups and connect them with Disciples congregations in the areas. One of these sites is in Southwest Louisiana (Hurricanes Laura and Delta, Feb '21 Winter Storm, and May '21 flooding); the other is in Eastern North Carolina, as an iteration of our ongoing partnership with Camp Caroline and the Pamlico County Disaster Recovery Coalition. Unfortunately, despite moderate publicity efforts, we have been struggling to get volunteers.
- We also have a referral active with Brethren Disaster Ministries in Dayton, OH to support the Tornado Survivors Pathways to Homeownership Project. Caroline is working to continue this work through an ecumenical site with UCC starting in January, but both denominations are struggling to confirm site leadership.
- This has made more apparent the necessity of expanding the Long-term Volunteer base. Of the roster received from Disciples Volunteering (32 LTVs), only 10 responded to communications from Week of Compassion, and half those respondents are no longer able or interested in serving in the role. Caroline is in conversation with Brethren Disaster Ministries about hosting a joint LTV training in April 2022.
- In August/September, we deployed one Long-term Volunteer to support flood recovery in Eastwick, PA, using grant funding awarded by National VOAD and UPS. The effort was worthwhile because of the impact for survivors, but the deployment had many issues, primarily due to low numbers of volunteers and challenges of collaborating on a project without Week of Compassion staff having been to the location and with multiple other project leaders working remotely.

Congregational Preparedness

- During the Disciples Virtual Gathering, Caroline hosted a workshop: *Not If But When: Disaster Preparedness for Churches and Leaders*, which had fairly good attendance (25 participants in addition to staff). Unfortunately, we have not had much response to the followup email sent to all participants.
- Several productive conversations with churches in the Northern California/Nevada Region about building a preparedness and response network. The greatest energy was around establishing a centralized communication channel for sharing disaster-related needs and available assistance among the churches of the Region. More robust preparedness training may be of interest to some congregations down the road, but with the pressures of COVID and the active wildfire season, pastors do not currently have the capacity for training.
- Caroline is developing a potential MOU with UCC Disaster Ministries, and an organization out of Houston called The Church Responds to launch an ecumenical platform to promote and resource congregational preparedness: *Willing to Respond*. This would provide an easy "on-ramp" for

congregations interested in disaster preparedness, provide access to additional informational resources, and help promote ecumenical connections, which are crucial for effective local preparedness and response.

Racial Equity

- The Oreon E. Scott Grant is underway, with significant review of the Week of Compassion domestic disaster work.
- Caroline has been deepening connections with the National Convocation, including through two virtual conversations with Piedmont District Convention and joining as a guest on the National Convocation Legacy & Vision webinar series.
- We were able to offer live Spanish and Korean interpretation of the workshop at Disciples Virtual Gathering. Technological difficulties limited the effectiveness of the interpretation, so we re-recorded a version of the Korean interpretation, which is now available for download through our website. We plan to make a similar recording with Spanish interpretation before the end of the year.
- Over the summer, we contracted Daphne Gascot Arias to complete a Spanish translation of the Congregational Preparedness Guide, which is now available for download on the website.

Notable Disaster Responses Since Spring Meeting

- Wildfires in Western U.S. -- This has already been an active wildfire season, and while Disciples have not experienced significant displacements, churches in Northern California (Redding and Chico) have provided assistance to evacuated communities.
- KY and TN Flooding -- Historic flooding throughout this year has affected communities in eastern and central Kentucky, as well as middle Tennessee. While we do not have Disciples congregations in the immediately affected areas, Caroline is working to identify partners for long-term recovery and connect other congregations across the regions. These “microburst” events resulted in high levels of damage in localized areas, and we should anticipate more such events as climate change increases the number of heavy rain incidents.
- Hurricane Ida -- This major hurricane had a significant impact on communities in southeast Louisiana, as well as in the Northeast, where the remnants of the storm caused severe flooding. The storm affected Disciples in Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, and New Jersey. In addition to providing solidarity grants to affected Disciples, Week of Compassion is connecting with partners and local congregations for long-term recovery.

Marketing and Communications

Over the past six months, many congregations returned to holding worship and other gatherings in person. With the late summer emergence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus, many of those churches then pivoted again and returned to an online format or found that their in-person numbers dropped off significantly again. Through this season of continued uncertainty, Week of Compassion communications continue to adapt to the shifting needs of congregations and communities.

Erin has worked on responding to questions about multiple emergent crises, shaping outward messaging to engage donors and congregations and keep constituents up to date on 1) how to give, and 2) how those gifts are being deployed. Targeted social media content and email updates, as well as direct replies to the questions of church leaders, remain a priority through this busy season of response.

Even with the urgency of unfolding disasters, communications continue to focus on named priorities for 2021 as well, lifting up ongoing global development needs, particularly related to refugees and women’s empowerment. For instance, the situation in Afghanistan has created an opportunity to highlight the needs of refugees abroad, as well as those being resettled in the U.S. Erin recently worked with Sharon Stanley Rea to host a webinar. The conversation between Week of Compassion, local Disciples, and Refugee and Immigration Ministries gave practical tools and next steps for building congregational engagement around refugee resettlement. We continue to support congregations in new ways, and have been promoting that Week of Compassion grants are available for churches interested and just getting started in this type of ministry.

Erin continues to expand social media reach. We have now been measuring month to month KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for more than a year to gauge where engagement is strongest and where it is weakest and also gain insight around what types of content performs best.

One learning across platforms is the growing need for engagement through video content. This is due, in part, to practical shifts as the platforms themselves prioritize visibility of video content among users. But it is also a learning from recent contact with churches, recognizing that video is the best way to engage church leaders when visiting in person is not possible and when churches may not even be meeting in person in their own local contexts.

Recent videos, such as an appeal for India COVID relief and an update on the situation in Afghanistan, have fared well across all platforms. We also continue to engage churches with custom video greetings or virtual preaching upon request, and anticipate that this trend will continue in the 2022 Special Offering.

Posts about recent and still-unfolding disasters remain the most consistently engaging. We continue to grow a younger audience via Instagram, though recent platform shifts to primarily video-based content will mean rethinking the types of content we share there. Facebook remains the primary means of engagement with the largest reach.

Current social media reach:

<i>Platform</i>	<i>Followers</i>	<i>Increase Since Fall '20</i>
Facebook	7894	426
Twitter	2184	49

Instagram	748	174
YouTube	47	17

Top performing posts from the past 2 quarters include:

- Hurricane Ida post, 8/30; 5.3k reach;
- Afghanistan video update and appeal, 8/27; 3.1k reach
- Graphic promoting disaster preparedness workshop for virtual event, 7/22; 4.2k reach

Erin is in the process of finishing up materials for the 2022 Special offering. We continue to take a ‘hybrid’ approach with a mix of print and digital resources available and to think critically about how to frame language of the pandemic for future use (i.e., whether in past or present terms) when much about that future timeline is unknown. The theme for 2022 is “Love Remains,” with a focus on domestic disaster response.

Much of Erin’s time over the summer was spent in preparation for and promoting Week of Compassion presence in the Disciples Virtual Gathering--the first all-Disciple event of its kind, in lieu of the scheduled 2021 General Assembly. Over 200 people visited the Week of Compassion booth in the virtual exhibit hall, with 25 attending Caroline’s disaster preparedness workshop. The event was a great engagement opportunity, and also a learning for future in-person assemblies, where having a virtual booth in a live exhibit hall could be a good way to connect with those who might not otherwise be able to attend!

Even while not traveling, staff continue to preach and speak in worship and other settings. In August, Erin was invited to speak (remotely) at the Kansas Regional Assembly; she has had recent preaching opportunities in Kansas and California as well (also remote).

Development

Three new congregations have joined the Circle of Compassion so far this year, establishing a named endowment fund to benefit Week of Compassion. Two more churches have begun steps to start new funds as well, and will join the “Circle” in the coming months. Erin has been reaching out to individual churches that have shown consistent support for Week of Compassion, and is preparing a mailing that will go to at least 50 churches to share more information about this important form of support for Week of Compassion.

The Development Team continues to reach out to top giving congregations, building relationships and expressing gratitude. In September, they wrote personal notes to all congregations that gave \$1000 or more in July and August-- months in which multiple disasters compelled churches to do special giving invitations for Week of Compassion.

Erin continues writing personal thank you notes to individual donors that give over \$250 (of which there have been more than usual in recent months!) and recently sent a special 'v.i.p.' letter to donors who have given a cumulative \$1000 or more so far in 2021.

Week of Compassion has 10 more recurring donors now than a year ago at this time, bringing the total to 78 monthly donors, accounting for nearly \$800 more per month in revenue from these donors alone.

Week of Compassion's base of endowment funds continues to grow, with support from congregations as well as families and individuals. Erin recently reached out to non-active endowment holders, and keeps in touch with those who remain active. In total, donors and churches have contributed nearly **\$90k** to Week of Compassion endowment funds in the past 6 months. Current fund values total **\$7,493,830.82**. That number is up from \$6.8 mil in 2020; and \$5.8 mil in 2019.

That number includes a recent large bequest that will further secure a stream of reliable income for the future mission of Week of Compassion. We have recently been made aware of a few other donors who have included (or plan to include) Week of Compassion in their will. Erin is planning some outreach for the fall, including a mailing and direct asks, to encourage some other top supporters to consider Week of Compassion in their estate planning as well. These types of gifts, as well as the congregational and individual endowment funds, continue to build a strong foundation over and above Special Offering income that will sustain Week of Compassion's mission for years to come.