

Executive Director's Report to the Week of Compassion's Board of Stewards

Fall 2023 Meeting

As Week of Compassion enters its 80th anniversary of being the “relief, refugee, and sustainable development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),” I am excited and grateful for what is to come. It will also be my 10th year as the Executive Director for Week of Compassion. This ministry is very different now than what it was eight decades ago and is even more different now than when I started this work. In the last 10 years, Week of Compassion has granted close to \$30 million to our partners all over the world to provide relief and sustainable development in times of disasters and rebuilding. Our unrestricted revenue has seen an increase of around 15% since 2013. Week of Compassion is only able to do this work because of the generosity of our donors and churches, dedicated staff and board members, and incredible partners all over the world. This ministry continues to expand and evolve to meet the current challenges and needs of our time. While we might have started as just an offering and a mission fund in the beginning, we now know that in order to have a positive impact on the mission, we need to fund our partners in the programs that they implement *and* initiate the work ourselves by filling in some of the gaps created by the changing landscape of our work. This is why I am so incredibly grateful for our entire staff as they do this work on a day-to-day basis; they put in lots of energy, creativity, and sensitivity in their work to advance the mission of Week of Compassion.

There are three new programs Week of Compassion has engaged with that bring together our work in refugee, disaster response, and global development in a way that we have not done before. First, our partnership with the Arizona Region is a three-year pilot focused on the work of borders and migration. This relationship officially began this past summer in partnership with the Arizona Region and local Arizona churches to work with migrants crossing the southern borders, and is continuing to evolve. One reason our board meeting is taking place in Arizona is to observe and learn how to increase the church's work on migration in a way that has the greatest impact on the lives and communities affected by migration policies.

The second programmatic part is our partnership with the Great River Region on disaster response and preparedness, another three-year pilot. The new agreement between the Region and Week of Compassion was signed recently, and includes several funding partners within the region. This Region will have a full-time staff member to engage with Disciples churches in the Great River Region (Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana) on disaster response and preparedness. Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold is taking the lead on this pilot, working closely with the region and the new staff person, and helping us learn and expand the ways in which we engage with local and regional churches in disaster preparedness. This region was chosen because it has high disaster-risk areas that see tornadoes and hurricanes yearly, impacting some of the most vulnerable populations in the three states.

The third program engagement that recently started is partnering with the Office of General Minister and President in [seconding a full-time staff member to the World Council of Churches to work in the program areas of women's health and reproductive rights](#). All over the world, women lack rights to access reproductive health, a tremendous problem leaving them vulnerable and in extreme poverty. This is an issue that many of our partners continue to address globally. Serving in this new WCC staff role is Alexa Dava, a recent young adult Disciple graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School. This secondment enables the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and our General Minister and President, to have a Disciple presence at the global level, working on programs that tremendously impact our churches all over the world. This three-year secondment began on September 6 and continues until the end of August 2026.

The secondment position is another way for the Church to support young adults and allow young people a deeper appreciation and understanding of the different ways Disciples are active in global ecumenical and humanitarian work. Last year, Week of Compassion sponsored seven Disciples seminarians to the World Council of Churches' General Assembly in Germany, where they experienced our global churches dealing with issues on human rights, women's empowerment and health, conflict and peace resolutions, and the deep theological divide at the global level where many continue to stay at the table and negotiate. Within the ministry's budget, each year, we sponsor a young adult from the southern hemisphere to attend a semester to do theological work in Bossey, Switzerland, with the World Council of Churches and the University of Geneva. In 2024, Week of Compassion is supporting the ACT Alliance to bring young adults from all over the world to the ACT General Assembly that will take place in Indonesia. One opportunity for this ministry to further engage and invest in young adults is to partner with [HELM for the next five years](#), helping Disciples seminarians and college students be more globally aware of the issues we face and gain leadership experience in various global contexts they will encounter. I am excited to engage with Rev. Dr. Tamara Rodenberg, the new president of Higher Education Leadership Ministries, in working to support Disciples in this work.

The three programmatic priorities set last year—disasters on the margins, women's empowerment, and climate change—continue to guide our global humanitarian work. On a recent visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan, I saw how these three programmatic priorities are very connected and reinforce our call to accompany our partners as they do this work. In Afghanistan, women and girls continue to have their rights taken away, and girls are not allowed to continue their education after the sixth grade. What is happening in Afghanistan is a massive human rights violation and a form of "gender apartheid." Many of the young girls we met, in their strong voices, shared with us how their dreams have been shattered and how they demanded to continue their education. This was heartbreaking, but I have hope in our partners' creative efforts to find ways to continue providing girls with education, working under the radar and away from official restrictions. After our visit to Afghanistan, we visited Pakistan across the border, where one of the biggest floods in history flooded 30% of the country last year, impacting many children and women. Our partners there are working in the area of women's health, providing medicine and contraceptives to help women support their family and community and live fully. At the same time, just in these two regions, we know that there are

other disasters brewing, especially surrounding the issues of education, food security and malnutrition in infants. These two countries are just a glimpse of the wider challenges in so many other places, and a reminder of the ways our three programmatic priorities can play an important role.

In regard to climate change, I am grateful that Week of Compassion is not only working with our global partners in doing advisory work on this issue and providing responses to ongoing climate-related disasters, but we are also coordinating with Disciples Homes Missions and their new staff member in climate justice Rev. Brian Frederick-Gray. This is an ongoing relationship that I look forward to our general ministries working together to address.

For the last several months, Week of Compassion has engaged with an outside HR consultant organization, The Pabulum Group, to evaluate our internal operations and staff needs. As part of the process, the consultant recommended the need for staff support to strengthen the ministry's internal workflow. This new position, *Managing Director, Domestic Operations* will be in charge of the operations of the ministry, working closely with staff on domestic programs, and creating structures and processes to support the wider staff. The function of the new staff person will be a combination of Chief of Staff and Director of Operations, touching many of the daily functions of Week of Compassion, collaborating with staff members to help the ministry be more cohesive in its work. This new position, in essence, will change the current staff structure within Week of Compassion to create greater collaboration among staff. In addition, this new position will enable the Executive Director to focus on other parts of the ministry that need additional programmatic attention and further develop the relationship and connection with global partners. More time will be spent visioning the mission, strategy, and direction of Week of Compassion. The search for the new position has already begun and hopefully will be filled sometime in 2024.

Financially, Week of Compassion continues to be in a strong position as the planning and budgeting remain on track. At the end of September financials, unrestricted revenue is up by 12% compared to budget and is down roughly 7% compared to last year's contributions. Overall program grant distributions to partners is at \$2.1 million at the end of September. In regard to spending, I want to draw your attention to the Personnel and Office expenses line. There is about \$10,000 over what was budgeted due to errors made by Treasury Services last year on three staff members' compensation. This was caught at the end of September and is now reconciled and will show an increase in spending at the end of the year. The return in the endowment is steady, and we won't have the full picture of the return until the end of the year, but we suspect it should be on target, if not exceed it, as we continue to add churches and individuals contributing to the endowment with the Christian Church Foundation.

For the 2024 budget, we are proposing an 8% increase in unrestricted revenue compared to the 2023 budget, from around \$2.5 million to around \$2.7 million. Unrestricted program distributions for partners are budgeted for an increase of around \$140k to total \$1.87 million, and Personnel and Office expenses increasing by \$150k to total \$640k. The Personnel and Office expense increase is for a 4% compensation increase for all staff, as well as the new additional staff

member. After all expenses and revenue, we are projecting a deficit of close to \$100k, and if there is a deficit, it will be taken out of the reserve.

On a final note, I am excited for Rev. Caroline Hamilton Arnold as she will be taking her much-deserved sabbatical in the summer of 2024. This work of disaster response is emotionally and physically tiring, and she has been doing it for over seven years. While she is away taking her rest and renewing her spirit, our incredible staff—Alan, Courtney, Raiza, and the new staff member—will take on her important work.