Week of Compassion

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

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May 14, 2026

Responding to the Responders

two events help equip and nurture leaders in crisis settings

The ministries of disaster response and recovery, and immigrant and refugee response, overlap in many ways, and not just in the Week of Compassion office. Across the life of our ecumenical partners, staff and leaders strive to find the most effective ways to respond in a challenging and constantly-changing landscape. Guided by the insights and actions of locally-led efforts, leaders across disciplines focus on honoring the dignity and worth of each person, and pursue the best practices for seeking justice, nurturing compassion, and empowering sustainable communities.

This work can be very hard. We may not be able to make it easier,
but we can certainly help each other through it.

This sentiment is shared over and over among colleagues, around conference tables, over meals, and during field visits. Out of recent conversations, partnerships have formed to bring collective resources to bear in considering: *How do we help faith leaders spiritually ground their work, caring for themselves and their congregations to build resiliency and endurance as they respond to crisis?* This spring, Week of Compassion's staff and community have been part of two significant and corresponding events focused on meeting this need.

In March and April, the DISASTER EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL CARE ACADEMY (DESCA) met online for six weeks. In collaboration with disaster, crisis, and preparedness organizations including Week of Compassion, DESCA offered pragmatic and informative help for faith and community leaders as they care for the needs that emerge from disasters and other crises. Each session also included a 15-minute guided reflection.

Spiritual nurture was also part of the FAITHFUL RESPONSE IMMIGRATION GATHERING convened in Ohio in mid-March. This event was designed to develop supportive relationships across denominational lines and to create and practice safety planning and rapid response. Leaders from churches and communities responding to heightened immigration enforcement also shared in guided meditation as a key part of each day.

Reflecting on DESCA, Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold (Associate Director for Domestic Disaster Response) said, "It started as a conversation around a dinner table at the National VOAD Conference (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster) between several colleagues from different denominations. We all see the need to build these skills within local congregations and were dreaming about a shared online learning forum. The crises just keep coming—on personal, communal, national, and global scales."

A similar conversation led to the Ohio Gathering, according to Rev. Grace Kozak (Associate Director for Immigrant & Refugee Response): “Each of these colleagues expressed interest in conversation to help leaders develop relationships and be able to respond more collectively to the immigration crisis. This is a time when people’s nervous systems are constantly agitated, and taking time to care for ourselves spiritually prepares us for the long haul of showing up faithfully no matter the circumstances.”

Brian Hoffman presenting at the Faithful Response Gathering

At lunch during the Ohio Gathering, two leaders sat together, one Disciples and one Brethren, and learned that their churches are half a mile from each other … and they had never met. Eager to do the same kinds of ministry, they are now working together to host a screening later this month of *Jesus Was A Migrant* and are exploring other ways to collaborate for the good of their community.

It is this combination of practical skill-sharing and genuine relationship-building that renews and strengthens leaders for the ongoing work of justice, response, and recovery in their communities. As Caroline says, “We are more effective as caregivers when we are also grounded and tending to our own emotional and spiritual wellbeing. In the spirit of cultivating good practices, we partnered with the **BELOVED Compassion Network** to offer 15-minute facilitated reflections at the close of each webinar in the DESCA series.” With nearly 350 online participants in the first seminar, more than 200 stayed for the guided reflection afterward!

Week of Compassion first connected with BCN when in 2025 they sought to partner in offering grief support groups for wildfire survivors in Los Angeles County. They were key partners in the Ohio Gathering as well. One participant said it best: “Grounding in our bodies through the kinds of spiritual practice BCN provided is a way to combat the kind of violence the State is enacting on our communities every day, and helps us show up to continue to do the work.”

Some of the Disciples and ecumenical organizers of the Ohio Gathering.

Week of Compassion is inspired by and grateful for pastors and lay leaders who respond to the needs in their local communities during and after storms and crises of every kind. We remain committed to resourcing, supporting, and nurturing the collegial relationships, practical skills, and focused spirituality that makes such leadership possible.

For more information about these events, contact Caroline or Grace directly, or reach out to Week of Compassion.

*See a video about the Faithful Response gathering shared by the UCC below, or by clicking **here**.*

Photos via Week of Compassion staff.

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MISSION : to work with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world
VISION : a world where God's people transform suffering into hope
CORE VALUES : connection - integrity - accompaniment

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