

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

April 2, 2019

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

Week of Compassion continues to provide vital support and care to communities all over the world as we continue to position this ministry in the best possible way to implement its mission. While there are internal and structural changes taking place for Week of Compassion, our mission, vision, and core values have remained the same. We continue to work with partners to provide for the critical needs of communities through the areas of refugee support, development, and relief. As of this writing, communities in the Midwest have suffered from extreme flooding, and water is only slowly beginning to recede. On the other side of the world, in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi, a major cyclone has caused severe damage, flooding many communities and wiping out crops for the next full year. Recovery efforts and rebuilding will take years and will involve much coordination from governments and NGOs. Week of Compassion will work with partners to respond to these communities, both in the immediate term and long-term rebuilding.

This board meeting will be the first time we gather as a board, and the first time we have a full slate of board members. The work that is ahead of us is crucial as we explore and ask questions about what it means to be a board, and how to best continue to prepare this ministry in such a way as to adequately respond to so many changes that are happening within our church and around the world. In the area of relief and refugees, we are experiencing a rise in the frequency of disasters and government policies that continue to displace people and separate families. The work that we do now continues to have tremendous impact on our partners, and especially to the people we are called to serve and walk alongside.

This has been a year of significant change and transformation for Week of Compassion, and it is just the beginning of our work. I see more possible changes ahead. Moving from a Committee for Week of Compassion to a Board of Stewards creates greater clarity, simplifies the lines of accountability, increases the efficiency of Week of Compassion, strengthens the support system for the office of Executive Director, and provides greater involvement for the ministry's stakeholders.

## **Board Development**

We have 12 board members: 8 with experience serving on the old Week Of Compassion Committee structure and 4 brand new board members. We have an exciting group of people with different gifts to bring to this board, including lawyers, medical doctors, fundraisers, and more. This year, we will look at which class to put each member of the board on so we can be up to date in our Standing Rules, and we hope to have this finalized by our fall board meeting. In moving forward, one of the things the Board's Life and Work Committee will need to look at is the process for electing and replacing board members, as well as assigning each board member to various committees to do the work of the Board.

I am currently in conversation with various leaders within our church and other non-profits about possible training for the Board in 2020. As we move forward, having the board understand its function and responsibility is crucial in helping to strengthen this ministry.

## **Staff**

Administrative Assistant: Suzie McKay continues to serve as our administrative assistant and is based in our central office at Disciples Center in Indianapolis. Suzie provides overall support for Week of Compassion; she comes into the office one day a week and is available from home on emergency situations. I am grateful for her work and ability to take care of the day to day administrative tasks.

Associate Director, Domestic Disaster Response: Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold received a title change in the beginning of the year, allowing her to strengthen and build our domestic disaster program. This is one of the most important programs we do, and the workload continues to increase due to the rising numbers of disasters that are calling for us to respond. At one point in our history we were heavily dependent on our partners to implement domestic disaster response, while we would mostly provide financial support to our partners to do the work. As our partners' ability to do this work continues to decrease, Week of Compassion must be more engaged in our domestic response and more hands-on in our approach. Our work has evolved as our partners have evolved. For this crucial work, we cannot just do disaster response alone anymore, but must also incorporate disaster preparedness. Rev. Hamilton-Arnold has already implemented this in her work, and will continue to work with local congregations and regions to promote disaster preparedness.

At some point, we will need to do an assessment of the current configuration of having only one staff person focusing solely on domestic disaster work and whether that is sufficient for Week of Compassion and for the church. I am grateful for Rev. Hamilton-Arnold, the deep care she has for the people she works with, and the sensitive care and pastoral support she provides to our clergy and communities during times of disaster. Rev. Hamilton-Arnold will be on maternity leave this summer and, if timing goes well, will join us at General Assembly. The staff and I have had conversations on how to best support her when she is away and have delegated tasks to different individuals while she is on leave.

Associate Director for Communications, Marketing and Development: Rev. Erin Wathen joined our staff at the beginning of the year in the newly developed role of Associate Director for Communications, Marketing and Development. As our work expands, having Rev. Wathen on our staff will enable us to better reach out to our congregations and partners and to share the work that we do on behalf of the church. Our presence in Social Media has increased since she has been on our staff, and the engagement level has had a big uptick since the beginning of January. As the nature of our work and the way we respond evolves, her role will be even more crucial as we try to understand the best way to share this with our churches and partners.

## **Financial**

The board will receive the 2018 audited financials from Treasury Services for this meeting, which will have already been approved by the Finance Committee of the Administrative Committee of the General Board.

In 2018, we finished -16.14% in our undesignated contributions compared to 2017 (that year we had severe disasters, specifically around Hurricanes Irma, Harvey, and Maria, thus increasing our undesignated gifts). Compared to our 2018 budget and what the WoC

Committee approved, we finished the year 2.40% above budget in our undesignated gift contributions (\$2,259,985 million compared to budget \$2,177,000). For Designated contributions, in 2018 we received close to \$650,000, compared to 2017 of \$2,367,636 (-72.6%). Our total contributions in 2018 were close to \$2.8 million.

When we look at our local congregation undesignated giving going back to 1991, our giving has always been around \$2 million. There has not been much growth in this area, and it only spikes when there are major disasters, such as in 2005 (Tsunami and Katrina), and in 2017 (Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria). The major area of increase is in our endowment, which continues to provide critical financial support. In 2018, we received close to \$400,000 from our endowment held at The Christian Church Foundation, the highest return since we began the endowment program back around 1998. Increasing and promoting our endowment giving opportunities, such as Circle of Compassion, will become a big focus for our staff and board as we move forward.

## **Communications and Marketing**

Rev. Erin Wathen is helping us to strengthen our communications and marketing work, collaborating with our ecumenical partners and other general ministry staff to be a greater presence with our social media, weekly Constant Contact email, and regular communication. One of the ways to have a greater reach with our audience is to grow our social media presence, through frequency of posting and increased engagement with our followers. We have also added Instagram to the platforms that we use to engage partners and church members, aiming for a younger audience than what we have on Facebook and Twitter. This has been one of our goals for the last several years as we explore different ways to engage with our younger audience who are not clergy. The use of each of these platforms is not just to raise our profile, but to educate and raise awareness about the many different kinds of work that Week of Compassion supports.

Rev. Wathen will be taking over our yearly special offering campaign, working with the Ecumenical One Great Hour of Sharing to create the resources and materials. This responsibility was handled by Rev. Hamilton-Arnold for the last several years, but having Rev. Wathen focus on our special offering resources will allow Rev. Hamilton-Arnold to build our domestic disaster program. We continue to evaluate regularly the materials we create and their use by local congregations as a way to save on costs and to make sure that the content is helpful and relevant to local leaders.

One of the big tasks for Week of Compassion is to be more strategic in the way we communicate with our audience, specifically making sure that our messages are clear, concise, and tailored to our targeted audience. Part of this task is to improve our style and make sure

the look and tone will be consistent in all of our communications. One of the things we will launch this summer will be our new logo and website. The current logo has been around since at least the 1990s and has not been updated since. The current version does not work well in our current social media, web, and branding; it is difficult to make the current logo fit well in newer media. At the same time, it is a strong logo with strong recognition among those familiar with Week of Compassion. We have strategically been in conversation with people about this work, and how to best create a logo and a website that will be appealing and interesting enough to make people want to come back to the site frequently. A new website and logo will mean updating many of our brochures and materials.

### **Fundraising and Development**

Endowment gifts continue to be a vital source of revenue as undesignated gifts show a slow decline. For the last year we have stalled in our promotion of the various ways people can give to our endowment funds held at CCF. Still, we have added a couple of congregations and individuals, and a few congregations are in the pipeline for joining our Circle of Compassion. There needs to be a greater emphasis on this aspect of our work. One of the things we need to look at is what is the best way to promote our endowment giving with congregations and articulate a clear understanding on the ways it impacts our work. Rev. Wathen is helping us think about this work, as well as getting our internal infrastructures up to date to help us better track and follow up with donors.

Another area where I am seeing potential growth is corporate matching gifts. More and more individual donors are having their workplaces match their gifts. One of the things we will focus on is understanding how to take advantage of this opportunity to maximize our donors' gifts. Perhaps the best way to move forward with this plan is to get an outside consultant who understands our work to help us strategize a way of tapping into these gifts.

### **Sustainable Development**

We continue to provide crucial support to our partners in the work of development, helping communities have greater access to water, education, and improving livelihood for mothers and young girls. This is one of the best ways we do our work and see the long term impact in ways we often do not imagine. When I visit communities and I see the work that we have supported from the last several years and the fruit it bears, it gives me hope. The way in which we have received sustainable proposals worked well under a committee model, where the entire Week of Compassion Committee would break into groups and review the sustainable development proposals. As we move to a board, we should be intentional and strategic in how we want to review, evaluate, and communicate our expectations to our partners. Because of this, I have paused receiving any sustainable development proposals from our ecumenical

partners to give us time to think through our new process, and for the board to give staff guidelines on how we should distribute \$200-500,000 each time we gather. I have only paused receiving proposals from our ecumenical partners and not from Division of Overseas Ministries.

## **Refugees and Immigration**

The global refugee crisis continues to grow and the number of refugees being resettled around the world continues to decrease. The number of displaced people will not go down anytime soon, and is the highest in our history. The current administration continues to create policies that are dismantling refugee resettlement programs in the United States. Many of our partners, including Church World Service and our own Refugee and Immigration Ministries, are working together to mobilize against the administration's various policies that are hurting refugees and immigrants. This includes holding the administration accountable for reaching the FY 2019 refugee admissions goal of 30,000 - and pushing the administration to increase the refugee admissions goal to at least 75,000 in FY 2020. Our partners work closely with Refugee Council USA to track arrivals on a weekly basis, issue report cards regarding the impacts of low numbers of resettled refugees, and meet with Members of Congress to exert oversight over the administration.

Through our partners we remain deeply active in support of asylum seekers and others seeking protection who are arriving at the U.S. border. Faith leaders and CWS have repeatedly denounced the administration's inhumane policy of separating and incarcerating families, contravening U.S. and international law by categorically denying opportunities for asylum, further militarizing our border, and releasing tear gas into a crowd of asylum seekers and migrant families. Rev. Sharon Stanley Rea of Refugee Immigration Ministries and our partners have mobilized a grassroots network to decry the asylum ban and uphold our moral and legal obligations, and participated in an interfaith letter signed by 715 faith leaders and groups denouncing the President's proclamation intended to block access to asylum for vulnerable families who cross between ports of entry and indefinitely detain migrant families.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is one of the few denominations with an office working specifically on refugee and immigration issues. We have Rev. Sharon Stanley Rea working in DC, mobilizing Disciples to advocate for refugee and immigration policy. During the current situation with our government and policies that are affecting families, especially Disciples families, her work is more vital now than ever before. One of the things we need to look at and evaluate during this time is whether it is enough to only have one person doing this important work. How do we invest in and support this work as a church? A proposal will come before you at this meeting to consider supporting our refugee and immigration work. The proposal comes from Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries, Refugee and Immigration

Ministries, and the College of Regional Ministers. Rev. Lori Tapia, National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, will be with us at our meeting to give us an update on her ministry and the ways the current administration's policies are having an effect on Disciples Hispanic congregations.

## **Relief**

### **International Response**

The earthquake and tsunami that occurred in the fall of 2018 in Indonesia caused much damage on the island of Sulawesi. Within days of the disaster, our partners, ACT Alliance and Church World Service, were able to provide food, water, and medicine to the communities affected. Currently, our partners are looking to build transitional shelters for families to move into while permanent homes are being discussed by the government. This process of rebuilding will take years, and Week of Compassion is looking to make a significant grant to do this work.

Intense Tropical Cyclone Idai took place in early March and is regarded as one of the worst tropical cyclones on record to affect Africa and the Southern Hemisphere as a whole. The long-lived storm caused catastrophic damage in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, leaving more than 700 people dead and hundreds more missing, affecting close to 1.5 million people. The entire year's worth of crops have been completely wiped out. In the early days, we worked with Global Ministries and provided solidarity grants for immediate response, providing emergency water and food to families. In the coming weeks and months our partners, ACT Alliance and Global Ministries, will assess the damage and provide a plan for Week of Compassion to consider in their response and rebuilding efforts.

### **Domestic Response**

#### **Disaster Response and Social Inequalities**

Over the past two years, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold has been learning about the ways disasters intersect with racism and social inequality and has been assessing how Week of Compassion responses can address systemic racism within our own structures. A recent series of academic studies have confirmed: recovery from natural disasters exacerbates existing social inequalities in communities, especially along racial and socio-economic lines. While greater changes are needed, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold has taken the following steps to incorporate these considerations in our domestic disaster work: incorporation of this information in disaster preparedness and response trainings; promotion of relevant advocacy opportunities, such as support for two bills before the Texas legislature this session; development of new partnerships and projects that specifically address the needs of historically underrepresented communities and that increase access to affordable housing. One challenge for incorporating new strategies into Week of Compassion responses is that many of the underlying issues must be addressed by federal, state, and municipal governments (rectifying the legacy of redlining and ongoing housing discrimination, zoning regulations, implementation of buyout programs, etc.).

### **Summary of Ongoing Responses:**

Louisiana Floods (August 2016): A new partnership, initiated by a Disciple working for Volunteer Louisiana, has created an opportunity for Week of Compassion to invest in a program for high vulnerability households who do not qualify for other assistance to purchase the FEMA Mobile Housing Units they are currently occupying.

Hurricane Matthew (Oct. 2016): Sustained long-term response continues through financial support of Volusia Interfaiths/Agencies Networking in Disaster—see May report for more details.

Hurricane Harvey (Aug. 2017): Long-term recovery is underway in Texas. The Disciples Volunteering mission station in Texas City continues receiving volunteers to work on cases received through Galveston Recovers, the local long-term recovery group. Collaboration continues between Disciples Volunteering, Week of Compassion, and Reach Beyond Mission (a Disciple-led youth mission trip organization); RBM has 4 weeks reserved at the mission station for the summer. This winter, Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold worked with RBM to revise the educational materials, focusing more specifically on disaster recovery. Rev. Hamilton-Arnold continues to look for new partnerships that will provide opportunities for Week of Compassion to invest in sustainable housing solutions for low-income individuals, given the extreme need for affordable housing options in Houston and across Southeast Texas.

Hurricane Irma, Florida (Sept. 2017): Week of Compassion primary avenue of response is VIND (see Hurricane Matthew above).

Hurricanes Irma and Maria, US Virgin Islands (Sept. 2017): In the USVI, Week of Compassion response has been through the Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (see below).

Hurricanes Irma and Maria, Puerto Rico (Sept. 2017): Week of Compassion continues support of the community energy program of Global Ministries bi-lateral partner, AMANESER 2025. This project addresses the ongoing fragility of the power grid in rural communities with solar power technology and helps them create communication and response plans for future disasters. The integrative approach is interesting, as it combines community organizing, disaster response and preparedness, and a broad view of the consequences of climate change. Home repairs continue through the Programa Edifiquemos of the Iglesia Cristiana (Discipulos de Cristo). Since the fall meeting, volunteer engagement has increased, with 13 groups participating December 2018 through April 2019, and 5 more scheduled in June and July 2019. Week of Compassion has encountered some challenges with communication between the on-island coordinators and



volunteer groups, but processes are improving. Financial reporting from the ICDCPR continues to be slow.

California Wildfires (Oct-Dec 2017): Church World Service has become the fiscal agent for the Los Angeles County LTRG (Long Term Recovery Group), which has provided a connection for supporting the long-term recovery from the 2017 and 2018 fires in the county.

Marshalltown, IA (July 2018): Progress on long-term recovery has been slow, due to a variety of factors, including delayed decisions by the LTRG and the over-estimation of the capacity of the local Habitat for Humanity Chapter. Reports from ecumenical partners in late March indicate some key decisions have been made regarding repair processes and volunteer engagement. Week of Compassion continues to work with Central Christian Church, which represents Disciples at the volunteer sub-committee of the LTRG. Additionally, our partners at Camp Noah are planning camps in Marshalltown over the summer; we are in conversation about the kinds of support they may need.

Carr Fire, Shasta County, CA (July/Aug 2018): Working primarily through First Christian Church, Redding and, by extension, through the Community Recovery Team. Provided some early grant funding for the operation of a donations warehouse. Currently waiting for the CRT to establish procedures for receiving volunteers. One avenue they are considering is working through an organization that raises red-flags due to negative reports from ecumenical and NVOAD partners and poor experiences of past volunteers. Josh Baird from Disciples Volunteering and Rev. Hamilton-Arnold have expressed concerns to Rev. Janet Chapman of FCC Redding and to leadership of the CRT.

Hurricane Florence (Sept. 2018): Since the fall report, Week of Compassion has provided grants to three county LTRGs: Jones, Pender, and Pamlico Counties. Our main volunteer efforts will focus in Pamlico County, where Camp Caroline is serving as a volunteer host site in coordination with the Pamlico County Recovery Coalition. DRSI provided consultation in Pamlico County, as well (see DRSI update below). We have also been making some referrals for local work teams to connect in other counties. A collaboration with NBA to provide a mental and emotional health retreat/workshop for clergy has been slow in development, but the event has been scheduled for May 18.

Hurricane Michael (Oct. 2018): We continue to be in conversation with our ecumenical and NVOAD partners for avenues of providing long-term recovery support. Through DRSI, we are helping provide consultation for the development of LTRGs in southwest Georgia.

#### **New Responses:**

Camp Fire, Butte County, CA (Nov. 2018): The Camp Fire was incredibly destructive, burning roughly 90% of the structures in the town of Paradise, CA. First Christian Church, Paradise sustained some damage to their building from falling ash and subsequent leaks in the roof. As of March, 2019, they were still unable to have public gatherings at the church, as repairs were still in progress and the lot needed to be cleared of debris and potentially toxic materials. 45 families out of the roughly 50 families in the church experienced prolonged evacuation; roughly 30 of those families had severe damage or total loss to their homes. 7 families from First Christian Church, Chico also sustained damage to their homes. FCCP has been meeting at FCCC since the fire broke out. FCCC is highly involved with the Chico ministerial alliance, which is developing a program for long-term emotional and spiritual care through the facilitation of grief support groups. We continue to encourage them to stay connected to the efforts of the Camp Fire Long-Term Recovery Group. This group is still in the process of developing. Upon visiting the group, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold had a concern with the ratio of residents from Chico compared to Paradise and Magalia (the more heavily affected areas). Affordable housing is of extreme concern in this area, as the housing stock was below 2% prior to the fire, and availability of affordable housing (subsidized and unsubsidized) was already in a crisis state.

Taylorville, IL tornado (Dec. 2018): In early December, an EF3 tornado caused moderate damage in Taylorville, IL. Davis Memorial Christian Church, though near the path of the tornado, was undamaged. The congregation was involved in early relief efforts and is working through a pre-existing relationship with a local organization called Missions for Taylorville (which focused on home repairs for elderly and disabled residents) to support long-term recovery. Rev. Bill Kerns is also serving on the volunteer subcommittee of the LTRG.

Midwest flooding (March 2018): Flooding across Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Missouri caused damage in dozens of counties (as of the writing of this report, the situation was still developing). As of March 22, 2019 no Disciples churches had, to our knowledge, sustained damage, though a few households had been evacuated. We are coordinating with the Regional Office to provide support to congregations involved in local relief efforts, to connect congregations with other information and resources, and to make referrals between our congregations and ecumenical partners (such as the International Orthodox Christian Charities, which may house volunteers at FCC Omaha).

#### **LONG-RANGE PROJECTS:**

Disaster Recovery Support Initiative: DRSI is a collaborative initiative between Week of Compassion, Disciples Volunteering, United Church of Christ Disaster Ministries and Brethren Disaster Ministries. The Disaster Recovery Support Initiative (DRSI) models, supports, mentors, and encourages the development of local Long-Term Recovery Groups through the sustained on-site presence of a Disaster Recovery Support Team. Throughout 2018, DRSI supported

long-term recovery group development on St. Thomas. While the model for DRSI has a typically deployment of 2-6 months, we decided to extend our presence due to several factors, including a lack of local capacity and limited investment by other national recovery organizations. We encountered several challenges, including conflict between the LTRG leadership and the Program Director and distractions from the core mission of the LTRG (from local government, FEMA, and other funders). In January, the participating denominations began a conversation with Church World Service about the potential support of DRSI through CWS. Among the possibilities discussed was the absorption of DRSI into the CWS Domestic Disaster Program. CWS was interested and began developing a proposal for transitioning DRSI. In March, 2019, CWS presented this proposal to the participating denominations in anticipation of bringing it to the CWS Development Humanitarian Assistance (DHA) Advisory Table during the spring meeting (April 2-3). Among the items for discussion at the DHA meeting will be sustainability of funding for the project as part of the CWS DDP. Through the winter and early spring DRSI has been providing consultation and support in Pamlico County, NC and in southwest Georgia through the Georgia VOAD.

Disaster Preparedness: Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold continues to expand the resources and offerings for encouraging disaster preparedness among Disciples congregations. In late March, Josh Baird of Disciples Volunteering and Rev. Hamilton-Arnold joined remotely for a workshop with the Oregon/SW Idaho Disciples (this is a follow-up to the training they led in the Region in October, 2018). Plans are underway to offer the training in the Alabama/NW Florida Region in the fall. Rev. Josh Baird and Rev. Hamilton-Arnold are in the process of compiling a congregational guide for disaster preparedness and response, including templates for developing communication plans, completing a risk assessment, and generating an inventory of assets and resources. We hope this will not only help congregations become more disaster-ready but will also help Week of Compassion and Disciples Volunteering develop a directory of congregations based on their disaster response capabilities and plans. In March, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold hosted a disaster preparedness introductory webinar through the Disciples Seminary Foundation Online Learning platform. More than 30 individuals participated live, and the webinar recording remains accessible. Rev. Hamilton-Arnold will host a 5-session online course the first week of April to expand on the webinar content.

#### **Partner Responses:**

Children's Disaster Services: The existing MOU with Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) was due for review and revision this year. BDM, Disciples Home Missions, and Week of Compassion developed a revised and updated MOU, affirming the partnership through 2021.