

## Program Update - Fall 2023 meeting to the Week of Compassion Board of Stewards

### **Domestic Disaster Response** - Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold

NOAA data, which tracks the number of billion-dollar disasters in the United States, adjusted for inflation, shows a steadily increasing trend, from *three* such disasters in 1980 to a record 22 in 2020. As of Sept. 12, 2023, the United States had already surpassed that record, with 23 disasters causing at least \$1 billion worth of damage, with additional major disasters (wildfires and severe storms) across Canada. Among those disasters: atmospheric river storm flooding in CA, multiple tornado outbreaks and hail storms across the midwest and the south, Hurricane Idalia, and the wildfire on Maui. These large-scale events have occurred alongside numerous smaller, localized severe weather and climate events - including dangerous and record-breaking heatwaves.

Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold is evaluating recent studies, including Disaster Resilience Zones identified by The Biden Administration, to help identify areas of concern, considering how churches can be involved in and supportive of mitigation and preparedness efforts in those communities. Conversations are ongoing with partners regarding how to adapt our responses to increase local capacity (especially in dually climate- and socially-vulnerable areas), increase structural resilience (such as through the FORTIFIED standards from the Institute for Building and Home Safety), and address persistent hazards such as extreme heat and coastal flooding.

One exciting development is a 3-year pilot project with the Great River Region, establishing a staff position: Disaster Relief Coordinator. This individual will:

- serve as the primary point of communication for the Region during times of disaster;
- help connect local congregations with ongoing disaster recoveries in the Region (hurricane recoveries in Louisiana and Mississippi, flood recoveries in Mississippi, and tornado recoveries in Mississippi and Arkansas), including coordinating Regional volunteer trips;
- help resources congregations for disaster preparedness;
- build connections with partners in areas of high vulnerability where we have limited Disciples presence;
- and represent Disciples of Christ at AR VOAD, LA VOAD, and MS VOAD

Hiring is in process, with the position slated to begin Jan 2024.

As Ms. Spratt has taken the lead on more of the preparedness and volunteer coordination pieces within the domestic disaster response portfolio, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold has had the opportunity to reflect broadly on the way WoC responds to domestic disasters, especially on further implementation of recommendations from the DEI report. Alongside the amended process for household solidarity grant distribution (setting a standard grant amount of \$250/household), Week of Compassion is piloting the Disaster Equity Grant with implementation funding from the Oreon E. Scott grant funds. Disaster Equity Grants make an additional \$1000

available to BIPOC, lay Disciples who experience property damage or financial hardship due to natural/climate disasters. One Disaster Equity Grant has been awarded so far, and 3-5 more are anticipated before the end of the year. Rev. Hamilton-Arnold has also been developing guidelines for evaluating projects and partners for long-term recovery, informed by the learnings and recommendations of the DEI report.

A few locations to highlight from among the two-dozen where Week of Compassion is supporting long-term recovery:

- *Hurricane Harvey (Texas, 2017)*: The designated fund for Hurricane Harvey recovery will close out in Q4 of 2023 or Q1 of 2024. With investment of just over \$800,000, Week of Compassion has supported repair and rebuild of homes in 7 counties in southeast Texas, helped facilitate nearly 250 volunteers (housed at FCC Texas City), and assisted 39 Disciples congregations. Grants supported innovative projects like the Wharton West End Initiative and Tierra de Esperanza (culturally-sensitive relocation of communities out of flood zones); resilience training with West Street Recovery; and subsidized trauma counseling at First Christian Church Aransas Pass.
- *Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Fiona (Puerto Rico, 2017 and 2022)*: Through PR VOAD and our partners at Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Week of Compassion has developed a new partnership with a local organization that started after the 2017 hurricanes - Techos Pa' Mi Gente. TPMG focuses on home repair, but also incorporates elements of community development. The ICDCPR has also been exploring partnerships with TPMG, to engage local Disciples in the rebuilding efforts. Conversations are ongoing about continued support of ICDCPR and collaborative hurricane recovery efforts.
- *New Homeownership Initiatives*: In Rolling Fork, MS and Mayfield, KY, Week of Compassion is supporting innovative programs to meet the needs of renters displaced by tornadoes by creating paths for affordable homeownership. These programs (Rolling Fork Build Back Better and A New Lease On Life) seek to promote generation wealth and community stabilization.
- *Hurricane Ida (Southeast Louisiana, 2021)*: As noted for the Spring Board of Stewards Meeting, Week of Compassion has begun a partnership in southeast Louisiana to support work among indigenous communities affected by Hurricane Ida. In addition to grant support (direct grants and grants via National VOAD) for The Indigenous Resilience Disaster Case Management Program (IR-DCMP), we are in conversation with The Lowlander Center about financial and volunteer support for resilient rebuilding.
- *Maui Wildfire (2023)*: As of Oct. 15, 2023, Week of Compassion had received nearly \$150,000 in designated gifts to respond to the August wildfire in West Maui, which devastated the town of Lahaina. In the weeks immediately following the fire, Children's Disaster Services (a Week of Compassion partner through Brethren Disaster Ministries) deployed teams to provide trauma-sensitive childcare in the Family Response Centers. The trained volunteers - including Board of Stewards member Judi Frost - offered spaces of play and comfort for children and a time of respite for their guardians. Long-term plans are still taking shape. Hawai'i VOAD has been hosting long-term

recovery subcommittee calls, and they are in the process of forming their long-term recovery group. Given the scope of the recovery, coordination across multiple stakeholders and aspects of recovery is a complicated task. Critical to those conversations are questions of how to provide accountability to locals (esp. the Native Hawaiian community) and ensure sustainable housing (and avoiding opportunistic development that will not benefit the local community). Week of Compassion is exploring multiple avenues of partnership through Hawai'i VOAD and through our ecumenical relationships. Access into the burn zone is still limited, and significant debris removal will be necessary before rebuilding can begin. Another very active conversation is around emotional/spiritual/mental health support, the need for which will be extensive.

### **Immigrant and Refugee Response - Rev. Alan Dicken**

The past few months have been busy for the Immigration and Refugee Response work of Week of Compassion. With changes to resettlement practices, a new initiative with the Christian Church in Arizona, a potential development with the Ohio Region, and ongoing work with churches around the country, Associate Director of Immigrant and Refugee Response, Rev. Alan Dicken has been active in many expressions of the church as we strive to continue building capacity for Disciples to respond to the needs of immigrants and refugees in their communities.

Connections with individual congregations are bearing fruit, as five congregations around the country have received Equity in Refugee Response Grants – totalling over \$10,000 for La Obra and Convocation congregations that are actively serving their refugee and immigrant neighbors with unique programs that are not traditional resettlement ministry.

Rev. Dicken has had conversations with over 35 local congregations since the spring board meeting. Many of these connections have been through denominational engagement, including sharing World Refugee Day resources, participating in a partnership with Be the Neighbor, which involved an in person visit to sites in Fort Worth and Tucson as well as virtual presentations five other weeks over the summer. Additionally, as part of a workshop presentation at General Assembly, Rev. Dicken was able to reach out to 100+ clergy and lay leaders who were interested in developing, strengthening, or connecting their refugee and immigrant responses.

Going beyond the conversations with individual congregations, there has been an emerging theme of collaboration in this ministry across various expressions and regions within the church. This past year has seen a transition to a new Immigration Attorney contract and a new staff person at DHM who serves as the Director for Justice and Advocacy ministries, which includes immigration and refugee concerns. Week of Compassion has healthy working relationships with these new positions so that the whole church may be better served through the collaboration across the General Ministries.

When looking to regional collaboration, Rev. Dicken traveled across North Carolina in May of 2023 to connect with churches and resettlement agencies. As a result, collaborative efforts of churches in the Raleigh and New Bern areas of North Carolina are developing so that smaller congregations with fewer resources are able to work together to be able to serve immigrants and refugees across the state. A number of clergy have expressed a desire to develop an intentional regional initiative of refugee support due to the high numbers of agencies, non-profits, and churches across the state that are already actively engaged in serving immigrant and refugee populations.

The largest development over the last few months has unquestionably been the formation and launch of the Arizona Disciples Border Initiative (ADBI). Born out of connections with La Odra, concerns over border responses, and in person visits to the Tucson area, Week of Compassion has worked with the Christian Church in Arizona to launch a three year pilot program that seeks to address the needs of migrants and the churches looking to serve those who have crossed the US/Mexico border into Arizona.

The program has three components - First, churches are using their space as shelters for families that have lost sponsors or who have been abandoned by sponsors after crossing into the US. These families are referred through a partner agency in Mexico that works to prepare families for the experience of the crossing. For a three month period (with the possibility of extending for another three months) families are able to stay at FCC Tucson and are provided with food, privacy, and a case worker who can help people get jobs, enroll children in school, and see the family move on toward independent living and the ability to thrive in their new country. The second piece involves other churches in the area that have resources to help the guests of the church to develop their professional skills and marketable opportunities. The commercial kitchen at FCC Saguaro is available for job training and for families to make and/or sell their own food. The third facet of the program is the immersion education program, developed by Rev. Pedro Ramos-Goycolea, an immigrant Disciples pastor in Tucson, who guides groups in a four day immersion program so that they might come to know and experience life and ministry at the borderlands.

The ADBI launched in June of 2023 and has already seen two families come through FCC Tucson. The program is looking to expand to other Disciples churches in the Tucson and Phoenix areas so that all congregations can serve either as hospitality centers, resource connectors, or other contributors to this valuable ministry and expression of the Christian Church in Arizona. Rev. Jay Hartley, Regional Minister of Arizona hopes that by partnering with Week of Compassion, that there will be ongoing development of other churches further inland who see the border not just as something in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, but also in Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Illinois, as more congregations learn how to be hospitality centers for migrants that may need support in communities throughout the country.

A new refugee ministry potential is blooming in the Ohio region as well. Based on refugee farming options in other parts of the country, the Christian Church in Ohio is exploring the possibility of converting some of their campground at Camp Christian to serve as a farm that

employs and serves refugees. The region is in early stages of this conversation, and Rev. Dicken has toured the state to connect with agencies, non profits, and churches in Akron, Cleveland, Toledo, Dayton, Cincinnati, Athens, and Columbus. As a result, it is clear that there are the resources, connections, and vision in the state to make this potential a reality. In the coming months and years, this will be a project that will hopefully continue to develop with God's guidance as the Christian Church in Ohio discerns the most faithful use of their resources and camp ground.

As the work continues to develop with emerging models moving away from traditional resettlement agencies, providing potential connections for rural congregations, Week of Compassion seeks to be at the forefront of these developments. To that end, Rev. Dicken is in regular contact with leaders at Church World Service who are developing resources for congregations looking to be involved in this Neighborhood Network, which offers support for Asylum Seekers, WelcomeCorps, and Ukrainians here on special status designations.

In an ever changing landscape and an ever evolving church, a crucial element of Immigrant and Refugee Response through Week of Compassion is to offer up-to-date resources and connections to all congregations, regions, and expressions of the church as we all continue to live out our call to show hospitality and compassion to refugees and immigrants who have come to bless our communities with the gift of their presence.

### **Preparedness, Volunteers, and Refugee Support - Ms. Raiza Spratt**

At the 2023 General Assembly, Disciples framed a full 3 bedroom 1 bath house in one morning! Glory be to God! People from 26 regions (including Canada) contributed 378 volunteer hours, coming together to alleviate suffering in the world. Among the volunteers were board members (THANK YOU), people who hadn't heard of Week of Compassion before, people ranging from 6 years old to well in their 80s, people with various skills and various abilities, and various expressions of our church. It was more than picture perfect; it was the Kingdom of God in our midst.

Since the Assembly, FCC Paducah - a host church for Week of Compassion in Western KY- has organized volunteers to work on an ongoing basis to place the house on site, and continue construction.

Week of Compassion has implemented steps to bring structure and efficiency to the volunteer management process. Last Spring, the volunteer webpage was a concept, the volunteer management software was a puzzle piece, the Asset Mapping tool was beginning to take shape in electronic form, and the Volunteer Plan was simply a proposal. Since then, we have made public a new volunteer page on the Week of Compassion website, which makes information easier to find for individuals and groups interested in service opportunities; we have used the

volunteer management software to capture the information of 190 potential volunteers; and we have referred 5 groups to partners using those tools.

The house-build during General Assembly provided the opportunity to test the bounds and limitations of the volunteer management software. The new software allowed Week of Compassion staff to manage 145 registered volunteers: easily sending communication with instructions divided by roles, electronically gathering most liability forms (only 4 people preferred paper forms the day of the event), checking-in folks the day of the event within 15 minutes, and easily accessing report information post-event for follow ups and to share the story.

Supporting Refugee and Immigrant resettlement response, our staff was able to offer our volunteer registration software to the Arizona Disciple Border Initiative, specifically for groups to register for the Caminantes immersion program, which to date has 3 people registered through the Week of Compassion Volunteer Local software.

At the Spring Board of Stewards meeting, Ms. Raiza Spratt presented a proposal for developing a robust Week of Compassion volunteer program: REED (Recruitment, Engagement, Evaluation, Development). This fall, she has developed an implementation plan focused first on Engagement and Development, refining communications for volunteers, registration processes, and training/leadership opportunities.

Looking ahead, the Week of Compassion volunteer program will benefit from building capacity for site leadership and developing a recruitment strategy to invite groups to participate. In the coming months, Ms. Spratt and Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold will be working on creating training and increasing the roster of available Site Leaders who can support our long-term recovery efforts. We will continue recruiting groups for the 10 volunteering opportunities we have active.

On the Preparedness side, building capacity within Disciples congregations to respond to disasters has been a mix of ongoing work and unexpected work guided by God's hand. Ms. Spratt has continued to support First Christian Church of Berea, KY, which has flourished into a team of committed Disciples that calls themselves the PREP team (Preparedness & Response Empowers People). Heart of the Rockies Christian Church led summer preparedness meetings focusing on individual preparedness. At the General Assembly, Ms. Spratt and Rev. Hamilton-Arnold facilitated a preparedness training with the room at capacity, touching members from 27 different regions. Some congregations joined Willing to Respond; others added their information to the Week of Compassion Resource Inventory list, and staff will continue to follow up with folks interested in preparedness.

In Puerto Rico, the central office of Iglesia Cristiana Discipulos de Cristo hosted a 4-week Spanish-language preparedness class, which Ms. Spratt planned and led. Leading up to the training, Week of Compassion facilitated connections to the Puerto Rico Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (PR VOAD), and three of the training sessions featured a local

partner: Mavi (supporting communities with access and functional needs), SBP (supporting FEMA application process for low income communities), and FEMA.

Before the start of hurricane season, the Florida Region hosted a series of preparedness conversations both in English and in Spanish. The English training resurfaced the desire for a regional team – development of which will continue during their Regional Assembly in 2024. The Spanish training made information accessible and connected leaders to each other and to Week of Compassion. The La Obra Convención in Florida covers Florida and Southern Georgia, so when Hurricane Idalia arrived in September of this year, pastors knew the communication plan, and Week of Compassion already had a relationship with leaders in the area, allowing provision of grants within a few days. This is a way preparedness connects people to a more efficient recovery.

Additionally, Ms. Spratt and Rev. Alan Dicken continue to organize monthly gatherings of Disciples actively engaged in refugee response. Ms. Spratt has also been connecting La Obra congregations with the opportunity to access the Equity Grant for resettlement response.

### **Communications & Development - Rev. Courtney Richards**

The *2024 SPECIAL OFFERING* (Feb 18 & 25) will be Week of Compassion's second design year outside the OGHS shared resources table, creating all offering materials 'in house' (Rev. Richards, contracted Disciples writers, Liz Myer (SALT+), and Hilary Rhodes Design). Titled *GIFTS TO LIVE ON*, it is rooted in the story of the generous widow as found in Luke 21:1-4. From the theme introduction:

*In the story of the generous widow, we see every Disciple who is part of Week of Compassion. Her generosity sparks a response in us: we give what we have, what we can offer as our very best, what is uniquely ours to bring. ...*

*What started 80 years ago as a single offering for a single cause, has flourished into decades of relationships with trusted partners, engaged in the work of empowering communities to claim their own strength and impact. ... As we do the long-term work of building relationships and true collaboration, we repeatedly discover the beauty and poetry that says new life is possible, that the Spirit of God is real and lives right here among us.*

Resources for worship and preaching will be in print, with those and additional resources (youth/children, video sermons, social media) available for download. Theme videos will again be in English voiceover, English voiceover subtitled, and Spanish voiceover. There remains interest in making the 'offering' theme an 'annual' theme, creating additional worship, study, and activity resources for use in congregations beyond the Q1 Special Offering emphasis. (This

did not come together as hoped in 2023, but is a renewed goal for 2024, especially alongside the 80th Anniversary emphasis (see below).)

*GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2023* in Louisville gave numerous spaces for Week of Compassion to connect with individuals and groups across the life of the church.

- In Sunday morning's 'Service Service' ~100 volunteers framed a 3-bedroom house inside the Exhibit Hall. Those panels will soon be reassembled as a home in Mayfield KY, part of our long-term tornado recovery in that area.
- Two overflowing *Workshops* provided education and information, as well as personal connection for additional follow up and future work.
  - In This Together (disaster preparedness and response) - Rev. Hamilton-Arnold and Ms. Spratt (~75 participants)
  - Welcoming Refugees (refugee response) - Rev. Dicken, joined by Kentucky Refugee Ministries Co-Sponsorship and Volunteer Engagement Manager Joseph Caminiti (~100 participants)
- The *Community Celebration* on Tuesday evening hosted about 300, and gave a chance for lively conversation and connecting with four featured partners. Having done both seated/dinner and casual/reception events, we're envisioning a hybrid event for future Assemblies, allowing us the best of both options.
- *Monday night worship* included a special offering for Week of Compassion, in which we received a little over \$14,500.
- Week of Compassion's *Exhibit Hall booth space* was a great and comfortable gathering space for many, both engaged in conversation with Staff and Board about Week of Compassion, but also simply as a welcome place of respite during very full Assembly days. We are glad to meet that need.

As always, Week of Compassion *COMMUNICATION* is intended to connect our ministry and our community through storytelling, for edification and amplification, and to tell a unified story of intersecting circumstances, communities, and responses. These connections happen in: general interest [emails](#) sent every other week; [website](#); daily (M-F) social media posts on the three primary platforms ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)), including response watch alert posts.

Recent *website* revisions include a redesigned [Volunteer page](#), and will soon include more effective social media feed highlights.

New brochures ([Immigrant & Refugee Response](#)) and updated print materials ([general information](#); [Domestic Disaster Response](#); [Endowment Fund](#); [Circle of Compassion](#)) were prepared in time for General Assembly and are also available as PDFs on our website.

In addition to congregational and individual giving, Week of Compassion remains vital and empowered by the strength of our *ENDOWMENT FUND*. Alongside the Week of Compassion *General Endowment Fund*, CCF holds 265 funds on our behalf, both *named permanent funds*



and *Circle of Compassion funds*. As of 8/31/23, the market value of the TOTAL Week of Compassion endowment fund is \$7.63 Million:

- General Endowment Fund = \$1.15Million
- Named Endowment Funds = \$4.65Million
- Circle of Compassion Funds = \$1.83Million

Within those 265 funds, the *Circle of Compassion* includes 77 funds, adding 5 funds in 2023: West Mesa CC, Albuquerque NM; Illinois Valley Cluster, IL; Hood River Valley Christian Church, Hood River OR; First Christian Church, Pekin IL; First Christian Church, North Kansas City MO (marking their 100th Anniversary).

In total, nine Week of Compassion named endowment funds have been added in 2023:

- 5 new Circle of Compassion funds (77 CoC funds total)
- 4 new named funds (2 memorial, 2 individual/family)
- In addition, CCF added 8 new funds with WOC as a beneficiary (3 families, 5 church legacy funds)

Several Circle of Compassion and at least two estate gifts are in process: There is currently one congregation voting in mid-October to establish a CoC fund, one congregation on a slow consideration track, and a cluster of churches renewing their consideration to create a fund together. We know of two estate gifts (one family, one church) in the legal settlement steps; no timeline on those, but gifts will be forthcoming.

Week of Compassion is exploring a new avenue of both marketing and fundraising, with athlete sponsorships. Working with Rev. Jonathan Hall, Senior Minister at First Christian Church of North Hollywood, Week of Compassion is piloting a sponsorship agreement. Jonathan is an accomplished marathon, ultramarathon, and IronMan racer; for his October 2023 IronMan California entry, Week of Compassion is his sole sponsor, with our brand colors and logo appearing on his new race jerseys for the event. He is creating a Facebook fundraiser, which we will share through our channels as well. The agreement is currently for one year (for consideration and renewal thereafter), with Week of Compassion committing up to \$1000 to cover up to four race fees, equipment, and other expenses at Jonathan's discretion. The entire fundraiser income benefits Week of Compassion. With several Disciples active in these race events, this could be a model to duplicate into a #CompassionIsATeamSport adventure!

Events to mark Week of Compassion's 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY are being planned for 2024.

*History / Communications:*

- Working with Dr. Joel Brown, Disciples of Christ Historical Society to:
  - update the existing narrative timeline (written ~2009)
  - create visual timeline (high graphic, low text) for sharing
  - photo retrospective of early offering materials, posters, etc.

- Occasional series highlighting key events along the timeline and/or 'Where are they now?' series on earlier projects, partners, and people.
- Using 'Gifts to Live On' theme idea & text, create additional study/worship resources for use throughout the year.

*Giving:*

- Reach a total of 80 Circle of Compassion churches *this year (2023)* so that we are at "80 by 80". (10/6/23: We have 77, with at least one more likely very soon. So close!)
- Establishing/announcing planned giving Legacy Society
- Additional invitations for giving throughout the year

*Celebration, Fall 2024:*

- Create a virtual event - blessings, remarks, partners, music.
- Some kind of 'party favor' for everyone who registers/joins online.
- Still very germinal. Planning team under consideration.