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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September 23, 2026

The Work of Staying

how relationships are shaping long-term recovery in Medford

While the fires were still smoldering in southern Oregon, Rev. Stacy Shelton was already asking what more her church could do.

First Christian Church of Medford had been distributing emergency supplies and food assistance through its existing outreach ministries after devastating wildfires swept through the region in 2020. But Shelton wanted to know what came next. In an early conversation with Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold, Week of Compassion's Associate Director for Domestic Disaster Response, she asked what more she and the church should be doing.

Photos were all taken by Michael Shepherd. Pictured: 3 Jackson County Long Term Recovery Group staff members, the Pastor of FCC Medford, and a church member.

"Caroline told me to wait," Shelton recalls. "It was some of the hardest advice to hear because I want to have answers and be a helper, but it was absolutely correct."

Waiting did not mean doing nothing. It meant listening.

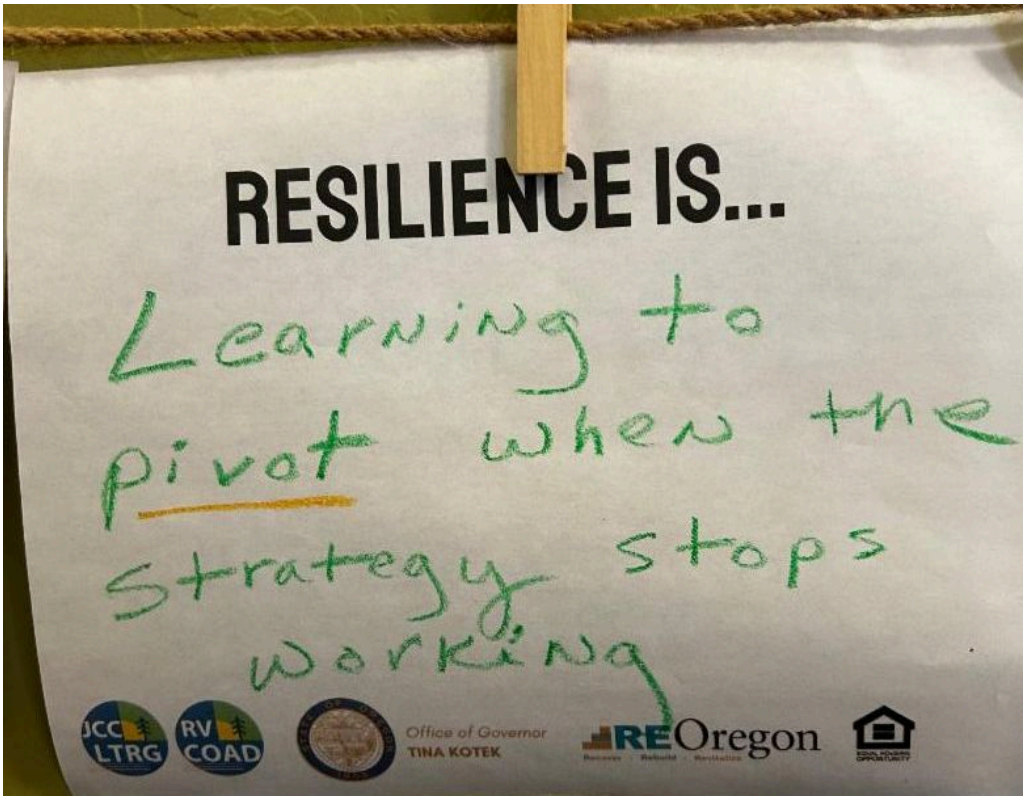
As emergency responders eventually went home and the immediate crisis passed, local leaders began the much longer work of helping their community recover. Shelton and other church leaders connected with the Jackson County Long-Term Recovery Group and United Way of Jackson County, joining community partners in asking a larger question: *What does this community need—not just today, but as it rebuilds for the years ahead?*

By consistently showing up for those conversations and participating in the Long-Term Recovery Group Unmet Needs Table, FCC Medford began to see needs that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Some survivors whose homes had been destroyed were ready to move into newly constructed homes, only to discover that they could not safely enter them because accessibility ramps had not been covered as part of the reconstruction. With support from Week of Compassion grants, combined with the generosity of the congregation, FCC Medford helped construct ramps so that people could finally return home.

The experience also changed how the church understood other challenges in its community.

Affordable housing and food access had been needs in Medford long before the fires. The church had responded to individual needs with rental assistance and grocery gift cards. Those acts of compassion still mattered after the fire, but through its involvement in long-term recovery, FCC Medford became more deeply aware of affordable housing issues and connected with community-led efforts working to address them.



The church was learning that sometimes the most faithful response is not to solve a problem alone, but to join others already working toward a solution.

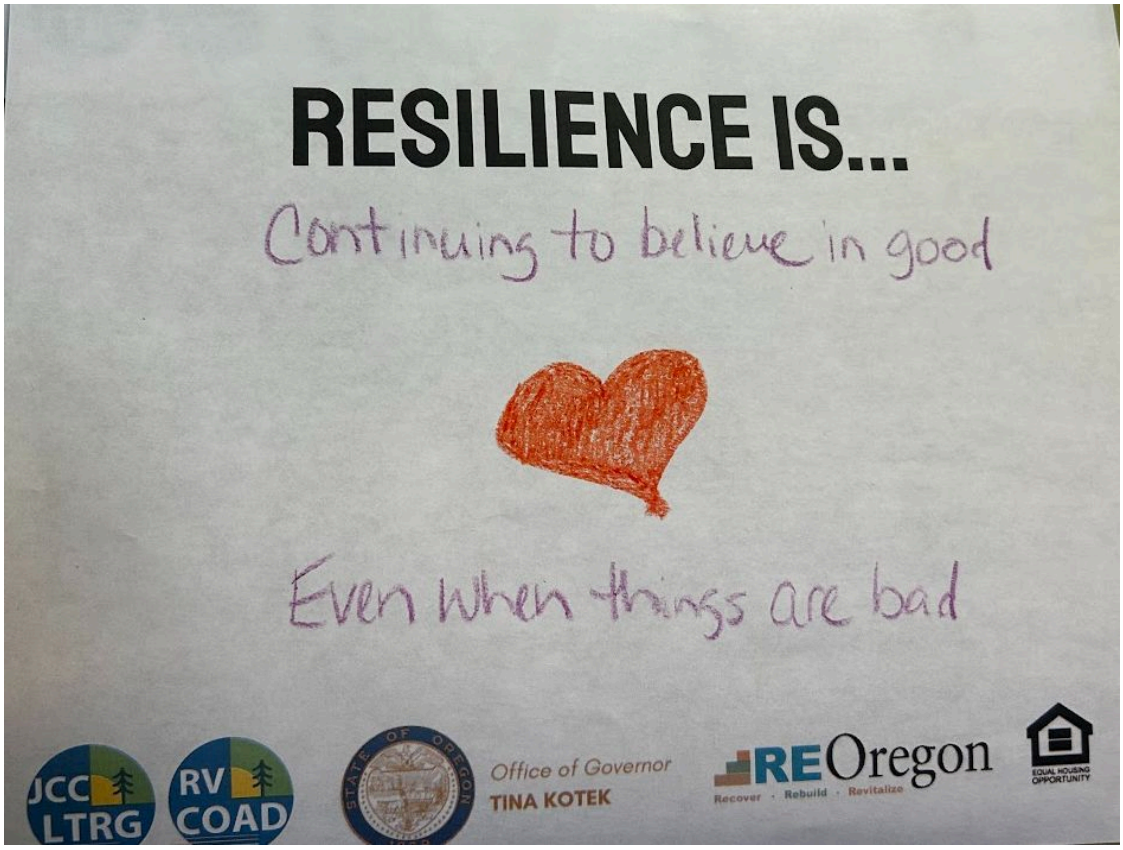
That is part of what long-term recovery looks like. Years after a disaster, the people still doing the work are largely the people who were there before it—neighbors, community organizations, local leaders, and churches. The work is slower and often

less visible, but relationships built over time allow communities to keep asking not only *How do we rebuild?* but *what will it take for our community to thrive again?*

This summer, Week of Compassion Disaster Response Manager Michael Shepherd met with leaders involved in Medford's recovery to hear what they have learned in the six years since the fires. The message from both the Jackson County Long-Term Recovery Group and United Way of Jackson County was remarkably simple:

Build relationships. Show up to listen. Help where you can. No church is expected to have every answer or unlimited resources, but your voice matters.

When we build relationships and remain present, we create the possibility of something greater. We can listen for needs that might otherwise be missed and connect people with the resources and relationships that help them thrive. Together, we can walk with a community toward a new vision of what is possible on the other side of disaster.



This is the work of staying.

Your support of Week of Compassion helps sustain this kind of long-term presence. It helps Disciples congregations remain at the table with their neighbors—not only when disaster strikes, but throughout the years of recovery that follow. Together with local partners and communities, they can keep showing up, keep listening, and keep walking alongside their neighbors as they shape a future together.

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