



...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Dear Church,

I am currently traveling, visiting partners in South America, and I heard the most recent news of cruelty and abuse at the U.S./Mexico border. I was surrounded by our local partners when I saw the heartbreaking image of Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and his young daughter, Angie Valeria. The two of them drowned trying to swim across the Rio Grande and cross into the United States.

These images reminded me of many individuals I met on a recent visit to the southern border in Texas, where young families and children from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and other countries come looking for safety. When I was in Phoenix this past May, I saw young families like them being dropped off by Immigration Officials at a Disciples church; the church provides shelter, food and blankets while families await their processing.

The father and daughter who died made that terrible journey believing our country to be a safe place; a second chance.

Like many of you, I am heartbroken. I'm praying about the best ways to help; and the most meaningful ways for the church to provide presence in a place of so much suffering.

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. This has been our mission for 75 years, since our church first moved to support refugees displaced by war and violence. Our vision remains the same as well: a world where God's people transform suffering into hope.

The immigration crisis is deeply complex. There is no easy way to address the overwhelming need that we see in our own backyard. However, as people of faith, we respond with love and compassion--working towards long-term solutions for those in great need.

Here's how.

For the last several years, Week of Compassion has been responsive to the border crisis through partners such as Church World Service; Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries; Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries; and the Oscar Romero Center in San Diego and Tijuana. These partners work to provide safe places for migrants. They provide shelter, meet basic needs, and provide legal counsel and advocacy services. These ministries of our wider church create safe havens for those who might otherwise find themselves in great danger. More recently, our Keep Families and Children Together fund has been supporting Disciples families--separated by current immigration policies-- by providing emergency supplies and support to meet their needs in a very difficult time.

Beyond meeting those urgent needs, we are coordinating and working with partners towards a more comprehensive, integrated approach to the crisis. Through these partnerships, immigrants seeking asylum will have safe places to stay while their requests are processed. They will be made aware of their rights, and will have access to available resources to ensure a more humane experience.

The crisis at our border is not happening in a vacuum. A wide range of issues in Central America--from gang violence to economic crisis to climate change-- drive this wave of mass migration. So our response must be multi-faceted. In addition to treating immigrants humanely, our ongoing work in that part of the world helps to reduce migration. When we support sustainable development projects, we enable communities to better provide for their own needs. This creates more opportunity for young adults who might otherwise come north. More opportunities mean families stay together. More resources stay within the community, making the community even stronger. Meaning that fewer make the dangerous journey across the desert.

When you support Week of Compassion, you support the work of our wider church at the border and in Central America, where we work to make life more sustainable. In this, we truly become the Body of Christ. Together, we answer the call to greet the stranger as though they were Jesus himself.

It is clear, as we see images and hear reports from the border, that our church is still called to respond to great suffering. This is not new; this is now. Now, with great urgency, we bring relief to these places of crossing over. We give hope to the stranger; to the one in need of food, clothing and shelter; to the child seeking sanctuary. Because Jesus reminds us, again, that this is what it means to be a disciple.

As we continue to pray for those suffering in this crisis, our compassion compels us to action. I'm grateful for the many ways in which Disciples are already opening their doors, opening their hearts, and sharing generously to enable transformative ministry. With your continued support, we can provide the sanctuary that so many believe they will find one day.



Peace,
Rev. Vy Nguyen
Executive Director

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