

Action Update- September 8

Sharing Abundance: Whosoever Will Christian Church Serves Neighbors In Need



Beltsville is a suburb of Washington, D.C., and many in the community work in service industry jobs in the city. Many were unable to work during the early days of the pandemic when businesses shut down.

Whosoever Will Christian Church, an African-American Disciples congregation situated in Beltsville, was operating a small-scale food pantry to distribute food in the community prior to

the pandemic. For the most part, the needs of the church's neighbors were met through member contributions and occasional outside donors, and hours were determined by the availability of volunteers.

As the needs of their neighbors increased significantly due to COVID-19, the church found ways to extend their services. Whosoever Will Christian Church began to have more frequent distribution--for a time, distributing food almost daily. More volunteers were available because people were not going to work, but more people were in need for the same reason. There were other challenges as well. With social distancing in place, church members had less access to the building, making it difficult to receive and organize deliveries. Items usually purchased from the food bank were more expensive due to increased demand, and the food bank instituted a \$2,000 purchase minimum to receive a delivery. And, the needs of their neighbors reached beyond food-- parents needed things like diapers, baby formula, and other necessities.

Week of Compassion, in collaboration with the wider church, provided support to the congregation of Whosoever Will to meet those needs and more. The church modified their food pantry service schedule, and now they do one large distribution monthly, with smaller distributions weekly. Now that people are going back to work, the church is trying to recruit more volunteers from the wider neighborhood and have acquired a van to make deliveries.

Rev. Dr. J. Edwin Lloyd Jr. says "during the COVID-19 period, Week of Compassion assistance [has] been highly impactful - this assistance has helped our food ministry

to thrive and move forward. I'm not sure how we would have managed without it. The giving capacity [of our members] was reduced due to the pandemic. Assistance coming through was a significant blessing. We are grateful to partner together so we can do what we are all passionate about."

"I deeply admire WWCC because they are able to use humble facilities to serve an amazing number of people in concrete, meaningful ways," says Regional Minister Allen Harris. "When I'm with this congregation, I feel their abundance - their faithfulness and desire to be of service in the world."

The impact of Whosoever Will CC is especially significant because COVID-19 has **disproportionately affected communities of color**, and draws attention to existing inequalities in our systems. "

"Because more people of color work in hospitality and other industry positions where the need for service declined, more people of color are being displaced in this pandemic," says Rev. April Johnson of Reconciliation Ministry. "Churches are having to become creative in the ways in which they underwrite food pantries and benevolence ministries. Some churches can't do this, but many are working to build capacity to respond to families with gaps in their paychecks. This crisis is also offering an opportunity for those not displaced to think about how they will contribute- either to volunteer their time, or sharing their spiritual gifts, stories."

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the ways in which our policies and practices are inherently harmful to Brown and Black communities. As Rev. Johnson says, "many people of color have to travel farther to get out of a food desert, or to access health services, due to a divestiture of networks. The local church has to be creative in helping people get access to healthcare, and healthy food, and other resources... The assumption that we're all the same is how we end up participating in systems that promote racist ideologies."

The ministries of our wider Church are working together to address the crisis of the pandemic, as well as the underlying crisis of systemic racism. Rev. Johnson notes: "Everything that we do impacts another part of the body." As this one Body, we are called to meet needs created by the COVID-19, as well as to address issues of racism that put people at greater risk for illness, hunger, and displacement.

Much of Week of Compassion's **response** to the pandemic is focused on addressing food security - both domestic and global. We give thanks for congregations like Whosoever Will, for the ways in which they serve and show up for their neighbors. We give thanks for your ongoing support, which allows us to partner with congregations and help expand their reach. And, we lift up the work of Reconciliation Ministry in addressing the inequalities that complicate the effects of the pandemic for so many of our neighbors. In the coming weeks, Disciples congregations will receive a special offering for Reconciliation Ministries. For **resources** to promote this offering in your church, visit the **Disciples Reconciliation Ministry website**.

Week of Compassion
Responses Since Sept 1



Iowa,
Storm Relief



Louisiana,
Hurricane Laura Relief



Texas, Hurricane Harvey
Long-Term Recovery

For an interactive map of all 2020 responses, [visit our website](#).

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