

## **Program Update - Spring 2024 Meeting to Week of Compassion Board of Stewards**

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

Work continues in Mayfield/Graves County, KY to support tornado recovery from the Winter 2021 outbreak, with the layered impact of flash flooding which affected 100+ households in the summer of 2023, but for which far fewer resources are available for recovery. One component of the partnership in Mayfield/Graves County is support for a new homeownership program. A potential collaboration with Second Christian Church is also in development, to support the congregation as a neighborhood resilience hub.

Week of Compassion is also supporting Rolling Fork Rising, a new-homeownership program for renters displaced by the March 2023 tornado in the majority-Black community of Rolling Fork, MS. The tornado damaged or destroyed nearly 75% of the housing stock in the area, which was 68% rental housing. Rolling Fork Rising has established a program for homeowner and financial education and trauma counseling as a prerequisite for qualification for a subsidized mortgage that will not exceed pre-tornado rental rates. The Great River Region is exploring possibilities for coordinating volunteer opportunities with Rolling Fork Rising.

Such volunteer opportunities would be part of the broader pilot program with Week of Compassion and the Great River Region, which created the Regional staff position of Regional Disaster Response Coordinator. Rev. Ronny Nowell started in the role at the beginning of March and has already done excellent work connecting with local congregations to evaluate their assets and interests for future disaster response and recovery. When severe weather hit the region in early April, Rev. Nowell served as the point of contact for churches in the Region, and he has helped coordinate with area churches that are providing cleanup assistance. We are excited to see these early fruits of the project. The Region is entering a time of leadership transition, as Rev. Dr. Nadine Burton begins a new call with the Christian Church Foundation, but the Interim Regional Minister, Rev. Alison Robuck is deeply committed to the success of the pilot project.

This spring, Week of Compassion has entered into a new partnership with the Eastern Shore Long-Term Recovery Committee to support a tidal flood recovery and mitigation project, which aims to elevate 100 homes that were flooded during a tidal event in 2021 and are at risk of repeat flooding in Somerset and Dorchester Counties - two of the poorest counties in the state of Maryland.

The intersection of social- and climate vulnerability continues to be a primary driver for the priorities of the domestic disaster program. In March, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold was invited to participate in a workshop hosted by the Coastal Resilience Center at UNC Chapel Hill – a Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence. The gathering brought together representatives from academia, the private and governmental sectors, and non-profit organizations to share learnings and identify potential areas of applied research related to racial equity, climate change, and disasters. A key takeaway from the gathering was confirmation of the priorities Week of Compassion has set for the domestic disaster program, especially related to sustainable housing and the impact of climate change on marginalized communities. Rev.

Hamilton-Arnold will consider how future collaboration with colleagues in academia could benefit the communities we serve.

At the National VOAD Conference in May, Rev. Hamilton-Arnold participated in two workshops highlighting these issues in practice: as a panelist discussing the Indigenous Resilience – Disaster Case Management Program in Southeast Louisiana and as the convener of a panel on cross-sector approaches for responding to extreme heat, featuring heat respite center work Week of Compassion supported in 2023 through the Arizona Faith Network and several Phoenix-area Disciples congregations.

The volunteer program continues to build slow momentum, with 6 groups scheduled to serve through Week of Compassion in Western KY during May, June, and July. We have also made a handful of referrals to recovery partners in other locations. Recruitment of additional site leaders and volunteer teams is an ongoing challenge.

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

The work of Immigration and Refugee Response continues to evolve as Week of Compassion strives to meet the changing needs of the world and the church. While maintaining existing contact with churches involved in refugee responses around the country, Associate Director of Immigrant and Refugee Response, Rev. Alan Dicken has also worked to expand the impact of the Arizona Disciples Border Initiative (ADBI), develop the potential of an agricultural incubator for refugee farmers with the Ohio Region, increased offerings of the Equity in Refugee Response Grant, and has embarked on new resettlement models through United for Ukraine and Welcome Corps to enable congregations to directly resettle specific individuals.

In reviewing the first full year of the Equity in Refugee Response Grant, it was obvious that while there was a good start, especially with La Obra congregations, there were some growing edges that needed to be addressed in 2024. To that end, through collaborative work within Week of Compassion staff and direct outreach from Rev. Alan Dicken, Week of Compassion saw the first North America/PacificAsian Disciples congregation grant recipient and the first two submissions entirely in Spanish. There continues to be intention in sharing this important resource to the broader church and with workshops and presentations coming up at La Obra Hispana Asamblea and the Biennial National Convocation this summer, the hope is to increase these offerings even further.

Within the context of a rapidly changing resettlement landscape, Rev. Dicken continues to connect with new resettlement agencies around the country, specifically in Kansas, Florida, and California and has provided these new offices with direct relationships with Disciples of Christ congregations. On top of these traditional resettlement models, Rev. Dicken has supported FCC Burbank in their United for Ukraine request to resettle a family member of their congregation from Ukraine to the US and is actively working with the Congolese Christian Church in Indianapolis to assist in their goal of resettling 14 Congolese families through the WelcomeCorps program. By working with other Disciples churches, and the Disciples Home Missions contracted Immigration Lawyer, Attorney Ocloo, Rev. Dicken emphasizes collaboration and partnership to help these congregations realize their potential in resettlement responses.

While most of the refugee response ministries of the church are understandably reactive, there is also an initiative in conjunction with the Ohio Region to potentially utilize part of the land owned by the campground to be put to use as an agricultural incubator for refugee farmers in central Ohio. Again, through collaboration with the local Church World Service office in Columbus, Ohio State University professors, and Mid-Ohio Farms, a local agricultural non-profit, the project is far more possible and has taken steps forward toward becoming a reality. The hope is that the rest of this year could be spent to consolidate resources and put together a strong grant request for federal funds, 2025 would be a year of funding and preparing the land & programming, and the farming could begin as early as 2026. This is a different kind of initiative than what we have seen in other expressions of the church, so there is still a lot to be determined regarding structure and Week of Compassion engagement, but there is excitement in this potential and Week of Compassion and the Ohio Region are doing what work they can to help move the project forward in constructive ways.

The Arizona Disciples Border Initiative (ADBI) continues to be an excellent expression of immigrant response. Several families have already gone through the hospitality center at FCC Tucson, and the case worker program has been very successful, and has become a model to Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries as they have also seen a need to hire a caseworker. Several groups, including the Disciples Women's Fellowship have attended the *Caminantes* Border Immersion experience, wherein Rev. Pedro Ramos leads a multi-day excursion to educate groups by bringing them to experience the realities of the border wall, shelters, and colonialism throughout the borderlands. Rev. Dicken has worked with Rev. Pedro Ramos, the director of the ADBI, and Rev. Jay Hartley, the Regional Minister of Arizona, to develop a request for the Oreon E Scott Grant offered through the Christian Church Foundation to hopefully increase funding in the coming year.

Looking ahead to World Refugee Day on June 20th, Week of Compassion is partnering with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) of the PC(USA) denomination to coordinate video and pdf resources for congregations to use as part of worship and education. While our two denominations are leading these efforts, we hope to see participation from the broader Church World Service member denominations.

In 2023, Disciples helped resettle 218 families. 56 families were cared for by 47 congregations across 17 regions. This year, there is an opportunity for Disciples to increase engagement and continue to meet the rising needs of refugees and immigrants around the world and domestically. However it may be that congregations, regions, and expressions of the church feel called to faithfully live out an immigrant and refugee response, Week of Compassion will strive to provide support, encouragement, collaboration, and prayer so that the church may be sustained in this essential ministry.

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

The 2024 special offering, "[Gifts to Live On](#)", was Week of Compassion's second venture outside the One Great Hour of Sharing shared resources table, creating all offering materials 'in house' (contracted Disciples writers, Liz Myer (SALT+), and Hilary Rhodes Design, coordinated

by Rev. Courtney Richards). The theme art and graphics also introduced 2024 as our 80th Anniversary year.

Content was very well-received; many congregations and pastors responded with appreciation for the variety of print and downloadable resources, in addition to having prepared social media assets and video sermons. It is always gratifying to see posters, coinboxes, and other resources 'in the wild' at our congregations and in their communications during offering season and beyond. [Theme videos](#) were widely used, and for the second time included a [theme video with Spanish voiceover](#) – a more intentional and inclusive presentation than an English voiceover with Spanish subtitles. (This will be a standard practice going forward.)

Week of Compassion streamlined our standing order and follow-up order processes, and in 2023 (for Special Offering 2024) worked with a new print/ship contractor. Plans are underway for 2025 Special Offering, with the visuals package again created by Liz Myer/SALT+. Given the significant and steady price increases in paper and postage (and both have longer delivery times), Week of Compassion is reviewing options to reduce costs, while still providing excellent quality resources, and the kinds of materials our churches find most useful.

Mentioned previously, and still a focus within overall communication strategy, is the idea to expand resources, employing the Offering theme as an annual focus, designing worship, study, and activity resources, using the stories and images of Week of Compassion, for use beyond the Special Offering 'season.'

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; our frequently updated [website](#); and daily (M-F) social media posts on the three primary platforms ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)), including response watch alert posts.

We have created branded [attention graphics](#) – 'response watch' (when severe weather is imminent or has just been reported), 'don't miss this' (for news of upcoming events or opportunities), and others – as well as branded [connection tags](#) to signify news related to volunteer, refugee response, and giving opportunities.

Week of Compassion has connected at Disciples Home Missions's Black Ministers Retreat, and the Florida Regional Assembly this spring, and will attend all three ethnic ministry gatherings this summer, sponsoring dinners at La Obra and North America Pacific/Asian Disciples, and leading workshops at National Convocation. New brochures and info cards were created this spring, highlighting our [Equity Grants](#) (also [in Spanish](#)) and our full listing of [Congregational Grants](#) (also [in Spanish](#)) in preparation for these gatherings. These brochures,

in addition to our other current info pieces, are also available on the updated [Media & Print page](#) of our website.

Alongside congregational and individual giving, Week of Compassion remains on strong footing because of the endowment held at the Christian Church Foundation. In addition to the Week of Compassion *General Endowment Fund*, CCF holds 267 funds on Week of Compassion's behalf, both *named permanent funds* and *Circle of Compassion funds*. As of 12/31/23, the market value of the TOTAL Week of Compassion endowment fund is a little over \$8 Million:

- General Endowment Fund = \$1.2Million
- Named Endowment Funds = \$5Million
- Circle of Compassion Funds = \$1.9Million

Within those 267 funds, the *Circle of Compassion* includes 79 funds, including 2 funds added already in 2024: Faith First Community Church, Davenport IA, and University Christian Church, San Diego CA.

2024 is Week of Compassion's 80th anniversary year. Having launched the year with our Special Offering theme art highlighting "for 80 years", additional communications and generosity connections are in the works to mark the occasion:

- Circle of Compassion - goal of "80 by 80". Currently 79 Circle congregations, with 3 more in consideration (Lee's Summit CC, Lee's Summit MO; First CC, Burbank CA; Church of the Foothills, Santa Ana CA), and 2 on a slower trajectory (maybe in 2025 - First CC, Hagerstown MD; Murray Hills CC, Beaverton OR).
  - Also creating a 'prospect' list - congregations that are deeply engaged Week of Compassion churches and often in Top 100 annually, but not yet Circle churches. Those churches will receive invitation letters soon to be one of the "and 8 to grow on" churches in this 80th Anniversary year.
- Narrative History - working with Disciples of Christ Historical Society and Disciples historian/writer to update the existing historical timeline, creating a piece that can be added as a flipbook and/or PDF to our online resources (and our DCHS archive).
- Visual History - also w/ DCHS - creating a digital retrospective of early offering materials, posters, artifacts, etc.
- Legacy Society - working with Christian Church Foundation (and from their own model), establishing a named society recognizing contributors who include Week of Compassion in their end-of-life and estate giving plans. We know many already have done so, this will be a way and place to gather and share those names, while inviting others to make the same plans and be included in the recognition as well.