

WEEK OF COMPASSION COMMITTEE

John Richardson, Chair

Johnny Wray, Minister/Administrative Director

Amy Gopp, Minister/Associate

Elaine Cleveland, Administrative Assistant

P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206

317-713-2442

www.weekofcompassion.org

OVERVIEW:

In 2007, the British-based non-governmental organization, Oxfam, issued a report that confirmed what many in the disaster response community were already suspecting – the number of weather-related natural disasters occurring in the world is dramatically on the rise. Indeed, the Oxfam study found that the number has more than quadrupled over the past two decades. In the early 1980s the world experienced about 120 weather-related disasters per year, compared to more recent figures of around 500 per year. The number of people affected has swelled by almost 70% - from some 174 million a year between 1985 and 1994 to some 254 million a year between 1995 and 2004. As one might regrettably surmise, it is the world's poorest and most vulnerable people who are the most severely impacted. While the Oxfam study covered the twenty year period 1985-2004, the trend has continued, and a recent report from the German reinsurer, Munich Re, noted that 950 natural disasters were recorded worldwide in 2007, the most since 1974 when the company began keeping records. There were 850 natural disasters in 2006 according to Munich Re.

This was the context in which Week of Compassion was called to carry out its disaster response ministry in 2007. While there were no “super” disasters like the 2005 hurricane season that produced Katrina, Rita, Wilma and more than twenty other tropical storms or the southern Asia tsunami in December 2004, 2007 was a very busy year for WOC. A number of southern Asian countries experienced some of the worst flooding in decades, as did southern Mexico. While the U.S. hurricane season was noticeably mild, several tropical storms ravaged the Caribbean and Central American countries, and major cyclones struck Bangladesh, Madagascar and the western Pacific. Indonesia, still recovering from the 2004 tsunami, again had to deal with earthquakes and floods. Earthquakes also caused significant destruction in Peru, Mozambique and China. Here in the U.S. the Southwest, Pacific Northwest and Midwest states experienced a number of severe storm systems that, in turn, produced some of the worst flooding in years. While several midwestern states and northern California had to deal with winter storm emergencies, southern California again battled several devastating wildfires.

2007 saw no signs of an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor any quelling of the atrocities in Darfur, Sudan and the eastern Congo. In 2007, Action by Churches Together issued a major appeal to its partners to support its Darfur Emergency Relief Operation and a new appeal on behalf of the growing Iraqi refugee crisis in Iraq, Syria and Jordan; both appeals became major priorities for WOC during the year. Here at home, the country was shocked by another school shooting, this time at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA.

Of course, the large humanitarian issues of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and other injustices remained as pervasive as ever in 2007, and Week of Compassion's support of long-term sustainable development projects remained an important part of WOC's witness and work in the world. Grants totaling nearly \$500,000 were made to projects in more than 45 countries and to eight U.S. states. These included food production/security projects in 28 countries through our partnership with the Foods Resource Bank and Church World Service, with WOC/Disciples serving as lead funder for projects in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Bosnia/Herzegovina. Through Seeds Program, Inc. WOC/Disciples provided seeds to thousands of families and hundreds of communities throughout Africa, with a major investment in Zimbabwe and Liberia. In conjunction with Global Ministries' Area Offices, WOC funded sustainable development projects in India, Chile, Lebanon, China and Angola, to name a few. WOC's sustainable

development work encompasses food security, income generation, health care, water, sanitation, education, peace-building and psycho-social care. WOC continues to make long-term rehabilitation work a priority, and the strong support WOC received in the aftermath of the southern Asia tsunami and the 2005 hurricane season is enabling us to continue such critical work in Indonesia, India and other Asian countries and along the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast.

In 2007, undesignated giving to Week of Compassion remained strong (\$2,422,218) and actually increased slightly (.50%). Designated giving reached \$685,928, an increase of 21.18% over 2006 designated giving. Income from WOC's endowment program and other funds in the Christian Church Foundation also continued to grow and reached an all time distribution high of \$151,041. Week of Compassion continues to give joyous and humble thanks to Disciples congregations, members and friends for their steadfast support, without which none of this ministry could be done.

1. Knowing that the current priorities are to start new congregations, transform existing congregations for mission, nurture leadership for these new and renewed congregations, and become a reconciling church, what is the role of your ministry in fulfilling these priorities?

Because of the significant resources given to Week of Compassion in response to the 2005 hurricane season, WOC has been able to continue its support of revitalization efforts to two congregations in the Great River Region: First Christian Church, Slidell, LA, and Westside Christian Church, New Orleans, LA - congregations whose ministries and facilities were seriously impacted by Katrina but to whom new opportunities of service and growth have been given. In 2007 WOC continued to provide major support of the Disciples Hurricane Recovery Initiative. That support included assistance to Disciples Mission Stations at First CC, Gulfport, MS; Grace Disciples Church, Covington, LA; First CC, Slidell, LA; Westside CC, New Orleans, LA; First CC, Metairie, LA; First CC, Lake Charles, LA; First CC, Port Arthur, TX; Northwood CC, Beaumont, TX; and Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries, Los Fresnos, TX – support that is providing numerous opportunities for ministry and witness within those communities and also the congregations sending work teams to them. More than 600 work groups (with more than 7000 volunteers) have participated or are scheduled to participate in the Recovery Initiative's goal of 750 work groups between September 1, 2006 and August 31, 2008. Also in 2007, WOC and ODV established a mission station with First CC, Pratt, KS, and FCC, Kinsley, KS, to support long-term recovery efforts in tornado-ravaged Greensburg, KS. Transformative stories abound of new energy and new life for individuals and congregations participating.

Just as work groups are a great tool for leadership building, Week of Compassion also supports other programs that nurture leadership for the church. In partnership with the Office of Disciples Volunteering/Disciples Home Missions, WOC supports the Summer Mission Intern program, and with Global Ministries/Division of Overseas Ministries, WOC funds the Global Mission Intern program - both programs that give Disciples young people individual opportunities for service. Again in 2007, WOC sponsored a mission/study trip for Disciples seminary students to the Balkans as it had the three previous years, with the purpose of giving emerging Disciples leaders the opportunity to see WOC dollars at work on the ground in Bosnia. In 2007, two seminary students also served as special interns with the Week of Compassion and thus, had unique leader development opportunities along with hands-on training in the ministries of relief and development. One of the priorities of WOC Associate, Amy Gopp, is to focus intentionally on building relationships with Disciples youth, young adults and seminary students, and as part of that priority, Amy participated in and/or led numerous young leader conferences, retreats and related events.

Week of Compassion continues to support several ecumenical efforts in the Gulf South working to address issues of race, class and poverty that have been further exposed in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. On occasion, WOC provides grants to partners, including congregations, as they seek to address similar issues in their community.

2. In what ways are you partnering with other expressions of the Church and with other general ministries?

Partnerships are the core of Week of Compassion. Everything WOC does is done in and through a remarkable network of partnerships. Much of that work is done through our ecumenical partners, and WOC is repeatedly recognized as enabling Disciples to be important participants in partner organizations like Church World Service, Action by Churches Together, Foods Resource Bank, IMA-World Health, Bread for the World, Habitat for Humanity, One Great Hour of Sharing and other church partners. Within the Disciples, WOC undergirds Refugee and Immigration Ministries and the Office of Disciples Volunteering in Disciples Home Missions and now, the Disciples Hurricane Recovery Initiative mentioned above. Also mentioned earlier, WOC supports the Global Mission Intern program and the Critical Presence Initiative in Global Ministries/Division of Overseas Ministries, as well as providing significant disaster and development grants through GM's Area Offices and overseas church partners. The Council on Christian Unity is a very valuable partner with whom we converse regularly around issues of ecumenicity, cooperative humanitarian ministries and the like, as well as working with CCU to support such programs as Bossey Scholarships for emerging church leaders from the developing world at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. The Christian Church Foundation has been a great partner in managing, promoting and building the WOC endowment program, as has Church Extension in providing stewardship of WOC dollars between the time they are received and the time they go out into the world to bring help and hope to hurting people. Certainly our partnerships with regions are important as we work with numerous regional and area offices each year to respond to Disciples affected by disasters, support regional work trips and participate in regional and area events.

3. How have you been involved in congregations to fulfill their mission and ministry?

There is no partnership more important for Week of Compassion than the partnership we share with the more than 2000 congregations that make the work and witness of WOC possible. That partnership involves, of course, far more than a financial relationship. In 2007, WOC supported more than 150 congregations in work/mission trips; relied upon 75 congregations to deliver disaster resources to needs within their memberships and communities; partnered with more than 25 congregations to combat hunger in the world with Foods Resource Bank local growing projects; and encouraged more than 450 Disciples youth groups in their participation with the Souper Bowl of Caring. In partnership with the Christian Church Foundation, WOC is also helping nearly a dozen congregations whose visible presence has closed, but whose ministry continues through permanent funds that support in perpetuity WOC and another dozen existing congregations that have chosen to undergird their commitment to Disciples' humanitarian work in the world by establishing similar funds in the Foundation – all part of the WOC endowment program that distributed a record \$151,041 to WOC in 2007. These are just a few expressions of the ways in which WOC helps congregations fulfill the mission Christ has given to them to respond to those Christ called "the least of these, my brothers and sisters."

When Christ spoke of finding one's life through giving it away, he surely was speaking to communities of faith as well as people of faith. WOC becomes one of the ways, not the only way certainly, but a very crucial and important way, for Disciples congregations to engage in self-emptying, life-giving, transforming ministry around the world, around the year.