

One Great Hour of Sharing Offering is March 22nd: Everything Is Potentially Local

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One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a worldwide UCC Lenten Offering to be collected in UCC Churches March 22, 2020. It supports disaster aid, refugee relief, and development that is ecumenical and worldwide in scope and implementation. Before I retired 9 years ago, I worked first in medicine, then in ecology. I would argue that as our world shrinks and epidemiological, political, and climate instability issues loom larger, everything potentially has local implications.

For example, my husband and I recently returned home to Northern Wisconsin from San Francisco, where we happily welcomed our sixth grandchild and got to know her big sister better. Our son, a Product Designer in the Bay area, must travel several times a year to China for business. For now, airline travel is restricted because of the Coronavirus epidemic, but what about later? This is not the first serious viral epidemic to arise in China. How long will it take to contain the Coronavirus epidemic? No answers yet, but funds from OGHS offerings are already helping. UCC Disaster Ministries are contributing a \$5,000 solidarity grant toward a growing ecumenical response to the Coronavirus emergency in China. Funds will enable purchase and air shipment of medical standard masks and robes to the Amity Foundation, an independent Chinese social organization founded in 1985 on the initiative of Chinese Christians (OGHS/UCC Facebook post).

As a large river biologist 10-20 years ago, my colleagues and I monitoring the Mississippi River wrestled with emerging issues relating to an increase in 100-year flood events and their possible relationship to climate change, which is now well-documented. Climate-related disasters have continued to occur, both locally (severe storms and floods in the Midwestern U.S), and worldwide (drought and wildfires in Australia, for example). In the United States from January 1 through October 8, 2019, there were 10 weather and climate disaster events (see map below) with losses exceeding \$1 billion each. This included 3 floods, 5 severe storms, and 2 tropical cyclones. (Source: National Centers for Environmental Information. <https://bit.ly/2MQt9NI>.) In 2019 OGHS helped provide timely aid to victims of disasters in Australia, the United States, and many other countries.

Partnerships with local organizations at the site of disaster use OGHS resources very efficiently. In April 2015, Nepal's worst earthquake in 80 years killed nearly 9,000 people. 598,401 homes were destroyed, and 283,585 were damaged. Since 2015 a \$240,000 loan from UCC Disaster Ministries has made possible construction of 94 earthquake-resistant homes in partnership with the Fuller Center for Housing. Families pay back interest-free loans into a revolving fund that is used to build more homes. UCC has funded 74 homes directly, and 20 were built with funds families paid back into the revolving fund. As funds continue to revolve, more homes can be built. (ucc.org/disaster).

Whether our donations to OGHS address climate-related disasters, epidemics, refugee resettlement, or development, need continues to exceed available resources. For example, only 4.5 per cent of global refugee resettlement needs were met in 2019 (UNHCR, the United Nations' Refugee Agency). Funds generated by OGHS did help in places like Nepal (earthquake recovery), Puerto Rico (earthquake and hurricane recovery), Florida (hurricane recovery), and many more.

Please reach out and give generously on March 22. Giving can be an individual or a group effort. One example of innovative fund raising here in the Upper Midwest home is especially inspiring. First Congregational Church, UCC, in New Baltimore, Mich., sells thousands of pasties at its semiannual Pasty Sales. The sales raise about one-fourth of the church's annual operating budget. Ten percent of proceeds go to outside causes including, in 2019, UCC Disaster Ministries. Average attendance at Sunday worship is just under 100, reported the Rev. Henry C. Brinker, Pastor. More than 60 church members and friends volunteered at a recent Pasty Sale. Who in the upper Midwest can resist a warm pasty, especially when buying enables a church to "Be the Church," giving aid and comfort to victims of disasters?

