



Adapting Disaster Response For COVID-19



In early March, the Nashville Metro Area was devastated by severe tornadoes. Twenty-six people were killed, more than 300 were injured, and thousands experienced property damage or loss. New Covenant Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) responded immediately, with support from Week of Compassion--in spite of damage to their own church facility. With so many of their neighbors in need, the church became a hub of

neighborhood relief activity. Church members and members of the wider community stepped in to volunteer, collecting and distributing needed supplies, assessing damage in the area, and serving hot meals from a tent on the church lawn.

But shortly after the storm, COVID-19 concerns meant new social distancing guidelines. The church could no longer gather large crowds to distribute necessities while also keeping everyone safe. Like many communities recovering from disaster, the people of Nashville and the congregation of NCCC had to adapt quickly in order to continue serving their neighbors. They limited access to the distribution center, controlling the flow of people to just a few at a time so volunteers and recipients could maintain distance. Soon, even these measures were insufficient.

While the COVID-19 pandemic stands as its own disaster, other natural disasters continue to occur. Right now especially, at the onset of tornado and flood season, communities are making preparations to weather the next storm, even as some continue recovery from previous events, all while facing new obstacles created by social distancing. In every stage of disaster response--from early relief, through long-term recovery--the COVID-19 pandemic creates new complications that will require creative solutions. In partnership with local congregations and communities, Week of Compassion continues to respond to current needs, while making plans to enable continued response through the duration of this pandemic.

Just as NCCC had to adjust their response to the March tornadoes, Week of Compassion, Disciples Volunteering, and many of our partners through National VOAD, are working to reframe the process of rebuilding. Rather than bringing in volunteers from out of town, workers are encouraged to volunteer in their own local communities, where they will not have to travel long distances or require lodging. Since volunteer groups can no longer participate in large numbers, necessary projects are assigned to small groups who can implement practices that will protect them, and the people they serve.

In Chattanooga, last week's storms caused widespread damage, leaving many without power and with no place to go. Week of Compassion provided support to First Christian Church and Ashland Terrace Christian Church, both of which had members affected. Even as they care for their own members, both of these Disciple congregations are partnering with community agencies, discerning the best ways to

serve their tornado-affected neighbors in light of COVID-19. Through one such collaboration, FCC-Chattanooga is working on plans to help distribute basic food and hygiene supplies to households dually affected by the tornado and pandemic-related economic hardship.

Meanwhile, New Covenant Christian Church has now gone mobile with the services they were at first providing from their property. Volunteers are delivering meals and hygiene items to their unhoused neighbors who live in a nearby tent community under the Jefferson Street Bridge (a camp that has seen many new residents in recent weeks). They also continue the important work of building neighborhood coalitions to facilitate long-term recovery; protect residents from predatory investors and landowners; and advocate for the just distribution of resources across the city and county.

In conversations with Week of Compassion staff, Rev. Dr. Judy Cummings, Senior Minister of NCCC regularly emphasizes the church's commitment to North Nashville--a historic black neighborhood, which has been overlooked during past disaster recoveries. "We are largely focused on making sure residents of this zipcode are able to keep living here," Dr. Cummings says, despite the damage from the tornado and the economic challenges from COVID-19. In being flexible, the church is able to meet growing needs in the wake of these compounding disasters.

We trust that in these difficult days, our Disciple churches and leaders are also experiencing the Living Christ in unexpected places: remaining flexible and open to the Spirit, and adapting existing ministries in order to serve those in need. Congregations, community partners and colleagues are all finding new ways to continue this critical work together. There is great hope in the collective commitment of our churches and partners to the ongoing work of responding to disasters with compassion.

Thank you for your support to Week of Compassion. To make a financial contribution please visit our [website](#) .



Visit our [website](#) for a full map of responses

1-3 Ohio, Storm Relief, Tornado Relief

4 Tennessee, Tornado Relief

5-6 California/Mexico, COVID-19 Relief

7 West Virginia, Flood Relief

8 North Carolina, Hurricane Florence Long-Term Recovery

9 Indiana, COVID-19 Relief

[Click Here to Donate](#)

[View this and other stories on Our Website](#)

[Click here to download a copy of the newsletter](#)

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.

STAY CONNECTED TO WEEK OF COMPASSION:

