

Action Update- November 17

Last week, we shared that communities in Central America, where Week of Compassion has longstanding relationships, were impacted by **Hurricane Eta**. As those communities begin to recover from that storm, many of them are now being affected by Hurricane Iota as it moves through the region. Week of Compassion is in touch with our partners, and will support responses to both storms. Please be in prayer for the people of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and all other areas in the path of this storm. To support this response, you can designate your gift "Hurricane:" on our [website](#); by mailing a check; or by texting "WoC" to 41444.

Answering the Call: Portland FCC Responds to Compound Disasters



Community relationships are important, even in the best of times. In hard times, those connections become essential. And congregations with pre-existing community ties are uniquely placed to meet critical needs when the going gets tough.

In the heart of downtown Portland, Oregon, First Christian Church has had a community feeding ministry in place for more than 25 years. Prior to the pandemic, they were distributing 100-125 sandwiches each week.

When COVID-19 impacted the city, other downtown programs had to close their doors almost overnight. This left a big gap in services, with

many people in need. But because FCC had existing relationships with many of those other ministries and services, they were able to move quickly to help fill the gap. With help from church members and volunteers, with support from Week of Compassion and **other denominational grants** for COVID-19 Relief, and in partnership with other community organizations, First Christian Church has been able to expand their capacity in a significant way. The church has increased the number of people they reach nearly tenfold. They have opened their doors to house a ministry that would otherwise have closed. And with deliveries of 7 tons of food per week from the Oregon Food Bank, church partners and volunteers sort and organize the food and help distribute the packages to neighbors in need.

Because of their long-standing presence in the community, and long history of working to

feed unhoused and lower income neighbors, the church also knew that a “one size fits all” approach to food distribution would not work in their neighborhood. Portland’s cultural diversity makes for unique needs among families from different cultural backgrounds. In order to honor those different cultures, and to preserve the dignity of those they serve, FCC works across their wide network of partners to exchange food where needed. Pastor Cynthia McBride offers the example of cheese -- while not a common ingredient for some families, it is a cultural staple for others; partners at FCC have been able to share and coordinate these resources. Eventually, they developed both an Asian pantry and a Latinx pantry.

With worship happening remotely, the building was almost entirely dedicated to the onsite feeding partnership, which grew to incorporate other downtown programs. The church also shared space to offer showers, laundry, and device charging for their houseless neighbors three days per week. Even without regular church programs happening, the building was seeing more traffic than usual.

Then, as the church continued to adapt to the needs of the pandemic, smoke from the wildfires that had affected so much of their state began to encroach upon the city. At one point, for a full week, Portland had the worst air quality in the world. It was hazardous, and people were not supposed to be outside at all.

If you don’t have a house, that is an especially tough situation.

This development posed further challenges to the newly expanded ministry at FCC, which had been happening primarily outdoors due to the pandemic. Now, the houseless neighbors-- many of whom were relying on the church for food support-- also had no place to go.

Through those challenging days of the wildfires, the people of First Christian continued responding to an ever-changing situation, working to meet the needs of some of their most vulnerable neighbors. With additional support from Week of Compassion, the church was able to offer water, as well as N-95 masks to their houseless friends. Filtration masks have been hard to come by during COVID-19-- and were especially appreciated by those living outdoors with the dangerous air quality every day.

“I’m so thankful for the congregation’s consistent response to the crisis,” says Pastor Cynthia McBride. “The response from the congregation has been one of thankfulness and gratitude. Some churches might say that if *we* can’t be in the building, *nobody* should, but that’s not the response here. It really reflects the heart of the congregation, that they want to care for neighbors in need... I’m humbled and honored to pastor with people who are passionate about the gospel and living out Christ’s call to love our neighbors.”

“Every gift the church has received has been helpful in underwriting this ministry... Week of Compassion has really been a blessing. We have the awareness that, in the midst of any crisis, as Disciples we know we are connected with people who care.”

As Portland First Christian Church continues to answer the call to serve their neighbors-- and serve WITH their neighbors-- in the midst of extremely challenging circumstances, our wider Church answers the call as well. Your gifts to Week of Compassion empower congregations like FCC to step up in times of crisis; to fill community needs when there are gaps; and to know that they are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses that reaches far beyond their own community, and beyond the sanctuary walls.

Week of Compassion
Responses Since November 9



Texas, Hurricane
Hanna Relief



Oklahoma,
Storm Relief



Guatemala, Hurricane
Eta Response



Honduras, Hurricane
Eta Response



Nicaragua, Hurricane
Eta Response

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

Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

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