

Action Update- July 14

Care for Caregivers: Trauma Care for Puerto Rico Pastors



*The pulpit at Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo)
en La Grama, Ciales, PR*

Photo: Craig Thompson,
Disciple Photo

In Puerto Rico, Disciples of Christ pastors carry the weight of multiple disasters: Hurricanes Maria and Irma (2017), from which many communities continue to rebuild; an ongoing economic crisis; multiple recent earthquakes; and now the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the weight of these crises, church leaders continue to offer faithful leadership and care for their members and neighbors. At the same time, they are experiencing significant accumulated stress, to the detriment of their own physical and mental health.

Following disasters, congregational pastors often play critical roles in recovery. Beyond caring for their own members, they take on leadership roles in the wider community as their neighbors begin to rebuild. Churches

become epicenters of everything from supply distribution to volunteer coordination. This means pastors take on additional workloads, along with the emotional labor of caring for those who have just experienced devastating loss. In many cases, the pastors themselves have also been directly affected by the disaster.

When pastors become caregivers for the entire community--who cares for the caregivers?

To help ensure that leaders can maintain their own wellbeing while continuing to serve and help their communities recover, Week of Compassion worked with denominational leaders in Puerto Rico to provide a training program to support pastors. At the end of June, Dr. Carlos Velazquez Garcia, Executive Director of the Psychotraumatology Institute of Puerto Rico gave the first training for pastors of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico. The training addressed compassion fatigue, toxic stress, trauma risk factors, resilience, and accumulated trauma. In this first training, Pastors learned skills for self-evaluation and for care of their congregations. 76 registered participants took part in the virtual event and gave positive feedback on the experience.

Since the event, many pastors have expressed their gratitude for the opportunity.

General Pastor, Rev. Miguel Morales wrote a pastoral letter to congregations, asking that churches provide time for pastors and their families to rest in the weeks ahead. This much-needed sabbath time provides a welcome sense of relief to those who have been working so hard. As a result, they will be better equipped to continue caring for their congregations.

A second, more comprehensive session is scheduled for later in August, and leaders are already looking forward to this time for further learning and healing. The facilitators anticipate that some pastors will receive referrals for continued counseling or mental health care following that event.

When those who are caring for others do not receive care themselves, everyone suffers. The burden of doing ministry in the midst of compounded trauma can lead to unhealthy patterns for leaders and institutions alike. Burn-out is likely. Compassion fatigue is real.

But compassion is real, too--and it is one of the most powerful tools available in disaster recovery as we help build resilient communities. Your support for Week of Compassion means that our wider Church can be present to lift up leaders as they continue to do the critical work to which they are called. We care for our church leaders so that they can care for others--all as the one Body of Christ.



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-  Missouri, COVID-19 Relief
-  Lebanon, COVID-19 Refugee Food Security
-  Kentucky, COVID-19 Relief
-  Ohio, COVID-19 Relief
-  California, COVID-19 Relief
-  Wisconsin, COVID-19 Relief
-  Puerto Rico, COVID-19 Relief
-  Texas, Hurricane Harvey Long-Term Recovery
-  Alabama, COVID-19 Relief
-  South Carolina, COVID-19 Relief
-  Missouri, Storm Relief
-  Indiana, COVID-19 Relief
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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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