



Week of Compassion

Fire in the Plains

Early last month, while ranchers in the heartland of the country were working hard through the height of calving season, wildfires broke out and rapidly spread across the plains of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Northwest Texas. Within days, over 700,000 acres had burned in Kansas, setting a new record for fire damage and threatening the livelihoods of many.

In Lane County, home of First Christian Church Dighton, at least six homes were destroyed, and many others suffered smoke damage. In Reno County, at least ten homes were destroyed, and several dozen homes suffered damage to wells, water lines and electrical lines. Across the state, ranchers lost grasslands, fence-lines, and cattle.

Rev. Aerii Smith pastors two Western Kansas congregations-First Christian Church Dighton and First Christian Church Utica. Both towns were affected by the fires. Pastor Aerii knows Week of Compassion is "built for disasters" and quickly reached out through the Kansas Region to coordinate support. She was pleased that the process "was simple and easy" and, within three days, congregants who had damage to their properties received support.

With the recovery process only in it's nascent stages across multiple Kansas counties, Week of Compassion has been coordinating with Rev. David Dubovich of Park Place Christian Church in Hutchinson, to support long-term recovery through the Reno County VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster). The church was able to receive and distribute Church World Service clean-up buckets arranged by Week of Compassion and deliver a Week of Compassion grant to the VOAD to help restore water and electrical access and begin other repairs. One retired couple with limited means received assistance with the reconnection of their electrical box. When a VOAD team visited their home to check in and deliver cleaning supplies, the couple remarked, "Thank You is not even a [big] enough phrase to thank everyone for what they have done to help us."

Rev. Smith notes that the most daunting part of the recovery is restoring the scorched land; "It won't be good for grazing for months at least, and maybe years," she explains. This means the long-term impact on the community will be extensive. Despite the challenges, Rev. Smith has seen God acting in her community in the weeks after the fires. "People from neighboring states and communities have been donating hay to sustain the surviving cattle, and the recent rain has readied our community to safely receive it." These events are

reminders "that God is here and with us."

The churches she pastors are also taking an active part in reflecting and spreading God's love in the aftermath of the fires. Motivated by their faith and desire to be more active in mission, her congregations typically take fifth Sundays to participate in service projects. At this end of this month, they plan to serve those who lost fences, homes, or other property in the fires.

Although there remains much work still to be done, Disciples have already made a positive difference through the support of Week of Compassion and the presence of local Disciples congregations in Kansas. For Rev. Smith, the Week of Compassion grants helped her congregations feel "some small sense of hope from our larger Christian community, from our larger Disciples of Christ family." In turn, they and other Disciples across Kansas are offering a sense of hope to their neighbors.

First Quarter's Responses

DISASTER RELIEF AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Africa

- Ethiopia, Drought
- Kenya, Droughts
- Madagascar, Cyclone
- Somalia, Drought
- South Sudan, Famine (2)
- Zimbabwe, Drought

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Peru, Floods

Middle East and Europe

- Syria, Internally Displaced Response

North America

- Canada, Emergency Response
- USA, Emergency Refugee Support
- USA, Long-term Disaster Recovery (2)
- California, Emergency Family Support
- California, Emergency Response
- California, Emergency Solidarity Support
- Colorado, Storm Recovery
- Florida, Storm Relief
- Florida, Long-term Hurricane Recovery
- Kansas, Emergency Response
- Kansas, Wildfires (2)
- Kentucky, Storm Recovery
- Michigan, Long-term Recovery, Flint Water Crisis
- Mississippi, Tornado Relief
- Missouri, Tornado Relief
- North Carolina, Long-term Hurricane Recovery (2)

South Carolina, Hurricane Matthew Recovery
Texas, Flood Relief
Texas, Flood Recovery
Texas, Storm Recovery

DEVELOPMENT, LONG-TERM RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION

Africa

Tanzania, Development

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