Secondary

Student Workbook









CARITAS AUSTRALIA

PROJECT COMPASSION

Unite Against Poverty this Lent

2027

Caritas AUSTRALIA

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IMPORTANT – STUDENT WELLBEING

At Caritas Australia, we believe that all people should be treated with respect and dignity. Everyone has the right to feel safe, especially children and vulnerable adults. Please consider your audience when selecting which stories and activities to share with your class.

Our Safeguarding animation recognises that learning about challenges to the health, wellbeing and safety of others and our earth can be hard. It encourages young people to talk to their teacher or trusted adult if they're feeling worried or upset about anything they have learnt through our resources or activities. The animation also acknowledges Caritas Australia's commitment for children and vulnerable adults to feel valued and heard by encouraging them to share their great ideas with us.

Watch Caritas Australia's Safeguarding Animation

Please note: This resource contains links to external web sites. Caritas Australia takes no responsibility for the content of such sites, nor do links to such sites imply endorsement of the views expressed therein. External links are provided for informational purposes only. Access the full policy here: Caritas Australia's Copyright Policy

Australian Aid

We are a valued partner of the Australian Government, receiving flexible funding under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) each year to implement development and poverty alleviation programs overseas.

Other Available Resources

All our resources are online! Access the films and written stories, teaching materials and our fundraising and awareness raising ideas at caritas.org.au/resources/project-compassion. Below is a list and short description of all the resources, as well as suggestions for use.

	Resource	Description/ Suggested Use
For Students	Student Workbook	A fillable PDF students can complete and submit back to their teacher. Use weekly to 'see, judge and act'. Dedicate 20–30 mins of weekly Religious Education classes. Go beyond RE and share tasks or sections of the research with teachers from other subject areas.
	Secondary Deep Dive	An interactive Thinglink image designed as a central location for students to access information about each of the stories, as well as to help them complete activities throughout the workbook.
	AD Stories	Audio described versions of each story.
For Teachers	School's Guide	A guide for the REC, APRE or Social Justice Leader. Includes tips to plan Project Compassion for the whole school.
	Teacher Handbook	Briefly explores the curriculum and learning opportunities for Project Compassion 2027. Send to subject learning area teachers. Use as PD reading if seeking to integrate global education from a Catholic perspective across curriculum areas.
Media	Weekly Films	Watch in homeroom, assembly or as stimulus for learning tasks in the classroom. There are six films: Introduction to Project Compassion 2027, Patricia's Story (Solomon Islands), Reaksmey's Story (Cambodia) and Yeshareg's Story (Ethiopia), Emergency Response Story (Venezuela), and a Thank you film.
	Photo Galleries	View photos from the field. The photos are available through the Deep Dive (interactive image) for each week. Use these photos to promote rich discussion about the 4 stories.

	Resource	Description/ Suggested Use
All Purpose	Introducing Project Compassion (PPT)	Overview of all 4 stories and the work of Caritas Australia. Share in homeroom or at assembly.
	School's Fundraising Guide	Ideas to inspire fundraising and awareness raising activities that are linked to the Project Compassion stories.
Prayer and Reflection	Ash Wednesday Liturgy	Liturgy of the Word, including distribution of the ashes.
	Prayer (PPT)	Reflection using the Project Compassion prayer and images. Use as a daily or weekly prayer for students or staff, or at an assembly.
	Weekly Reflections	Weekly reflections linking the Project Compassion stories to the Sunday Scripture readings. Use for weekly staff prayer/reflections during Lent or in RE lessons with students.
	Way of the Cross (PPT)	A reflection following the traditional Way of the Cross, to use during Holy Week. Comes with Leaders' Notes.
Telling Others	Newsletter Notices	A brief insert for your weekly school newsletter, explaining the week's Project Compassion story. Include in print/online school communications.
	Social Media Toolkit	Content and assets to share your support of Project Compassion through your social media channels.

Introduction

Welcome to Project Compassion 2027!

Caritas Australia is the international aid and development organisation of the Catholic Church in Australia and is part of one of the largest aid and development networks in the world – Caritas Internationalis – working in over 200 countries and territories.

Each year, Project Compassion runs during the six weeks of the Church season of Lent. We invite people across Australia to help us raise funds AND act in solidarity with the millions of people across the world with whom we work. We ask you to join us in building a more just and fairer world: a world in balance, at peace and free of poverty.

Project Compassion is an opportunity for students to learn about life in different countries through the personal stories of people who have participated in Caritas Australia-supported programs. The notions of our interconnectedness as one human family are embedded throughout the content and suggested learning tasks.

We endeavour to support the integration of a Catholic worldview. Catholicism is a comprehensive way of life that should animate every aspect of how we, as Catholics, view the world.

LENT LINK: PRAYER, FASTING, ALMSGIVING

This is a focused Religious Education task for each week that deepens the link between the Project Compassion stories, the Lenten traditions, themes and Scripture.

By making explicit links, students are encouraged to see how their actions to learn and support the work of the church, through Caritas Australia, are an extension of their faith.

Resources 2027

The bulk of the learning tasks for each story are arranged in a ‘See, Judge, Act’ sequence.

See

Students encounter stories of participants involved in Caritas Australia supported projects through the text, films and photographs. Students witness the challenges and positive changes of people who experience extreme poverty and injustice.

Judge

The Catholic Social Teaching (CST) reflection tasks provide students with a framework to ‘judge’.

Act

Students, in response to what they have learnt and in light of Catholic Social Teaching, practise planning personal and collective responses and start to see how their local action can have a global impact.

Unite Against Poverty

Project Compassion 2027 invites us to ***Unite Against Poverty***. It reminds us that when people work together, change is possible.

Poverty is more than not having enough money. It can mean not having the things people need to live safely and well, such as food, clean water, shelter, health care, education or opportunities.

As members of God's global family, we are called to care for one another and stand alongside people experiencing challenges. Through prayer, learning, fundraising and action, Project Compassion encourages us to recognise our shared humanity and respond with compassion and hope.

When people come together to share their skills, resources and strengths, they can help build communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. By working together, we can create a fairer and more just world and help bring about God's vision of hope, dignity and peace for all.

> *Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*
>
> **Galatians 6:2**

Introducing the Theme to Your Class:

Unite Against Poverty

Help students understand that poverty is not just about lacking money, it can mean going without education, clean water, food, healthcare, or a safe place to live. Explain that by uniting and taking action together, we can make a real difference in the lives of people facing these challenges.

Ask students to think about:

- What does it mean to 'unite'?
- Who are we uniting with?
- What actions can we take as a class or school to show compassion and support?

Invite students to write a message of unity or hope for people experiencing poverty. These could be displayed around a large globe or map in your classroom, showing that we are part of a global community working together to create change.

You might also create a 'Wall of Unity' where students contribute drawings, poems, or pledges that reflect their commitment to ending poverty. These can become prayer or reflection points throughout Lent.

By taking these small but powerful steps, your class can be part of the movement to *Unite Against Poverty*, bringing the message of Jesus to life through action, love and hope.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) Guide

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles cover all spheres of life – the economic, political, ecological, personal and spiritual. The principles are inspired by scripture and the writings of the Pope and other Catholic leaders about social issues.

Caritas Australia's work is shaped by the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.

HUMAN DIGNITY

We believe every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore has inherent dignity that should always be safeguarded.



SUBSIDIARITY AND PARTICIPATION

We believe all people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Subsidiarity requires that decisions are made by people closest and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community.





SOLIDARITY

We believe we are part of one human family and have a responsibility to help each person achieve their full potential.



THE COMMON GOOD

We believe the good of each human person is intimately related to the good of the whole community. We are all responsible for each other.

PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

We believe in prioritising the women, men and children most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice.



CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

We believe that care for our common home is vital for the common good of all people. We believe a true ecological approach is a social approach. We are to be protectors of creation and of one another.



For more on Catholic Social Teaching, including classroom activities, short films and other resources, visit our CST Toolkit.

Photo credits: Caritas Jerusalem (middle left). Peter Caton/ Caritas Australia (bottom left and top right), Caritas Australia (remaining photos).

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Project Compassion Film



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PROJECT COMPASSION
LENTEN PRAYER

Loving God, Father of all,
We hold in our hearts
The hurt and hungry of the world.
Many people do not have enough
food, water, healthcare, education and shelter.
The dignity you give them is not respected.
We pray this Lent,
During which we embrace prayer, fasting and almsgiving,
That the sacrifice of your Son
Will inspire us to reach out to others.
May we *Unite Against Poverty*,
Especially through Project Compassion.
We know that Jesus is the bread of life.
May we, in our turn, be bread for others.
May your Holy Spirit turn hearts of stone,
Into hearts of flesh
For the life of the world and the peace of all creation.
Amen.



Patricia with her friend in their village in Malaita province, Solomon Islands. Photo: Caritas Australia.

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Where We Work

For over 60 years, Caritas Australia has stood alongside communities in Australia and around the world, working together to create lasting change.



CST Film Study Guide



Patricia's Story (Solomon Islands)



Reaksmey's Story (Cambodia)



Yeshareg's Story (Ethiopia)



Emergency Response (Venezuela)

OVERARCHING QUESTION

How are the principles of Catholic Social Teaching evident in the work of Caritas Australia?

- Human Dignity
- Preferential Option for the Poor
- Care for Our Common Home
- Solidarity
- The Common Good
- Subsidiarity and Participation

GUIDED REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- **Human Dignity** – How is the Caritas Australia supported program working to upholding the dignity of the people in the community?
- **Common Good** – How are individual and social rights and responsibilities being fulfilled? How is the program benefiting the whole community?
- **Preferential Option for the Poor** – How is Caritas Australia demonstrating their commitment to working with the most vulnerable and marginalised?
- **Solidarity** – How are the Caritas Australia supported programs an example of solidarity? How is supporting Caritas Australia one way we can act in solidarity?
- **Subsidiarity and Participation** – How are the Caritas Australia supported programs enabling people to participate in their own development and in their community? How are the participants empowered to make decisions that affect them and their community?
- **Care for Our Common Home** – How are the programs encouraging environmental sustainability and equity, and respect for the environment?

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Patricia's Story

Solomon Islands

UNITE AGAINST POVERTY this Lent



14-year-old Patricia sitting outside her home in Malaita province, Solomon Islands. Photo: Caritas Australia

Patricia’s story

Solomon Islands

14-year-old Patricia lives in a rural village in the Malaita province of the Solomon Islands with her parents, three sisters and younger brother. As the eldest child in her family, she has always helped shoulder responsibilities at home. Every day, she supports her family by collecting firewood, grating coconuts, preparing food and caring for her younger siblings.

But until recently, one chore consumed hours of her day and left her too exhausted to think about her future: collecting water.

Before a new water system was installed outside her home, Patricia and her mother had to walk long distances to collect water for their family. The nearest water source was far from home, in a dense and hilly rainforest that is home to poisonous snakes. Because families from surrounding communities relied on the same water source, there were often long queues. Some days, Patricia and her mother would spend hours walking and waiting just to fill their buckets.

The task was physically demanding. Carrying heavy buckets of water over long distances took a toll on Patricia.

"I had to carry very heavy buckets and containers over a long distance," Patricia said. *"It was really hard.“*

On average, collecting water took around two hours every day. During the rainy season, conditions became even more difficult. Flooded rivers and muddy water sources often made access impossible, creating uncertainty and hardship for families who relied on them. For Patricia's father, Lazarus, the daily journey brought constant worry about the safety of his children.

"As a father, I was concerned because the water source was far away and crowded," he explains. *"The water source was so far away that sometimes they returned home after dark. It was not safe."*



Patricia collecting water from a water source that is located in a dense forest 1-2km from her village. Photo: Caritas Australia

Photos: Caritas Australia

The burden of collecting water affected many aspects of Patricia's life, including her education. After spending hours walking and carrying water, she often returned home exhausted.

"The buckets were so heavy, and the water source was so far away," Patricia remembers. *"When I came home, I didn't feel like studying."*

Over time, Patricia lost interest in school and eventually stopped attending. Like many children with significant household responsibilities, the demands of daily life made it difficult to focus on learning.

Access to clean water has been a long-standing challenge for many communities in the Malaita province. Its mountainous terrain and scattered settlements make it difficult to establish and maintain water supply systems.

Many areas lack proper water treatment and distribution infrastructure, resulting in unsafe drinking water. Malaita is also highly vulnerable to climate change, with floods, droughts and cyclones damaging water systems, contaminating freshwater sources and disrupting rainwater collection.

According to the World Bank (2024), at least 28% of the population in the Solomon Islands, more than 1 in 4 people, do not have access to basic drinking water services, and 65% do not have access to basic sanitation services (World Bank, 2024). Only 59.9% of girls successfully complete lower secondary education (World Bank, 2023). Many communities rely on contaminated water sources, leading to waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea and cholera. Limited access to safe water also hampers hygiene and increases the risk of malnutrition and child mortality.

The Common Home project, run in partnership with the Catholic Diocese of Auki, works to improve access to water, hygiene and sanitation. The project rehabilitates gravity-fed water systems, constructs sanitation facilities, builds pit latrines and handwash stations, and provides hygiene training.

Today, thanks to the new water system supported by the Common Home project, life in Patricia's village has been transformed. A water tap now stands just metres from Patricia's family's home. Instead of walking long distances every day, Patricia can collect water quickly and safely. Her family can now access clean water whenever they need it.

When Patricia turns on the tap, she is not just accessing clean water. She is gaining time to learn, time to dream and time to build the future she wants. For a 14-year-old who dreams of becoming a teacher and helping her family, that changes everything.







Patricia's Story Learning Activities

A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

Human Dignity

- A belief that every person is made in the image of God and is intrinsically valuable and worthy of respect, simply because they are human
- A quality of being human, independent of ethnicity, creed, gender, sexuality, age or ability
- A reality challenged by poverty, hunger, lack of water and injustice

A. How is human dignity demonstrated in Patricia's story?

B. How can supporting Project Compassion help people to live with dignity and reach their full potential?

Scripture Connection - John 4:7-15

Read the Scripture passage and reflect on the following:

Why is water so important in both this Scripture and Patricia's story?

Why should access to clean water be considered a human right?

How can Christians respond to communities that lack access to basic necessities?

Patricia's Story Learning Activities

FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

PRAYER

Write a prayer inspired by Patricia's story.

FASTING

Patricia spent up to two hours each day collecting water for her family. Choose one convenience you regularly rely on and go without it for a set period (for example, social media, streaming services, gaming, or takeaway food).

Daily Journal or Reflection

Keep a simple journal about your experience.

Prompt questions:

- What convenience did I choose to give up?
- How did this affect my daily routine?
- What frustrations or challenges did I experience?
- How does this compare with the challenges Patricia faced each day?
- What does this activity reveal about the things I take for granted?

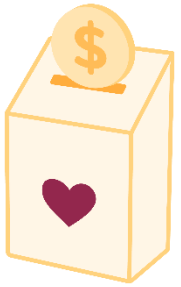
ALMSGIVING

Research one way that access to clean water can improve a person's quality of life.

Write a short reflection explaining:

- Why clean water is about more than drinking.
- How access to water supports human dignity.
- Why supporting communities through Project Compassion matters.

Consider making a donation to Project Compassion as a practical response to your learning.



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Reaksmey's Story

Cambodia

UNITE AGAINST POVERTY this Lent



Reaksmey standing outside the kitchen in Epic Arts Café, where he now works. Photo: Caritas Australia

Reaksmey's Story

Cambodia

23-year-old Reaksmey is from Kampot province in Cambodia and lives with a hearing disability. After his mother died 15 days after he was born, Reaksmey was raised by his two aunts. Growing up, communication was difficult for Reaksmey and his family, as none of them knew sign language.

'Since I was small until I grew up, I found it very challenging to communicate with family, with my friends, with my community because I have a hearing disability. I can't talk to people and I cannot hear people,' Reaksmey shared.

School was also challenging. He found it difficult to communicate with his classmates and experienced discrimination.

'I went to school to grade six, but I felt sad because I couldn't communicate with my friends, I couldn't hear my friends. I always stayed alone. My other friends just talked to each other, but I was alone,' he shared.

Because of this discrimination, Reaksmey left school after grade six and spent most of his time at home helping on the family farm.

In Cambodia, children with disabilities often face discrimination and challenges in accessing education. Sokny Onn, CEO of Epic Arts, said negative attitudes towards disability remain common.

'The majority of people still think that people with disability was caused by karma, that we were not a good people from previous life,' she said.

The Inclusive Education in Kampot project, delivered with local partner Epic Arts, is dedicated to opening doors for children with disabilities, ensuring they can learn, grow, and thrive alongside their peers. It supports children and young people with disabilities through inclusive education, sign language classes, vocational (job skills) training and art programs.



Reaksmey baking bagels in the kitchen at Epic Arts café. Photo: Caritas Australia

Photos: Caritas Australia







When Reaksmey participated in the project, he was able to learn sign language and discovered a way to communicate for the first time in his life.

The project also helped provide Reaksmey with a bicycle so that he could travel to and from the centre. He made friends, developed new skills and discovered ways to express himself through dance and art.

'Before I joined Epic Arts, I was lost and alone. After I joined Epic Arts, I got the opportunity to draw and paint. The drawing and painting allow me to express my feelings and emotions,' he shared.

Through vocational training, Reaksmey developed an interest in hospitality and applied for a job at the Epic Arts Café, a social enterprise that has employed people with and without disabilities for 20 years.

After successfully completing the interview process, he was hired as a kitchen hand. He now prepares ingredients, makes bread and bagels, and works alongside colleagues, many of whom also have hearing disabilities.

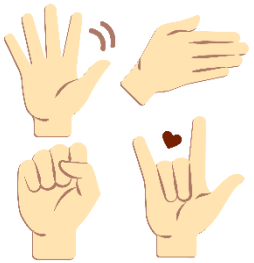
'What I enjoy the most is cooking and making food at Epic Arts café. At the same time, I can make friends and that makes me happy,' Reaksmey shared. *'My hope for the future is to continue working at Epic Arts café for a long time. I also want to learn different skills so I can earn better income in the future.'*

Sokny said Reaksmey's journey has also helped his family better understand the rights and abilities of people with disabilities.

Reaksmey has a simple message:

'Please encourage people with disabilities to have the opportunity to participate, to have the opportunity to find jobs, just like everyone else.'





Reaksmey's Story Learning Activities

A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

Subsidiarity and Participation

- From the Latin word subsidium, meaning support or assistance
- The idea that people and groups have the right to participate in decisions that affect them and, when they can't meet their own needs, other parts of society (e.g. the government) act according to their duty to assist with resources and support
- An approach to common life that promotes participation and ensure people are architects of their own development

A. How is Subsidiarity and Participation demonstrated in Reaksmey's story?

B. How can supporting Project Compassion help people participate more fully in their communities and achieve their goals?

Scripture Connection – Romans 12:4-8

In this passage, St Paul reminds us that God has given every person unique gifts and talents. Although our gifts may be different, each one is valuable and has a role to play in building up the community.

How did learning sign language help Reaksmey recognise, develop and share his gifts with others?

How does Reaksmey's story challenge the assumption that a person's limitations define what they can achieve?

In what ways can communities help people discover and use their God-given gifts?

Reaksmey's Story Learning Activities

FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

PRAYER

Write a prayer inspired by Reaksmey's story.

FASTING

For one week, fast from making assumptions about others. Instead, look for the gifts, talents and strengths they bring to your community.

Daily Journal or Reflection

Keep a simple journal about your experience.

Prompt questions:

- What assumptions do people sometimes make about others?
- How did assumptions affect Reaksmey's life?
- What gifts and talents was Reaksmey able to share once he had opportunities to participate and connect with others?
- What can I do to recognise the strengths of others?

ALMSGIVING

Consider one way you could give your time, talents or support to others this Lent.

This could involve helping a younger student, volunteering in your local community, supporting a family member or participating in a service initiative.

Reflection Questions

- How did the support of others help Reaksmey build confidence and develop his talents?
- Why is giving our time an important form of almsgiving?
- How can I use my gifts and talents to support others?





Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Yeshareg's Story

Ethiopia

UNITE AGAINST POVERTY this Lent

Yeshareg at home with her harvested potatoes. Photo: Peter Caton/Caritas Australia

Yeshareg's Story

Ethiopia

30-year-old Yeshareg lives in the Kaffa Zone of south-western Ethiopia with her husband, Tamiru, and their two children, Henok and Mintamir.

Life has not always been easy for Yeshareg and her family. In the area where they live, droughts and floods often make it difficult to grow food. There were times when her family struggled to find enough to eat and could only afford one or two meals a day.

'Back then, hunger was a constant struggle. Life was very difficult. On good days, we ate only twice. Other days, we had just one meal,' Yeshareg shared. *'We rarely washed our clothes because we couldn't afford soap.'*

In Ethiopia, more than 10 million people face hunger and malnutrition and 55% of children under five are suffering from malnutrition (World Food Programme 2025). Fuel shortages linked to the war in the Middle East have also sharply increased fuel prices countrywide, with the cost of staple food prices rising sharply.

The CLEAR project (Innovative Climate-Smart Livelihood Enhancement for Resilience Building Project), run by Caritas Ethiopia, helps communities improve food security and income through improving farming skills, income diversification and access to basic services such as clean water and sanitation.

Through the project, Yeshareg joined a women's savings and potato-farming group. She learned how to grow vegetables including potatoes, cabbage, beetroot and carrots in her garden.

'Since joining the organisation, I've learned to grow cabbage, potatoes, beetroot, carrots and other vegetables in my garden,' she said. *'Our garden is a model for our community. We grow potatoes, eat some, sell the rest, and save the income.'*



Yeshareg cultivating sweet potatoes in her garden in her village.
Photo: Peter Caton/Caritas Australia

Photos: Peter Caton/Caritas Australia

Last year, Yeshareg harvested 400 kilograms of crops. She sold 300 kilograms and kept 100 kilograms to feed her family. The money she earned helped pay for her children's school uniforms, exercise books and other school supplies.

'Our lives are much better now. We've gained so much and improved our lives. Before joining, even fruit was hard to get. Now my life has completely changed,' Yeshareg said.

The project also helped Yeshareg and other women in her community learn how to save money together. Their savings group now has 50,000 Birr set aside to support members and help them plan for the future.

As part of the project, Yeshareg received a sheep, which later had lambs. She sold one of the lambs and used the money to help pay for her children's education expenses.

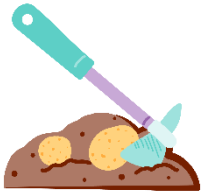
Yeshareg hopes that one day her community will have better health services and access to clean drinking water.

'We also need clean drinking water. Our children don't have clean drinking water,' she said.

From struggling to find enough food to providing three meals a day for her family, Yeshareg's life has changed significantly through the support of the CLEAR project.

'We're happy with our life now. If we keep this up, our future will be even better.'

Along with generous donor support, the CLEAR project is supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).









Yeshareg's Story Learning Activities

A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

The Common Good

- Something "belonging to all and meant for all", e.g. the climate (Pope Francis, Laudato Si' n23)
- An idea that ensures people reach their full potential as individuals and communities
- What happens when individual rights to personal possessions and community resources are balanced with our collective responsibility to meet the needs of others

A. How is the Common Good demonstrated in Yeshareg's story?

B. How is supporting Project Compassion one way you can demonstrate a commitment to the Common Good?

Scripture Connection – Parable of the Sower

(Mark 4:1-9)

Read the Scripture passage and reflect on the following:

Which parts of Yeshareg's story connect to the image of seeds growing in good soil?

What "seeds of hope" can you identify in Yeshareg's story?

How can small actions or opportunities lead to long-term change?

Yeshareg's Story Learning Activities

FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

PRAYER

Write a prayer inspired by Yeshareg's story.

FASTING

For one week, fast from food waste. Pay attention to the food you throw away and make a conscious effort to eat what you take, store food carefully and use leftovers where possible.

Daily Journal or Reflection

Keep a simple journal about your experience.

Prompt questions:

- How much food did I waste during the week?
- Why do you think food waste is a global issue?
- How might wasting food affect people and the environment?
- How did this activity help me better understand the importance of food security?
- What changes could I make to reduce food waste in the future?

ALMSGIVING

Yeshareg used the income from her harvest to invest in her family's future. This Lent, consider one way you can invest in the future of others through generosity. This might include donating to Project Compassion, supporting a fundraising initiative, or sharing resources with someone in need.

Reflection Questions

- How can a small act of generosity create long-term opportunities for others?
- What is one way your support could help create positive change in someone's life?
- How does almsgiving help build a more just and compassionate world?



Content Warning

The following story includes real images and information from communities affected by the earthquakes in Venezuela, which some readers may find distressing.

It is important to consider the needs and experiences of students when using this resource.



Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Emergency Response

Venezuela

UNITE AGAINST POVERTY this Lent

Buildings destroyed by the Venezuela earthquake. Photo: Caritas Venezuela

Emergency Response

Venezuela

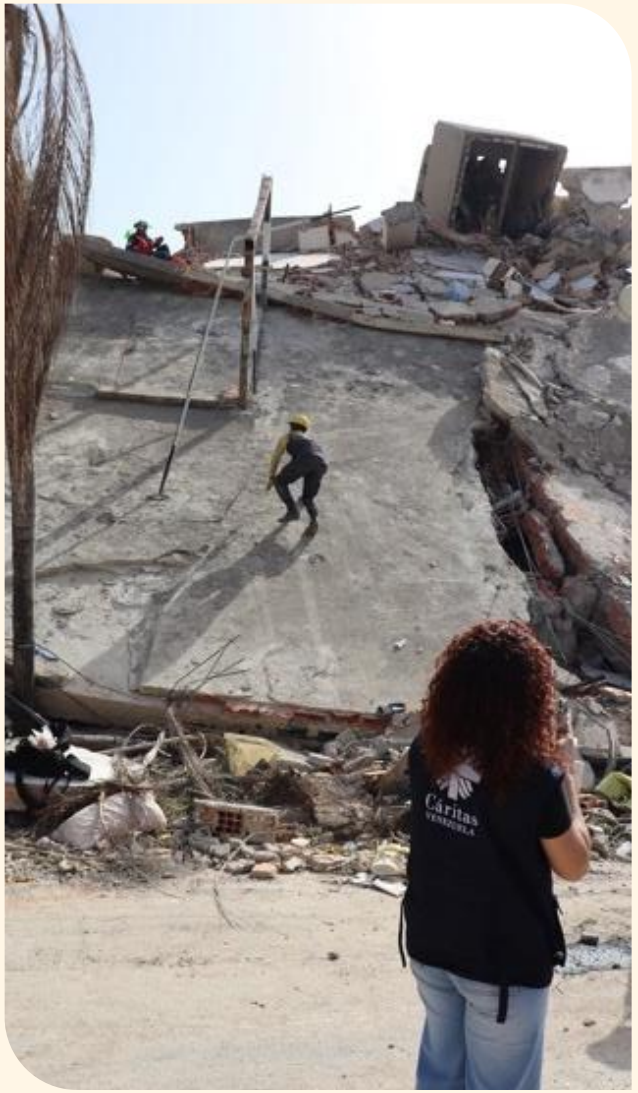
On 24 June 2026, two major earthquakes struck Venezuela within minutes of each other, devastating communities across Caracas and the country's central and coastal regions. More than 6,000 people were confirmed dead, while thousands more were injured or missing. Buildings and homes collapsed or became unsafe, vital infrastructure was severely damaged, and essential services were widely disrupted.

The disaster struck a country already facing immense humanitarian need. Before the earthquakes, around 7.9 million people in Venezuela required humanitarian assistance. Many families were already living with food shortages, limited access to healthcare and unreliable basic services. The earthquakes have placed people who were already vulnerable, including children, older people, pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses, at even greater risk.

In affected communities, local Church parishes were among the first places people turned to for help. Parishes opened their doors to shelter displaced families and distributed emergency supplies wherever they could. This immediate, community-led action created a foundation for a broader response coordinated through Caritas Venezuela.

Caritas Venezuela has long had a presence in communities across the country, including remote and hard-to-reach areas. It has been working in the country since 1963 and is present in all states across the country through its Diocesan network. Prior to the earthquake, the organisation was supporting over 60,000 vulnerable households amid an economic crisis that saw 7.9 million people already requiring humanitarian assistance before the earthquakes struck.

Three weeks into the response, Caritas Venezuela received more than 19,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid, with 84 per cent already distributed to families affected by the disaster. The response delivered 17,808 full emergency assistance kits for families, 10,820 food kits and 6,988 hygiene kits. More than 6.8 million litres of water were also distributed, together with 96,000 units of medicines and medical supplies for hospitals and healthcare facilities.



Rescue teams searching for survivors of the earthquake.
Photo: Caritas Venezuela

Caritas Venezuela reported that aid was being distributed faster than new supplies were arriving. This reflected the reach of the relief effort, while also underscoring the continuing need for support as communities began moving from immediate emergency assistance towards recovery.

Volunteers have been central to the response. Around 10,000 people joined Caritas teams through local parishes and dioceses, helping to receive, sort, pack and distribute aid. Their work has enabled emergency assistance to reach thousands of families through a network rooted in local communities.

Janeth Márquez, Executive Director of Cáritas Venezuela, described the urgency of the first phase of the response:

'Our first priority is to save lives and search for the injured. Very soon we will need to provide supplies, water, food and hygiene items for those in disaster relief centres or on the streets.' she said.

The response is focused on several connected priorities. In the immediate phase, teams are supporting efforts to save lives and search for injured people. They are also preparing to provide water, food, hygiene items and other supplies to people staying in relief centres or living on the streets because their homes are uninhabitable. As the response develops, Caritas Venezuela plans to assess people's situations more fully so assistance can address their needs holistically.

Monsignor José Luis Azuaje Ayala, President of Caritas Venezuela, spoke of the scale of the disaster and the hope found in solidarity: *'We are visiting the affected areas, as you can see, the scale of which has truly shaken us, sharing the suffering of the people and above all looking forward to the solidarity of the Venezuelan people is what fills us with hope at all times.'*

Despite significant progress, thousands of families remain in temporary accommodation, and many may be unable to return to their homes. Continued support will be essential as recovery efforts expand, helping communities address immediate needs while beginning the longer task of rebuilding lives, homes and essential services.

The response demonstrates the strength of local networks in a disaster. Through parishes, dioceses, volunteers and partners, Caritas Venezuela is standing alongside people facing grief, displacement and uncertainty. As emergency relief continues and recovery begins, solidarity will remain vital for families whose needs will extend far beyond the first weeks of the crisis.







Emergency Response Learning Tasks

A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

Solidarity

- A firm and persevering commitment to the common good, which reminds us that everything is related
- The act of standing shoulder to shoulder with others
- A way of saying, 'I'm here with you'.

A. How is solidarity demonstrated through the response to the earthquakes in Venezuela?

B. How is supporting Project Compassion one way you can stand in solidarity with people affected by disasters and emergencies around the world?

Scripture Connection – Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Read the Scripture passage and reflect on the following:

Compare the actions of the Good Samaritan with the response of Caritas and its local partners following the earthquakes in Venezuela. What similarities can you identify?

Why did Jesus choose a Samaritan as the example of compassionate action?

How does this parable challenge us to respond to people experiencing hardship?

Emergency Response Learning Tasks

FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

PRAYER

Write a prayer for the people of Venezuela.

FASTING

For one day, fast from a comfort or convenience you use regularly. Use the time you gain to learn about a humanitarian crisis or pray for people affected by disasters.

Daily Journal or Reflection

Keep a simple journal about your experience.

Prompt questions:

- What did I choose to go without?
- What do I often take for granted?
- How might losing access to basic services, shelter or possessions affect a person after a disaster?
- How did this activity help me reflect on the experiences of people affected by the earthquakes in Venezuela?
- What did this activity teach me about gratitude and solidarity?

ALMSGIVING

People affected by disasters often need support long after the emergency has passed. Consider one way you could support people facing hardship, such as donating to Project Compassion, participating in a fundraiser or raising awareness of a humanitarian crisis.

Reflection Questions

- How can a small act of generosity make a difference during a crisis?
- Why is support important even after the immediate emergency has ended?
- How does almsgiving show solidarity with people experiencing hardship?
- How can my actions help bring hope to others?



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