Secondary

Student Workbook









CARITAS AUSTRALIA

PROJECT COMPASSION

Unite Against Poverty this Lent

2027

Caritas AUSTRALIA

Do you observe Lent regularly? Why/Why not?

What do you know about Lent?

What significance does it have for you?

Throughout Lent, we commit to strengthening our faith through the three pillars: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Pope Francis said:

> …in Lent, *to act also means to pause*. To pause *in prayer*, in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan *in the presence of a wounded brother or sister*. Love of God and love of neighbour are one love… For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying.
>
> (Pope Francis's Lenten Message 2024)

During Lent, we take time to reflect and be strengthened by the Holy Spirit so that we are not indifferent to each other or global poverty. Through Project Compassion, we can stand in solidarity with our neighbours around the world. We can celebrate Caritas Australia's partnerships with other agencies around the world, which support those most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice. Your donations help to strengthen their lives, their families and their communities.

Over the next six weeks of Lent, through Project Compassion, we will explore stories of hope in the Solomon Islands, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Venezuela. Let's focus on how we can enrich our connectedness as a global community.

Prayer

Traditionally Christians pray for themselves and others during this time of Lent. Project Compassion encourages you to pray for the people and communities you encounter through the stories about the poorest of the poor.

Fasting

Fasting is one of the most ancient practices linked to Lent. It can be an aid to prayer, as the pangs of hunger remind us of our hunger for God. Fasting can be linked to our concern for those who are forced to fast by their poverty, those who suffer from the injustices of our economic and political structures, and those who are in need for any reason. Traditionally, abstaining from meat was one way of remembering people who did not have enough to meet their daily needs. Today, some people choose other ways to 'fast' such as limiting time online, stepping away from constant entertainment, or giving up small comforts as a way to reflect and grow in compassion.

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is a sign of our care for others and an expression of our gratitude for all that God has given us. Caring for others is part of many faiths. Almsgiving by Christians is illustrated in the Bible, in Acts 4:33-37. During Project Compassion, reflect on ways you can care for others out of what you have.

How can you come together with your local community to *Unite Against Poverty* this Lent?

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.

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Secondary Deep Dive

The Secondary Deep Dive is an interactive image created as a central location with everything you need to complete this student workbook. This includes the stories and videos for each of the 4 stories.

Whenever you see any of the below icons in your workbook, go to the Secondary Deep Dive and find the matching icon to access the information you need to complete the activity.

Here are some icons to keep an eye out for throughout the workbook:





Click here to view:

Secondary Deep Dive

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 Solomon Islands with her parents, three sisters and younger brother. Like many first-born daughters, 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 journey was not easy. 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.

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.”

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 completely exhausted.



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

"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, school began to feel out of reach. Patricia lost interest in attending and eventually stopped going. Like many children facing significant daily responsibilities, the demands of life at home made it difficult to focus on learning.

The journey to clean water has been a long struggle for many communities in the Malaita province in the Solomon Islands. Many areas lack proper water treatment and distribution systems, which results in unsafe drinking water. Malaita is also highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly rising sea levels and extreme weather events. The island is prone to floods, droughts, and cyclones, which can damage water supply systems, contaminate freshwater sources, and disrupt 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 in the Solomon Islands are forced to rely on contaminated water sources, leading to waterborne diseases like diarrhea and cholera. Limited access to safe water hampers hygiene, increasing the risk of malnutrition and child mortality.

The Common Home project, run in partnership with the Catholic Diocese of Auki, aims to improve access to water, hygiene and sanitation. The project works with communities to rehabilitate gravity-fed water systems and construct sanitation facilities. It also focuses on building pit latrines and handwash stations to improve sanitation in the community, as well as training to promote hygiene and eliminate open defecation.

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.

For Patricia, that extra time has opened the door for her to return to school next year.

Although she admits she once felt she didn't want to go, she now looks forward to learning alongside other children. She wants to make friends, learn to read and write, and gain the education she needs to build a brighter future. When asked what she hopes to become one day, Patricia says that she wants to become a teacher, like her father.







Patricia's Story Learning Tasks

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Task 1 – Comprehension

A. What were some of the challenges faced by Patricia and her family?

B. Explain how Caritas Australia and their partners have supported Patricia and her community.

C. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Patricia's story? (Refer to CST guide on page 3)

D. Why is access to clean water more than just a health issue?

Task 2 – The Ripple Effect of Water

Read / Watch Patricia's story and reflect on how ***her lack of access*** to clean water was influencing different aspects of her life:

Area	Impact
Health	
Education	
Leisure Time	
Family Responsibilities	
Community Wellbeing	
Future Opportunities	

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.



Patricia's Story Country Study

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Secondary Deep Dive Link

What is the population of the Solomon Islands?
What is the population of Australia?

Solomon Islands:

Australia:

Predict life expectancy in the Solomon Islands and Australia.

Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not?

Solomon Islands	Australia
Prediction:	Prediction:
Actual:	Actual:

What percentage of the population in the Solomon Islands using at least basic drinking water services?

What percentage of the population use basic sanitation services?

List 3 ways a lack of reliable access to clean water can affect poverty levels.

The Laudato Si' Goals

Identify one or more Laudato Si' goals and explain how they are being addressed through the work of Caritas Australia and its partners.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Select two SDG goals that are relevant to Patricia's story. Explain your selection.

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

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

Reaksmey grew up in the Kampot province in southern Cambodia. He never knew his mother, who passed away from a heart attack 15 days after he was born.

When Reaksmey's dad re-married and moved out to live with his new family, Reaksmey was left to be raised by his two aunts. But despite their best efforts, communication was difficult as none of them knew any sign language.

School was a struggle for Reaksmey. Without the ability to speak or hear, he was not accepted by his fellow classmates who discriminated against him because of his disabilities.

Because of the discrimination he experienced from his classmates at school, Reaksmey quit school after grade six and never went back. From there on, he mostly stayed at home and looked after the cows in his family farm.

In Cambodia, children with a disability are often severely disadvantaged when it comes to their education prospects. Sokny Onn, the CEO of Epic Arts (and a former Epic Arts student) said that longstanding community attitudes about disability in Cambodia often leads to discrimination against people with disabilities.

The Inclusive Education in Kampot project is dedicated to opening doors for children with disabilities, ensuring they can learn, grow, and thrive alongside their peers. Working with local Cambodian NGO Epic Arts, the project supports teachers and schools with the tools and learning environment they need to create truly inclusive classrooms, to ensure that children with disabilities can access education, and enjoy the same rights as every other child.

It also supports young people like Reaksmey with opportunities to help them participate more fully in society through sign language classes, vocational training and art.

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

The project also helped provide Reaksmey with a bicycle so that he can travel to and from the centre.



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

At Epic Arts, Reaksmey was able to connect with and form friendships with other young people with a disability. He also participated in a range of classes including dancing, painting, handicraft, computer, coffee making and vocational training.

The dance training centre at Epic Arts has special floor mats that vibrate whenever there is music, which enables people with a hearing disability to 'feel' the music, even if they cannot hear it.

'When I dance, I can't hear the music, but I use eye contact with my team,' Reaksmey shared.

With support from his art teacher, who also has a disability, Reaksmey found a way to channel his thoughts and emotions through art.

As his confidence grew, so did his ambitions. Reaksmey took part in vocational training and became especially interested in hospitality. With encouragement from his teachers, he applied for a job at the Epic Arts Café, a social enterprise that has been providing employment to people with and without disabilities for 20 years.

After successfully passing the job interview, Reaksmey was hired as a kitchen hand. As part of his role, he prepares ingredients in the kitchen, making bread and bagels, and working alongside his colleagues, many of whom also have a hearing disability. He hopes to continue developing his skills and learn how to make coffee and smoothies.

Sokny said that Reaksmey's growth and transformation since joining the project has changed how his family sees him.

'His family always thought that Reaksmey won't be able to do anything, or learn, or find a job and earn money. To see Reaksmey learn a new skill and get at job at Epic Arts café and earn some income – that is a big impact for Reaksmey's life and for his family,' she said.

Reaksmey has a message he wants to share with people everywhere about the importance of inclusion.

'I just want to share a message to everyone to stop discriminating people with disability, like me, who have a hearing disability or those with physical disabilities,' he shared.

'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 Tasks

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Task 1 – Comprehension

A. What were some of the challenges faced by Reaksmey?

B. Explain how Caritas Australia and its partners have supported Reaksmey.

C. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Reaksmey's story? (Refer to CST guide on page 3)

D. Why is feeling included more than about just being present?

Task 2 – A Message Worth Hearing

Read Reaksmey's statement:

'I just want to share a message to everyone to stop discriminating people with disability, like me, who have a hearing disability or those with physical disabilities'

Reflect on Reaksmey's experiences growing up and his journey through Epic Arts.

A. What experiences in Reaksmey's life may have led him to share this message?

B. What does his message reveal about the impact that inclusion and belonging can have on a person's life?

C. How does Reaksmey's story challenge common assumptions about disability and participation in society?





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 school 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?



Reaksmey's Story Country Study

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Secondary Deep Dive Link

What is the population of Cambodia?
What is the population of Australia?

Cambodia:

Australia:

Predict life expectancy in Cambodia and compare it to Australia.

Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not?

Cambodia	Australia
Prediction:	
Actual:	Actual:

What percentage is the completion rate for children of primary school age in Cambodia?

Approximately what percentage of the population in Cambodia lives with a disability?

List 3 ways inclusion can help people share their gifts and talents.

The Laudato Si' Goals

Identify one or more Laudato Si' goals and explain how they are being addressed through the work of Caritas Australia and its partners.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Select two SDG goals that are relevant to Reaksmey's story. Explain your selection.

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 Kaffa Zone in south-western Ethiopia with her husband, Tamiru, and her 9-year-old son Henok and 4-year-old daughter Mintamir. In the area where she lives, food insecurity and extreme weather are a common occurrence. Droughts make it hard to grow crops, while during the wet season floods cut off access to roads and destroy farms.

Life has not been easy for Yeshareg and her family. Her family's days were often defined by scarcity. Food was never certain. Meals came twice a day at best, sometimes less. Even soap and basic sanitary items were precious.

'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.

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 (Innovative Climate-Smart Livelihood Enhancement for Resilience Building Project) project aims to support communities in Ethiopia who experience persistent drought, climate shocks, water scarcity, and limited livelihood opportunities.

Run by our partner Caritas Ethiopia, the project helps improve the livelihood of women, men and youth through better agricultural practices, income diversification, and improvement in basic services such as drinking water supply and household sanitation so that community members have increased food security and increased income.

The project aims to support 14,000 people in Ethiopia over five years, and so far, has supported 8,864 people since the project's inception.

Through the CLEAR project, Yeshareg was able to join a women's savings and potato-farming group. For the first time, Yeshareg began to cultivate vegetables like potatoes that could both feed her family and be sold in the market.



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

Last year, Yeshareg harvested 400 kilograms of crops – selling 300kg and keeping 100kg for her family. Through the sales of the potatoes, she was able to earn enough money to pay for her children's school uniforms and materials. She can also prepare nutritious meals for her daughter, making sure she started each day nourished.

The project didn't stop at farming. Yeshareg and other women in her community formed a savings group, contributing regularly and supporting one another. Over time, they built up significant savings, something that would have once felt impossible.

'We've learned to save money. We save money every week. Together, we've saved 50,000 Birr. It has been a great help. It has inspired us… I've set aside money for [my children's] schooling,' she said.

As part of the project, Yeshareg was given a sheep which gave birth to offsprings. She was then able to sell the lamb and use the additional income from her sales to pay for her children's education expenses.

In the future, Yeshareg would like to see improved medical facilities in her community, as well as access to clean, drinking water.

From eating sometimes just one meal a day to regularly eating three meals a day, Yeshareg has come a long way thanks to the support of the CLEAR project. For her, the future looks brighter than before and she is determined to continue working hard to ensure her children can grow up healthy and happy.

The CLEAR project is also supported by the Australian government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).









Yeshareg's Story Learning Tasks

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Task 1 – Comprehension

A. What were some of the challenges faced by Yeshareg and her family?

B. Explain how Caritas Australia and its partners have supported Yeshareg.

C. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Yeshareg's story? (Refer to CST guide on page 3)

D. How can a lack of food security affect different aspects of a person's life?

Task 2 – Difficult Choices

Before joining the CLEAR project, Yeshareg often struggled to provide enough food for her family. She also found it difficult to afford basic necessities such as soap, school supplies and other household needs.

Imagine you are in Yeshareg's situation and have limited money to spend each month. Rank the following items from 1 (highest priority) to 8 (lowest priority):

___ Food

___ Clean drinking water

___ Soap and hygiene products

___ Repairing your home

___ Exercise books and school supplies

___ Seeds for planting crops

___ Healthcare and medicines

___ Saving for the future

Discuss :

- Which items did you rank differently?
- How did you decide what was most important?
- Were there any items you found difficult to rank?
- What does this activity reveal about the choices families experiencing poverty may have to make?
- If you could only afford THREE of these items, which would you choose? Would your rankings stay the same or change? Why?

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?



Yeshareg's Story Country Study

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Secondary Deep Dive Link

What is the population of Ethiopia?
What is the population of Australia?

Ethiopia:

Australia:

Predict life expectancy in Ethiopia and compare it to Australia.

Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not?

Ethiopia	**Australia**
Prediction:	
Actual:	Actual:

What percentage of the population in Ethiopia are undernourished?

What percentage of the population in Ethiopia lives on less than $10 a day?

List 3 ways food security can affect more than just what people eat.

The Laudato Si' Goals

Identify one or more Laudato Si' goals and explain how they are being addressed through the work of Caritas Australia and its partners.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Select two SDG goals that are relevant to Yeshareg's story. Explain your selection.

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Content Warning

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

If you find this content upsetting, speak with your teacher or another trusted adult.

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Emergency Response

Venezuela

UNITE AGAINST POVERTY this Lent



Buildings destroyed by the Venezuela earthquake. Photo: Caritas Venezuela

Emergency Response

Venezuela

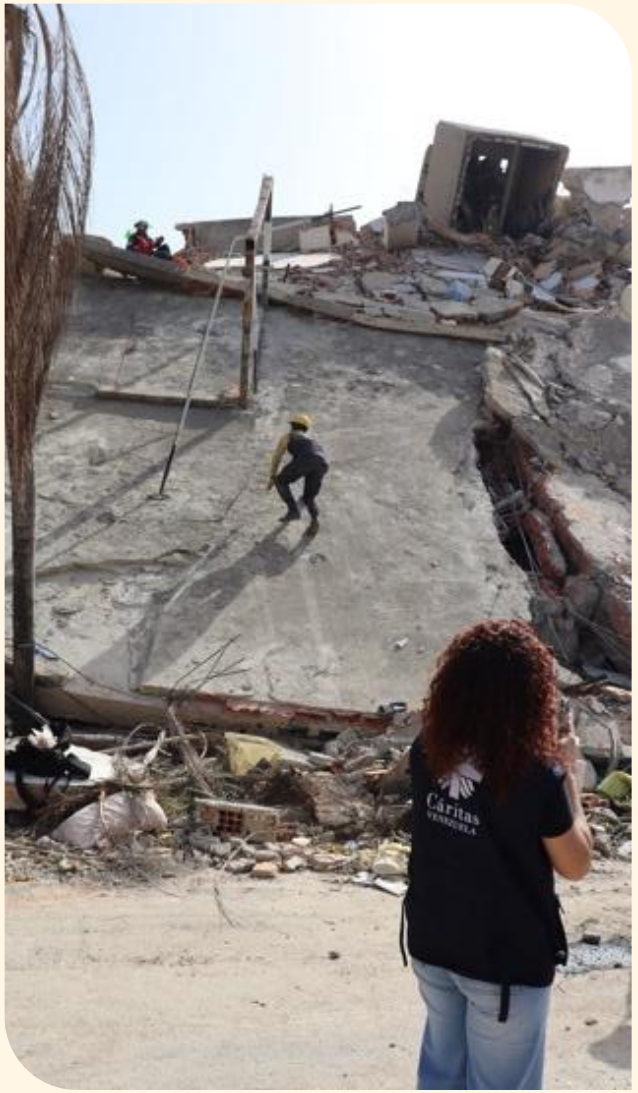
On 24 June 2026, two major earthquakes struck Venezuela within minutes of each other, devastating communities across Caracas and the country's central and coastal regions. More than 6,000 people were confirmed dead, while thousands more were injured or missing. Buildings and homes collapsed or became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

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Task 1 – Comprehension

A. What happened in Venezuela in June 2026, and how did it affect local communities?

B. Explain how Caritas Australia and its partners have supported the people of Venezuela.

C. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in the Emergency Response story? (Refer to CST guide on page 3)

D. Why can natural disasters have long-lasting impacts on communities?

Task 2 – When Disaster Strikes

The earthquakes made an already difficult situation in Venezuela even worse.

Research one of the following issues that people in Venezuela were experiencing before the earthquakes:

- Food shortages
- Access to healthcare
- Access to basic services
- Economic challenges

Write a short 1-page summary explaining:

- What the issue was
- How it affected people's daily lives
- Why the earthquakes may have made the situation more difficult



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?



Emergency Response Learning Tasks

Caritas AUSTRALIA | PROJECT COMPASSION

Secondary Deep Dive Link

What is the population of Venezuela?
What is the population of Australia?

Venezuela:

Australia:

Predict life expectancy in Venezuela and compare it to Australia.

Find out the correct answer. Does this surprise you? Why/Why not?

Cambodia	Australia
Prediction:	
Actual:	Actual:

What percentage of the population in Venezuela using at least basic drinking water services?

What percentage of the population in Venezuela lives on less than $10 a day?

List 3 ways that a person's basic needs are impacted by disasters.

The Laudato Si' Goals

Identify one or more Laudato Si' goals and explain how they are being addressed through the work of Caritas Australia and its partners.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Select two SDG goals that are relevant to the Emergency Response story. Explain your selection.

Thank You

Photo Credits

- Patricia's Story (Solomon Islands) – Caritas Australia
- Reaksmey's Story (Cambodia) – Caritas Australia
- Yeshareg's Story (Ethiopia) – Peter Caton/Caritas Australia
- Emergency Response Story (Venezuela) – Caritas Venezuela

Students

- Learning about challenges to the health, wellbeing and safety of others and our earth can be hard. If you are feeling worried or upset about anything you have learnt about through this resource, make sure you talk to your teacher or trusted adult. They can share your concerns via our website.
- Do you have an idea for how Caritas Australia can improve our school resources? We would love to hear it! Please email education@caritas.org.au

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.

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