



GIFTS TO LIVE ON



February 18-25 Special Offering 2024 Planning & Resource Guide



 "...they contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."
 + LUKE 21:4

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A wide variety of resources are available online:
weekofcompassion.org/2024

- Children’s Sermon & Activities
- Coloring Pages
- Youth Activities
- Theme Video (English & Spanish)
- Giving Calendar
- Mission Moments
- Worship Resources
- QR Code for Online Giving
- Video Sermons from Week of Compassion Staff



Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. In 2024, Week of Compassion marks 80 years of a single mission: working with partners to alleviate suffering throughout the world, toward the vision of a world where God’s people transform suffering into hope.

A Message From the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When visiting our partners and seeing their work, I am constantly reminded of the tremendous impact of your gifts to Week of Compassion, and the ways you give new life in many corners of the world. On a recent visit with partners in Afghanistan, we met a young widow in Bamyan. Her husband was killed in a bombing, leaving her to care for their three daughters alone, challenged by existing poverty and a disability that makes it almost impossible to work. As a woman in her 20s, and with only daughters and no sons, she is unable to take care of herself and her family, as women are forbidden to be outside the house without male accompaniment. Usually resorting to begging for meager subsistence, this widow and her children have connected to Week of Compassion's local partner, ensuring they have enough to live on.

In her gratitude and generosity, she welcomed us into her tiny mud hut home and invited us to hear her story - a story that now includes the simple gifts of food and clean water, shelter and healing, and education for her three growing girls. **The mission of Week of Compassion continues to be vital in providing relief and hope to communities all over the world.** The work of bringing wholeness in a fragmented world requires many of us, across the whole church, and many partners. We each play an important role, and together, we not only provide relief to others, but also lift each other up in this holy work.

This truth is made plain in the story of the generous widow, found in Luke 21. Week of Compassion follows her lead, when as Disciples we bring an all-that-we-are offering, receive unexpected gifts from unlikely places, and take seriously the gathering and sharing of resources for the sake of those in need. **In the gifts we bring, others find what they need. In the act of giving, the impact carries beyond the giver.** Blessed by God's mercy and multiplied by God's grace, these are truly **GIFTS TO LIVE ON.**

This year, we mark the 80th anniversary of the very first *Week of Compassion* offering. Recent months have seen increasingly severe and frequent natural disasters in the United States, even as the world witnesses ongoing war in Ukraine and the Middle East, earthquakes in Morocco, drought in the Horn of Africa, and flooding in Libya, impacting those regions for years to come. Communities are gaining traction in long-term recovery after devastating tornadoes in Kentucky, repeated hurricanes in Florida, and catastrophic wildfires in Hawaii. Such natural, political, and climate crises continue to increase the numbers of displaced persons worldwide. **Over the past 80 years through Week of Compassion, Disciples have responded to needs around the world, constantly evolving to meet new challenges.** As Rev. Dawn Weaks, who wrote this year's sermon starter and scripture commentary, has said, "We honor the courage of those who came before by being courageous now!"

When we step forward in faithfulness, as the generous widow did, our gifts combine and the abundance of God's compassion overflows, even in the face of challenge, fatigue, and uncertainty. It is about so much more than dollars and cents. Week of Compassion is where Disciples respond to the challenges and the blessings we see and experience in the world. Week of Compassion is a full-body-of-Christ response. Our General Minister and President, Rev. Terri Hord Owens has often said, "When Week of Compassion is there, the whole church is there".

Over the last 80 years, in communities recovering from disasters; among those creating new lives after fleeing their homes; and when creating hopeful futures in the face of extraordinary challenges, you have been there, because *you are Week of Compassion.* You continue to share **GIFTS TO LIVE ON**, with compassionate generosity. Thank you for your constant support and partnership, throughout the year, throughout the world.

In gratitude,



Rev. Vy Nguyen
Executive Director, Week of Compassion





photos: 1 Bruce McCoy; 2 OGMP/Adam Frieberg; 3 Ashland CC (VA)

Theme Introduction

GIFTS TO LIVE ON

In the early 1940s, as World War II created humanitarian crises around the globe, the International Convention (now the General Assembly) of the Christian Church made recommendations for multiple aid and relief projects. Partnering with ecumenical colleagues, the church designated a Day of Compassion special offering. Soon after, the Wartime Service Fund was approved and churches designated a **Week of Compassion**, a focused time for prayer and giving to support the ongoing war response. Expanded to include humanitarian aid as well as disaster response and refugee resettlement, a new ministry took shape.

Then and now, Disciples have been clear: When needs arise, we need to respond ... we need to be moved, we need to be generous, we need to be faithful, we need to be transformed.

We need to take on the role of the generous widow.

"[Jesus] looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.'"

- Luke 21:1-4 NRSVue

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Jesus sees the widow and her gift, and rejoices in her generosity. Others were giving from what they could spare - but this woman, Jesus said, was giving everything she had to live on. Such generosity upends expectation. She brings two small coins, the merest contribution, but she is the giver Jesus praises most highly. It is not only the coins themselves that matter. It is the way she gives - **it is the story of her generosity that outlasts her.**

That's what Week of Compassion does - what Disciples do. We bring what we have to live on, which becomes a resource for others to live on - and that



photos: ACT Alliance

mutual giving is how our story lives on too. When we give, we know that our gifts are not the only ones that matter - **the true gift of compassion and connection lies in the resilience of the communities we serve.** The mutual contribution of those most affected, combined with dedicated partnerships rooted in connection, integrity, and accompaniment, puts flesh on God's grace for everyone involved.

Through Week of Compassion, families find stable housing and restored community after tornadoes in Kentucky or hurricanes along the Florida Gulf Coast. Children are cared for and kept safe as their parents gather resources to reclaim normalcy following fires on Maui. Women in South Sudan receive life-saving health care that allows them to return to dignity and wholeness with their families. Elderly and disabled persons left most vulnerable during war are given shelter, nutrition, and community in respite centers at the border of Ukraine. Refugees and asylum seekers find new opportunity and true hospitality in the U.S. as local congregations help them explore new neighborhoods, learn new languages, and find new hope.

In the story of the generous widow, we see every Disciple who is part of Week of Compassion. Her generosity sparks a response in us: we give what we have, what we can offer as our very best, what is uniquely ours to bring. An offering can come in an envelope, out of a prayer book, as a meal lovingly prepared, or from a well-worn toolbox on a work site.

What started 80 years ago as a single offering for a single cause, has flourished into decades of

relationships with trusted partners, engaged in the work of empowering communities to claim their own strength and impact. This is long-lasting and constantly evolving work – a transformation that takes time. As we do the long-term work of building relationships and true collaboration, we repeatedly discover the beauty and poetry that says new life is possible, that the Spirit of God is real and lives right here among us.

The widow's giving is a model of faithfulness. It is a standard of generosity. It is the guide for partnership that encourages and empowers countless people around the world who have received support and nurture and transformative hope ... because of these gifts. Because of her two coins – and two coins more – and two coins after that.

Thanks be to God for these abundant and generous **GIFTS TO LIVE ON.**

QR code to give



Week of **Compassion** ONLINE GIVING

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION & SERMON STARTERS

by Rev. Dr. Dawn Darwin Weaks

"Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

-Luke 21:1-4

This story is known through generations of Christians as a story of sacrificial giving. Evoking the 'widow's mite' is synonymous with asking people to 'give their all.' But take a moment to read a few verses that come before this story. You will find blistering judgment for religious leaders who mistreat vulnerable widows like this woman and who only give to others to keep up appearances. So, when Jesus' next words are to point out a poor widow's stunning witness of faith, is he commending her as an example, or condemning the wealthy religious leaders as frauds? In other words, was it a compliment, or a lament?

REFLECT: *How has this story lodged in your spiritual imagination: a tale of a faithful heroine, or a warning for the wealthy, or something else?*

To discern an answer, first we need to note where this widow's story is in the larger story of Jesus' life. Both Mark and Luke record it, and both place it within their Passion narratives. Remember and hold onto that. We'll return to it in a moment. Next, we need to note how the widow's story connects with other stories in the gospels. For Mark, it's one of three mentions of widows. Matthew's gospel mentions widows only once and John's gospel doesn't mention widows at all. But Luke's gospel talks about widows nine times—and three more times in Acts. Luke wants us to notice widows, much like Jesus does in this story!

Luke tells us about Anna, an elderly widow for many years, and a prophet known for her devotion to God. She meets the infant Jesus in chapter 2 and tells everyone that he is the one they've been awaiting. In chapter 4, Luke reminds us of the hospitable widow Elijah visits. He contrasts her welcome to religious leaders not willing to recognize prophets in their midst. Then, in chapter 7, Luke becomes the only gospel writer to document Jesus raising the son of a widow. And if that weren't enough, in a parable found only in Luke (chapter 18), Luke's Jesus tells us the story of a persistent widow, wronged repeatedly by a judge; she wears the judge out with insistent advocacy until justice is hers! Finally, here in chapter 21, Luke mirrors the story in the gospel of Mark - this widow on Jesus' path to the cross. **This widow becomes an embodiment of Jesus' parable on persistent faith,** giving her all in the offering, despite the injustices of corruption in the religious system that was supposed to care for her. She is noticed, and Jesus proclaims her 'better than the rest' as he spends his last days teaching in the temple.

Any student of the Bible knows that widows are a uniquely vulnerable group in the Bible's cultural settings. A widow had no legal, economic, or cultural status without a husband. For this widow in Luke's story to give her last two cents was unthinkable, at best a breath-taking show of trust in her God, and at worst a miscalculated throwing away of any livelihood she could muster. But for the wealthy folk to give out of the extra they had, that was no cause for notice or concern. There is nothing wrong with making a calculated gift after careful budgeting of resources and planning for philanthropy. It is, surely, how most large gifts are given to charitable causes around the globe, likely including Week of Compassion.



photo: Week of Compassion

*** REFLECT:** *How do you decide what to give, to your church, to other causes, or to Week of Compassion? Do you have an intentional process or 'give from the heart'? Are those two mutually exclusive?*

Yet Jesus' assessment of the wealthy givers to the offering in the temple is downright offensive. "These people have given out of their extra," he said. It seems he is further describing the same folks he lambasted in 20:47, the ones who stole the houses of widows with their unethical business practices. Jesus does not mince words as he describes the punishment that awaits them.

Alongside that condemnation, Jesus proclaims that the gift of the poor widow woman is greater than any of the others because she gave "all she had to live on." Remember the parable Jesus told about a widow in Luke chapter 18? It seems that his encounter with the widow in the temple was an embodiment of that 'persistent knocking' of the widow in the parable. Maybe when the widow in the temple gave her offering, it was the way she knocked on the door of justice, the way she pestered until her persistence paid off, the way she was able to stand up with dignity and do her part. Maybe she gave to insist on her own dignity; perhaps she contributed so that she could exercise her own power. Maybe she gave to prove to herself that she still could. Though this widow was considered of low status by our world's standards, **by her giving, she sets a high standard of generosity** and delivers a convicting witness to those with more means to give, and even shames those who might abuse her with their means!

*** REFLECT:** *Could giving an offering be an act of resistance to powers of oppression?*

Can you think of a time when you knew it was? Did that motivate you?

Is giving to Week of Compassion such an act?

If this widow is both generously trusting and defiantly advocating, then the answer to the question, "Was Jesus commending her as an example, or condemning the elite religious leaders as frauds?" is Yes. Yes, maybe Jesus was saying look at her giving all she has to live on, what faith! And maybe he also was saying, isn't it a shame she's

doing that while these people with worldly power give so little of themselves.

Now we are back to the placement of this story in both Mark and Luke. Remember, both place it within their narratives of Jesus' passion. This is a Holy Week story, a story that is fitting to retell as the Church begins the Lenten season. Jesus is preparing to give his life, just as this widow woman has given her offering: completely, with nothing left over. **Like the widow giving her offering, when Jesus offers his life, it is both an extravagantly generous act of trust and a powerful witness of resistance** against systems that seek to snuff out such tender sacrifice. Jesus too will give all he has to live on. He will give all he has, *to live on*.

For eighty years, Week of Compassion has stood with vulnerable and courageous people around the world. **Together as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we have given our offerings, both as an act of bold trust in God's abundant provision and as an act of resistance in solidarity with those who suffer in our world.** Now it is ours to again give in such a way that we both honor God and shame the devil. It is our time to give in such a way that we both trust God with what is, and knock on the doors of what should be. **Like our widowed sister and our resurrected Lord, may we, too, give all that we have, that our witness may live on.**

GIVING ALL WE HAVE

Mission Moments, sharing Week of Compassion's witness and work, are available for use in worship, as sermon illustrations, in newsletters, and studies. Go to the Special Offering 2024 Resources Page (weekofcompassion.org/2024)

- **girls' education in Afghanistan**
- **welcoming refugees in Virginia**
- **caring for children after wildfires in Hawaii**
- **healthcare for women in South Sudan**
- **new homes after tornadoes in Kentucky**

*** Additional stories covering the last two years can be found at the Stories page on our website (weekofcompassion.org/stories).**

MISSION MOMENT: GIFTS TO LIVE ON Hope and Home

For the past couple of years, when you would drive into Mayfield, KY from Paducah, KY and crest the hill to the north of town, the sight would take your breath away – a town flattened. Businesses, churches, homes, all destroyed when, on December 10, 2021, a mile-wide EF4 long-track tornado hit multiple counties in western Kentucky, leaving a massive path of destruction and thousands of Kentuckians homeless. Disciples swiftly responded through Week of Compassion and Kentucky West Area congregations, and the generosity of Disciples lives on as homes are rebuilt and communities are restored.

In the two years since that event, Week of Compassion has partnered with Long-Term Recovery Groups to stabilize communities and support them through their recovery. Volunteer referrals and grant funding are helping move rebuilding forward in multiple counties - all with unique approaches to meeting the needs in their own neighborhoods.

At the 2023 General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky, Week of Compassion and the Local Missions Team worked with Help Build Hope to frame a house for survivors in Mayfield. With prep work done by Disciples Men, and following a communion service to bless and focus the work, in just one Sunday morning, nearly 100 volunteers built the frame for a three-bedroom home entirely inside the Assembly's Exhibit Hall. Disassembled into 53 complete panels, with the prayers of the whole Disciples church literally written on the beams, that home has now been built on its new foundation in Mayfield, guided by The Fuller Center, with the help of local Disciples volunteers. "These issues seem so big that sometimes it's hard to know the small steps that can begin to make big changes," Leah Eubanks,



photo: OGMP/Adam Frieberg

Outreach Pastor of First Christian Church Paducah reflects on the ongoing Disciples engagement with volunteers in Mayfield. "This is hard stuff and so necessary. So grateful to witness this work!"

In Mayfield and the surrounding county, more than 70% of tornado damage occurred to rental housing, yet agencies were still reluctant to fund the rebuilding of rental properties. Amid record inflation and skyrocketing materials costs, many landlords who had purchased homes as foreclosures and vastly under-insured them simply left. The Mayfield Graves County Long-Term Recovery Group is focused on a thriving future for their community, dedicated to making Mayfield a more resilient and sustainable place. With strategic creative partnerships, the LTRG created *A New Lease on Life*, a program that moves displaced renters into permanent housing, using partners, volunteers, and donated items to repair and improve existing vacant homes.



photo: Week of Compassion

Survivors can lease the property at considerably reduced costs, while completing courses in home ownership and financial management; after a year, they have the option to purchase the home far below market value. Week of Compassion started as a financial supporter of *A New Lease on Life* and is now a full sponsor, which includes contributing volunteer labor to complete repairs for homes in the program.

“These issues seem so big that sometimes it’s hard to know the small steps that can begin to make big changes. ... So grateful to witness this work!”

Part of this long-term recovery is the steady presence of volunteers, and the ongoing gift of accompaniment, connecting with the everyday needs and experiences of survivors as they rebuild and return to their homes and routines. Volunteers from Speedway Christian Church in Indianapolis had a sacred moment during their work in Mayfield, when they unexpectedly met the future homeowner of the very home they were working on, who had just learned his home dedication was around the corner. The volunteers listened carefully to the complicated emotions that surfaced in this family as they shared their story of relief and recovery after almost two years of waiting for assistance. This holy encounter brought deeper meaning to the work of their week - more than “just yard work,” they said, “this is what accompaniment means, helping people heal by letting them share their story.”

Bringing **GIFTS TO LIVE ON** is what the work of Week of Compassion is all about. Gifts of every kind, from every source - those closely affected and those simply concerned, skilled and volunteer labor, on site and in prayer, providing funding, showing up to work and taking time to listen. What lasts is more than any one gift or giver alone. What holds fast is mutual sharing and true partnership, everyone bringing their best, building on a foundation of prayer and generosity. Where buildings and spirits once flattened can be renewed and lifted up, God’s gifts to us - and our gifts to others - truly live on.



photos: 1 OGMP/Adam Frieberg; 2 Week of Compassion; 3 Mayfield Graves County LTRG

WORSHIP RESOURCES

by Pastor Oscar E. Banks IV

Call to Worship

We gather to worship the God of all creation -
Our hearts are open, and our minds are receptive.

We gather in unity as a hope for the world -
**Our lives are connected, and our love
has no bounds.**

We gather to share in the grace and love of Jesus -
**Our hope is built on the love of Christ, living on in
each of us.**

No matter our backgrounds, our faults,
or our leanings -

**We are bound together in discipleship and by the
power of the Holy Spirit!**

Invocation

Holy Spirit, you are welcome in this space
to create and recreate our hearts, our minds, our
purposes, and our desires.

We welcome your transformative power
to access the deepest parts of us.

Align us with the person and purpose of Jesus
Christ our Lord,
that we might give our all in compassion and care
for others.

Have your way O God in our lives, both now and
forever. Amen.

Prayer for the Community

We have gathered from the four corners of
our community,
and are gathering around the world,
to seek how we might serve our neighbor
with a little more love and compassion than we did
the day before.

We gather with concerns that often hinder our
consideration for others.

We gather to offer gifts of worship, words,
and wonder.

As we lift these gifts in unity, we pray the peace,
comfort, and joy of the Lord
will heal our brokenness, inspire our thoughts, and
enliven our passion for love.

In the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Communion Meditation

The most uncomfortable seat on the airplane is
the middle seat. Stuck between a seat of free-
range access of movement and a seat of comfort.
Stuck between the gatekeeper seat and the seat
of views of the beautiful clouds. Stuck in the seat
that owns no armrest. Stuck between. As Jesus sat
at the table with his friends preparing to face the
biggest test of his life, Jesus was stuck between
the conclusion of his earthly journey and the
hope of resurrection. Jesus was stuck between
breaking bread with committed friends and with
a compromised foe. In this stuck-between space,
Jesus stayed focused on his purpose. Jesus stayed
focused on his destination of bridging the gap
between a broken humanity and the God of our
salvation. We come to this table, stuck between
tending to what we have and need for ourselves,
and attending to the cries and needs of the
world around us. We gather to be freed from that
dilemma, at a bountiful table where there is always
more than enough to live on. We come to take
bread and cup, remembering the One who is with
us in our in between, and who calls us forward to
our life's faithful purpose.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Creator, Savior, Sustainer of all,
we've come together on this day to give you praise,
for you alone are worthy of all the glory.

We thank you for your passion displayed at
this table.

We thank you for giving your all – in your living and
in your dying.

As we partake of these blessings in your name,
build in us compassion for your people in the
struggle beyond this space.

Lead us by the power of your Holy Spirit and the
teachings of our redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Invitation to Offering

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."

As we consider our offering, let these words become more than a hymn. May we remember it is God's grace that keeps us. We have the opportunity to pay forward the grace that has found us. We can be a blessing to those in need. This church is part of our community in so many ways. [Name some of the outreach in which your church takes part.]

Let us give freely and joyfully to the work of Jesus Christ in the ministry of Week of Compassion, our relief, refugee, and sustainable development ministry, a part of the whole Disciples church. Gifts we share, today and throughout the year, make the ministry of Week of Compassion possible - bringing relief following disaster, helping refugees settle into new homes, and transforming suffering into hope, around the world. May our small gift live on beyond this moment and breathe life into hearts unknown to us. Let our light shine through these gifts of love, alleviating suffering and restoring lives. Let our light burn bright into the darkest spaces, and bring healing to our world.

Prayer of Dedication

Most holy and ever-loving God, we give thanks for these gifts of love, given from the resources we live on, shared so others may live on as well. May your Spirit increase our gifts to expand your work through your church. Bountifully bless your people who so freely gave of their treasure, whether large or small. We pray these blessings over your people in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Benediction

We gathered for worship -

Now let us go to serve.

We gathered for praise -

Now let us go to love.

We gathered in unity -

Now let us go to light up the world.

With all that we have, all that we are,
and all that we hope to be -

**Let us offer our lives to God in this day
and forever more!**



photo: OGMP/Adam Frieberg

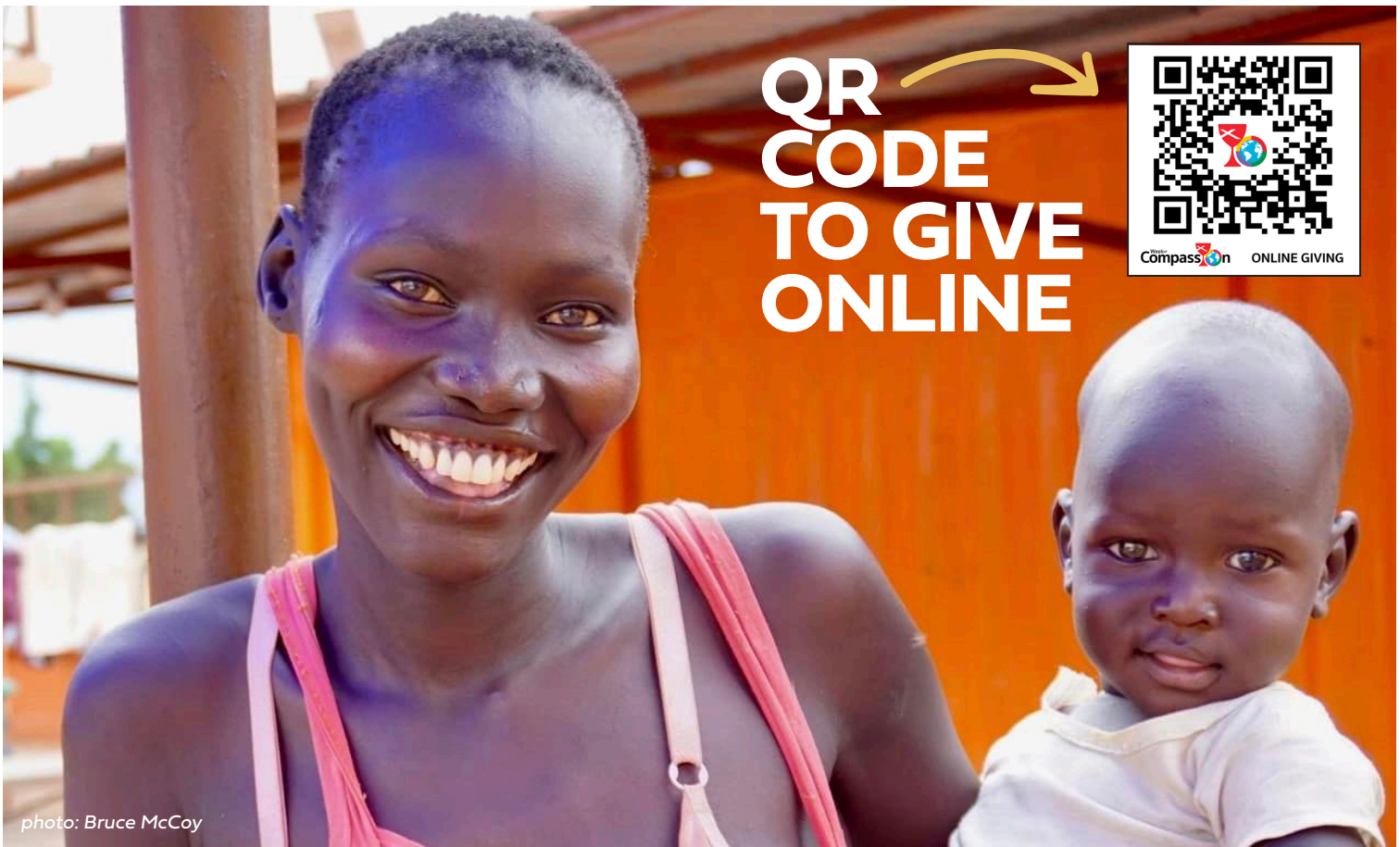


photos: 1 Bruce McCoy; 2,3 Week of Compassion; 4 ACT Alliance

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- Coloring Pages
- Youth Activities
- Theme Video (English & Spanish)
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photo: Bruce McCoy