

# 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.

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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