

**March 14, 2010**

**Each year on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Catholics throughout the United States are invited to contribute to Catholic Relief Services. I served on the Board of Catholic Relief Services for six years and can personally testify to the good work it accomplishes in assisting the very poor in 99 countries. It enhances the well-being of those desperately needing food, drinking water, health care, or basic education on the basis of need – not race, creed, or nationality.**

**For more than 65 years, Catholic Relief Services has been a successful vehicle in enabling Catholics in the United States to express their solidarity with people suffering from war, violence, poverty, and social injustice around the world. Through CRS, we promote peace and development and restore hope to those who are in desperate need.**

**We can all be proud of the enormous role that Catholic Relief Services has been playing in the emergency relief efforts following the devastating Jan. 12th earthquake in Haiti. Why? CRS was already well positioned to help address this enormous tragedy. Catholic Relief Services has had a significant staff and functioning programs in Haiti since 1954. Prior to the earthquake, CRS was spending \$30 million per year under the direction of 315 CRS staff members to alleviate the incredibly widespread poverty in Haiti. It has been the largest program CRS has in any of the 99 countries in which we function. CRS has been working in each Haitian diocese always in collaboration with the local bishop, to alleviate the hunger, homelessness, as well as to address health care needs. After the earthquake, we were able to transfer additional staff skilled in disaster relief from the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, and other countries.**

Catholic Relief Services has enabled our diocese to partner with Bishop Chibly Langlois in the extremely poor Diocese of Fort-Liberté in Northern Haiti. I visited that diocese with several members of our diocese to witness the need for training teachers to educate children who have not had opportunities for education. We also saw the need to help re-claim the land to grow fruits and vegetables as well as purify the water so that people would not need to walk more than a mile each day for potable drinking water. We likewise established a partnership with an orphanage in the capital of Haiti.

I have seen the great benefit of the CRS micro-financing program provided to women in Asia and Africa. To enhance their own dignity and enable them to support their families, a woman may be lent \$25 or \$50, taught how to be accountable for the money, and given skills to establish a small business making and selling crafts or perhaps raising chickens. This CRS micro-finance program is now active in 30 countries across the globe.

Many children and adults in our diocese make use of Rice Bowls during Lent. This program, sponsored by CRS, raises funds to support hunger-related projects focusing on agriculture, education, micro-finance, health, water, and HIV and AIDS. Seventy-five percent of the funds generated are used for such projects globally and 25 percent of the proceeds remain in our diocese to address local hunger needs which have become so extensive during the past year. We have distributed our share of the funds to agencies serving the hungry in all four counties of our diocese.

Please be generous in supporting Catholic Relief Services. It is a very effective way for us to stand in solidarity with those living daily from the devastating effects of poverty, conflict, and injustice.