

CRS official concerned over proposed aid cuts

Notes hunger stalks Africa

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES — Michael R. Wiest, deputy director of Catholic Relief Services, should have been in the African nation of Rwanda last week but instead he wound up at the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road.

Unfortunately, the majority Hutu and the minority Tutsi, two tribes who comprise Rwanda's population, are currently engaged in a bloody civil war. Conditions for the relief agency's workers have become extremely dangerous, Wiest noted, and all the agency's international staff have been evacuated.

"I felt my presence there would only distract our staff," Wiest said at an afternoon forum in Room 6 on Thursday, April 21.

As part of a tour of upstate New York to promote CRS, the U.S. bishops' relief agency, Wiest spoke for more than an hour about CRS' extensive work throughout the world on behalf of relief and development. A 21-year veteran of the agency who has spent a total of 14 years in Africa, Wiest currently lives with his family in Morocco and directs CRS' overseas operations.

Wiest told his listeners of CRS' work in many of the same world trouble spots that make the news here every day. He recalled, for example, that CRS had to play hardball in Croatia with the local

Catholic church in order to distribute aid to non-Catholics in the former Yugoslavia.

"We found it very difficult to get Catholic structures to be open to helping Muslims," he said. "We finally said we're either going to do it this way or on our own."

In another trouble spot, Rwanda's civil war highlights one of several calamities East Africa faces, Wiest said. Such civil conflicts as the one tearing Rwanda, combined with environmental deterioration, poor rainfall and locusts threaten the lives of the 16.3 million people who live in the Horn of Africa, home to such nations as Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and Kenya, he remarked.

He added that CRS is concerned the U.S. government will significantly decrease food aid next year at a time when the Horn is facing the potential for near-apocalyptic famine.

"We feel these programs targeted toward life-sustaining activities are taking a big cut," Wiest said.

To illustrate his point, he recalled two well-known recent famines, the one in Ethiopia in the 1980s, and the one in Somalia in the 1990s.

"We are moving toward a Somalia or Ethiopia situation," he said of all East Africa. "And we're just not ready for it."

Under this country's law, U.S. food aid is generally distributed throughout the world by voluntary agencies such as CRS. According to information from CRS, which has managed most U.S. government food aid for the last 40 years, President Bill Clinton has proposed to cut funding for Title II of the Food for Peace program to the tune of \$49 million.

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File photo
Father John T. Judie (right) cools himself with a fan while sitting next to Father Edward J. Dillon during the Black Catholic Revival Mass in July, 1991.

Father John Judie to conduct Black Catholic pre-revival rally

Father John T. Judie, a priest of the Archdiocese of Louisville, Ky., is scheduled to conduct a Black Catholic pre-revival rally at St. Bridget's Church, 174 St. Bridget's Drive, from May 1-3.

The rally is intended to help prepare people for a Black Catholic Revival, which is scheduled for Oct. 17-19, at a site as yet undetermined.

During the pre-revival rally, Father Judie — who has developed his own revival ministry — will preach on the theme, "To Be Called ... To Be Chosen." The evening programs, which will begin at 7 p.m., will also include a mix of songs, readings, dramatizations and testimony.

Monday, May 2 has also been designated "Youth Night," and will include faith statements by four youths.

According to Jacquelyn Dobson, director of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries, Father Judie was asked to lead the rally because of the success of the first Black Catholic Revival he conducted in the diocese July 22-24, 1991. That revival attracted more than 1,000 people over the three nights.

"He is a dynamic preacher of the Word," Dobson said of Father Judie, who was ordained Aug. 1, 1987.

Dobson emphasized that the rally is open to people of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds.

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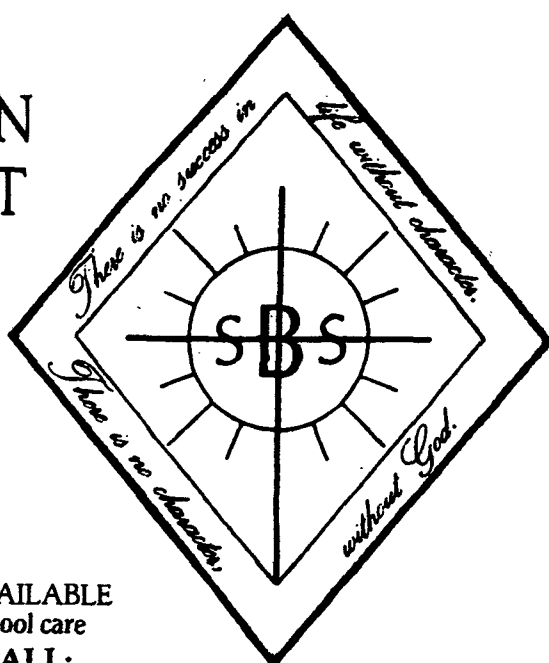
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