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Catholic Relief Services

PRAYER • FASTING • EDUCATION • ALMSGIVING

Operation Rice Bowl

Tom Price, communications director for Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' overseas relief agency, will be the first to admit there's nothing "sexy" about economic development.

In fact, he noted, donations regularly pour into CRS and other relief agencies when huge disasters like last year's Hurricane Mitch wipe out the homes of regions like Central America. For that matter, areas like the former Yugoslavia that are plagued by dramatic wars draw press attention — and donations, he said.

That's one of the reasons CRS promotes Operation Rice Bowl (ORB) in Catholic parishes each Lent, said Price during a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from his Baltimore, Md., office. Catholics might know about the program through the cardboard "rice bowls" that are distributed in various parishes each year that are used to store money donated by families.

Price said he hopes Catholics will continue to fill those cardboard bowls because "99 out of 100 places where we work" need aid to develop economic and social structures, not just relieve the immediate effects of a disaster.

"It brings attention to the plight of people where there's no war going on," he said of ORB, which funds 180 development projects in 40 countries. "The development side that follows major emergencies doesn't get as covered by the media."

In Price's ideal world, the press would regularly tell the story of people like Lawrence Lakra of Chandwa, India, who oversees an ORB-supported initiative called "Project Sustain." According to a CRS interview with Lakra, Project Sustain has helped 251 small, marginal farmers in Chandwa improve land management and water resources.

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STORY BY ROB CULLIVAN



Kosovo citizens, plagued by the ill effects of the war there, obtain supplies provided by Catholic Relief Services recently. Photo supplied by CRS.

Kosovo presents huge relief hurdles

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Many people in this country may have grown tired of hearing about the seemingly endless conflict in the former Yugoslavia. But Nick Ford, an Ohio native who runs Catholic Relief Services' office in Kosovo, hopes his fellow citizens don't forget the people of the Balkans.

"These people are the same that we find everywhere in the world," he said of the Kosovars who have suffered through a bitter war. "I think the average Joe in Kosovo wants (the war) to end today. It's the same thing if they were living in the States — you wouldn't want war."

Kosovo's "average Joes" — mostly ethnic Albanians — have been experiencing conflict since the early 1990s, when their parliament declared Kosovo, a formerly autonomous Yugoslav republic, independent. But it was a move bitterly opposed by Yugoslavia's Serb-dominated government.

The conflict was marked through most of the 1990s by the Kosovars' anti-Yugoslav protests and sporadic violence between both sides. But the conflict became a full-scale war in early 1998, a war that has displaced at least 300,000 people.

The war pits an ethnic Albanian guerrilla force, the Kosovo Liberation Army, against the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Army. The war has been marked by civilian massacres, much like those that have marked other wars by the Yugoslav Army against Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia in what was once the united nation of Yugoslavia. Although all sides have killed civilians, the Serbs have been responsible for the vast majority of civilian deaths, according to reports from the various fronts.

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