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## Rice Bowl

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"The water conservation techniques I teach allow farmers to extend the growing season and produce two or three crops per year, where before they produced only one or none," Lakra told CRS, which published his story this year in its ORB literature. "Because of this training, families in Chandwa no longer need to be separated while some members search for work or migrate to cities for six to ten months of the year."

## History of helping

According to CRS, Operation Rice Bowl was begun in 1975 in Allentown, Pa., as an interfaith effort by Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders to respond to the African drought of that year. It has since become an official Lenten program of CRS stressing the need for Catholics to pray, fast and give "alms" for the development of poor nations.

More than 13,000 parishes — including 80 in the Diocese of Rochester — have participated or plan to participate in this year's ORB efforts. Judy Taylor, who coordinates ORB for the Diocese of Rochester, said the 1998 effort raised more than \$89,000, which represented an 18 percent increase in donations from the previous year.

"I'd like to think folks are becoming more globally conscious," Taylor said, when asked why she thought donations have increased so dramatically. "Our church has been calling us to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters."

ORB on the national level raised \$6.2 million last year, and has experienced increases in donations for the last four years, according to Maggie Conley, CRS marketing coordinator for Operation Rice Bowl.

In a phone interview from her Baltimore office, Conley said that CRS has probably experienced increases in donations to ORB because it has stepped up both its ORB promotional efforts in recent years as well as improved its relationships with individual diocesan directors like Taylor.

She added that CRS is confident ORB will raise \$6.6 million this year. Rice Bowl offers the person in the pew a chance to help out others in the world, she explained.

"I think that people in the church are looking for concrete ways to combine their faith life with practical ways (to help)," she said. "All of our Rice Bowl programs are projects that are designed to enhance the self-sustainability of families. I think one of the exciting things about Rice Bowl is the long-term. It's investing in people to invest in themselves."

To buttress her point, Conley said she traveled to an ORB-supported project in a

Peruvian village last year where CRS workers had helped farmers improve their potato-growing techniques.

"This community was proud of what they could do," she said. "They said this was the best crop of potatoes they had had in awhile."

## Neighbors next door

Conley noted that 25 percent of ORB funds go to outreach efforts in each diocese that participates, while 75 percent goes to projects in other countries.

Here in the Diocese of Rochester, 49 churches, food pantries and other outreach programs received a total of \$22,400 in ORB grants last year, Taylor said. One of those projects was St. Alphonsus Church's Food Pantry in Auburn, according to Suzanne Norton, who coordinates the pantry with her husband, Charles. The pantry, supported in part by donations from area food banks and the federal government, received \$300 from ORB, Taylor said. That ORB money provided meals for about 400 people, Norton explained.

St. Alphonsus' pantry feeds 190 to 210 families a month, Norton added, pointing out that many of its clients are the working poor.

"A lot of times it's people who have a tough month, maybe with medical bills, and we don't see them again," she said.

It's these kinds of stories, Conley said, that impel CRS to keep a quarter of its ORB funds at home.

"That 25 percent really allows us to recognize that it's important to lend help around the world and to the people next door," she said.

## Parish partners

Kathy Termine coordinates ORB's fundraising at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece. Using bulletin announcements, posters and other materials, Termine said she doesn't push Rice Bowl too much in her parish, but nonetheless, is always impressed by people's response.

"It just seems to be something where people say, 'I'm looking for the little Rice Bowl boxes,'" she said, noting the parish raised almost \$2,000 for ORB last year.

She added that she and her family keep their Rice Bowl on the kitchen table during Lent to remind them of those whose tables might not be as full each day. Along with her husband, Mike, Kathy coordinates the social ministry committee at her parish, so social concerns are always being

discussed by her four children, she said.

"We can't feel that we're isolated, that this is somebody else's problem," she said of hunger. "(Operation Rice Bowl) raises an awareness that it's not just persons in the Third World that are in need of food, but also in our diocese, hunger hurts right here, too."

Those sentiments were shared by Glenna Wickline, co-chair of the joint social ministry committee of St. John the Evangelist Church, Newark Valley, and its mission parish, St. Francis of Assisi, Catawag.

Wickline runs ORB fundraising for her parishes — which collectively donated more than \$1,500 last year to ORB — and she said the effort helps Catholics realize how people are affected by severe poverty in other nations. She added that CRS provides ORB calendars with personalized stories of how development projects affect individuals. That personal touch is important in attracting donations, she said, because many people are bored or turned off by economic stories detailing a nation's debt crisis or other misfortune.

"If you're a parent, or a child, or a grandparent, you can empathize with people more than with just some (economic mess)," she said.

## Kosovo

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In a Feb. 24 phone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from CRS offices in Pristina, Kosovo's capital, Ford, 30, noted his office oversees the largest food distribution effort of any international organization in Kosovo. CRS — the U.S. bishops' international relief agency — has provided food rations for 400,000 Kosovars, regardless of their ethnic affiliation, and provided fuel and firewood for 7,000 individuals and 100 schools, he said.

CRS has a staff of 12 non-Kosovars, including himself, as well as 70 Kosovars. Ford has served the office since November. He added that CRS has also extended a helping hand to thousands of displaced Kosovars in the Yugoslav regions of Montenegro and Serbia.

Speaking by cell phone, Ford said his office and the surrounding area had been without telephone service for more than a week. He added that Pristina has suffered a number of cafe bombings and that trips on any road are dangerous because of possible landmines in the road.

"We've been extremely lucky," he said, noting that no CRS worker had been killed or wounded.

He added that many people have lost their homes, and are spending the winter as refugees from the war.

"We're working and living in conditions that, even without the security concerns, would be defined as a challenge," he said.

Ford welcomed the recent negotiations



between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians over Kosovo's future. On March 8, the KLA announced that its leaders are ready to sign a peace agreement. However, certain elements of the ethnic Albanian army also stated they would never put down their weapons, even though disarmament is a key component of the agreement.

For that matter, Serbs oppose another aspect of the agreement, that it would be backed with the deployment of NATO troops — including U.S. troops. That's also a prospect that Kosovars would proba-

bly greet with mixed emotions, Ford said. No one likes being occupied by a foreign army, but continuing the war is not an attractive alternative, he commented. He stressed that CRS takes no sides in the conflict, and he noted that relief workers would welcome a settlement.

"It'll definitely change the working environment," he said of a settlement. "If there's peace in Kosovo, and it takes NATO troops to keep that peace, then we'd welcome it."

Whatever the outcome, Ford said that the Catholic Church will continue to serve all sides that need aid. Although Catholics number only 160,000 citizens out of Kosovo's primarily Muslim population of 2 million, the church has earned respect for its outreach efforts, he said.

He added that he hoped U.S. Catholics would continue to make donations to CRS and educate themselves about the Kosovo crisis. He reiterated that most people in Kosovo just want to get on with their lives, and not feud with their neighbors.

"Unless you're a committed combatant, I think you want this war to end," he commented. "But I'm not sure that sentiment is shared by the people in the bush with the gun."

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