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Children

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"They say that our lunches are better than their school lunches," Sister Kuhn said with a laugh.

But Sister Kuhn's smile turns down when asked whether she can tell if the children seemed malnourished.

"In some of the children you see very thin hair," she said. "Their faces are gaunt, and there's a lack of expression. There's not a perkiness. You just want to give 'em a hug and feed 'em up."

Hidden hunger

Famine does not stalk the land, and the vast majority of American children never miss a meal. However, a minority of youngsters do suffer from the fact that their parents or guardians are unable to secure a steady diet.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, almost 4 percent of New York state households have members who frequently must skip meals, sometimes going without food for an entire day. More than 6 percent of the state's households have low-quality diets, and their members resort to emergency food assistance because of lack of money. Federal statistics indicate that more than half the people who benefit from food stamps are children.

Such children — and the people who raise them — are the concern of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishops' anti-poverty office, according to Father Robert J. Vitillo, executive director. Father Vitillo's office has chosen to focus on children in poverty this year as part of a three-year campaign that began in 2001 to highlight U.S. poverty. Information on the campaign can be found on the Web at www.povertyusa.org.

As welfare-reform measures took effect in the 1990s, public assistance rolls were reduced across the country, and greater numbers of mothers, especially single moms, entered the work force, he said in a telephone interview from a parish he is currently serving in Alaska. However, many such women have found that new jobs have failed to create bounty on their tables, he added.

"They're needing to subsist by going to soup kitchens and food pantries," he said.

One out of every six American children lives in poverty, according to CCHD, and the effects of such poverty includes hunger that can impede a child's growth and development.

"There's a whole body of knowledge that says when children don't have adequate diets, they don't perform as well in school," Father Vitillo said. That point was

Operation Rice Bowl recognizes Judy Taylor

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Catholic Relief Services has given its 2002 Operation Rice Bowl Award to Judy Taylor, education and advocacy communication manager for the Diocese of Rochester's Catholic Charities.

CRS, the U.S. bishops overseas relief and development agency, recognized Taylor for her work in promoting the annual Lenten hunger-relief fundraiser, which incorporates prayer, fasting, education and financial giving.

Since Taylor began overseeing the diocese's Operation Rice Bowl program in the late 1980s, participation has increased steadily by parishes, which distribute Operation Rice Bowl materials to parishioners. Parishioners then donate to the program by collecting money in cardboard "rice bowls" throughout Lent. As an example of the increase in participation, Taylor said 80 parishes participated in the program during 1998, raising more than \$89,000. During Lent 2001, 93 parishes participated raising more than \$106,000. The Rochester diocese is now among the top-10 U.S. dioceses in terms of raising funds for Operation Rice Bowl, she added.

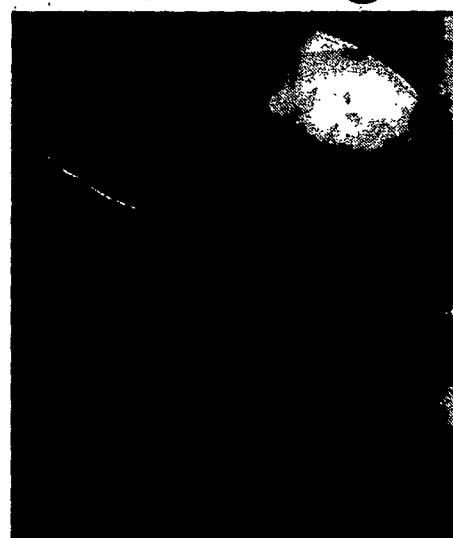
supported by Jim Stipe, northeast regional organizer for Bread For The World, a nonpartisan Washington, D.C.-based anti-hunger lobbying organization.

Stipe, whose organizing territory includes New York state, provided statistics his group has gathered from various sources on children's hunger. According to Bread For the World, hungry children are more than three times as likely as well-fed children to suffer from unwanted weight loss; four times as likely to suffer from fatigue; almost twice as likely to have frequent ear infections; almost three times as likely to suffer from concentration problems; and are absent from school more often than other children.

For decades, the United States has worked to end child hunger, Stipe said, noting that many breakfast programs in schools were started during World War II when military recruiters reported that enlisting men suffered from malnutrition. Yet the combined effects of welfare reform and economic downturn mean there continues to be a minority of Americans malnourished in a land of plenty, he said.

Blame to go around

In a nation that exports huge amounts of food each year, it may seem a mystery why any child should go hungry. But those



Seventy-five percent of the proceeds goes to CRS, with the remainder going to hunger-relief efforts in the diocese. Abroad, the program has funded everything from fish hatcheries in Cambodia to farms in Rwanda. In the diocese, funds have been used by parish soup kitchens and pantries, as well as by hunger-relief programs run by other denominations and groups.

Taylor expressed humility when asked

how she felt about being recognized.

"I'm honored to be recognized for my small part in our diocesan efforts to address hunger at home and abroad," she said in a press statement.

"It's not so much an award for my work," Taylor added during an interview. "It's more an award for our parishes' response and participation."

She also noted that her work benefited from the installation in the late 1990s of a diocesan-wide computer network that links all parishes with the Pastoral Center in Gates. The network has enabled her to save time and money, and eliminated duplication costs in sending out Operation Rice Bowl information, she said.

Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities, praised Taylor for her efforts on behalf of Operation Rice Bowl.

"We see the hard work, enthusiasm and desire to work with her team that Judy exemplifies each year as she works on the Operation Rice Bowl program," he said in a press statement. "But it is wonderful to see that Catholic Relief Services notices her dedication to this important mission."

To learn more about Operation Rice Bowl, click on the links for it at the CRS Web site at www.catholicrelief.org.

month to offer a series of classes on nutrition, cooking and food budgeting. Among the skills clients will learn will be how to prepare good meals on hot plates, and how to read food labels to determine nutritional content, the women said.

Like Stipe and Father Vitillo, the women want the nation and the state to help end hunger by reconsidering some aspects of welfare reform measures slated for renewal by September of this year. For example, Stipe said Bread For The World is working with congressional Republicans and Democrats to create a welfare system that rewards people for the efforts they make to stay off public assistance. One way to do that would be to stop counting employment time against the five-year lifetime assistance limit for people who find jobs yet still need some public assistance.

Like other advocates for the hungry, Martin-Turner said hungry families often suffer from such other effects of poverty as homelessness and a lack of transportation. Living on limited budgets, family heads won't be able to provide a steady diet for their children until they can provide steady lives for themselves, she noted.

"You're still finding people robbing Peter to pay Paul," she said.

And no doubt, you'll find them at noon each weekday at St. Peter and Paul.

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