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Famine

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"Across the region, people are suffering," he said. "We have come through the first months of the year known as the 'hungry season' only to find a harvest that is far below expectations. In desperation, many are now eating seeds that were to be planted for the next harvest — which is still some 10 months away."

Search for food

Father Michael Murimi, parochial vicar at St. Cecilia's Parish in Irondequoit, was ordained in the Diocese of Nakuru in Kenya. Like other African nations in the region, Kenya has in recent years been suffering from food shortages caused by poor harvests as drought has ravaged the land. The Kenyan priest, who has been stationed in the Rochester diocese since January 2000, said his sister, her husband and five children have been forced to walk almost 50 miles from their hometown to find food in other communities. His sister's farming family has suffered a lack of crops like thousands of other Kenyans.

"It's just pathetic, a pathetic situation," he said, noting he sends money to his mother and his sister to help them when he can. "People are hard working, but they don't have enough rain."

If things are bad in Kenya, they are even worse in neighboring Malawi, where widespread famine looms due to a chronic shortage of corn, a national staple, Catholic missionaries warned. Unless international aid to the southern African nation is mobilized immediately, as many as 4 million people may be at risk of starvation by August.

Already this year, hundreds of people — mostly children and elderly — have died from malnutrition and related diseases. After initially denying the crisis, the Malawi government recently declared a national emergency and said 80 percent of the country's 10.5 million people were at risk. With international aid agencies caught unaware, Catholic missionaries have been at the forefront of the relief effort.

"I have never seen anything like it. People have been streaming in to us looking for help. All they say is 'njala' — hungry,"



Reuters/CNS

A malnourished child, unable to eat normally, is fed through a tube at a hospital in Zomba, Malawi, where a food crisis was looming in late May.

said Sister Agnes Hinder, a 74-year-old Medical Missionary of Mary who has worked in Malawi for almost 30 years.

In normal years, Malawi produces enough food to feed itself, although there is always a "hunger gap" in the months before the April-June harvest period. This year, however, has been different.

Drought in some areas and floods in others hit last year's harvest badly. The shortages were exacerbated in October by soaring commercial prices, which the government blamed on regional shortages, but critics blamed on mismanagement of the national grain reserve.

Famished villagers started to eat anything they could find — pumpkin leaves, banana tree stems, even sawdust. Some children died after eating poisonous roots. The crisis also sparked vigilante attacks on suspected thieves across the normally peaceful country known as the "warm heart of Africa."

When farm laborer James Black was accused of stealing three cobs of corn, watchmen from a neighboring farm dragged

him along a dirt road and beat him senseless. Then they sliced off his ears and put them in his pocket. In a sense, he was lucky — other victims have been burned alive, had their hands or feet cut off, or even been killed. Many deaths go unreported.

"This is a whole new phenomenon. It is inhumanity born of desperation," said Medical Missionary Sister Catherine Dwyer.

Blame for the crisis has been apportioned to God and man. Erratic rains and localized drought last year wiped out part of the harvest. But the government of Malawi compounded the problem by selling off the country's emergency corn supplies early in the year and failing to replenish them later.

Catholic bishops, missionaries and Western donors say they suspect corrupt officials of profiteering.

"Some of the shortages are politically driven, some weather driven and, let's face it, some driven by greed," Sister Dwyer said.

On Easter Sunday, March 31, Malawi's bishops issued a pastoral letter accusing the government of allowing corruption to grow. But if the situation is stark now, it is likely to deteriorate further in the coming months. The U.S. government and the European Union have pledged to ship in 140,000 tons of aid. A small number of international organizations is arriving to provide localized help, mostly through church structures. The United Nations is expected to launch an emergency appeal. But if the necessary international aid does not arrive on time, missionaries and aid workers are predicting a full-blown famine, perhaps as early as August.

"We are really worried," Sister Dwyer said. "Right now people are eating, but that can only last another three or four months. After that, there is nothing left."

Meanwhile, despite a looming threat of starvation to 7.8 million of Zimbabwe's population of 11 million, in May President Robert Mugabe's government turned down a U.S. government offer of 10,000 tons of maize because it was not certified entirely free from genetic modification. Mugabe's government has been accused of exacerbating the effects of the food shortage. Maize has been scarce since February, with long lines forming for limited stocks on sale. The opposition Movement for De-

mocratic Change said those without cards showing support for Mugabe's ruling Zanu-PF party are forbidden to line up in many rural areas. Mugabe blames unfavorable weather conditions throughout southern Africa for the food crisis, but analysts say it was exacerbated by disruption of commercial agriculture by farm seizures the government promoted.

What you can do

Pope John Paul II urged solidarity between the well-fed and the hungry in a message to the opening session of the June 10-13 summit on world hunger in Rome sponsored by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. Solidarity must be the criteria that supports all international efforts to deliver emergency food aid, to improve harvests and food distribution systems and to help the world's poorest people grow the food they need, he said.

Solidarity is not charity, he said, but justice, based on "the acknowledgment that the resources which God the creator has entrusted to us are destined for all." While mainly an ethical obligation, guaranteeing that "everyone has their daily bread" is also a practical obligation for the international community because poverty and hunger "constitute a real threat to peace and international security," the pope said.

Despite Africa's enormous challenges and current famine threat, Culligan said there are many reasons for hope in Africa. For example, he said, Angola and Sierra Leone recently ended civil wars, and are on the road to peace. Hence, more now than ever, Africans need support to build a better future, he noted.

"Africa is at a turning point," he said. "Africa's citizens, churches and civil society are rising to the challenge of community development, human rights and democratization. Africa is rising with hope and healing."

He added that U.S. Catholics can help Africans by sending contributions designated for southern Africa to Catholic Relief Services, P.O. Box 17090, Baltimore, MD. 21203-7090. For more information, call CRS at 800/724-2530, or visit the CRS Web site at www.catholicrelief.org.

Contains reporting by Rob Cullivan in Rochester.

Bishops

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our advisory panel on sexual abuse to recommend to me any further changes in our policy that would align it with the charter," he said.

The bishop also said that more needs to be done to promote the healing of victims of sexual abuse by priests and to restore trust in the ministry of the nation's bishops. He plans to consult his advisory panel in these matters, and also in his effort to help heal the pain and grief of diocesan parishioners whose priests were removed from ministry because credible allegations were made that they sexually abused minors in the past.

"As I ask our priests and all the people of the diocese to hold me fully accountable to do all in my power to protect children, I also ask them for their prayerful support," Bishop Clark added.

The bishops' meeting drew extraordinary newspaper and broadcast coverage, with more than 750 media representatives converging on Dallas to cover it.

Members of victims' groups — notably Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, or SNAP, and Victims of Clergy Abuse Linkup — had unprecedented access to bishops and media as the bishops prepared to act on issues such groups had pressed for many years.

The meeting also featured extraordinary acts of self-criticism on the part of the bishops.

They devoted their opening session June 13 to listening to victim-survivors, an expert in child sexual-abuse trauma and criticisms by two prominent lay Catholic lead-

ers of the way bishops exercise their authority and leadership in the church today.

The final session June 15 was a half-day devoted to prayer and reflection on how to serve better as bishops in the future. The 48-page prayer book provided to them for use during an all-night eucharistic vigil was filled with biblical passages and prayers on themes of repentance and forgiveness.

At one of the sessions from which reporters were excluded, Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston, where the national scandal broke open last January, delivered what one bishop described as a "profound apology" to his fellow bishops.

In his opening presidential address, Bishop Gregory challenged the bishops to approach "perhaps the gravest crisis we have faced" in U.S. Catholic history with an attitude of "confession, contrition and resolve."

He placed blame for the crisis on the bishops' shoulders, saying it stems from "a profound loss of confidence by the faithful in our leadership as shepherds, because of our failures in addressing the crime of the sexual abuse of children and young people by priests and church personnel."

Archbishop Harry J. Flynn of St. Paul-Minneapolis, chairman of the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, shepherded the charter through five hours of open debate and vote June 14 before hundreds of reporters.

Before the open debate, the bishops had spent six hours behind closed doors June 13, including an extraordinary three-hour evening session, trying to hammer out their differences on key aspects of the charter.

One of the major issues — debated for two-and-a-half hours in closed session and more briefly again in the open session — was whether priests or deacons with only

one accusation in the distant past and exemplary service for many years following treatment should now be removed from ministry.

In the end the bishops decided that the good of the church — the restoration of credibility and trust — demanded a policy that will not allow any offender to return to any form of ministry.

They set laicization — dismissal from the clerical state — as the general norm, providing that if the priest or deacon does not consent to it, available church procedures will be initiated to laicize him without his consent.

The charter adds, "If the penalty of dismissal from the clerical state has not been applied — e.g., for reasons of advanced age or infirmity — the offender is to lead a life of prayer and penance. He will not be permitted to celebrate Mass publicly, to wear clerical garb or to present himself publicly as a priest."

The charter mandated creation of a new USCCB Office for Child and Youth Protection to help dioceses implement the charter and oversee what they do, reporting publicly each year an evaluation of each diocese. Eparchies, the dioceses of Eastern Catholic churches, are also required to follow the charter and be evaluated annually.

Responsibility for overseeing the national office and reviewing its annual report before publication is to be in the hands of a blue-ribbon National Review Board. After the charter was adopted Bishop Gregory announced that he has named Oklahoma Gov. Frank Keating to head that board.

In every diocese the charter mandates a diocesan review board, made up mostly of lay people who are not in the church's employ, to investigate all allegations of sexual

abuse of minors and to periodically review diocesan policies and procedures for possible improvement.

Every diocese is to have an "assistance coordinator to aid in the immediate pastoral care of persons who claim to have been sexually abused as minors" by anyone who works for the church.

The charter sets rules for reporting allegations to civil authorities — requiring it if the alleged victim is still a minor, encouraging it if the victim is no longer a minor when he or she comes forward.

It opposes secrecy in legal settlements, saying a confidentiality agreement is forbidden unless the victim seeks it "for grave and substantial reasons," which are then to be noted in the text of the agreement.

A key element for future protection of children is a mandate for every diocese to establish "safe environment" programs to educate children, parents and church personnel in sex abuse prevention and detection.

Background checks of all church workers will be required and screening procedures for priesthood candidates will be reviewed and improved. All U.S. seminaries are to undergo a new apostolic visitation — onsite investigations under Vatican auspices — to assure the quality of their programs of "human formation for celibate chastity."

Despite extensive speculation in the U.S. media that the legislative norms adopted by the bishops face an uphill fight in Rome, one Vatican official contacted by Catholic News Service guessed that the review process might be completed within three months — a short time by Vatican standards.

Contributing to this story were Patricia Zapor in Dallas and Cindy Wooden in Rome.