

Relief aid sent to Iran

BALTIMORE (CNS) — Catholic Relief Services has allocated \$100,000 for emergency assistance to help victims of the earthquake in Iran.

More than 25,000 people were reported killed in the Dec. 26 quake in the ancient city of Bam, Iranian officials believed the death toll may rise above 40,000.

CRS said the aid will be used to provide emergency food, medical care and other life-saving assistance, according to an agency statement. CRS staff will assist agency partners in distributing the aid.

"In addition to unimaginable sorrow, right now the people in Bam and the surrounding areas are struggling to provide for even their most basic needs, as food, water, medicines, shelter and warmth are all in short supply," said Ken Hackett, CRS president.

CRS' efforts will concentrate in Bam, where approximately 70 percent of the ancient city's mud structures were destroyed when the earthquake struck, leaving tens of thousands homeless, the statement said.

Britain's Catholic Agency for

Overseas Development, known as CAFOD, announced that it has donated \$150,000 to Islamic Relief Worldwide to help the victims of the earthquake.

"The current priorities are to provide the survivors with temporary shelter and medical assistance and to meet the most immediate basic needs. These include medical supplies, water purification equipment, electricity generators, tents and blankets," said Tim Aldred, CAFOD's emergency officer.

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace also announced it was seeking donations to assist with the relief effort.

"As is always the case with every major disaster worldwide, Development and Peace will accept — and forward — donations to help the victims of the earthquake that struck the Bam region in Iran on Dec. 26," the agency said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Contributions to CRS may be made by mail to: Catholic Relief Services, Iran Earthquake Response, P.O. Box 17090, Baltimore, MD 21203-7090; or by phone at: (800) 736-3467. Contribu-



Reuters/CNS

An Iranian mother mourns the loss of her child following a mass burial at a cemetery in the ancient Silk Road city of Bam Dec. 30. Government officials said the death toll from Iran's devastating earthquake may reach 50,000.

tions also may be sent to: Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Bam Earthquake, 5633 Sherbrooke St. East, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H1N 1A3.

PRIESTS' LETTERS ASK TO DISCUSS CELIBACY

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) — One-fourth of the priests in the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese have asked for a discussion of priestly celibacy by the U.S. bishops.

They made their request in a letter Dec. 11 to Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The letter said: "It is our position that the current and prospective shortage of priests constitutes a grave threat to the church in our country because ... our Catholic faithful are more and more being denied their baptismal right to full access to the sacramental life of the church."

The priests added that "mandatory celibacy is a major obstacle to devout and otherwise qualified men responding to this call" to priesthood.

The letter echoes similar calls made by groups of priests in the Milwaukee Archdiocese and the dioceses of New Ulm, Minn., and Albany, N.Y. In their letter, the Albany priests urged "that from now on celibacy be optional, not mandatory, for candidates for the diocesan Roman Catholic priesthood."

A group of priests in the Diocese of Arlington, Va., countered with a letter in support of mandatory celibacy.

In response to the Milwaukee letter, which first raised the issue, Bishop Gregory expressed strong support for the celibacy requirement.

KEARNEY COACH SETS RECORD FOR VICTORIES

Ed Nietopski, head boys' basketball coach at Bishop Kearney High School, recently became the all-time leader for wins among Section 5 coaches.

The magic moment occurred Dec. 17 at BK, when the Kings won 57-54 in overtime over rival Aquinas Institute. That victory gave the 76-year-old Nietopski a career record of 528 wins and 319 losses.

His win total broke the previous Section 5 mark of 527 held by Roger Rigby of Scio.

A high-school coaching veteran of 42 years, Nietopski is in his 15th season at Kearney after spending the previous 25 years at the former Cardinal Mooney High School.

— Mike Latona

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