

## **Catholic Relief Services & Catholic Colleges and Universities: A Strategic Alliance**

### **CRS History and Purpose**

Catholic Relief Services was founded by the Catholic Bishops of the United States in 1943, to assist the poor and disadvantaged outside of this country. Our organizational identity comes from the Catholic Church. Our work is grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the principles of Catholic social teaching, which call all people to solidarity, to work toward the elimination of poverty, to speak out against injustice and to actively shape a more peaceful and just world.

Catholic Relief Services currently works in over 80 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In the past five decades, CRS has served millions of the world's poor and marginalized. CRS assists those who are suffering because of natural and man-made disasters, and promotes integral human development through programs in agriculture, health, education, micro finance, peacebuilding, human rights, and HIV-AIDS.

### **Who We Serve and Our Outreach in the United States**

Our focus is two-pronged: we serve the poor and marginalized overseas and the Catholic community in the United States. Being identified with and supported by the Catholic community in the U.S. gives us the responsibility to involve that community in understanding its role in systems of injustice and how it can help change those systems. U.S. Catholics have an important contribution to make in helping to create a more just world, and our choices as consumers, investors, voters and advocates resonate far beyond our borders. CRS is the link between the Catholic community in the United States and its brother and sisters around the world. Our experience overseas and our place within the Church puts us in a unique position to help raise awareness of the developing world and to help Catholics in the U.S. forge real connections with people overseas.

### **Why Catholic Colleges and Universities**

Catholic colleges and universities, their faculty, administrators and their student populations are a potentially significant force in the dual constituency model of CRS work and service. In the long term, colleges and universities have great influence in the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, choice of lifestyles, careers, and political perspectives of society. This happens not only by the education and experience that students obtain while at school, but also by the presence of the institutions themselves in the communities where they are located. For short to medium term goals university populations are somewhat more easily accessible and amenable to activism on social justice issues. Catholic colleges and universities are striving to integrate Catholic social teaching and the social mission of the Church into their campus life and academic programs. There are many opportunities for mutual benefit and support in this area, as both the academic community and CRS attempt to understand and work within a variety of economic, political and social environments using Catholic social teaching as the framework which guides who we are, what we do and how we do it.

### ***What CRS has to offer the Academic Community***

- A unique insight into the social mission of the Church internationally
- Access to empirical data and material for research and study on a wide variety of economic, political, social, and human rights issues
- Linkages with colleges, universities and research institutes in the countries where CRS works overseas
- Opportunities to participate in the work of CRS overseas and domestically, including public policy debate and advocacy

### ***Benefits to CRS***

- Mobilization of support from university populations for key social justice advocacy initiatives
- Collaboration on operational and applied research needs of CRS
- Academic support for study and analysis of strategic international issues from a Catholic social teaching perspective
- Opportunities to influence attitudes and behaviors about international social justice issues through information, exposure and education

### **Africa: A Window of Opportunity**

In their recent pastoral letter, *A Call to Solidarity with Africa*, the American Bishops stated:

*We write in hope, recognizing the history, strength, spirituality, courage and capacity of the Church and peoples of Africa. We write with deep concern, witnessing the proliferation of armed conflict, deterioration in health care and education infrastructures, the weakening of social and community structures, and an increasing spread of disease and other threats to the lives of our African brothers and sisters. Our fear is that Africa's hopes could be destroyed by indifference and inaction in Africa and around the world.*

CRS' two year campaign on Africa, *Africa Rising: Hope and Healing*, brings attention to the challenges facing Africa and strives to advance policies in the U.S. government, international financial institutions and the private sector that support development goals. As a Catholic community, we emphasize the moral obligation that calls us to solidarity with our poorest brothers and sisters around the world.

The campaign presents a unique opportunity for advancing the relationships between Catholic colleges and universities and Catholic Relief Services by initially focusing on a timely and concrete issue. It lends itself to collaboration at many levels, including but not limited to:

- Student and faculty activism related to legislative advocacy
- Expanding the availability of resources for first hand information about Africa and current issues to classes, academic publications, conferences, etc.
- Opportunities to identify and develop research projects/case studies of mutual interests, particularly relevant to the professional schools