

Catholic Relief Services:
**One Organization's Journey with Catholic Social Thought and
Corporate Social Responsibility**

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Catholic Relief Services

Introduction

Catholic Social Thought and Corporate Social Responsibility contain many concepts that are foundational for an organization seeking to become "A Good Company" and promote ethical values in its culture and in its work. The concepts have in common universal values that are shared by many faith-based traditions (e.g., Christian, Jewish, Moslem, Hindu, etc.) as well as some for-profit companies and corporations. While organizations may recognize the innate value of the principles, the challenge comes in embedding them into an organization's fabric and culture and in allowing the principles to guide decisions and relationships at all levels and in all functions. For more than a decade, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the official relief and development agency of the U.S. Catholic Church, has consciously attempted to inculcate these principles into its work in 99 countries around the world, as well as within the Agency itself.

In the public mind, CRS is best known as an American humanitarian agency that responds to the world's major emergencies and disasters. Over the past year or so, CRS has provided humanitarian assistance to victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan, hurricanes and mudslides in Central America, the food crisis in Africa's Sahel and the ongoing conflict in Darfur. More recently, the Agency responded to the people displaced by violence in the Middle East, as well as the earthquake, tsunami and volcanic eruptions in Indonesia.

But emergency relief is only a part of the work of CRS. The Agency also helps communities develop the resources they need to sustain themselves. CRS overseas assistance efforts around the world involve programming in agriculture, HIV/AIDS, community health, education, emergency response, peacebuilding and microfinance. Domestically, CRS implements educational programs in dioceses, parishes, schools and homes to inform people in the U.S. about the Agency's work, and to foster solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need around the world. CRS strives to educate U.S. Catholics

about their moral responsibilities toward poor people around the world, and is increasingly providing opportunities to act upon them.

Underlying this work is a commitment to the U.S. Catholic Bishops' call for global solidarity¹ by promoting awareness of international and social justice issues. Because the causes of poverty are often rooted in international or domestic policies that perpetuate inequity and injustice, CRS works with local dioceses, the offices of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and with other international Catholic networks to promote more just and socially responsible policies and practices — at home and abroad. In other words, CRS understands its mission as a relief and development agency to include the promotion of global solidarity and social justice.

But this has not always been the case.

Nearly 15 years ago, the leadership and employees of CRS realized that over time the Agency had lost focus of some basic principles of Catholic Social Thought. A deliberate decision was made to start down a path that would bring the organization back in line with these principles. Looking back it is clear the decision was a good one, but the experience was filled with anxiety, angst and disillusionment as well as excitement, energy and hope. This paper will follow that journey of how the principles were institutionalized and linked to practices that have made CRS a better organization – and hopefully, a “Good Company.” It will also point to the way ahead and what has to be done to keep Catholic Social Thought and Corporate Social Responsibility as the foundation for Agency’s philosophy, values and practices.

1. The history of CRS and how it lost focus on the tenets of Catholic Social Thought

CRS was founded in the crucible of war. Originally called War Relief Services, the Agency was created in 1943 by the U.S. bishops to help resettle Polish refugees fleeing from Soviet gulags and to assist war orphans and other suffering people.

From its beginning, CRS has always understood itself as a Catholic agency. For much of its history, CRS understood its mission as performing the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, and so forth. The Agency first did this in the context of war relief. Hence, CRS was essentially an emergency and refugee organization at its founding.

A confluence of events in the mid-1950s helped the Agency to expand: the end of colonial rule in Asia and Africa, the beginnings of the Cold War, and the granting of U.S. government funds to CRS as a result of the Truman Doctrine. The Agency's name was officially changed to Catholic Relief Services in 1955, and the next 10 years saw it open 25 country programs in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. With resources provided by the American Catholic community and the U.S. government, the Agency’s

programming focused on the provision of basic relief, including simple distributions of food, clothing and medicine.

As CRS grew, its programming focus widened, adapting to meet the needs of the post-World War II Catholic Church and the circumstances of the people it served around the world. Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s and 1980s, there was an evolution toward socio-economic development and more efficient emergency response. Although this evolution was for CRS a positive step, it was largely secular in nature and driven by increased funding from the government. Through this process, CRS came to broaden its understanding of its mission from primarily one of charity and emergency response to one of development, self-help and sustainability. The Agency came to view its work through a “development lens,” in which high value was placed not only on addressing the manifestations of poverty through relief activities, but also on eliminating the immediate causes of poverty through long-term development programs. A side effect of this emphasis on professionalism, however, was that the mission of CRS received less attention. CRS was not alone in this struggle for organizational identity. Many Catholic institutions, including the Church’s health care institutions, its extensive and excellent schools and universities and its other social service programs, also struggled with their “Catholic identity.”²

At the same time, in the wake of the post-Vatican II period, CRS began to grapple with new approaches to and understandings of its work, its identity and its mission. The Agency’s leadership passed from the clergy to laypeople, and CRS joined many other Church-based institutions in wrestling with questions surrounding its Catholic identity.

Events in the late 1980s and early 1990s fundamentally changed the world in which CRS worked. Those years brought two new factors. The first was the end of the Cold War, which led to volatile political and social climates in many developing and Third World countries. Throughout Africa and parts of Europe, Asia and Latin America, governments were weakened—and sometimes destroyed—by ethnic conflict coupled with famine, drought and other natural disasters. The end of the Cold War also brought a drastic cut in foreign aid that had been funneled to many poor countries to thwart Communism. As a result, the development programs in very poor countries, particularly in Africa, which American NGOs such as CRS were carrying out on a large scale, and to which they had tied their identity, were no longer able to attract public funding.

At the same time, many CRS staff members began to reflect seriously on the strengths and weaknesses of the Agency's approach to development. There was a growing recognition that the focus on socio-economic development, while positive, was too limited. On the one hand, CRS had a clear understanding of who it was and what it did when its staff was handing out packets of food in Europe and, later, in the developing world. But now the Agency had expanded its programming. There was an increasing sense that the identity of CRS was being obscured, and this prompted an Agency-wide process of organizational introspection.

2. The journey back

As CRS began inaugurating a re-evaluation of its mission and identity, it was jarred by an event that forever changed it as an institution: the Rwandan genocide.

By 1994, CRS had been working in Rwanda for three decades, since before that nation won its independence. The CRS staff was aware of the conflicts between Hutus and Tutsis. But they had concluded that addressing these societal relationships was not a part of the Agency's mandate as a relief and development organization. CRS staff simply tried to work around them.

Then, in April 1994, the genocide began. More than 800,000 people were murdered over three months. It deeply affected CRS as an agency and as individuals. CRS staff lost friends, colleagues and family members. And when it was over, they saw that all the good work they had been doing—the silos and schools they built, the children they fed, the farms they helped to plant—was not enough. CRS programs were wiped out within days and many of the people they had served perished.

The Rwandan genocide accelerated the process CRS had already begun of taking a hard look at itself. What the Agency learned from the horror of Rwanda was that its work in relief and development, though carried out effectively and efficiently, was not enough. Its identity as "development professionals" came under serious question. Agency officials realized that they had not addressed the justice issues relating to the structures that perpetuated societal imbalances in Rwanda. The Agency had failed to support programs that fostered right relations among peoples, among institutions and people, and inside the Church.

After much reflection, CRS resolved to address not just the symptoms of crises—burned-out houses, homeless refugees and food shortages—but also the systems and structures that cause crises. It concluded that this was sound policy as well as a moral imperative. Without true systemic change necessary to produce more peaceful or tolerant surroundings, relief and development efforts could not succeed.

The events in Rwanda were a catalyst that impelled CRS through what can only be described as an institutional transformation. As the Agency went through this process, it was guided by a jewel it rediscovered in its religious tradition: Catholic Social Thought.

Catholic Social Thought provides the perfect framework for an organization like CRS. It calls people to solidarity, to balance relationships in society and among themselves. It places the dignity of the human person at the center of all CRS does. It upholds the principle of subsidiarity, which says that higher levels of an organization like CRS should perform no function or duty that could be better handled at a more local level, by people who know the cultural, social, and political context better than CRS people do.

At the same time, the principles of Catholic Social Thought speak universal truths to people of other faiths. As an international agency, CRS faced the challenge of regrounding itself in its Catholic identity, while at the same time maintaining and strengthening its community of staff and partners, who represent religions and cultures from every corner of the globe. Catholic Social Thought promised to make that possible.

The operational changes demanded by these insights did not happen overnight or easily. And, in fact, it is still a work very much in progress. There have been a number of milestones along the way.

Beginning in late 1995, CRS embarked on the first Agency-wide strategic planning process in its history with the aim of devising a guide to its choices and actions. People throughout the Agency entered the process ready to expand their understanding of the mission of CRS to include justice, peace and systemic change. This involved a good deal of debate, as would be the case any time a successful organization considered making a change to what it had been doing well for decades.

In 1996, as the result of a series of retreats and executive workshops, the Agency determined that the concept of *justice*, as defined in Catholic Social Thought – the establishment and maintenance of right relationships among all people – should be formulated as a distinct strategy. It was clear that achievements in development would continue to be undermined through violence and inequality if CRS did not address the systems and structures that created poverty and marginalization. It was not enough to provide goods and services to the poor; CRS needed to support local partners and communities to change social structures that contribute to unjust situations. A new approach was needed and it was called the Justice Strategy.

Since then, CRS has worked to address issues of justice in all its programs. Instead of viewing its work through a “Development Lens,” CRS now began consciously employing a “Justice Lens” in evaluating its programming. Namely, it viewed its mission and work from the perspective of whether it built a culture of justice and peace through the promotion of just and right relationships.

Having made a commitment to a Justice Strategy, CRS launched an Agency-wide education effort. Because CRS has nearly 5,000 employees spread around the world, it could not simply assume that each of them would understand, agree with and want to implement the concept of justice in the same way. Indeed, “justice” is a concept that can carry vastly different meanings, depending on one’s cultural perspective.

Therefore, CRS undertook a participatory, reflective process that allowed people to explore the concepts of Catholic Social Thought from their own perspectives and, having done that, begin to decide how to carry the Justice Lens out in their work. Over about two years, every CRS office in every country it served engaged in a facilitated “Justice Reflection” exploring the basics of Catholic Social Thought. These Justice Reflections helped CRS employees to better understand and “own” the concepts of Catholic Social Thought and the Justice Lens. Feedback from the Justice Reflections led to development

of the CRS Guiding Principles, a series of eight statements that summarized the essence of Catholic Social Thought.³

This process took on added momentum in 2000, when CRS convened a "World Summit," which brought together 250 CRS staff members and people from its partner agencies around the world, asking them to bring along the ideas that had been percolating at the Agency's country and regional levels. Once they were gathered, these staffers and partners developed their ideas into an Agency vision. Out of the World Summit came the CRS Vision Statement:

Solidarity will transform the world to:

- *Cherish and uphold the sacredness and dignity of every person*
- *Commit to and practice peace, justice, and reconciliation*
- *Celebrate and protect the integrity of all creation*

In practical terms, implementing the Justice Lens meant reexamining everything CRS did—its programs, its policies, how its staff related to the people they serve, how they related to the U.S. Catholic community, how they related to one another as fellow employees of CRS—and evaluating all this in terms of whether it helped to build a culture of justice, peace and reconciliation.

In terms of programming, CRS now evaluates not just whether its interventions are effective and sustainable, but whether they might have a negative impact on a community's social or economic relationships. Assisting one group in a community, even if its members are in dire need after a disaster or emergency, might alienate the members of a group that did not receive assistance. Staff must determine what effect CRS programs might have on relations between various groups, such as leaders and community members, men and women, rich and poor, and Christian and Muslim. All of this enters into the justice equation.

This commitment to solidarity also led CRS to realize that, as a Catholic agency, it not only had an opportunity, but an obligation to help U.S. Catholics connect with the people CRS serves overseas. In other words, CRS recognized that it serves a dual constituency: both poor and marginalized people overseas *and* Catholics in the United States in their way of being open to poor and marginalized people. In 2002, CRS established the U.S. Operations Division, which seeks to raise the awareness of U.S. Catholics about the plight poor people around the world. At the same time, CRS provides opportunities for Catholics to put their faith into action by participating in advocacy, programs and partnerships that address issues of international peace and social justice.

CRS also realized that, as an organization, it had to practice what it preached. This meant examining its management practices as well as its programming overseas. CRS introduced a concept called the "Just Workplace," which entails listening to its employees, allowing innovations, engaging various levels of the organization in decision making, and keeping people throughout the organization informed.⁴

3. The influence of Catholic Social Thought and Corporate Social Responsibility in CRS programming

As a faith-based, non-profit relief and development agency, Catholic Relief Services is not part of what is commonly understood as the "business community" and therefore has never explicitly promulgated or enacted the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility. To the extent that Corporate Social Responsibility is about moderating the drive to maximize profits by considering social and environmental factors that benefit the community and the world, its tenets do not necessarily impact an organization like CRS.

But in recent years, the understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility has expanded. One widely accepted definition of Corporate Social Responsibility has been offered by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, which states: "Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large."⁵ In the sense that Corporate Social Responsibility is concerned about the effects that an institution has on the community and the world, and its emphasis on sustainable development, its principles most certainly have something to say to an organization like CRS.

Understood narrowly, CRS adopted the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility decades ago, when it embraced the "development lens." As the agency moved to professionalize its programming and make a longer-term impact than was possible by offering mere handouts of food and other supplies, it embraced the concepts of sustainable development that would enable communities to become self sufficient and avoid dependency on foreign aid. With the advent of the Justice Lens, however, CRS became more aware of the effects of its programming on local communities and gradually devised strategies to minimize negative impacts and maximize the local assets and capabilities of the people it served.

For example, for many years CRS has employed the "Do No Harm" approach to doing development work within a context of social or political conflict, which is an effort to examine the complex roots of these conflicts and to help international Non-Governmental Organizations, despite their good intentions, from exacerbating these tensions.

In addition, environmental issues have become more of a concern to CRS in recent years. Severe economic pressures often lead people in poor communities overseas to despoil their local environments in order to scratch out a minimum level of subsistence – over farming soil, deforesting trees for firewood, polluting local waterways. In its agricultural programs, CRS has adopted agro-economic development and environmental stewardship strategies that seek to mitigate this ecological damage and devise systems that allow communities to reap benefits from revitalized environmental systems.

There are several other sectors of CRS programming in which the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility and Catholic Social Thought intersect:

Corporate Engagement

CRS has embarked on a process of engaging corporations in the Agency's work of relief and development. These kinds of partnerships potentially offer great opportunities that will provide substantial benefits for the people CRS serves. One example is the partnership CRS has entered into with Atlas Copco Drilling Solutions of Garland, Texas. CRS, with funds provided by its donors, recently purchased a water drilling rig from Atlas Copco. The rig was given to the Ethiopian Catholic Church, which is using it to drill wells in the semiarid central Ethiopian Rift Valley, where a lack of access to clean, reliable drinking water threatens the health of its residents. As a part of this partnership, Atlas Copco has agreed to provide water development strategies throughout Africa.

In another example, earlier this year CRS received a \$3.2 million grant from Microsoft to enhance emergency response and relief operations through the use of advanced technology. The grant allowed CRS to implement and benefit from the latest Microsoft products and technologies, enabling all CRS domestic and overseas offices to use the same versions of the main Microsoft business applications. Specifically, the grant enabled the Agency to upgrade its core software in 79 countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and the United States.

While such partnerships with corporations open an exciting window of possibility, they also must be evaluated and measured against the principles of Catholic Social Thought and the Justice Lens. The Agency has recently begun investigating how best to manage corporate engagement decisions that create competing interests or values. For example, CRS is revising and refining a set of guidelines that will help determine if a particular partnership is appropriate. This is a broad-based and inclusive process that is helping the agency live out its commitment to Catholic Social Thought and the Justice Lens as well as the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Extractive Industries

CRS has also become active in shedding light on the issues surrounding extractive industries, particularly oil.

Through the Extractive Industries in Africa Initiative, CRS works with country programs and partners, as well as the U.S. Catholic Church and other partners, to ensure that natural resource exploitation fosters poverty reduction and development and does not come at the expense of human rights, the environment and the human dignity of the poor who live amidst such massive wealth.

CRS supports training, research, policy and advocacy activities at the local, national, regional and international levels. CRS supports efforts to control the trade in "conflict

diamonds" and promotes the idea that trade in oil and other natural resources between Africa and the U.S. should respect human rights and promote transparent and accountable management. Policy changes by international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, governments and multinational corporations are needed if Africans are to benefit from the continent's enormous natural wealth.

CRS, along with numerous Chadian and Cameroonian and international partners, plays a critical role in ensuring governmental, oil industry and World Bank compliance with safety, environmental standards and development policy relating to prospecting, drilling and the transportation of oil and the subsequent use of resulting revenues. Community organizing, advocacy and regular widespread information exchange from monitoring exercises brought needed international attention and accountability. CRS has published two widely cited reports on these issues: *The Bottom of the Barrel*⁶ and *Chad's Oil: Miracle or Mirage?*⁷

CRS is also a signatory to the Publish What You Pay statement of principles calling on oil, gas, and mining companies to disclose their revenue payments to national governments.

Microfinance

CRS began small enterprise development projects in the 1960s and launched its first microfinance pilot project in 1988. Through its microfinance programs, CRS aims to help empower poor people, especially women, by providing access to financial services – ranging from credit and savings to insurance – that are integral to human development. This will enable them to better support themselves and their families, while developing a solid foundation on which to create self-sufficiency in the future.

CRS has established a solid track record of assisting the entrepreneurial poor in cities, towns or densely populated rural areas. However, reflection on Catholic Social Thought, especially on the option for the poor, led CRS in 2005 to refocus its microfinance strategy. There was a sense that CRS could do more to reach out to extremely poor, severely marginalized people whose borrowing capacity is in the realm of tens rather than hundreds of dollars. This underserved population, which often needs a safe place to save rather than taking on debt, and who live far from towns and cities, requires an entirely different model than the traditional microfinance institution.

Therefore, CRS has made a strategic decision to empower and support local ownership of existing microfinance programs (in accordance with the Catholic Social Thought principle of subsidiarity) while exploring alternative methodologies that target marginalized and underserved communities. The Agency will refocus its efforts on facilitating the formation of savings-led groups, or self-help lending groups as well as assessing ways that credit and savings services can compliment business development services initiatives, agriculture, agribusiness, and other cross-cutting programs in livelihood development to expand economic opportunities for the very poor.

Savings-led groups, in which a small group of people pool their resources, which are then used to provide small loans to group members, benefit group members quickly. They especially benefit women, who increasingly head up poor households and who studies have found are far more likely than men to channel increased income from their business activities into essential benefits for their families.

One example of a self-help lending group model is the Savings and Internal Lending Community (SILC). The SILC model provides financial services to the poorest of the poor who are in need of savings services and very small loans of \$5 to \$30. After a few years in operation, individual participants in SILC programs can be linked to more formal types of financial services, such as microfinance institutions, commercial banks and credit unions. SILC programs are completely sustainable and require little or no outside assistance once the groups are established and trained. The model is highly replicable among communities because it is simple, appeals to common sense and is inherently transparent.

Fair Trade

CRS has worked since 1995 to promote economic justice through its promotion of Fair Trade, an alternative approach to international trade designed to create economic opportunities for disadvantaged artisans and farmers who are often left on the sidelines of the conventional trading system. Fair Trade is a network of trading relationships built on a series of mutual commitments that reflect core principles of Catholic Social Thought on economic justice:

- Fair prices/just wages: Regardless of the prevailing market price for products/labor, producers and workers in the Fair Trade system are paid prices/wages that meet basic needs and permit people to work in dignity.
- Cooperative workplaces: Fair Trade, particularly in crafts and commodities, has been closely associated with the promotion of cooperatives that help marginalized producers achieve economies of scale and improve their position in the marketplace.
- Access to credit/technical assistance: As indicated in the section above on Microfinance, access to working capital is one of the chief obstacles to rural development worldwide; Fair Trade buyers are required to provide access to credit on fair terms, and generally work with their producer partners to deliver the technical assistance they need to thrive.
- Ecological sustainability: Fair Trade encourages and rewards producers for organic and shade-grown farming and provides technical assistance to help them transition to more sustainable farming techniques.
- Long-term relationships: Fair Trade relationships are generally long-term, providing farmers and artisans with the assurance of sustained revenue streams and affording the ability to make long-range plans for themselves, their businesses and their families.

Each of these commitments finds ample resonance in Catholic Social Thought on the economy and the environment. Collectively, they foster social and economic development because they respond directly to the just demands of small-scale artisans and farmers for the resources they need but cannot access in conventional markets.

The CRS Fair Trade Program comprises three discrete programs: Work of Human Hands (handcrafts), the CRS Fair Trade Coffee Program and the CRS Fair Trade Chocolate Program. In each program, CRS works to connect its dual constituencies through partner organizations whose businesses embody Fair Trade principles.

In the Work of Human Hands program, CRS has partnered since 1995 with SERRV International, a non-profit alternative trade organization whose “mission is to promote the social and economic progress of people in developing regions of the world by marketing their handcrafts and foods in a just and direct manner.” In the Coffee Program, CRS works with more than one dozen for-profit companies that uphold Fair Trade principles in all their trading relationships with coffee farming cooperatives overseas. And in the Chocolate Program, CRS partners with SERRV International to promote Divine chocolate, which is made using exclusively Fair Trade cocoa beans from the Kuapa Kokoo cacao farmers association in Ghana. Divine is produced by London-based Day Chocolate, of which 47 percent is owned by the farmers of Kuapa Kokoo. This means that the farmers not only earn a fair price for their cacao, but also participate in decisions about how the company is run and share in its profits.

Finally, each of these programs generates revenue for CRS. Every time a CRS constituent in the United States purchases crafts, coffee or chocolate through the program, a percentage of that purchase goes to the CRS Fair Trade Fund. The Fair Trade Fund, in turn, makes Development Grants to small-scale producer groups overseas that are working to access the Fair Trade market and Market-Building Grants to Fair Trade advocates in the United States whose activities have unique potential to expand opportunities for producers overseas. Through this mechanism, CRS is working to amplify the benefits of its Fair Trade programming for the people it serves overseas.

Peacebuilding

Perhaps the clearest influence of Catholic Social Thought on the Agency’s programming can be seen in its embrace of peacebuilding as a strategic priority. The term “peacebuilding” as used here refers to the long-term project of building peaceful, stable communities and societies. It is useful to distinguish it from two other similar, but distinct activities: Peacemaking, which is the work of diplomats bringing warring parties to an agreement to cease hostilities; and peacekeeping, which is typically the activity of a third-party military force that attempts to maintain ceasefires between armed forces in conflict.

After adopting the Justice Lens as an Agency-wide strategy, CRS assembled a team of regional advisors and a headquarters-based technical staff to work with partners to launch peacebuilding projects in dozens of countries. Headquarters began monitoring the number of staff trained in peacebuilding as well as the number of projects explicitly

designated for work on peace and justice. The work of determining where to start fell to CRS partners and country programs. Rather than pursue a specific niche in peacebuilding, the choice was made to let a thousand flowers bloom. In these early efforts, CRS built principally on its existing partnerships, mostly with the local dioceses in the countries where the Agency has programming, but also with other local partners. The advantage of this approach was that it allowed the Agency to quickly devise programs that led to a wide breadth of experience. For example, in Sri Lanka, CRS has worked with the Church to address longstanding conflict between ethnic groups in the North and the South. The Church, with members on both sides of the troubled divide, has established a National Peace Program. This is facilitated through 12 centers across Sri Lanka. Some of the major CRS-assisted activities include: North/South exchange programs, peace education workshops, rallies and marches, language learning initiatives, peace camps, leadership training, publications of peace manuals, etc.

From this early concentration of peacebuilding efforts on the grassroots – at the parish and village level, with local partners and individual dioceses – CRS has launched several efforts to facilitate peacebuilding as a more regional level. These efforts involve working with the “grass tops” of societies, namely with groups of bishops, with bishops’ conferences from Latin America, Asia and Africa, and on the continental level in Africa with SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar). These groups of bishops are coming together to discuss their experiences of conflict in their continents and in their own countries.

For example, in the spring of 2004, aided by U.S. government funding, CRS brought a group of 21 Burundians, including bishops, priests, sisters and a range of lay leaders to the Baltimore area. They were offered three weeks of joint planning and preparation for practical peacebuilding back in Burundi. It was reasoned that in a predominantly Catholic country, where a decade-old conflict still smolders, the Church with its array of institutions could play a critical role.

CRS and Partnerships

All CRS programs are based upon operational relationships that capitalize on complementary capacities to achieve the optimum benefit for poor and marginalized people. At their best, these relationships reflect the concept of partnership – embodying essential principles of Catholic Social Thought, such as respect for human dignity, the life of the person in community and people’s ownership of their own development.

CRS bases partnerships upon a shared vision for addressing people’s immediate needs and the underlying causes of suffering and injustice. As an organization of the Catholic Church in the U.S., CRS works closely with the local Catholic Church, usually through its social action agencies, because of a common commitment to justice that defends the dignity of all persons. CRS also collaborates with other faith-based and secular organizations (including private, government, community and intermediate entities) in recognition of the role they play in promoting justice and reconciliation, and of the

fundamental values which are frequently shared by other faith and humanitarian traditions.

All CRS relationships and partnerships assign responsibility for decision making and implementation to a level as close as possible to the people whom decisions will affect, in accordance with the Catholic Social Thought principle of subsidiarity. Local partners share the responsibility for identifying priority needs and opportunities, designing the response to those needs and acquiring the skills required for the implementation of that response.

CRS fosters equitable partnerships by engaging in a process of mutually defining rights and responsibilities, another facet of Catholic Social Thought. These rights and responsibilities are defined in relation to each partner's capacity. In its relationships with partners, CRS promotes openness and sharing of perspectives and approaches. These relationships are founded on a spirit of respect of differences, a commitment to listening to and learning from each other, and a mutual willingness to change behavior and attitudes. CRS also encourages relationships between local partners and local communities. By building partnerships, CRS seeks to make a contribution to strengthening civil society. CRS also encourages partners to engage in dialogue and action with other members of civil society in order to contribute to the transformation of unjust structures and systems.

Policy and Advocacy

Advocacy refers to the different strategies aimed at influencing decision-making at the local, national and international level. CRS advocacy focuses on issues arising from its work overseas with the poor of the world. CRS engages in advocacy based on the Agency's understanding of the principles of Catholic Social Thought, especially the dignity of the human person, the Biblical understanding of justice and the common good as the promotion of right relationships in community and the call to solidarity.

For CRS, seeking justice and global solidarity require that the Agency strives to uphold systems that promote justice and peace, and likewise works to change structures, systems and practices that do not respect the rights of all and that do not allow full participation in economic, social and political life. It also means that Catholics must contribute to the transformation of relationships and attitudes that separate the developed and developing world and contribute to the perpetuation of unjust systems and practices. Most importantly, solidarity and justice call Catholics to action.

As people of faith, Catholics in the United States have a moral obligation to speak out on issues that affect our brothers and sisters around the world. The U.S. Catholic Bishops, in their statement, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, state:

What does it mean to be a Catholic living in the United States in the year 2004 and beyond? As Catholics, the election and the policy choices that follow it call

us to recommit ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel and church teaching into the public square.⁸

Likewise, the Bishops in the same statement point out that as citizens of the U.S., Catholics hold a unique power to address important policy issues, particularly international issues. They state: “As citizens and residents of the United States, we have the duty to participate now and in the future in the debates and choices over the values, vision and leaders that will guide our nation.”⁹

In the United States, CRS raises awareness about issues confronting the world’s poor, helps educate Catholics about public policy issues that impact the people the Agency serves overseas and encourages them to join CRS in its advocacy efforts for more just and socially responsible policies and practices.

Specifically, CRS advocacy encompasses three approaches:

- CRS Policy Issue Advisers research and analyze policy issues of concern to CRS and its worldwide partners. They develop public policy recommendations in close coordination with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and with other like-minded organizations in the United States.
- The CRS Advocacy Department staff oversees the promotion and support of the Agency policy and advocacy priorities. The Legislative Affairs staff is dedicated to forging relationships with members of Congress and their staffs, as well as Administration officials and to advocate directly before them with the policy recommendations prepared by CRS Policy Issues Advisers. The CRS Legislative Affairs staff also liaises with legislative staff from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to coordinate messages and workload and work with advocates from like-minded organizations.
- The Advocacy Department staff also coordinates efforts to reach out to the U.S. Catholic community through dioceses, parishes, universities, religious communities and like-minded organizations to raise awareness about international policy issues and to engage Catholics in the policymaking process. The staff provides resources like educational materials, advocacy training opportunities and legislative network activities.

Conclusion: The Path Forward

It has been more than a decade since CRS adopted the Justice Strategy and the Justice Lens. The 2000 World Summit generated great enthusiasm and optimism in the Agency about the possibilities for the future. The challenge going forward is channeling and maintaining that momentum.

In 2001, the executive leadership of CRS laid out a Strategic Framework that would guide the Agency for the next five years. The Strategic Framework laid out a goal and five objectives, each of which applied to all parts of the Agency and were intended to be accomplished in five years or less.

The goal: The people we serve support each other to achieve their full potential, share equitably in the goods of the earth and live in peace.

The objectives:

1. CRS, working with our partners, will have facilitated concrete changes to systems and practices that contribute to injustice.
2. The people that CRS and our partners serve are fuller participants in local, national and global actions for the common good.
3. CRS and our partners will meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable through building sustainable local capacities
4. CRS, our partners and the people we serve demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that promote peace, tolerance and reconciliation.
5. CRS has systems, structures and culture that promote staff initiative and ownership, and achievement of our strategy.

CRS is now in the midst of evaluating its progress toward those objectives, as well as devising a new Strategic Plan that will guide the Agency through the next five years.

Another challenge to maintaining the CRS commitment to Catholic Social Thought and the Agency's Guiding Principles is the staff turnover that an institution experiences over time. New employees have varying levels of familiarity with Catholic Social Thought and do not share the history of the process that led CRS to embrace a commitment to inculcate these principles in its life and work. To address this issue, CRS has devised a Justice and Solidarity Reflection, which is a requirement for each new employee. This reflection is a two-day intensive immersion in the principles of Catholic Social Thought, the history of how CRS came to a renewed appreciation of it Catholic Social Thought tradition, and an overview of how CRS employs Catholic Social Thought in its programming and in the workplace.

One Human Family

The CRS mission statement clearly declares that the “Fundamental motivating force in all CRS activities is the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” which calls all believers to realize our common humanity, our relatedness as brothers and sisters in Christ, and our obligation to exercise a preferential option for the poor no matter where they are – in our own backyard or on the other side of the world. The Gospel of Jesus Christ makes global love of neighbor through the ministry of service to the poor a requirement and not an option for anyone who would call themselves Christ's disciples.

This insight led CRS to conclude that its ministry to the poor is not confined to people who live overseas. For this reason, CRS has embarked on a mission of helping Catholics

in the U.S. live their lives in greater solidarity with the poor overseas. This solidarity involves not just improving and changing the lives of poor people in the developing world, but requires that Catholics in the U.S. change their own lives as well. In order to make a lasting change in the lives of people in developing countries, American Catholics must contribute to transforming the unjust structures that keep people in poverty and conflict around the world. In order to make any headway to changing these structures, Americans, as citizens of the richest nation in the world, must change the reality in their own country. With 65 million members, the American Catholic Church could, and should be a force committed to international peace and justice in the world.

As a U.S. Catholic organization that can contribute significantly to the American Church's understanding of international social justice issues because of its experience on the ground, CRS came to recognize that it had not only an opportunity, but also an obligation, to help American Catholics respond to the Gospel call to be concerned about the needs of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters.

Consequently, CRS has begun a major push to engage U.S. Catholics, on the basis of our shared faith, in actions that promote global love of neighbor and build upon our understanding that we are all part of One Human Family. CRS is raising awareness that the Catholic faith calls each of the faithful to realize that the diminishment of any person's dignity by poverty, conflict or injustice is a diminishment of our own humanity.

As a result, CRS reformulated its strategy to include an effort to reach out to the hearts and minds of U.S. Catholics, engage them in solidarity and to assist them in living their lives justly. Serving U.S. Catholics is both a means – to a more just world – and an end in itself for Catholics to follow the teachings of their faith. To that end, CRS created a U.S. Operations division in its headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland, to expand its work in the United States. Through education, advocacy, global exchanges and other programs, CRS U.S. Operations will help American Catholics understand that all aspects of their lives – the way they live, consume, vote, invest and give – affect the One Human Family both at home and abroad.

The Inspiration and Challenge of Deus Caritas Est

As a humanitarian agency that deeply values its Catholic identity and tradition, CRS greatly values the encouraging and challenging words of Pope Benedict XVI in his first papal encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. More than half of its 71 pages are devoted to Catholic humanitarian organizations like CRS that carry out the Church's mission of welfare, charity and social justice.

In an address to the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* days before the encyclical was publicly released, as well as in the encyclical itself, Pope Benedict made it clear that helping one's neighbor is not an option for Catholics. "The ecclesial organization of charity is not a form of social assistance that is casually added to the Church's reality, an initiative that could also be left to others. Instead, it is part of the nature of the Church," Pope Benedict said in his address to *Cor Unum*.¹⁰ In other words, it is our obligation as Catholics to

reach out in solidarity to our brothers and sisters, both in our midst and overseas, particularly those most in need. We are all called to be One Human Family.

Pope Benedict directs several messages to those who work at organizations like CRS:

- Our work should always be done in a spirit of humility.¹¹
- As humanitarian workers, we must also be motivated by a “heartfelt concern” for the people we serve, and humanitarian action should be rooted in selfless love (the love of neighbor called agape).¹²
- The Church’s humanitarian workers “must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, [i.e., Marxism] but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love.”¹³
- Those of us who work in the Church’s charitable organizations should receive the proper professional training and resources to carry out our tasks.¹⁴

Inspired by the entreaties put forth by Pope Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est*, CRS, in a spirit of humility, faces several challenges as it strives to continue its commitment to inculcating Catholic Social Thought and Corporate Social Responsibility in its practices and policies.

- Outreach to Islam. In our work around the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, CRS is daily in contact and collaboration with our brothers and sisters of the Islamic faith. Indeed, many locally hired employees of CRS, as well as many of our partners, are Muslim. In our delivery of lifesaving emergency and long-term development services, we do not distinguish between Christians and people of other faiths – or people who espouse no religious faith. In our day-to-day interactions with people of other religious traditions, particularly those that are non-Christian, we strive to be understanding and welcoming. It is an ongoing challenge to maintain this openness to religious pluralism while at the same time remaining true to our Christian tradition and heritage.
- As an organization based in a country that is the world’s remaining superpower and represents an increasingly wealthy and influential Catholic constituency, CRS must remain conscious of its power and influence as an institution and its ability to overwhelm local Church structures. It is our policy to work through and defer to local Church entities. However, in an emergency, when lifesaving help is urgently required and CRS has the ability and resources to provide it, such sensitivities can be overlooked.
- In a related point, it is CRS policy and intention to work with and through the local Catholic Church Caritas organizations. Situational realities and requirements, however, sometimes dictate a more proactive approach that can alienate smaller, local Catholic social service agencies. CRS must strive to keep in mind these sensitivities, even in the most exigent of circumstances.
- Finally, one of the major funders for CRS projects overseas has historically been, and remains the U.S. government. Although the U.S. Catholic community has a long history of generosity to the poor people overseas served by the CRS, the Agency applies for and accepts U.S. government funds because they greatly enhance the amount of humanitarian aid and long-term development it is able to

provide. CRS acts as a transparent mediator in the delivery of a great deal of U.S. foreign aid overseas, ensuring that the generosity of U.S. taxpayers is not squandered by corrupt regimes or inefficient programs. Decisions to accept U.S. government funds are made in accordance with the Agency's Catholic values, its mission and its programming priorities.

Endnotes

¹ United States Catholic Conference, *Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1997).

² Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: the Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2003), 103-159.

³ The CRS Guiding Principles:

- **DIGNITY AND EQUALITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON** All of humanity has been created in the image of God and possesses a basic dignity and equality that come directly from our creation and not from any action on our own part.
- **RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES** Every person has basic rights and responsibilities that flow from our human dignity and that belong to us as humans, regardless of any social or political structures. The rights are numerous and include those things that make life truly human. Corresponding to our rights are duties and responsibilities to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good of all.
- **SOCIAL NATURE OF HUMANITY** All of us are social by nature and are called to live in community with others -- our full human potential isn't realized in solitude, but in community with others. How we organize our families, societies and communities directly affects human dignity and our ability to achieve our full human potential.
- **THE COMMON GOOD** In order for all of us to have an opportunity to grow and develop fully, a certain social fabric must exist within society. This is the common good. Numerous social conditions -- economic, political, material and cultural -- impact our ability to realize our human dignity and reach our full potential.
- **SUBSIDIARITY** A higher level of government -- or organization -- should not perform any function or duty that can be handled more effectively at a lower level by people who are closer to the problem and have a better understanding of the issue.
- **SOLIDARITY** We are all part of one human family -- whatever our national, racial, religious, economic or ideological differences -- and in an increasingly interconnected world, loving our neighbor has global dimensions.
- **OPTION FOR THE POOR** In every economic, political and social decision, a weighted concern must be given to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. When we do this we strengthen the entire community, because the powerlessness of any member wounds the rest of society.
- **STEWARDSHIP** There is an inherent integrity to all of creation and it requires careful stewardship of all our resources, ensuring that we use and distribute them justly and equitably -- as well as planning for future generations.

⁴ CRS has identified seven components of a Just Workplace:

- **Leadership Engagement in Development of a Just Workplace:** All staff are called to become engaged and to participate in the pursuit of a Just Workplace by exhibiting leadership in practicing and encouraging others to practice just behavior, as defined in the Guiding Principles.
- **Balancing Rights and Responsibilities:** This component seeks to advance a Just Workplace by upholding the basic rights of staff, while at the same time, balancing these rights with the mutual responsibilities of using resources properly and being accountable for one's actions.
- **Institutionalizing the CRS Guiding Principles into the Agency's Work:** As an organization created by the U.S. Bishops and fulfilling the aspirations of the American Catholic community, the Agency strives to integrate its Guiding Principles into all its work, including management policies and practices.

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- **Management Policies and Practices:** This calls for clarity and consistency in CRS organizational culture, work environment, management practices, policies and procedures based on CRS Guiding Principles.
 - **Employee Relations (Due Process):** CRS promotes right relationships based on the dignity and humanity of all staff.
 - **Effective Communication:** CRS seeks to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of all communication, written and verbal, interpersonal as well as institutional, in order to achieve a Just Workplace.
 - **Valuing Differences:** Because of the nature of its work, CRS stresses the importance of valuing and respecting, not simply tolerating, differences within the Agency.

⁵ World Business Council for Sustainable Development, *Corporate Social Responsibility: Meeting Changing Expectations* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Business Council for Sustainable Development, March 1999), 3.

⁶ I. Gary and T. Karl, *Bottom of the Barrel: Africa's Oil Boom and the Poor* (Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services, 2003).

⁷ I. Gary and N. Reisch, *Chad's Oil: Miracle or Mirage? Following the Money in Africa's Newest Petro-State* (Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services, 2005).

⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call for Political Responsibility* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum"* (2006).

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2006), 35.

¹² Ibid, 32.

¹³ Ibid, 31.

¹⁴ Ibid.