

Operation Rice Bowl gives help to a world in need

This month, as Catholic communities across the country observe Lent, a national program lends real meaning to the season of prayer and reflection. Operation Rice Bowl, CRS' annual Lenten initiative, encourages Americans to learn about the effects of global poverty and to pray for the people most affected by social injustice. At the same time, participants in ORB can have a direct impact on global hunger through their contributions, and play a part in CRS' vision of 'one human family' by supporting their brothers and sisters around the globe.

Every year, Catholics who participate in the program contribute about \$8 million to food security projects that help people in 40 countries where CRS works. To demonstrate the impact these contributions have, ORB highlights the stories of people whose lives have changed as a result of this solidarity.

Take Pailash, for example: A young orphan in India, he was left to fend for himself on the streets of Kolkata, even after losing movement in his legs to polio.

Wheeling around on a wooden plank, the then 6-years-old boy decided to sell newspapers, a common trade among India's street children. He earned anywhere between 50 to 100 rupees a day. That equals about one to two U.S. dollars.

For many years, and since before he can remember how he was left there, Pailash lived on the streets, working long days and getting little sleep, too afraid to close his eyes for fear that someone would steal his money.

A haven

Then last year, a stranger took note of him and brought him to Daya Dan, or the House of Mercy, a school in Kolkata where Catholic Relief Services is supporting a feeding program. The school, run by the Missionaries of Charity and supported by Operation Rice Bowl, quickly became a refuge for Pailash.

"Here at the school I have finally found a safe place to call home," says Pailash, now 14 and wheeling around in a bright red wheelchair. "And I no longer worry about

being hungry, because I receive meals every day.”

The kids at Daya Dan make up an unusual, yet close-knit family, most having been orphaned in infancy. Some were left as toddlers on train platforms, abandoned on doorsteps or taken to the school by concerned strangers. Most of them have varying degrees of physical or mental illness, ranging from cerebral palsy to paralysis to autism or profound mental retardation.

A Lenten tradition

The House of Mercy in India is supported by Operation Rice Bowl, the program that has become a tradition for millions of Catholics. During the 40 days dedicated to reflection, prayer and fasting, ORB and its emblematic rice bowls become the focal point for more than 14,000 parishes, schools and community groups in the U.S.

Participants in ORB learn about global poverty and fast in solidarity with those who are affected by hunger. They also put donations into the program’s symbolic rice bowls, which are collected and donated to hunger projects abroad and in the U.S. Since its beginning in 1975, ORB has raised more than \$167 million to fund CRS’ development projects.

ORB also offers meatless recipes for dishes similar to those prepared in the featured countries, using food staples like rice, beans or vegetables. One of them is Kadai Aloo, a mild potato curry from India using a blend of Asian spices.

By preparing these dishes, Catholics can observe Lent with a simple meal while learning about places where people live on less than \$2 a day and where meat is often considered a luxury.

Signs of hope

As for Pailash, he just scored a 59 [out of 60] on an exam. His favorite subject is math and he plays the bongos in the school’s orchestra. “I like the drums because God gave me nice hands,” he says. “My favorite song is He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

Pailash will graduate from the House of Mercy this year and is likely to transfer to another Missionaries of Charity-supported boys’ high school. “There I will learn

skills for a trade and then I will be able to find a job and earn a good living for myself.”

ORB has supported food security projects worldwide for more than 30 years. While 75 percent of the money raised is used to support programs overseas, the remainder stays in local dioceses.

To learn more or to download resources, visit <https://orb.crs.org> .

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