Catholic Social Teaching Focus

OPTION FOR THE POOR

Jesus tells us to care for those who are most in need in the world. He reminds us of our Christian duty to give a voice to those who go unheard and to help those who are most vulnerable.

ENCONTRER
THE SINGH FAMILY

When the Malaguni River in East India floods, Megha and Raj Singh, their two children and their extended family cannot get to the nearest market—nearly 5 miles away—to buy and sell food. If the waters do not recede quickly, their rice fields fail, and their animals become sick from diseases spread through dirty water. The family faces financial danger.

That’s why CRS is helping the Singh family prepare for flooding with new farming tools and techniques. Now Raj plants his fields worry-free using a special type of rice that can survive flooding. He can collect and save his seeds for future use. And he now has the resources he needs to vaccinate his cows, ensuring they, too, survive the floods.

Megha grows vegetables in a kitchen garden, so her family has healthy meals even when she can’t visit the market. During past floods, the family had to survive solely on rice. But now, planting veggies in special sacks, she is able to raise the plants above flood lines, ensuring her family has reliable access to nutritious food.

Just as important, Megha has learned new ways of growing food, so that the entire family gets the most nutrition out of every meal. Now, the whole Singh family is healthier, and with these new ways of farming, they can continue to thrive, even during floods.

FACTS TO CONSIDER

Population: 1,236,344,631
Size: 1,269,219 square miles; 1/3 size of the United States

- Nearly 42 percent of India’s population, almost 500 million people, live on less than $1.25 per day while about 48 percent of children under age 5 suffer from stunting—the failure to grow and develop properly as a result of malnutrition.
- Human trafficking remains a major concern throughout the country, while natural and man-made disasters continue to affect India every year.
- CRS programming in India focuses on emergency resilience, relief and recovery; strengthening agriculture livelihoods; improving health systems and services; and preventing human trafficking and supporting trafficking survivors.

For downloadable photos, visit crsricebowl.org/photos.
**INDIA | OPTION FOR THE POOR**

1. **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**, describe what the Catholic social teaching principle Option for the Poor means.

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2. **WHAT IS CHALLENGING** about living out this principle personally and as a larger, global community?

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3. **WHAT IS ONE ACT** that you will commit to doing this Lent that will remind you of the importance of this Church teaching?

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Catholic Social Teaching Focus

SACREDNESS AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

We were made in God’s image and likeness. Because of this, every human being has a special value and purpose. We need to care for each other so that we can be the people God calls us to be.

ENCOUNTER EVELINA

Evelina, like generations of Zambians before her, used to survive on meals made from corn flour, usually a porridge called “nshima.” “Growing up, I’d eat porridge in the morning, at lunchtime and again in the evening,” she says. After all, it was cheap and easy to make.

Unfortunately, nshima has very little nutritional value—and relying too heavily on it has led to high rates of malnutrition. Many in Zambia have full bellies, but little nourishment. And this is particularly dangerous for children under age 2, who need high levels of vitamins and minerals to grow up healthy and strong. That means mothers who are nursing—as well as their children—need nutritious meals.

So, CRS is teaching women like Evelina how to prepare healthier meals and grow new, vitamin-rich crops like peanuts, pumpkins and sugar cane. In many cases, these crops were already being grown in the village. Now, Evelina and others are adding more nutritious food to their children’s nshima, like ground peanuts or eggs. And, what the women learn, they share with their community—especially expectant mothers.

“We sing and dance during the cooking lessons because we are happy to learn how to cook different types of food,” says Evelina. Evelina is healthier, and so is her son, Steven. “I know I am taking good care of him, because he’s full of energy, he’s strong and never sick,” she says, with a smile.

FACTS TO CONSIDER

Population: 14,638,505

Size: 290,587 square miles; slightly larger than Texas

- Zambia is a peaceful country with vast agricultural lands. However, Zambia continues to suffer from the devastating impacts of an AIDS epidemic, chronic food insecurity and widespread poverty.

- More than 74 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Many rural families rely on subsistence farming, with limited access to credit or savings. During the “hungry season,” when food is scarce, many families eat only one meal a day.

For downloadable photos, visit crsricebowl.org/photos.
Fill in each of the boxes on the activity sheet as follows.

**Dignity within yourself.**
Write or draw how you see God’s presence and dignity within yourself.

**Dignity within your friend.**
Write or draw how you see God’s presence and dignity within a friend or someone you know.

**Dignity within your neighbor.**
Write or draw how you see God’s presence and dignity in those you have not met personally, but who are still our brothers and sisters.
Catholic Social Teaching Focus

DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

Jesus spent years working as a carpenter. Work is important as it helps people express their talents and potential. People must be paid a fair wage for the work they do, so they can provide for themselves and their families.

ENCOUNTER FERNANDO

Fernando dreams of becoming a businessman. He also dreams of a better future for his family, and this motivates him to sell cookbooks on San Salvador’s buses. It’s dangerous work for $10 a day—gangs frequently stop and harass drivers and passengers—but he keeps going, determined to achieve his dreams.

It was his dreams that led him to YouthBuild, a 6-month, CRS-sponsored program that trains young people in business. There, he found a positive community to help him pursue his passion, despite the challenges of life in El Salvador. “When I tell my classmates that I want to do something, they tell me to try it and to not hold back.”

Training with YouthBuild wasn’t easy on Fernando or his family. Without his wife to support him and care for their two young daughters, the early mornings and long days might have been impossible. “YouthBuild is a family because families help you realize your dreams,” Fernando says. It’s a fact he knows well.

Fernando is putting his newfound skills to work. After graduating from YouthBuild in 2016, he took part in a series of entrepreneur workshops organized by CRS and is currently working on a new business plan. He is also a part of the YouthBuild network of graduates, youth leaders who mentor other young people and look for new opportunities for employment and growth.

“We have a saying,” says Fernando. “Once a YouthBuilder, always a YouthBuilder.”

FACTS TO CONSIDER

Population: 6,125,512

- Size: 8,124 square miles; slightly smaller than Massachusetts
- El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. With a population of just more than 6 million, it is also considered the most industrialized country in Central America. However, its people continue to face serious challenges.
- An estimated one in five El Salvadorans have emigrated. The income inequality between rural and urban areas is severe and low economic growth and high levels of violence and insecurity continue to affect Salvadoran society in profound ways.
- Environmental degradation and global climate change make the country highly susceptible to natural disasters. The country is the second most deforested in the Western Hemisphere.

*YouthBuild is a member of the YouthBuild International network.
EL SALVADOR  DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

We are called to explore our vocation and mission in life. Think about how you will share your gifts and talents in order to serve the world.

Use the space below to write a letter and promise to yourself about your dreams and goals for the future. Describe how you will uphold the dignity of work for yourself, as well as for your brothers and sisters around the world.
Catholic Social Teaching Focus

CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPATION

Humans are social by nature. We need each other. Like the early disciples, we are called to come together and grow as a community—whether that community is in our classroom, workplace or family.

ENCOUNTER MARIA

Maria de la Luz remembers what it was like growing up in Ejido Hidalgo, Mexico. “We said we were rich because we had a lot of corn, beans and animals.” But now, with few jobs and even less rain, young people—including Maria’s children—are leaving the community in search of a better life.

To help families like Maria’s, CRS launched a greenhouse project empowering women with meaningful work and community. Women visit their community greenhouses to grow cactuses to sell—but they also go for so much more. “At the greenhouses, we laugh, we talk, we spend time together. Sometimes we leave our homes angry or sad. But then we start working with the plants, and we forget. Talking, laughing—we forget our problems for a while,” says Maria.

As the cactuses grow, so too do the economic opportunities. “We didn’t believe we were going to get that far. It’s a lot of joy, a lot of excitement to see so many plants flowering.”

The flourishing cactuses aren’t the only things that give Maria pride. Even though they live far away, she still remains close to her family. “I give thanks to God that he gave me all my children and grandchildren,” she says. “They give me strength and courage to work hard. My children call and say, ‘Don’t give up, Mom. Have faith in God.’”

FACTS TO CONSIDER

Population: 120,286,655

Size: 761,600 square miles; about 3 times the size of Texas

Although Mexico has one of the largest economies in Latin America, half of its population lives in poverty. Ongoing economic and social concerns—in addition to drug trafficking, violence and organized crime—are causing an increasing number of people to be forcefully displaced from their homes and businesses.

The CRS Mexico program addresses several issues of importance: migration, peacebuilding and human rights, and inequitable access to rural development opportunities.

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Humans are social by nature. We need each other. Like the early disciples, we are called to come together and grow as a community—whether that community is in our classroom, workplace or family. We are also called to ensure that each member of our community has the ability to fully flourish and participate in a way that respects our inherent dignity.

1. As a group, brainstorm how you can create community and serve those who belong to your various communities.

2. How can we ensure that all those who make up our human family have the ability to participate fully in our society and community?

3. Illustrate your group’s response to these questions on your poster. Be prepared to present to the whole class.
Catholic Social Teaching Focus

CARE FOR GOD’S CREATION

God created every plant, every mountaintop, every animal—everything. And God said that these things are good. We find God in these good things, and so we must take care of creation, for ourselves and for our entire human family.

ENCOUNTER DITA

Dita, her husband and their seven children depend on the money they earn selling crops from their small farm in Ethiopia. But frequent droughts often mean that families like Dita’s, who depend on home-grown crops, go hungry. And amidst the current, historic drought in Ethiopia, more than 10 million people are struggling with hunger.

But thanks to a CRS program that helps families prepare for crises like droughts, Dita was able to build a new house and open a small store. Instead of relying solely on what she can grow on her farm, she is able to sell items like pasta, shampoo and bananas. She earns a steady $400 a month.

“Before, I had to get eggs from my neighbors. Now I have 15 hens,” she says. Saving and borrowing money not only allowed her to buy hens, but also a metal roof for her new house, a rarity for families in this part of Ethiopia.

“Now we have no problems with food,” she says. Unlike families across Ethiopia who struggle to find enough to eat, Dita says her children eat three times a day, thanks to her newfound business knowledge.

And what’s more, all her children are attending school. “When I was a child, there were no educational opportunities,” she says. Then, with a shy but proud smile, she adds, “That’s a big difference.”

FACTS TO CONSIDER

Population: 96,633,458

Size: 426,373 square miles; slightly less than twice the size of Texas

- For more than 50 years, CRS has taken the lead in responding to natural and man-made disasters affecting Ethiopia’s most vulnerable communities.
- El Nino has contributed to the crisis of Ethiopia’s drought. Millions of lives are threatened by hunger, as many areas have not seen rain for 2 years.
- CRS’ disaster mitigation and recovery projects in drought- and flood-prone areas have rebuilt individual and community assets in the form of agriculture, livestock, health, and water and sanitation assistance.
ETHIOPIA | CARE FOR GOD’S CREATION

We are called to be stewards of God’s creation, to care for and uphold all of creation with respect. However, we often fall short of using resources wisely and caring for the Earth.

What are ways that our brothers and sisters around the world suffer due to our failure to care for creation? Think about Dita’s story and hardships faced by many in Ethiopia.

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What are ways that you see the most vulnerable in your local community impacted by our failure to care for creation?

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