

Solidarity Springs from Water

The Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, MN and the Diocese of Kitui, Kenya, with the facilitation of Catholic Relief Services, established a Global Solidarity Partnership in 2004. A Global Solidarity Partnership is a program of CRS whereby a Catholic diocese or cluster of parishes in the United States and a diocese overseas develop a relationship based in mutuality and shared faith. Check out www.crs.org/gsp for more information.

Water Comes First

During a mutual planning session in Kitui, Kenya in October of 2005, leaders of the Diocese of Kitui, Kenya and the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, MN came together to discuss what types of initiatives they would undertake as part of their newly established Global Solidarity Partnership. In addition to sharing models of small Christian communities, fostering women lay leadership, connecting like groups in both dioceses (e.g. Men's and Women's leadership groups), and offering prayers for each other, the two dioceses committed to engage together on a water project.

In the Diocese of Kitui, in the Southeastern part of Kenya, access to water, particularly during the dry season, is a constant worry. In recent years the prolonged dry season has wreaked conditions of famine proportions. Some communities have already come together to create solutions to this pressing issue; but many remain extremely vulnerable to drought and famine. Consequently the Diocese of Kitui expressed this concern as a major priority of its social development programming in the near future. The leadership from the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, having witnessed themselves the first signs of drought during their visit in October 2005, committed to partnering with the Diocese of Kitui on this issue, with CRS Kenya as facilitator.

In the dry season people (mostly women and children) must walk up to 12 miles a day to fetch water. In the past four years the two districts that comprise the Diocese of Kitui (Kitui and Mwingi) have experienced major drought and consequently famine due to the increasingly erratic rains. This has caused heavy dependence on outside food aid, a temporary and unsustainable resolution to the recurring crisis. Leaders and residents feel their dignity stripped away each time they must rely on such assistance, and they are eager to engage in efforts that will enhance their own resilience during future drought. The Kitui Water Project was developed with the objective to restore and protect human dignity among the people of the districts of Kitui and Mwingi, Kenya by enabling them to provide for their families, crops and livestock in future years even during the increasingly prolonged dry season.

Specifically, the Kitui Water Project, implemented through CRS Kenya and the Diocese of Kitui Development Office, will support the construction of dams made of earth and sand to harvest water during the erratic rains. These dams will conserve water for livestock and the fields during dry seasons, and shallow wells will be dug alongside the earth dams to provide clean drinking water for residents. Together the Diocese of Kitui and the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis hope to be able to provide each



person in the targeted communities with access to at least 20 liters of clean water per day for consumption, use in domestic chores as well as in agriculture and livestock production. This initiative will greatly enhance residents' ability to endure future drought, decrease time and energy spent in retrieving water from distant sources, and reduce the incidence of water-borne diseases.

Water Harvests Mutuality

The Kitui Water Project has become a true partnership, with each actor assuming roles most appropriate to their skills and constituencies. The Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis is implementing an educational campaign about the need for access to safe water in places where water is scarce (e.g. Kenya) and the importance of conserving water in places where water is abundant (e.g. MN), as well as a fundraising effort to garner monies for the Kitui Water Project. The Diocese of Kitui on their part is to provide information and educational materials about scarcity of water to the Archdiocese to use in their education campaign, organize and educate their communities to plan and implement the water project, and offer regular reports and updates on the progress of the project to their partner. CRS Kenya water and sanitation experts will provide technical support in the development of the project and ongoing project implementation oversight, as well as assist in monitoring and evaluating the project impact. The results thus far have been inspiring!

Water as a Channel of Solidarity

As the Diocese of Kitui works hard to identify and organize target communities to build dams, and CRS Kenya provides feedback and advice from their experiences with water projects in other parts of Kenya, the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis has enthusiastically invited people across the Archdiocese to become involved in the Kitui Water Project in a number of exciting and innovative ways.

Children Illustrate and Expound on Water as a Precious Resource

Last year the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis Rural Life Office focused their annual Essay and Poster contest on the topic of "Water as a Precious Resource." Primary school students were asked to reflect on ways they use water in their lives, how they conserve water, and whether they think Minnesotans generally take good care of their water resources. Families and children eagerly participated and the winning submissions were published in the Archdiocese newspaper. All the entries were also displayed in the annual Harvest for Hope Celebration in the Archdiocese. This initiative laid the groundwork for future events in the Archdiocese around the theme of water.

Students take on The H2O Challenge



During Advent of 2006 and Lent of 2007, students throughout the Archdiocese learned about how people in other countries often lack access to clean water and the devastating impact this has on a family and a child. Students were then invited to take part in addressing this problem by taking [The H2O Challenge](#). The challenge was simple: Make water their only beverage for 2 weeks. Then collect the money they would have otherwise spent on beverages and bring it in at the end of two weeks. All the funds raised would support the Kitui Water Project. Teachers and students alike responded eagerly.

Over 90 schools and parishes have participated in the challenge, collecting over \$56,000 to date to support the Kitui Water Project, while also praying for their sisters and brothers in Kitui and learning about the dire situation of access to water there and in other parts of the world. Students at Visitation Convent in Mendota and Shakopee Area Schools were challenged not only to simply drink tap water, but to understand what their peers in other parts of the world must drink on a regular basis. Teachers placed a jar of river water on their desks, and over the course of the two weeks students and teachers alike watched as "yucky things" began to grow in the water. Teachers at Our Lady of Peace in Minneapolis focused more on the quantity of water that children in other parts of the world consume. They displayed a pitcher of water on their desks to represent how much water the class collectively could use during the entire school day - for drinking and washing hands!

Keely Wojda, a Faith Formation Coordinator in the Archdiocese, praised the value of introducing the activity during the Advent season: "This water challenge is really life-giving -- at a time, this Advent season in particular, when everything we hear seems to be about buy, buy, buy, gifts, gifts, gifts - this (challenge) is talking about giving up and being open to the Spirit - it really does fit in liturgically and our whole staff is excited about it!"

Minnesota Farmers Take up the Cause

The Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis is also joining forces with [Foods Resource Bank](#) to support the Kitui Water Project. Foods Resource Bank engages grassroots agricultural communities in the U.S., along with individuals, churches and urban communities, to grow solutions to hunger problems in our world. Several farmers and parishes participated last year by donating land, labor and inputs to the growing project, and then monetizing the harvest and donating the proceeds to the Kitui Water Project. This year promises even wider involvement with more than 50 acres already committed to the project. According to Dale Hennen of the Rural Life Office:

Farmers who have worked on [the Foods Resource Bank project] get really excited about this because they see the potential. They're big-hearted people, who have a sense of being very blessed, and it's a way for them to give to people and help others who need assistance. That's really what farming is about. It's about growing for others; a farmer couldn't possibly eat all the food they grow. It is a way to do something other than grow a crop harvest and cash it in, but do something in solidarity.

One parish in a heavily farming area of the Archdiocese, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, is currently engaged in a broad effort to involve members of the parish in a range of ways - volunteering time, donating land, and providing funds for inputs such as seed, fertilizer, and tillage. The parish will celebrate *Kitui-FRB Commitment Sunday* on May 6, leading up to it by providing stories of people from Kitui, myths and facts about worldwide hunger, and information about the Kitui Water Project. Thanks to the Global Solidarity Partnership with the Diocese of Kitui, many of the farmers and other parishioners have met representatives of the very communities that this project will support. Dale sums up the importance of this effort nicely: "This [project] is an extension of the farmers' concern and love for the people of Kitui."

The Dignity of Water

This Global Solidarity Partnership has provided people of both the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis and the Diocese of Kitui the opportunity to “go together to God”¹ in implementing this project to promote human dignity, a primary theme in Catholic Social Teaching. As stated in the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, “human persons... ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing... the right to education and work...” As partners in Christ, the people of the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis and the Diocese of Kitui are together seeking to restore a crucial component of all that is necessary to live a genuinely human life: water.



¹ Quote from Bishop John Kinney regarding partnership, Diocese of St. Cloud, MN