

Partnership

The Dioceses of St. Cloud, Minnesota and Homa Bay, Kenya entered into a Global Solidarity Partnership in 1999, under the direction of Catholic Relief Services (CRS). It is an attempt to concretely live out our catholic, *universal*, faith, by walking together as brothers and sisters in Christ, as one family called to know and care for one another despite geographical or cultural boundaries. We believe that we cannot know GOD well unless we know the diversity GOD created in His image. We believe we cannot reflect the divine image given to us, unless we are willing to exemplify our Triune GOD in giving and receiving from each person and loving others, working together as community as our Trinity is.

In order to live this belief out, the two dioceses have continuous exchanges of:

- **Personnel:** currently the third missionary priest from Homa Bay is serving in the St. Cloud Diocese; the Franciscan Sisters of both dioceses have also had some exchanges in both directions
- **Delegations:** delegations travel on a three year cycle – one year delegates travel from Minnesota to Kenya, the next from Kenya to Minnesota, and the third year is a year off for reflection and evaluation of the partnership before beginning the travel schedule again; delegations are not “work” trips or service type mission trips, nor are they “proselytizing” times to convert one another to our way of thinking; they are simply an opportunity to observe and enter into the faith and cultural life of the other diocese; delegates include priests, sisters and lay people young and old from all over the diocese
- **Prayers:** holding one another in prayer is a key part of our faith partnership; this is done through sharing Mass intentions, holding prayer services for special needs, remembering special dates (such as ordinations, confirmations, installations, funerals, etc.) in one another’s diocese
- and **Gifts:** we strive to share what is good and beautiful about our diocese with one another; sometimes this is sharing ideas and information (intellectual), prayers or ways our church and communities function (spiritual), and sometimes it is physical things or finances (material gifts). The gifts each diocese offers do not need to be “equal,” they simply need to be “mutual” (both contributing whatever it is GOD has given them).

Beginning the Project

The partnership began with a “project” in 1999 – the Metal Silo Project, under the direction of CRS. It was completed a few years later. After some time off to just focus on the relationship (which is always to be the main purpose and top priority over any project or material gift-sharing), it was decided in 2006 that the time had come to carefully look at what ways the needs and gifts of both our dioceses could come together. Assessment and prayer led the two Leadership Teams to discern that the most pressing need in Homa Bay Diocese is surrounding the issue of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC’s); the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in Homa Bay is higher than the rest of the country for numerous cultural and geographical reasons, causing a huge number of children and youth to be orphaned, leading to additional issues. Meanwhile, one of the gifts that the St. Cloud Diocese has is financial resources, and giving, charitable people. This need and this gift are able to work together to benefit the young people of Homa Bay Diocese through the Child Survival Project.

The Need

The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is considerably higher in Homa Bay Diocese for several reasons. One is the cultural tradition of wife inheritance. Begun to help support women in a culture/society that does not give power or property-owning rights to women, by having brothers-in-law “inherit” widows after their husbands died, this practice grew to one that rapidly spread HIV/AIDS (if a man died of AIDS, in most cases his wife also had it; she is then inherited and passes it on to her new husband, who in most

cases already had one or more wife, who then contract it too, along with the children of all of the wives). Similarly, the cultural practice of polygamy (having multiple wives) is also common among the Luo tribe in the Homa Bay region, which has the same quick-growing effect on HIV/AIDS victims.

The large number of sufferers from HIV/AIDS also means a large number of deaths, leading to hundreds of thousands of children being left orphaned. When a child or children lose a parent (“partial orphan”), in most cases the remaining parent cannot manage all the tasks and the need to work to raise money to care for the family; in many cases the remaining parent is also sick and therefore even less able to provide for their family. This leads to many older siblings being forced to quit school in order to work to help pay the family bills or do the household tasks. Without their education, their future will continue on a path of poverty. If children lose both parents (“total orphan”) they may be forced to go live with other extended family members, or could even be sent to an orphanage or other social services system. This creates problems because if the family loses their family land, it becomes extremely difficult to gain access and purchase land again in the future, especially without education to help them get out of poverty. This just adds to the vicious cycle of poverty that HIV/AIDS can force young people into.

It was determined that the best way to positively impact this great need would be to provide tertiary education or vocational training to young adults who are orphaned and providing for their younger siblings. (In a few rare cases a student still has both parents living but is still in extreme poverty – such as parents being disabled, too elderly or suffering chemical addictions that make them unable to work or support the family) By sponsoring their education that they could not otherwise afford, they will not need to quit school to work to raise those funds; they will also earn a degree that will give them a concrete skill they can use to obtain employment and be able to earn a living to help provide for their family, all the while allowing them to maintain their family land and hopefully help them get out of the cycle of poverty!

Commitment

After a few years of assessment, discernment and putting the project into place with the help of Catholic Relief Services, the two dioceses entered into a 5 year commitment to each contribute what they’re able to what has become known as the “Child Survival Project.” St. Cloud Diocese is committing \$25,000 a year for the five years to provide partial scholarships to youth throughout the Homa Bay Diocese for their tertiary/vocational education. Homa Bay Diocese is contributing staff time and personnel, on-the-ground support and some help funding community support resources (such as HIV/AIDS prevention trainings, social workers to check up on youth sponsored by the program, etc.)

We are four years into the project, with one year (and \$25,000) to go.

What the project does

The Child Survival Project does a wide array of things to support young people orphaned by HIV/AIDS to help them get out of poverty, including:

- HIV/AIDS prevention education
- Identifying the most needy children (youth/family names are brought forth by the parish priests, and then a diocesan selection committee follows-up to identify who in fact is most in need and can most benefit...it’s a hard decision, as there are SO many needy youth, and even a sum as large as \$25,000 is barely a drop in the bucket); young people are selected from as many parishes in the Homa Bay Diocese as possible, paying close attention not to over-duplicate in areas where other similar projects may already be helping, so that the positive effects can be as far-reaching as possible.

- Education (partial sponsorships to help cover tuition, books, uniforms, etc.)
- Exam fees (the government charges exam fees for all students completing programs, which causes some youth to not be able to officially finish and get their degree, but Child Survival Project helps with this)
- Social workers from the community to continue to support youth sponsored by the program, including training for the social workers to provide psychosocial support
- Oversight by CRS, who are professionals and global experts in development projects such as this, along with having staff on the ground in Kenya and even in Homa Bay Diocese

Young People helped

Students still in the project are enrolled in programs to study things like teaching, information technology, community development, electrical, agriculture, secretarial, accounting, social work, catering, business administration, human resources, tailoring, health record and information, masonry, CPA, etc. What a wonderful array of skills and leaders to be entering the community and wonderful future ahead for Homa Bay Diocese!

To date 82 students have been enrolled in the Child Survival Project. Sixteen of them have already graduated with their degrees and are either working or looking for employment. Fourteen will graduate this semester. Unfortunately six students have dropped out for various reasons, and one student passed away. But 45 students will be continuing in the project this next year – and they still need your help!

On average it costs about \$400 a year to sponsor a young adult's education in the Child Survival Project, in addition to the social work and community support costs of the project. Every dollar donated goes to great use, and is making a difference in the life of young adults and their families greatly in need.

The Mission Office has some documents with bios, photos and letters of many of these young people supported through the Child Survival Project for more information about their need, and their success through this great program.

The Child Survival Project is just one of the ways that our St. Cloud Diocese is able to be a partner and walk together with our brothers and sisters in Homa Bay, knowing that the gifts they share with us too through our partnership and their faith and prayers for us are more valuable than any dollar amount we can send. We are proud to walk together towards our Lord!