

CRS West Regional Meeting Report

June 9-10, 2008



About 40 people from 17 dioceses on the West Coast gathered at Presentation Retreat Center in Los Gatos, CA to collaborate and plan on promoting global solidarity in their dioceses through the work of Catholic Relief Services. The two-day meeting had a full agenda, but what many found most important was the chance for conversation with diocesan peers and CRS staff from Mexico, Jerusalem, CRS

Headquarters, and around the region.

This short report summarizes the meeting and provides links to distributed materials, more information, and follow-up action items.

GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

Lisa Kuennen-Asfaw spoke to us on the Global Food Prices Crisis, helping us to understand its scope, depth, and causes. The crisis is a “perfect storm” of rising prices for food commodities and transportation, increased demand for food, and decreasing supply due to drought, biofuels, and politics. A CD with Lisa’s PowerPoint presentation is being sent to participants this week. If you do not receive one by July 10th, please contact Evangely Aliangan at ealiangan@crs.org or 619-297-8273.

For more information about the food crisis and CRS’ response worldwide please checkout the [CRS Public Policy on Food Aid](#) on our main website.

CRS MEXICO

Erica Dahl-Bredine, Country Manager for CRS Mexico, gave participants an in-depth view of CRS’ work there, focusing on immigration. She first sketched the recent economic and political factors that help explain current immigration from Mexico to the US, focusing on NAFTA. She then reviewed CRS programs in Mexico. The three main goals of CRS Mexico are:

1. To support the Mexican Catholic Church in their efforts to “humanize” the reality of immigration, through legal aid and houses of refuge.
2. To create alternatives to immigration through microfinance, projects to improve agriculture, and labor advocacy.
3. To advocate and educate US Catholics about immigration.

You can find out more about [CRS Mexico](#), view the latest [CRS Action Alert](#) on immigration and learn more about [CRS' work on migration](#) on the agency's website.

INFORMATION SEED FAIR

Monday evening, we gathered outdoors for a Seed Fair. CRS developed the Seed Fair overseas as an effective way to match farmers in need with sellers of seeds. At our Information Seed Fair, diocesan "farmers" sought out "seeds" of CRS information programs and opportunities to plant in their diocesan soil:

- Maria Arroyo (marroyo@crs.org) – CRS Hispanic outreach and our new website *CRS en español*.
- Jeanine Boucher-Colbert (jcolbert@crs.org) – Food Fast, resources for High School Education, and Fair Trade
- Joe Symkowitz (jsymkowi@crs.org) – Legislative Advocacy and Global Fellows
- Ed Morgado (eamorgado@gmail.com) – Foods Resource Bank
- Joe Hastings (jhastings@crs.org) – CRS Speakers, ministry training workshops, and Operation Rice Bowl

BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE DIOCESE

Tuesday morning, Tom Ulrich spoke to us about building capacity in our dioceses to promote global solidarity, especially through the work of CRS. Since many diocesan staff are stretched thin with multiple responsibilities, it was no surprise that the evaluations listed this topic as the most helpful. Tom gave out a "Short Guidebook to Building Capacity." If you would like additional copies please contact the CRS West office at crswest@crs.org.

You can find more helpful resources in the [Diocesan Director Toolkit](#) on the U.S. Partner Resources site and led us through the process of moving from "organizing everything yourself" to organizing a Diocesan Global Solidarity Committee.

CRS JERUSALEM/GAZA/WEST BANK

For those participants who were able to stay beyond lunch on Tuesday, Tom Garofalo, Country Representative for JGWB spoke about the work of his staff in Palestine. CRS considers the situation in Gaza and the West Bank among its top humanitarian crises, since the political situation creates chronic shortages of food, medicines, and everything needed for daily life. You can read more about CRS work in Palestine at crs.org/Jerusalem.

Also, like CRS Mexico, CRS Palestine also considers advocacy and education among US Catholics a top priority. This reflects that Israeli-Palestinian relations are the top international policy priority of the USCCB.

View the latest [CRS Action Alert on the Middle East](#).

RESOURCES FROM THE MEETING

The following Resources were included in the participant packets:

- [CRS West: Who We Are and What We Do](#) - An update on who does what at CRS
- Workshops Available from CRS West – Joe Hastings and Maria Arroyo offer these workshops for training of catechists, parish ministers, deacons, etc.
- [Frontiers of Justice Alumni in the West Region](#)– Please directly contact alums in your diocese to speak about CRS at schools, parishes, JF groups, etc.
- [Fair Trade Ambassadors](#) – they have made a commitment to promote Fair Trade in your diocese in the coming year. Please contact them!
- [Global Fellows in the West Region](#) – they are available to preach (and possibly preside) three times a year at weekend liturgies about CRS. If interested, please contact Mikaele Sansone at 410-951-7336 or msansone@crs.org.

To find more resources helpful to Diocesan Directors, please visit the [U.S. Partner Resources site](#).

EVALUATIONS

Thanks to everyone for the helpful feedback you provided on the regional meeting evaluation forms. Please review the [evaluation responses](#).

We look forward to speaking to you all soon and gathering again as a region in 2010!

