# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CRS Rice Bowl is an Expression of Pope Francis’ Call**

**to Build a Culture of Encounter this Lent**

**Baltimore, MD, February 21, 2017 --** In his Lenten message this year, Pope Francis encourages the faithful to participate in Church Lenten campaigns and promote the culture of encounter.

"I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favor the culture of encounter in our one human family. " said the Pope.

CRS Rice Bowl’s theme for 2017 is Encounter Lent, encouraging Catholic families in the United States to encounter ourselves, our neighbors, and our God anew. For more than 40 years, CRS Rice Bowl has served Catholic families, parishes and schools by offering a rich array of resources -- stories, prayers, recipes, videos, a daily calendar and now an app, to deepen their experience and observance of Lent.

“Lent is a favorable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ,” Pope Francis said. “Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love.

“CRS Rice Bowl is about people and the hope we have for each other. It’s about our ability to encounter our neighbors no matter where they live, to love them as God loves us,” said Joan Rosenhauer, Executive Vice President of U.S. Operations for CRS.

“At a time when there is so much conflict in the world, this Lenten program gives people of all ages a way to respond to human suffering with compassion and action. To learn the names and stories of our brothers and sisters, to include them in our prayers, to contribute our Lenten sacrifices so they can live better, healthier lives; this is the way we deepen our faith, building a culture of encounter and holding up the dignity of each and every one of us,” Rosenhauer said.

With CRS Rice Bowl, each week of Lent is a new opportunity to meet a family from a different country overseas, hear their personal stories, learn about their culture and experience a meatless meal they serve at home.

Each Lenten story illustrates a principal of Catholic social teaching – an essential element of Catholic faith that says every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family.

“We want to meet people where they are in their day-to-day lives, in schools, in parishes, and on the go. CRS Rice Bowl is an easy to use tool that helps people deepen their Lenten journey by participating in our Lenten traditions – prayer, fasting and almsgiving - in a time and way that suits them best. For some families this means following the Lenten calendar at home, for others it means downloading the app, or making the Lenten recipes, or watching the Lenten Stories of Hope on their tablets – any way people choose is a good way to make this Lent a season to encounter ourselves, our neighbors and our God and serve the poor around the world,” said Beth Martin, CRS Rice Bowl program director for U.S. Operations.

Twenty-five percent of all contributions stay in local dioceses to support hunger and poverty prevention programs such as community gardens, food pantries, soup kitchens, support groups, and job centers. The remaining 75% goes to support CRS’ humanitarian and development programs overseas, providing life-saving assistance and hope to impoverished and vulnerable communities.

CRS Rice Bowl materials are designed for [families](http://www.crsricebowl.org/families), [parishes](http://www.crsricebowl.org/parishes), [educators](http://www.crsricebowl.org/schools), [universities](http://university.crs.org/content/crs-rice-bowl?_ga=1.215328978.41825816.1481218657) and [dioceses](http://www.crsricebowl.org/diocese). They are available in print, on the web, and through the mobile app, and in both English and Spanish.

Follow CRS Rice Bowl on Twitter [@CRSRiceBowl](https://twitter.com/CRSRiceBowl), like CRS Rice Bowl on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CRSRiceBowl/) and download the app from the [iTunes](https://itunes.apple.com/us/genre/ios/id36?mt=8) or [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store/apps?hl=en) stores.

To learn more about CRS Rice Bowl, visit [crsricebowl.org](http://www.crsricebowl.org/).

**Editors, Reporters and Bloggers:**

For photos, FAQs, social media memes, web banners, and bios please visit the [**CRS Rice Bowl Media Kit online**](http://www.crsricebowl.org/about/mediakit) or contact: Anna Ruiz [anna.ruiz@crs.org](mailto:anna.ruiz@crs.org) or 410-951-7238

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**Catholic Relief Services** is the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States. The agency alleviates suffering and provides assistance to people in need in more than 100 countries, without regard to race, religion or nationality. CRS’ relief and development work is accomplished through *programs of emergency response, HIV, health, agriculture, education, microfinance and peacebuilding.*  For more information, visit [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org/) or [www.crsespanol.org](http://www.crsespanol.org/) and follow Catholic Relief Services on social media: [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CatholicReliefServices), Twitter at @[CatholicRelief](https://twitter.com/CatholicRelief" \t "_blank" \o "Catholic Relief Services Twitter) and @[CRSnews](https://twitter.com/CRSnews" \t "_blank" \o "CRSnews), [Google+](https://plus.google.com/+catholicreliefservices/posts), [Pinterest](http://www.pinterest.com/catholicrelief/) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/catholicrelief).