

WEEK 1

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: VISIT THE PRISONERS

People in prison are still people—they are made in the image and likeness of God. No matter what someone has done, they deserve the opportunity to hear the Word of God and find the truth of the message of Christ.

STORIES OF HOPE

“Lord, when did we see you?” —Matthew 25:37

Matthew’s Gospel invites us to remember that we are responsible for helping all our sisters and brothers, even those who are strangers to us. When we do this, we care for Christ.

The season of Lent gives us a wonderful opportunity to reflect and make room in our hearts to welcome the stranger. Through our **prayer**, we encounter Jesus, who is present in the face of every member of our human family. When we **fast**, we encounter the obstacles that stop us from fully loving God and our neighbor. When we **give alms**, we share what we have with others.

This Lent CRS Rice Bowl takes us to three countries—Madagascar, El Salvador and Timor-Leste. Hunger and malnutrition, which happens when we don’t get the right amount of nutrients, are challenges that too many families face each day. One out of every 10 people worldwide don’t have enough to eat. Sometimes this is caused by natural disasters like floods and droughts. Other times, families don’t have enough money to buy the food they need, or the food they can get doesn’t have all the vitamins and minerals they need to stay healthy.

CRS helps communities find solutions to each of these problems. Farming families learn new skills and grow stronger, healthier harvests. Communities train health care workers so children can get regular check-ups and parents can learn new nutritious recipes to make sure their families get a balanced diet. People in vulnerable areas prepare for unpredictable weather that could destroy crops.

Jesus calls us to help those in need. Our Lenten prayers, fasting and sacrificial gifts help us answer this call.



Photo by Jim Stipe / CRS

FACTS TO CONSIDER

- One in 10 people worldwide don’t have enough to eat and almost 1 in 4 of all children under age 5 are stunted, meaning that they are struggling to grow and develop.
- A study done by the World Health Organization and other international organizations estimates that almost 690 million people went hungry in 2019—up by 10 million from 2018, and by nearly 60 million in five years.
- The term malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person’s intake of energy and/or nutrients.



For downloadable photos, visit crsricebowl.org/photos and watch the video from Week 1 at crsricebowl.org/stories.

WEEK 2

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: VISIT THE SICK

Parents in Madagascar learn how to keep their children healthy with support from community health workers. Ministering to the sick—and helping others stay well—is one of the corporal works of mercy and something Jesus instructs us to do when he says, “I was ill and you cared for me” (Matthew 25:36).

A STORY OF HOPE FROM MADAGASCAR

What is your favorite show or movie? Why do you like it? Has it taught you anything new or interesting?

In Madagascar, families gather to watch puppet shows that entertain and teach. They love seeing the brightly colored puppets talk to each other, tell stories and ask the crowd questions. After each show, parents leave with new information to help their families.

Half of all children in Madagascar are undernourished, meaning they don't have enough nutritious food to stay healthy. Parents want their children to grow up healthy and strong, and the puppet shows give them new knowledge they can use right away to make sure that happens. Community health workers trained by CRS use the puppets to teach families about how doctor visits, hand washing and *rainbow foods*—different colored foods like tomatoes and carrots that have important vitamins and nutrients—are necessary to stay healthy.

Frankline and Labaladezy have eight children. Their youngest child, Thorin, is almost a year old. While Frankline was pregnant with Thorin, she and her husband Labaladezy watched the puppet shows and learned new ways to support Thorin's growth and development. When Thorin was born, his parents fed him different, more nutritious foods and took him to the health center for regular check-ups. Thorin is growing a lot and is reaching all his developmental milestones.

Frankline is happy her youngest son is doing so well, and she sees the positive effects of their new rainbow diet on the rest of the family. She says, “I dream that my children will stay healthy.



Photo by Dooshima Tsee / CRS

I hope that Thorin may become a doctor or a leader in our community.” Every parent wants their children to reach their full potential, and CRS is helping make sure they can do just that.

FACTS TO CONSIDER:

- CRS has worked in Madagascar for nearly 60 years, providing lifesaving relief in the wake of natural and man-made emergencies, and supporting development in education, agriculture, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and other areas.
- Communities are working together in Madagascar to address food insecurity and malnutrition through an innovative CRS program called Community Led Total Nutrition. The program aims to improve the health of children under age 5 through education, health check-ups and better nutrition.
- Stunting, which happens when a child doesn't get the right amount of nutrition, affects nearly half of all children in Madagascar and has a permanent impact on their physical growth and brain development.



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WEEK 3

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY

Many of our sisters and brothers in Christ do not have access to clean water, a basic necessity that each person needs to survive. We should support the efforts of those working toward greater accessibility of this essential resource.

A STORY OF HOPE FROM EL SALVADOR

Some young people in Ahuachapán in eastern El Salvador think that being a farmer is a thing of the past. Their families have farmed for generations, but climate change and soil erosion have caused harvests—and therefore their incomes—to shrink considerably.

Edwin Carlos, a 17-year-old eager to support his parents and two little brothers, did not see farming in his future. However, after a teacher told him about how new techniques and technology were changing the way farming was being done to help restore the environment, he changed his mind. Edwin Carlos decided to join a group of 220 students who are learning skills like the importance of distancing when plowing and how burning harvest residue can harm the land and air.

Sadly, El Salvador has lost 75% of its rich land because of the large number of trees that have been cut down and harmful agricultural practices like the extensive use of fertilizers, making it one of the most food-insecure countries in the hemisphere. “He who knows has an obligation to act,” says Edwin Carlos, who now knows how to use water properly so that it is not wasted, and organic manure and other resources to provide nutrients to the soil to produce more—and healthier—crops.

Thanks to this school program, CRS’ Raíces Ahuachapán, Edwin Carlos has also learned how to grow vegetables at home—knowledge that was extremely important during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the days of the confinement, nearly 1,200 families started home vegetable gardens to grow nutritious foods like onions, tomatoes, cucumbers and squash. They can eat what they harvest or sell the produce at their church or the local market for additional income.



Photo by Oscar Lera/Silverlight for CRS

Pope Francis reminds us that “young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis.” Thanks to programs like CRS’ Raíces Ahuachapán, young people are becoming active agents of that change.

FACTS TO CONSIDER

- El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. With more than 6 million people living there, it is also considered the most industrialized country in Central America. However, its people continue to face serious challenges.
- An estimated 1 in 5 Salvadorans have left the country due to lack of sufficient income to support their families, high levels of violence and insecurity, issues that affect El Salvador’s society in profound ways.
- Environmental degradation and global climate change make the country highly at risk to natural disasters. The country is the second most deforested in the Western Hemisphere.



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WEEK 4

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: FEED THE HUNGRY

Feeding the hungry is the first corporal work of mercy mentioned by Jesus: “For I was hungry and you gave me food” (Matthew 25:35). In Timor-Leste, communities are growing the food they need to thrive with the help of tools and training from CRS.

A STORY OF HOPE FROM TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste is a small Asian country, slightly larger than the state of Connecticut. It’s on the other side of the world near Australia, and it’s one of the world’s newest countries—only 18 years old. In comparison, the United States will be 245 years old this year!

Many families in Timor-Leste live in rural areas and work as farmers. But challenges like changing weather patterns make it difficult to grow enough food. They depend on rice as a main part of their meals, and hunger and malnutrition are big problems. More than one-third of people in Timor-Leste don’t have reliable access to enough nutritious food. This especially affects children and their ability to develop to their full potential.

With training from CRS, families are starting home gardens to grow different vegetables, beans and other foods that are rich in nutrients like vitamin A and iron. The gardens are built to withstand droughts and flooding, and the families add the food they grow—such as spinach, cabbage, peanuts, carrots and tomatoes—to their daily rice staple, providing more nourishing meals that help children grow and stay healthy.

Parents attend nutrition groups in their communities where they learn how to build and improve their gardens. They also learn new recipes that incorporate the produce they grow—and they sometimes have cooking competitions to see who can prepare the tastiest meal!

Eliza and her husband Paulino have six children. After participating in her community’s nutrition group, she and Paulino started a home garden and began growing different crops based on the rainy and dry seasons. They also started



Photo by Amy Djafove / CRS

raising chickens, which provide additional protein to their meals and income from selling the eggs. Eliza wants her children to be healthy and says, “I know the vegetables provide essential vitamins for them.”

FACTS TO CONSIDER:

- Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in 2002, making it the first new nation of the millennium. As a new country, it experienced conflict and other obstacles that have impacted its development and the wellbeing of the Timorese people.
- Most families in Timor-Leste live in rural communities, and more than 80% make their living as subsistence farmers. Frequent natural and man-made disasters make it difficult for families to grow enough food to survive. As a result, the country has one of the world’s worst nutrition rates.
- CRS has been providing aid to the Timorese people since 1979 and works with partners and farming communities to improve farming and storage techniques, to become resilient to disasters such as landslides and flooding, and to improve nutrition within families.



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WEEK 5

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: FEED THE HUNGRY

In Madagascar, communities work together to ensure all their children have adequate nutrition. They are living out the corporal work of mercy feeding the hungry not only by making sure each family has enough food, but that each child has the *right* food to lead healthy lives.

CRS Rice Bowl supports families and communities experiencing hunger locally and globally. Your CRS Rice Bowl gifts help to live out this corporal work of mercy for millions of people around the world.

A STORY OF HOPE FROM MADAGASCAR

Although Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world, the joy of its people is contagious, and their hospitality is overwhelming. The small communities that make up the country are tightly-knit, and they support each other through difficulties like climate change, chronic hunger and malnutrition.

Seasonal drought—which is becoming more severe and lasts longer each year—makes it difficult for families to harvest enough food to survive. One in every 2 children in Madagascar are undernourished. But with new farming techniques and knowledge about nutrition, that is changing. Community members are learning how to improve their farms, grow different vegetables and prepare more nutritious meals with training and support from CRS.

Aimee's family has farmed their land for generations. They share a large plot of land and help each other plant and sow. Aimee recently learned new ways to plant her vegetables, which has led to bigger harvests—meaning more food and income for her and her family. She is also learning new ways to use her fresh produce to cook more nutritious meals for her children. Her 2-year-old son Marela loves the cassava and onion dish that Aimee prepares, and he eats all his food because it tastes so good.



Photo by Jim Stipe / CRS

Aimee sees that the food from her garden is helping her children grow and stay healthy. She is proud of her hard work and can see the fruits of her labor. She says, “What makes me happy is when I go to my garden and I see all the things that I’ve planted grow. When I see flowers or the greens, or when I see the first seeds sprouting, it’s like I’ve transferred a kind of power from my hands to the plants. That makes me happy.”

FACTS TO CONSIDER:

- Madagascar is the second largest island country in the world—about the size of Texas. The northern and eastern parts of the country are covered in lush tropical rainforest while the southern part of the country is drier and experiences frequent droughts.
- Madagascar experiences severe natural disasters like cyclones, floods and droughts, which can make it difficult for families to access food.
- More than 50% of all households in Madagascar can be classified as food insecure, and 90% of the country’s population lives on less than \$2 a day. Many families are subsistence farmers or raise livestock.



For downloadable photos, visit crsricebowl.org/photos and watch the video from Week 5 at crsricebowl.org/stories.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Week 1—Visit the prisoners

1. Explain the corporal work of mercy visit the prisoners. People in prison are still people—they are made in the image and likeness of God. No matter what someone has done, they deserve the opportunity to hear the Word of God and find the truth of the message of Christ.
 - *You can refer to the time we had to stay home because of the pandemic: Many felt like prisoners in their own home. Wouldn't you have liked to be visited by others?*
2. Why do you think there are still people suffering from hunger today, despite new technology, increased wealth in the world, and other reasons?
3. The seven corporal works of mercy are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the prisoner and give alms to the poor. What do they mean to you?

Week 2—Visit the sick

1. Explain the corporal work of mercy visiting the sick. We all know what it feels like to be sick. It can be painful and make us feel alone. God made us to be healthy and whole. We can ease the suffering of those who are ill by visiting them, praying for them and performing other acts of charity.
2. How is the corporal work of mercy visiting the sick demonstrated in this story?
3. What are ways you or others have helped those who are sick?

Week 3—Give drink to the thirsty

1. Explain the corporal work of mercy giving drink to the thirsty. Many of our sisters and brothers in Christ do not have access to clean water and suffer from the lack of this basic need. We should support the efforts of those working toward greater accessibility of this essential resource.
2. Why is caring for creation so important and what is the impact—locally and globally—when we don't care for it?
3. In 1986, Saint John Paul II established the World Youth Day, which takes place annually and brings together thousands of young people from around the world. How are young people particularly important to the Church and to society in general?

Week 4—Feed the hungry

1. Explain the corporal work of mercy feeding the hungry. There are millions of people around the world who experience chronic hunger and malnutrition, even though there is enough food in the world to feed everyone. Every person has the right to life, including what is necessary to sustain a life with dignity. We need nutritious food to live and thrive, and it is our responsibility as Christians to help those who don't have enough food to eat.
2. Giving people food and the tools they need to get food for themselves are two different but important ways to feed the hungry. Why are both necessary?
3. How can you help to feed the hungry?

Week 5—Feed the hungry

1. Remind students about the corporal work of mercy feeding the hungry. People go hungry for many reasons. There are many factors that may limit the availability of food or access to food in a community, including natural disasters, human-made emergencies, epidemics, environmental issues and low agricultural production. CRS tries to live out this work of mercy by providing food to those who need it in emergency situations and by helping people find ways to gain regular access to food.
2. Aimee's family has farmed for generations but needed new tools and extra support to successfully combat the challenges of climate change in her community. What can that teach us about people we encounter who experience hunger, poverty, homelessness or other struggles?
3. What are some ways our community can help feed the hungry?