



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

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February 21, 2017

Dear Brothers in Christ,

The Season of Lent is fast approaching. It's a reminder for me to ask everyone to participate in the **Annual Ash Wednesday Appeal for our Sister Diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica, and Rice Bowl** sponsored by Catholic Relief Services.

It has been 25 years since Mandeville was established as an Apostolic Vicariate and it is almost 20 years since it became a Diocese. The population is only 1% Catholic, and so many people experience the effects of poverty. There is still a great need for assistance from our diocese.

This year Catholic Relief Services, which sponsors Operation Rice Bowl, has chosen the theme: *Encounter Lent*. We are reminded that through **prayer**, we encounter Christ who is present in the faces of every member of our human family, with many still walking the long road to Calvary.

Through **fasting**, we encounter our own obstacles, those things about ourselves that prevent us from loving God and neighbor. And through **almsgiving**, we encounter our brothers and sisters around the world, asking what we can give up so that others might have life to the fullest.

I encourage you and your faith communities to participate wholeheartedly in the annual Ash Wednesday Mandeville Appeal and Rice Bowl sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. Participation in both of these Lenten Programs are concrete ways we show solidarity with our brothers and sisters beyond our borders.

Please remind everyone that Lent is a time to think of the thousands of men, women and children. They wait daily for one small bowl of rice to feed their hunger at many refugee camps as they seek to escape the violence of war and religious persecution. This is a time when parish communities and families can make a sacrifice that will help others to encounter Christ through the Church in action.

I am grateful for the many times you have promoted these Lenten Programs in the past. If you need information or assistance to initiate the Rice Bowl Program in your parish or CCD classes please contact the Diocesan Mission Office. Be assured of my prayers during this season of Lent.

Fraternally in Christ,

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak
Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown