



## Kenya next country to be helped by Catholic Charities Solidarity Team

By Debra Miller  
Correspondent

Envision your livelihood and your home suddenly in ruins. Visualize walking several miles every day just to have fresh water to drink. Imagine becoming orphaned and being head of your family because your parents were victims of a tsunami.

Every day, the news makes us painfully aware of the extreme struggles that many poor children and their families experience around the world and here at home. But, what can we do? As Christians, we have an obligation. As Catholics, we have an opportunity.

Since its formation 13 years ago, the Diocese of Metuchen Catholic Charities Solidarity Team (CCST) has focused on initiatives from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as well as issues that

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) deems as priorities. The all-volunteer CCST selects a complex project and dedicates its time and resources to strategizing how to resolve it.

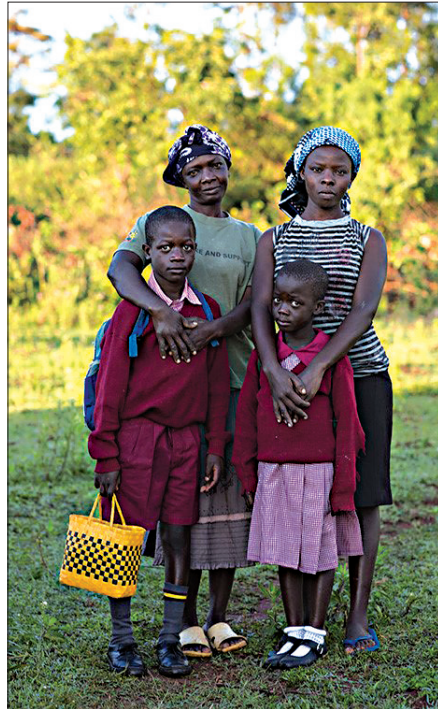
Recently CCST announced its latest effort, “Prosper Project,” is gearing up to assist Kenyan families in navigating healthcare and economic programs. Msgr. Joseph J. Kerrigan, founder of CCST, said there were two reasons the group has chosen to help Kenyans.

“In general we wanted to give the faithful in Metuchen more opportunities to practice solidarity overseas, and Africa and the Middle East were two regions we have not touched yet,” he explained.

“More importantly, in all we do at CCST, we value relationships and accompaniment. The former CRS director in Guatemala, Lane Bunkers, was re-as-



Felix Odhiambo teaches business and geography at the local high school when he is on holiday from Karatina University. Recently, the diocese's Catholic Charities Solidarity Team announced its latest effort, “Prosper Project” is gearing up to assist Kenyan families in navigating healthcare and economic programs.



Replacing her tin shop with a brick-and-mortar store is one investment Janet Anyango Okeyo plans to make using money she saved through a CRS-supported Savings and Internal Lending Community.

— photos by Sara A. Fajardo/CRS

signed to Kenya in 2014. We worked very well with him in Guatemala and wanted to continue that relationship. We also had a priest from Kenya, Father Gilbert Otieno, preach in the mission cooperative program in the Metuchen diocese one year, and some of our CCST members met him and wanted to help him. With a good relationship already in place with CRS and local Kenyan clergy, we felt we were in a good position to make a fruitful commitment to Kenya.”

Deacon Mike Martini of Immaculate Conception Parish, Annandale, was on the board of Catholic Charities when he was tapped to lead the project during an advocacy trip with Msgr. Kerrigan. He calls the project a “very personal journey” and takes advantage of his pulpit time to talk about the work of CCST and how CRS enhances our Catholicism.

“I can’t change the world but I can help through my parish,” Martini says. “Preaching with a social justice theme gets a positive response. We can all be proud of what the church does.”

The first CCST project began in partnership with the Diocese of Santa Rosa in coastal Guatemala in 2003. Led by Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski, a nine-member team traveled there on a 10-day mission to get orientated to the needs of the region. Upon their return, they determined that education, healthcare, agriculture and family stabilization needed urgent addressing.

Many parishes in the diocese answered the call to fundraise and even sent delegations to the Latin America country to offer prayers, expertise and their time to help the local community throughout several years.

Continued on page 7

## Image of the Week

Where in the diocese can it be found?



Last issue's image...



The image, which was featured on page 3 of the August 13 issue of *The Catholic Spirit*, can be found at St. Paul the Apostle Worship Site—Transfiguration of the Lord Parish, Highland Park.

The winner is...

Theresa Byrne, parishioner of Transfiguration of the Lord, Highland Park.

To be a winner, you must call (732) 562-2424 after 9 a.m. Monday. The first caller to correctly identify the image and its location will receive a one year subscription, renewal or gift subscription to *The Catholic Spirit*. **Those who correctly identify an image are not eligible to take another guess for 90 days.**

Continued from page 3

As a result, most all of the Santa Rosa priorities were addressed, including two new mile-long potable water pipelines, the installation of fuel-efficient non-polluting stoves in remote mountain villages, five professionally-staffed clinics, school scholarship incentives for young girls and a micro-lending program for villagers to achieve financial independence.

Msgr. Kerrigan, who also serves as pastor of Holy Family Parish in New Brunswick, founded the CCST volunteer group when he was director of Metuchen's CRS. "We initially tried to mimic and miniaturize how Catholic Relief Services worked out of its headquarters in Baltimore, but after our success in Guatemala, we began to localize our work and give it our own signature," he said.

When the 2004 South Asian Tsunami devastated a region of India, CRS immediately committed to participating in the recovery process. It was CCST that continued to go to the country every two years to manage orphan care, housing and restoration of the fishing industry there.

When comprehensive immigration reform began to rise nationwide in 2005, Justice for Immigrants was formed by the diocese in response to the growing Catholic drive to address the issue. CCST volunteers stepped up to write opinion pieces, join rallies and speak at parish

events and to groups about the Catholic Church's perspective.

In 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan ravaged the Philippines. CSST mobilized and raised more than \$600,000 within the diocese to help the one million people who were displaced. A Haiyan task force was formed and delegates made regular trips to the stricken area to help in relocating those who lost their homes in the storm.

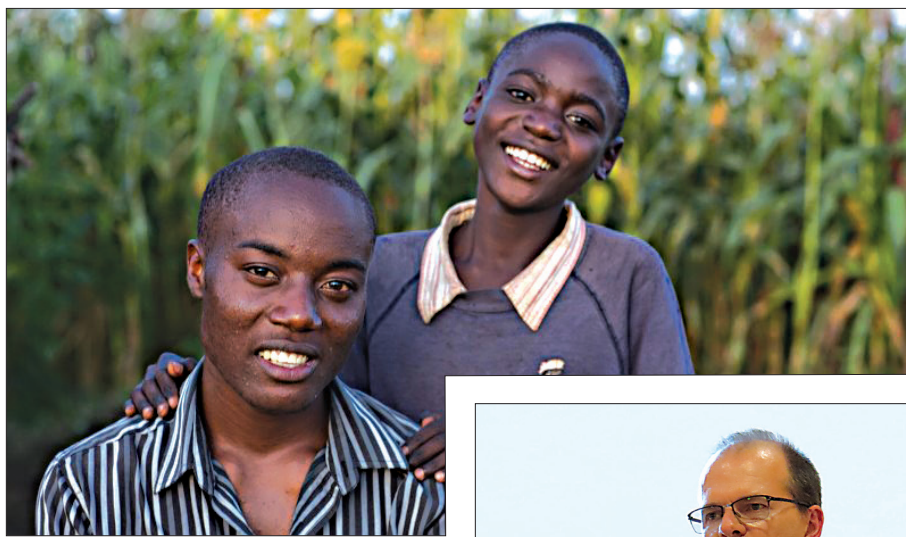
Though only one-quarter of the diocesan parishes participate in CCST projects, Msgr. Kerrigan doesn't feel overwhelmed about the task at hand.

"There's still a lot of ground to cover in the work of solidarity," he said. "Compared to CRS, we are just the little lemonade stand but our team is folks who look at what they do as their main ministry in the Church."

Looking toward the future, Msgr. Kerrigan noted that CCST has begun the program development phase of two initiatives in the Middle East.

"With the refugee crisis in Syria, we made a two-fold decision: to start helping Caritas Lebanon, who is doing the bulk of the refugee work within Lebanon, and to explore starting a refugee resettlement program within the Diocese of Metuchen for refugees cleared by the U.S. State Department," he said.

The lives of hundreds of villagers in a half-dozen communities in India, Guatemala and the Philippines have im-



Above, after Felix and Levis Odhiambo lost their parents to complications from AIDS, Felix has been the main caregiver for his younger brother. Right, Msgr. Joseph J. Kerrigan, CSST founder, is shown giving a homily. — photos by Sara A. Fajardo/CRS and Erin Friedlander



proved thanks to CCST intervention. It's of mutual benefit for everyone involved; the volunteers are treated like family and welcomed into villagers' homes.

CCST convenes once a month and welcomes new members. Meetings and information about their annual dinner fundraiser Oct. 29 in Somerset are posted on its website: [www.ccsolidarity.org](http://www.ccsolidarity.org).

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