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Q & A: Ken Hackett

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 25, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

All this week at Q & A, we will be looking at the distinctive nature and contributions of Catholic charitable activities.

Ken Hackett is the President of Catholic Relief Services [1], an organization that has been much in the news because of their leading work in Haiti.

With news reports indicating that there has now been a cholera outbreak on the island, readers may wish to click on the link above and make a further donation.

The question: Based on your work, what is distinctive about Catholic charitable activities?

Ken Hackett: Catholic charitable activities are truly catholic, that is to say, universal. In answering this question, perhaps Archbishop Timothy Dolan, chairman of the CRS Board, best expresses our approach: ?At Catholic Relief Services, we don?t just help people who are Catholic; we help people because we are Catholic.?

Lane Bunkers directs the CRS program in Ethiopia, where about 80 percent of the country?s nearly 80 million people live in rural areas. Of these, fewer than 15 percent have access to safe water. He relates a story that echoes the experience of many CRS people in the field.

CRS donated several drilling rigs to the Ethiopian Catholic Church to tap deep groundwater. Our partner, the Hararghe Catholic Secretariat, used one of the rigs to drill a borehole in Dire Dawa, an arid eastern district in Ethiopia. The borehole now provides 2,400 households with access to clean water. Recently, the Secretary General of the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat Abba Hagos Hayish toured some of the communities benefitting from this work.

?What do you think of this water project?? asked Abba Hagos of a Muslim woman filling a 5-gallon jug with water from one of the system?s taps.

?It?s wonderful!? she exclaimed. ?Look how clean this water is. Our life has changed.?

?Do you know who is responsible for this project?? Abba Hagos inquired. The woman put down her water jug and looked at him with a slightly puzzled expression.

?They call themselves Catholics,? she said, emphasizing the strange word at the end of her sentence. ?I?m not sure exactly what that means. But we give thanks to God for their work.?

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Links:
[1] http://crs.org/