

Amid aid cuts, support for CRS collection ‘very urgent’

written by OSV News |



Amid the Trump administration’s sweeping cuts to overseas humanitarian aid, an annual collection used to serve the vulnerable in the U.S. and abroad has taken on “a very urgent significance,” said Bishop Daniel H. Mueggenborg of Reno, Nevada, head of the U.S. Catholic bishops’ national collections efforts.

The Catholic Relief Services Collection will be taken up in most of the nation’s Catholic dioceses March 29-30, with donations also accepted directly at usccb.igivecatholictogether.org, part of the #iGiveCatholicTogether campaign.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in a statement March 10 noted the funds support six key Church-related entities meeting an array of social and spiritual needs:

- Catholic Relief Services, the overseas relief and development agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S., which provides both disaster relief and economic development initiatives among the world’s lower-income nations.
- The USCCB’s Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, through which the bishops work to address the pastoral needs of U.S.-based Catholics who span an array of cultural backgrounds.
- The USCCB’s Secretariat of Justice and Peace, which advocates on behalf of the poor

while working for peace.

- The USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services, which had contracted with the federal government for decades, under a congressionally established program, to resettle refugees vetted by U.S. immigration and security authorities until Jan. 24. The USCCB filed suit against the Trump administration Feb. 18 for suspending the contract, which the administration later terminated altogether Feb. 26.
- Catholic Legal Immigration Network, or CLINIC, a Maryland-based nonprofit established by the U.S. bishops to provide legal aid to refugees and migrants — including immigrant Catholic clergy and religious, upon whom close to 90 percent of the nation's Catholic dioceses rely.
- The Holy Father's Relief Fund, which enables the pope to quickly assist disaster victims.

Bishop Mueggenborg said that “abrupt stop-work orders on foreign humanitarian relief work” have left CRS and other aid organizations “unable to sustain their work overseas, bringing food, life-saving medicine and daily necessities to people in need.”

The administration's suspension and subsequent termination of its refugee resettlement contract with the USCCB has also impacted “thousands of refugees,” he noted.

The USCCB's statement on the CRS national collection noted that even when federal funding was still in place, the USCCB still had to supplement the monies, because federal grants did not cover the whole cost of supporting refugees.

The conference also noted that the U.S. government's funding suspension has forced the USCCB and its local partners to begin laying off employees, damaging their partnerships and future ability to provide refugee assistance. It noted donations to the 2025 collection “will be vital to the Catholic initiatives to reveal Christ's love to those in need.”

In 2023, the bishops distributed \$12.7 million in grants and donations among the CRS collection's six beneficiary organizations, according to an end-of-year report.

Among other projects the funds supported were anti-trafficking efforts in the fishing and seafood industries, legal aid to a religious sister from Asia forced to leave her U.S. ministry due to visa complications, pastoral training for Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics in the U.S., economic development in Chad, and support for Colombia's Catholic bishops in ending that nation's brutal decades-long civil war.

Those efforts have also served to address several root causes of migration — including political instability, conflict, exploitation, environmental crises and poverty — as well as the U.S. deficit in clergy and religious, which has become acute in recent years.