



STORY AND
PHOTOS BY
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A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Sixth-graders package 15,000 meals for world's poor

ST. JAMES SIXTH-GRADER NOAH WAGNER IS ALL SMILES AS HE CARRIES AN ARMFUL OF BAGS CONTAINING FOOD BOUND FOR BURKINA FASO IN WEST AFRICA.

NOAH WAGNER, a sixth-grader at St. James School in Wesleyville, quickly darts between aisles of his peers who are packaging dried rice, vegetables and soy protein bound for Burkina Faso in West Africa.

Carrying an armful of food bags, Noah's smile brightens the cafeteria at Erie's St. Mark Catholic Center, where hundreds of Erie County Catholic school students gathered March 25 for a Global Poverty Project.

"This is amazing," Noah yells above the din of music and chattering kids who, by day's end, packaged 15,000 meals. "I like how we can help other people and have fun, too."

Just as Noah completes his sentence, Andrew Moser, a representative from Rise Against Hunger, a partner of Catholic Relief Services' Helping Hands, bangs a loud gong to let students know they reached the 7,000 mark in the number of bags packed.

Helping Hands coordinates volunteers to package nutritious meals for people in Burkina Faso and other needy areas of the world where shortages of food and famine take a heavy toll.

Holding one of the plastic packages of food bound for West Africa, Moser explains that a vitamin packet is inserted into each bag. Once sealed, the dried contents can last up to two years.

"I love coming to these events," Moser says. "[Rise Against Hunger] always says we could package these meals in a factory somewhere faster and cheaper. But we're in it to create a movement. We want to cast a vision of a world

without hunger. I'm here trying to convey that vision to these kids."

The Catholic Schools Office, in conjunction with the Office of Social Justice and Respect Life and with a grant from the diocesan Religious Education Endowment Fund, coordinated the service day as part of a three-year Global Poverty Project.

Another significant grant from the Thomas Lord Charitable Trust made it possible for the diocese to plan the Global Poverty Project. Beginning this year, sixth-graders from eight Erie County Catholic schools will learn about the underlying social justice issues of global poverty and how to take action against it.

The March 25 service project was one component of this year's effort. Teachers also taught lessons on poverty and, in April, students attended a Global Poverty Summit at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Erie.

The summit included workshops, speakers and even a taste test of the contents of the packages that the young people packed two weeks earlier.

Kim Lytle, curriculum director for Catholic schools, was impressed by the students' reactions to the project.

"They get it," Lytle says. "They got their hands dirty and they invested their time and energy into feeding the hungry."

Patrice Swick, director of the Office of Social Justice and Respect Life, spoke to classes about her own mission work in Tanzania and the need to look beyond ourselves to help others.

"This has been such a fantastic experience for students to have a hands-on experience in a global way," Swick says. "I think you can have a hands-on experience locally, but for a sixth-grader to be able to have an active part in our global church is exciting." †



ST. JAMES SIXTH-GRADERS BRADLEY WOODRING, KALYN AQUILLANO AND MORGAN SIGLER ENJOYED PACKING DRIED FOOD FOR THE GLOBAL POVERTY PROJECT SERVICE EFFORT THAT WILL FEED THE HUNGRY IN BURKINA FASO.