



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers in Christ,

This year has been challenging on all of us. As I write, I want to acknowledge my appreciation for the good work you have been doing and continue to do to serve the faithful of our Diocese throughout this unprecedented time. Please know that your dedication to the Gospel is a blessing to the world and the people of our Diocese.

As we approach the Lenten Season, where we remember the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord, we can unite our sufferings to His. Let us take this opportunity to reignite our faith, and enter deeply into the Lenten penitential practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In particular this Lent, it is important to remember that while this year has been difficult for us, in many ways the missions have been struggling even more so. As such, I would like to encourage you and your faith communities to continue to participate in two Lenten programs: the Ash Wednesday Mandeville Annual Appeal, and Operation Rice Bowl.

As you well know, we have been in partnership with the Diocese of Mandeville in Jamaica for several years. The Mandeville Diocese is the poorest Diocese in Jamaica, with 22% of its inhabitants living in poverty. While great strides have been made in the country in recent years, the pandemic has set them back considerably in the areas of education and assistance. The parishes are struggling as well, and our help to them at this point is vital.

Our Diocesan church has also participated in Operation Rice Bowl for many years and continues to encourage the faithful to make Rice Bowl a family Lenten Program. Operation Rice Bowl benefits Catholic Relief Services which is the official international relief agency of the American Catholic Church, as well as several charities here in our own Diocese. In particular, Catholic Relief Services has been working diligently to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, while helping the communities that have been the hardest hit, both from the virus, and its economic impacts. I hope you will encourage your parishioners to continue in this effort to help those in need and proclaim the Gospel.

I am grateful for the many times you have promoted these Lenten Programs with your faith community. Please remember that we are not asking you to give of your own parish resources, but rather to allow your parishioners to be a part of the missionary work of the Church through these programs. If you need clarification or would like to initiate the Rice Bowl Program in your parish or CCD classes, please contact the Diocesan Mission Office.

Fraternally in Christ,

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak

Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown