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April 27, 2006

Dear Cross International Catholic Outreach,
and all the generous people who have given of themselves to help us help others,

CROSS has been an incredible support to our work here of reaching out to those in need. One of the things that impresses me continually about Jesus is that he was concerned about people's physical well-being as well as their spiritual needs. He taught them the Our Father, but he also cured the sick, fed the 5,000, and raised the dead to life. That is, he wanted people's lives to be good "on earth as it is in heaven."

There is a phrase you may have heard before; it is one that I like a lot. "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish, and you feed him for life." The Catholic Church has a long history of giving people fish. CROSS helps us with food that we give to the poor that come to our door asking for help. There is great immediate need for the 60 families we help each week.

But we are learning to teach them to fish as well. We Jesuits are supposed to be "Men for Others." One of the ways we "teach people to fish" is through our "Animals for Others" (AFO) program. To sum up simply, we take needy families in a Maya Indian village, and give newly weaned female pigs to about half a dozen of them, with one male pig for the group. Before that they have to receive some training, and we give them cement to build a floor for the pig pen; the walls and thatch roof they do themselves. We also give them some feed (a few sacks) to get the newly weaned pig going. After that runs out, the family has to provide the food for the growing pig.

When the pig gets big enough to mate, it mates with the one male pig in the village. When it has its first litter, the family gives back two female pigs (when they are weaned) to the program. Those two pigs are then given to two other families, and the process begins again. The first family can keep all of the rest of the pigs for their own use: to reproduce again, to sell and to consume.

What I like about the program is that it is an effort to change the structure of poverty, at least in some small way. We have been able to help some of the families who formerly received a bag of food, moving them off the list of weekly food to helping them long term through the AFO program. CROSS has assisted us greatly with this, providing us with the support money for 75 families, as well as a vehicle to get around to the many villages that have become a part of the program. What started out as a part-time project in three villages has grown into a full-time apostolate in 22 villages. We have helped 137 families so far we will expand to 5 more villages this year.

Thanks to all of you who are helping us to help others. May God bless you, and all those you love.

In the Lord's peace,

Fr. Dick

Fr. Dick Perl, S.J.
Pastor