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Search begins for new CRS president

by Catholic News Service



Ken Hackett (CNS 2009 file photo)

BALTIMORE -- Catholic Relief Services has begun a nationwide search for a successor to its president, Ken Hackett, whose career with the international humanitarian agency of the U.S. Catholic community spans nearly four decades.

"The good news is that we can do this patiently and carefully, because we are able to approach any leadership changes from a position of strength, success and stability," New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan, chairman of the CRS board, said in a Sept. 29 statement announcing the search.

Hackett, 63, has agreed to continue serving as president for six months beyond the end of his current five-year term in June 2011 and the new president is expected to be installed by January 2012. He will continue to serve as a consultant to CRS until July 2012.

CRS' president since 1993, Hackett joined the agency in 1972 following Peace Corps service in Ghana. His first assignment was in Sierra Leone and he served CRS in posts throughout Africa and Asia, as well as in a variety of positions at CRS headquarters.

He was regional director for Africa, guiding CRS' response to the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85, and supervised operations in East Africa during the crisis in Somalia in the early 1990s.

During his 17 years at the helm, CRS grew from an operating budget of approximately \$300 million to more than \$800 million today. One of the largest and most respected international humanitarian agencies, CRS operates in more than 100 countries, with a global staff of nearly 5,000.

Archbishop Dolan acknowledged Hackett's contributions, including leading the agency through emergencies such as Hurricane Mitch in the late 1990s, multiple famines in Africa, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 and the Haitian earthquake earlier this year, as well as shepherding a major initiative to provide lifesaving medicine to people with AIDS in the developing world.

"It is only because of his extraordinary leadership these past 17 years that we are in such a secure position that we can approach this transition calmly and carefully; and only because of his selfless 'calling the question' that we are now commencing this realistic planning for the future of this agency we all so love," the archbishop said.

Born in Roxbury, Mass., Hackett graduated from Boston College in 1968. He has received honorary degrees from his alma mater, Cabrini College, College of Great Falls, College of Notre Dame of Maryland, New York Medical College, University of Notre Dame, University of San Diego, Villanova University and Mount St. Mary's University.

In 2004, he was invested as a Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great, one of the highest papal honors.

Hackett has served as North American president of Caritas Internationalis, the confederation of humanitarian agencies of the global Catholic Church, and on the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs.

He is currently a member of Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley's International Advisory Council and serves on the boards of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the Vatican body that coordinates the church's charitable work, and the Africa Society, a think tank and public education organization dedicated to educating Americans about the continent of Africa. He is a consultant to the U.S. bishops' committees on Migration and on International Justice and Peace.

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From 2004 to 2009, Hackett served on the board of directors of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a federal effort to increase aid to countries that demonstrate a commitment to ruling justly, investing in people and encouraging economic freedom.

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