The Iowa SHARES program that saved the lives of thousands of starving Cambodian refugees.

Pope John Paul II's homily delivered to more than 350,000 people at Living History Farms on October 4, 1979 told them that they were the "stewards" of the earth with "the potential to...rid the world of famine." A month later Governor Robert D. Ray visited Thailand and saw the horror of thousands of Cambodian refugees starving to death after being driven from their homes by the Khmer Rouge. When the Governor returned to Iowa and described what he had seen, four religious leaders who had participated in the ecumenical service with the Pope urged the Governor to lead an effort to assist these refugees. Michael Gartner, then Editor of The Des Moines Register, placed his newspaper behind this campaign. Iowa clergy, community leaders, and the people of Iowa rallied to the call of Iowa SHARES (Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation).

Many Iowans still remember the photo of an emaciated child holding an empty bowl in The Des Moines Register with a coupon asking for donations to Iowa SHARES. Inspired by the plight of these starving refugees and the words of the Pope, individuals donated more than $600,000 to purchase food and medicine for 30,000 starving Cambodians. The first such delivery was made on Christmas Day, 1979, less than three months after the Pope's Iowa visit. Iowa doctors and nurses followed shortly after to provide medical care.