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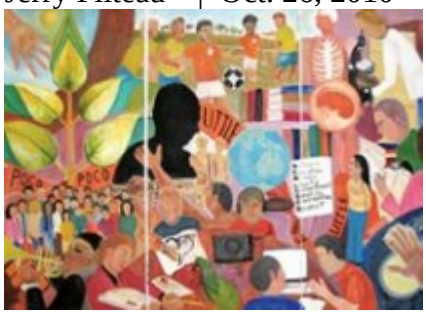
Bishops defend Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Jerry Filteau | Oct. 26, 2010



A mural in the New Brunswick, N.J., headquarters of New Labor, an alternative worker's organization that advocates for low-wage immigrants. New Labor receives CCHD funding.

WASHINGTON -- Quoting Pope Benedict XVI -- "justice is the primary way of charity" -- a bishops' report on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development reaffirms the campaign as "a unique and essential part of the Catholic community's broad commitment to assist low-income people, families and communities."

The report, endorsed in September by the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was released Oct. 26.

The review was prompted by criticisms that the CCHD has funded some organizations which directly or indirectly advocated positions not in accord with basic Catholic teachings.

The CCHD has come under repeated attack by critics, some of whom oppose its work and have sought to kill the campaign.

The criticism over the years has sometimes been overstated or misplaced. In many cases, the accusations from conservative quarters were about organizations that received no direct funding but had become allied over time, often loosely, with CCHD-funded organizations.

The bishops vowed that henceforth "CCHD will be more clear on the 'Catholic' in the Catholic Campaign for Human Development." In the future, according to the report, CCHD "will review every aspect of its work, including funding criteria and guidelines, grant making process and all applications and contracts to better reflect CCHD's foundations and Catholic principles and to safeguard against any misuse of funds by groups."

"No CCHD funds will go to groups whose actions conflict with fundamental Catholic social teaching," it says.

For decades the CCHD has relied heavily on Pope Paul VI's major social encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* ("The Progress of Peoples") as its Magna Charta. Now it finds new vigor in the teachings of Pope Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate* ("Charity in Truth"):

"If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. ? Justice is the primary way of charity. ? The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more

effectively we love them. This is the institutional path ? of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly."

The CCHD is reviewing and revising its Web site and all forms, applications and grant agreements ?to clearly reflect CCHD mission and foundations, Catholic social and moral teaching and the directions and substance of this Review and Renewal [report],? the report says.

For more coverage of the U.S. bishops' statement on the Campaign for Human Development, see:

- Jerry Filteau: CCHD wants to woo back bishops who left campaign [1]
- Michael Sean Winters: Catholic identity demands the work the CCHD promotes [2].
- Jerry Filteau: Bishops defend Catholic Campaign for Human Development [3]
- Jerry Filteau: Any room for trade-offs in CCHD? Leaders say no. [4]

The U.S. bishops formed the Campaign for Human Development in November 1969 as a major national program to help the poor help themselves out of poverty. ?Catholic? was added to its name in 1998 to clarify the Catholic character of its mission and activities.

Over the past decades the CCHD has given some $200 million to local self-help community organizing and economic development projects aimed at raising the poor out of poverty by their own bootstraps. From yearly diocesan collections, 25 percent stays in the diocese and 75 percent goes to the national campaign -- in many cases coming back to the local diocese in the form of national grants, each approved not only by a national bishops? committee but also by the local bishop.

?For 40 years the Catholic bishops and the Catholic community in the United States have carried out a serious and sustained commitment to help low-income people and poor communities improve their lives and address the causes and costs of poverty,? the report says.

In the intervening four decades, many things have changed it says, but ?one thing has not changed -- the Gospel call to hunger and thirst for justice. In fact, Pope Benedict has placed concern for the poor at the very center of the church?s life. The current economic distress and widespread poverty that comes with it have made the mission and message of CCHD more urgent, timely and important.?

In an interview with NCR shortly before the report?s release, Bishop Roger Morin of Biloxi, Miss., head of the bishops? CCHD Subcommittee, said the criticisms of the campaign have been taken seriously and are being addressed.

CCHD needs to tell its story better

He said the criticisms have also highlighted the need for CCHD to tell its own story better. ?We need to tell the good news stories about what has been able to be accomplished with the funds that have been given to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development so that people will begin to hear with their own ears and see with their own eyes that in fact poor people can help themselves and poor people can be directly involved in bringing about institutional change,? he said.

Bishop David Zubik of Pittsburgh, a member of the CCHD subcommittee, headed the working group that wrote the Review and Renewal report. It consulted with some of CCHD?s critics as well as moral theologians and others in refining criteria for organizations seeking CCHD funding.

When the bishops met in San Antonio last June, members of the subcommittee and working group met at Sacred

Heart Parish with leaders of COPS -- Communities Organized for Public Service -- a primarily Catholic interfaith organization that got some of its main initial funding from CCHD in the 1970s and continues to receive funding today.

Missionhurst Fr. Walter D?heedene, Sacred Heart?s pastor, told NCR that CCHD over the years has played a significant role in funding COPS programs of human development and leadership training -- empowering poor, chiefly Hispanic communities in the city to achieve neighborhood changes in housing, education, sanitation, health and a variety of other fields.

Since its founding in 1974 by six mainly Hispanic Catholic parishes in San Antonio?s poor South Side and West Side, COPS has been instrumental, through community organizing and civic activism, in channeling hundreds of millions of dollars in investments into streets, schools, libraries and other infrastructure in the city?s poorer neighborhoods.

D?heedene, head of San Antonio COPS?s clergy caucus, said the organization?s biggest current effort is getting voter turnout for the November elections. He emphasized that COPS does not try to tell people how to vote, but high voter turnout sends a message to elected officials that people in San Antonio?s poorer neighborhoods are a force to be reckoned with.

?Education is big? in this year?s voting, with a $550 million bond for schools at stake, he said, and ?fair treatment for immigrants? is another key issue this year.

That is the kind of story that critics of CCHD tend to ignore -- or purposely sidestep because they object to all such forms of church activism on behalf of the poor -- as they focus on issues like CCHD funding of organizations with coalition ties to other community organizing groups that include issues like advocacy of same-sex marriages or public funding of abortion among their goals.

In the past year CCHD defunded five such groups because of such ties; it found the alleged connection in several other cases misleading or unsubstantiated, or the funded group publicly disavowed its association with the non-Catholic agenda of such coalition partners.

Morin said the working group that prepared the Review and Renewal report ?did an outstanding job.? He said that while the Administrative Committee approved the report in September, it will also be discussed by the full assembly of bishops at their mid-November meeting in Baltimore and in the smaller regional meetings the bishops always hold in conjunction with their national meeting.

The Administrative Committee approved the report for release before the national meeting because that gathering takes place Nov. 15-18, just days before this year?s annual CCHD collection is scheduled in the parishes of most dioceses on the Sunday before Thanksgiving -- Nov. 21 this year.

?I think the document that we have now basically addresses the concerns that were there,? Morin said. ?[There is] a more pronounced Catholic identity for the campaign. We have reviewed the grant application process? to assure a closer adherence of applicants to Catholic social and moral teaching.

Grant prohibitions more explicit

He noted that the local diocesan bishop must now, as before, approve any CCHD grant to an organization, but he said the ?grant application language now? is more explicit in prohibiting applicants from forming alliances with other organizations that have agendas not in conformity with Catholic social and moral teachings.

?We can?t predict what people will do in the future,? he said, ?but in some of the [past] instances where it was

necessary to cancel a grant or withdraw funding, it was because a member of a collaborative or alliance [group] had gone far afield from their original work.?

?No one was funded at the outset ? that gave, as the scope of work that they were going to be involved in, any activity that would be contrary to church moral or social teaching,? he said.

Mistakes in CCHD funding, he said, generally arose out of the evolution of such coalitions and alliances, where an organization once judged to be free of taint found itself allied with one or more other organizations that had subsequently begun to advocate legalization of same-sex marriage, greater access to abortion, or other positions clearly opposed to Catholic social and moral teaching.

Morin, whose own involvement in CCHD began many years ago when he was a priest and director of the campaign in his home Archdiocese of New Orleans, said that under revised CCHD procedures ?the language is more specific in terms of [grant recipients] not forming alliances, coalitions, collaboratives with groups that are involved in taking positions on issues that are contrary to church teaching.?

He also said there has been ?some misinterpretation? in the past that direct Catholic institutional connections might be a liability for community organization or economic development groups seeking CCHD funding.

?That would not be up-front grounds for denying funding? to an applicant, he said.

He added that the former CCHD criteria for representation by the poor on governing boards of organizations are being made more flexible. The campaign still maintains a principle that the poor must have a significant voice in a funded organization?s policy and activities, but strict percentage limits of the past have been modified to allow more flexible guidelines.

CCHD focuses its grants on self-help for the poor and economically disadvantaged, and Catholic organizations seeking aid for projects outside those purposes have been excluded, he said, but ?not because they were Catholic ? that was distorted over a period of time? into a complaint that CCHD discriminated against specifically Catholic groups.

The new report clearly says that Catholic connections will be considered a plus in CCHD grant-making. ?Catholic organizations and organizations that include Catholic parishes, organizations and institutions in substantial numbers will receive priority consideration as long as they effectively carry out CCHD?s mission and clearly reflect CCHD?s foundations,? it says.

More parish involvement

The report also signals a new CCHD effort to engage Catholic parishes across the nation in carrying out its mission of combating poverty -- and in the process, strengthening Catholic life and spirituality in those parishes.

?CCHD?s work not only makes progress against poverty possible in particular places; it also can strengthen parish life and enrich the broader Catholic community,? it says. ?CCHD proposes to gather a number of Catholic pastors (and other persons with relevant theological, organizational and academic expertise) to examine how CCHD activities strengthen parish life and witness (or have not) and to explore how to better link the mission and activities of CCHD to the mission and community life of Catholic parishes and the church.?

That challenge could be one of the most essential elements in the CCHD Review and Renewal report: If Catholic parishes across the country become more aware of and engaged in the campaign?s 40-year efforts to empower the nation?s poor and give them greater say in their own destiny, it could lead the CCHD to new heights of participation in Catholic social teaching across a broad spectrum of diverse social and political views.

Since the tremendously popular national collection for economically suffering women religious began, the annual CCHD collection has fallen into second place, but it remains the most popular of the bishops? other regular national collections, garnering about $10 million a year despite annual attacks by politically conservative groups bent on destroying it.

[Jerry Filteau is NCR Washington correspondent.]

The complete document "The Review and Renewal of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development," as accepted and affirmed by the USCCB Administrative Committee, September 15, 2010 now available (http://tinyurl.com/2e25ffg) on bishops conference Web site.

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