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Biblical association, USCCB reach agreement

Patricia Zapor Catholic News Service | Jun. 13, 2011

WASHINGTON -- The Catholic Biblical Association has reached an agreement with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops over sharing income from sales of Bibles and other related material.

Statements from Benedictine Father Joseph Jensen, executive secretary of the biblical association, and Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of media relations for the USCCB, acknowledged an agreement, which both said they were pleased to have reached. Neither would disclose details of the agreement.

Since 2007, the association and the USCCB, under the auspices of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, had been trying to work out an arrangement for sharing some of the income from licensing of Bibles and other uses of biblical and spiritual material. The CCD licenses religious and spiritual literature in the United States.

For decades, the association received payments from the CCD for sales of Bibles and other publications that use the New American Bible translation, which includes substantial work by members of the association done in collaboration with the CCD. Payments -- which the association said represented 25 percent of the income from licensing -- were stopped in 2008 while the confraternity sought changes in the arrangement.

As a new revision of the Bible, known as the New American Bible Revised Edition, or NABRE, was released in March, settling the financial arrangement between the two organizations took on new urgency. The NABRE includes the first revised translation since 1970 of the Old Testament.

Eventually the two organizations entered into the process of conciliation provided for under canon law. But in the end that formal system did not result in a resolution. Father Jensen told Catholic News Service the two organizations reached an agreement on their own.

Earlier, Father Jensen had said that ramifications from the payments being suspended included questions such as who has the legal rights to the payments and how the association would continue to pay for its program of scholarships and stipends for scholars and students.

The first year after the payments were cut off, the Catholic Biblical Association had a $170,000 deficit because it honored the grants to which it was already committed, he said. In the intervening years, the association had suspended all its grants except for a few student stipends and a famine relief donation.

Father Jensen told CNS June 7 that the agreement with the USCCB "recognizes our ongoing contributions to the work of the CCD; and, advancing knowledge of the Scriptures (and) provides CBA with ongoing funding for its operations." He added that it also creates a framework for increased cooperation with CCD on future projects.

Sister Mary Ann said, "The bishops prize quality biblical scholarship and look forward to continued work with the (association) in this area."

Father Jensen said that cooperation between the two organizations goes back to the founding of the Catholic

Biblical Association in 1936. "Relations have almost invariably been cordial and productive for both parties."

The agreement was signed June 1.

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