

Following the money from the White House

Tom Gallagher | Mar. 22, 2012 NCR Today

Commentary

For weeks now, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York and Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., have been decrying the so-called maltreatment of Catholics and our faith by the Obama administration because of the rollout of a mandate requiring coverage of contraceptives in health care plans. We've heard and read incredibly caustic words and letters from many U.S. bishops.

The bishops' conference staff of Anthony Picarello, Mercy Sr. Mary Ann Walsh and Richard Doerflinger have stepped double-time to get their views out in the media, whether going on TV shows, commenting on online articles or having articles published on *The Huffington Post* and other outlets.

Even Lori got involved in the comments strategy and dropped a [snarky retort in the comments section](#) [1] of *America* magazine on its recent editorial on the contraception issue. Snarkiness is counterproductive, in opposite to a ?pastor of souls,? let alone a bishop who should know better.

According to Catholic News Service, then cardinal-designate Dolan said he emailed Sr. Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity who heads the Catholic Health Association, on Feb. 10 to tell her he was "disappointed that she had acted unilaterally, not in concert with the bishops."

Here's Dolan's characterization of Keehan's situation:

"She's in a bind," the cardinal-designate said of Sr. Carol. "When she's talking to [Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen] Sebelius and the president of the United States, in some ways, these are people who are signing the checks for a good chunk of stuff that goes on in Catholic hospitals. It's tough for her to stand firm. Understandably, she's trying to make sure that anything possible, any compromise possible, that would allow the magnificent work of Catholic health care to continue, she's probably going to be innately more open to than we would."

In a Feb. 10 statement, Keehan praised what she called "a resolution ... that protects the religious liberty and conscience rights of Catholic institutions."

What makes Dolan look again and again as a not-ready-for-prime-time political amateur is the fact that the Catholic bishops' conference itself and Catholic, non-hospital and university organizations (separate from Catholic hospitals and universities' receipt of federal funds) happily accept hundreds of millions of dollars a year from the federal government, including from the Obama administration.

This undeniable fact has been well known to all of the bishops well before January, when the original HHS mandate was announced. And throughout the subsequent period of extraordinary nastiness, unkindness was

communicated from the U.S. bishops and their staff towards Obama and his administration.

Let's take a quick survey of the money flow. In other words, let's follow the money. Here's a partial list of the federal government's money flow to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops itself and other non-Catholic hospital and university organizations (with one reference to one Catholic university grant).

Highlights of federal funding to the U.S. bishops and certain Catholic nonprofit organizations

The Obama administration has increased federal funding to Catholic nonprofits for both domestic and international services to those in need. In total, more than \$1.5 billion in federal funds went to the Catholic church and Catholic-affiliated organizations in the last two years.

From 2009 to 2010, there has been an *increase* of \$120 million to Catholic charities agencies from the prior years.

One qualification: The publicly available data below is not comprehensive, as it does not include grants from all federal agencies.

Approximate obligated United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and HHS funds to Catholic Relief Services, an agency entirely controlled by the U.S. bishops:

FY 2010: \$361,678,348

FY 2009: \$322,071,017

FY 2008: \$297,831,017

FY 2007: \$197,647,940

In 2008, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided \$12.45 million in international food assistance grants to Catholic Relief Services. In 2011, that increased almost five-fold to \$57.89 million.

(Source: HHS, USDA)

Approximate total federal funds to Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), as reported by agencies to CCUSA:

2010: \$554,212,255

2009: \$429,823,957?

2008: \$440,371,591

(Source: Catholic Charities USA Annual Survey)

U.S. Department of Labor grants to Catholic organizations include an approximate total of \$5,345,500 in FY2011 to Catholic University of America for health IT skills training and Catholic Charities of Kansas City for ex-offender reintegration. These approximate totals increased significantly from previous year totals of \$909,981 in FY2007 and \$300,000 in 2008 and 2009.

Catholic Medical Mission Board received \$7 million in funds from HHS in 2011 for global health activities, a significant increase over \$500,000 in funds in 2008, \$1.3 million in 2009 and \$1.8 million in 2010. (Source: HHS)

The South African Catholic Bishops Conference received \$20 million in funds from HHS for global health activities in 2011, up from \$2.5 million in 2008 and almost double in funding of \$12 million each in 2009 and 2010. (Source: HHS)

HHS funds to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS):

USCCB/MRS has received an average of \$29 million for each of the last three years in four grant areas of activities, including employment services, economic self-sufficiency and support for unaccompanied children. (Source: HHS)

Again, the U.S. bishops themselves, have received almost \$100 million from the Obama administration during the past three years. Yet, Dolan, Lori, Picarello, Doerflinger and Walsh paint President Obama and the administration as anti-Catholic, anti-religion?

On Oct. 3, [three Catholic Charities agencies](#) [2] -- the Diocese of Wichita, Kan.; the Diocese of Trenton, N.J.; and the Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn. -- received \$2.8 million for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood activities from the HHS Administration for Children and Families.

The Catholic Volunteer Network received 75 percent of their original grant request from the Corporation for National and Community Service. (Note: CNCS and its total budget were almost completely eliminated by Congress earlier this year.)

Beyond the money doled out to the U.S. bishops and Catholic-affiliated organizations is the broad and deep consultation by Obama and the administration with Catholic church leaders. During the past three years, the Obama administration has actively engaged a wide-range of Catholic leaders on major policy matters.

According to the White House, numerous Catholic leaders served on the first ever President's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, including Catholic Charities U.S.A., the U.S. bishops' conference, Catholic Relief Services, Mexican American Catholic Colleges, Maryknoll, NETWORK and the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change.

Besides Dolan, Obama has met with Bishop Charles Werster of Salt Lake City, Utah, and Sisters Anne Curtis

and Sally Duffy on immigration issues. He met with Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, N.M., on budget and poverty issues, as well as the full board of Catholic Charities U.S.A. on the occasion of their Centennial celebration, among others.

This past fall some 150 leaders of Catholic Charities agencies from across the country spent a daylong briefing and dialogue at the White House.

Catholic Charities U.S.A. joined First Lady Michelle Obama last year at the launch of "Let's Move Faith and Communities" in helping kids live healthy lives.

Melody Barnes, chair of White House Domestic Policy, gave the keynote address at Catholic Charities U.S.A. Poverty Summit in Fort Worth, Tex.

Several Catholic hospitals and health systems joined other participants at the White House conference initiative titled, "Improving Health Care through Faith-based and Community Partnerships."

The Obama administration's "common ground" initiatives include the first ever Pregnancy Assistance Fund, the expansion of the adoption tax credit and maternal and child health innovations such as Text4Baby, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visitation program, and the President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative.

The Pregnancy Assistance Fund to support vulnerable pregnant women was authorized as part of the Affordable Care Act. Seventeen states have received grants for programs to assist vulnerable pregnant women. States like Connecticut are partnering with local Catholic Charities agencies on this new initiative.

The administration tripled the adoption tax credit, increasing it to a maximum of \$13,170 per child. The tax credit was included in the Affordable Care Act and is refundable and eligible taxpayers can receive the credit even if they owe no tax for that year.

Last Easter, over 30 Catholic bishops, clergy, women religious and laypeople joined the president and other Christians to commemorate Easter at the White House.

In Rome, Miguel Diaz, the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, hosted a conference titled "Building Bridges" in partnership with Vatican agencies and Catholic non-governmental organizations addressing pediatric HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and interreligious dialogue.

Diaz has also worked closely with Suzan Johnson-Cooke, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom, and both attended the recent conference on interreligious dialogue in Assisi, which was hosted by the Vatican.

It is abundantly clear -- indisputable, in terms of the significant and new federal dollars flowing to the U.S. bishops themselves and their corporately-controlled entities, and other Catholic-affiliated organizations, coupled with the extensive outreach to hundreds of Catholic leaders all over the country seeking their input on major issues affecting all of society -- that Obama and his administration consider the Catholic church a critical, indispensable partner in advancing the common good in the U.S. and abroad.

Why aren't Dolan, Lori, Picarello, Doerflinger and Walsh celebrating this undeniable fact? Why aren't they speaking honestly to the Catholic population about the authentic truth of the Obama administration's enormous commitment to the church and her broad ministries?

Why aren't Dolan, Lori, Picarello, Doerflinger and Walsh taking an optimistic, hopeful orientation towards Obama and his administration on the issue of the HHS mandate, given the unprecedented commitment he is making to the Catholic church?

[Tom Gallagher is a columnist and contributor to *NCR*.]

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[1] http://americamagazine.org/blog/entry.cfm?blog_id=2&entry_id=4970

[2] <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2011/Grantawards2011.html>