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Toledo diocese under fire for federal housing program

Tom Gallagher | Aug. 27, 2012 NCR Today

Bishop Leonard Blair of the Toledo, Ohio, diocese is in the middle of a major local storm involving the diocese's federally funded housing program.

According to the *Toledo Blade* [1]:

> Several limited liability corporations and nonprofits closely tied to the Diocese of Toledo receive up to $480,000 from the federal government every month for hundreds of low-income housing units, including a violence-plagued housing complex near downtown.
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> A 1-year-old child was shot and killed at Moody Manor on Aug. 9, sparking a major community outcry. Her 2-year-old sister was wounded in the same shooting. The complex's ties to the diocese have upset some.
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> "Have they gotten comfortable with just making the federal money?" said Pastor Cedric Brock, pastor of Mount Nebo Baptist Church on Detroit Avenue and president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance.
>
> Pastor Brock has asked to meet with Toledo Bishop Leonard Blair about the complex, as has Larry Sykes, a Toledo Board of Education member.
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> Msgr. Michael Billian, president of Mareda Inc., the diocese's low-income-housing corporation, said in a statement emailed to The Blade through a diocesan spokesman that the Bishop's Office had not received any requests for meetings from Pastor Brock or Mr. Sykes. Msgr. Billian did meet Tuesday with Mayor Bell and other city and police officials.
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> Diocesan spokesman Sally Oberski said the housing program is part of the church's mission.
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> "This goes a long way back to what Catholics do," she said. "We feed the hungry. We house the poor." Ms. Oberski emphasized the Diocese itself receives no money from HUD."

Poor Sally Oberski. She claims the "diocese itself receives no money from HUD." This is nonsense, as the reporter quickly points out:

> In total, seven different limited liability corporations affiliated with the diocese receive up to $480,700 every month for hundreds of project-based Section 8 units, according to information from HUD obtained by The Blade.
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> The Moody Manor complex is owned by Moody Manor LLC, which is owned by Mareda Inc. Mareda's sole member is Bishop Blair. Its president is Msgr. Billian.

The story goes on to say:

> Section 8 housing is different from traditional public housing, where a public housing authority owns and manages housing units.
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> Lance Freeman, an associate professor at Columbia University who studies housing issues, said project-based Section 8 complexes arose because "there was an idea that the private sector could better manage affordable housing than the government."
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> In recent years, there has been a move away from such types of complexes that tend to concentrate more low-income tenants, Mr. Freeman said, in favor of Section 8 vouchers, which allow tenants to move to a privately owned house or apartment of their choice.

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Links:
[1] http://www.toledoblade.com/Religion/2012/08/24/U-S-funds-diocesan-housing-entities.html