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Cardinal George accused of using immigrants in gay marriage battle

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NCR Today

[**Editor's Note:** *This post was updated to include Cardinal George's response.*]

In a half-page ad in Monday's *Chicago Tribune*, a group including several elected city officials and laypeople honored by the church urged Cardinal Francis George to retract his threat to withdraw funds from Catholic organizations that are members of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. The organizations are recipients of funds from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

In June, it was revealed that George wanted the organizations to disassociate themselves from the coalition for immigrant rights because it supports civil marriage for gays and lesbians in Illinois.

"In essence," said the signers, "Church leaders have decided to use immigrants and those who seek to help them as pawns in a political battle about an issue that is entirely unrelated to the care and welfare of those who seek refuge in our country. We write to you as loyal and proud Catholics to urge in the strongest possible terms that you rescind this threat."

"Should the Church ignore our call, we will call on Chicago's philanthropic community to join together to fill the gap caused by the Church's capricious act."

Among the signers were the clerk of the City of Chicago, four aldermen, two Cook County commissioners and five past recipients of the Christifideles Award, given to laity who have taken personal and ministerial responsibility for church renewal.

Later Monday, George answered the open letter with an open response of his own, posted on the

Facebook page of the Catholic Conference of Illinois. The archbishop said that donors to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development do so "with the understanding that their money will be passed on to organizations that respect the teachings of the Catholic faith. Organizations that apply for funds do so agreeing to this condition."

"It is intellectually and morally dishonest to use the witness of the Church's concern for the poor as an excuse to attack the Church's teaching on the nature of marriage," George wrote.

He said the Human Development campaign had "no choice but to respect the unilateral decision of the ICIRR board that effectively cut off funding from groups that remain affiliated with ICIRR," and that the church's work for immigrants and immigration reform "remains intact."

In reaffirming the church's position on marriage, George quoted an excerpt from Pope Francis' first encyclical, co-written with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and then summarized in his own words that "the whole civilized world knows that" men and women are not interchangeable in matters of marriage and family life.

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