

American Life League chastises Catholic Charities USA for affiliation

Brian Roewe | Aug. 9, 2013

A pro-life group has charged the United States' largest Catholic charitable organization with "promoting homosexual activism and birth control" through its affiliation with a national network aimed at promoting youth success and curbing school dropout rates.

In a [video report published July 29](#) [1] on its YouTube page, the American Life League accuses Catholic Charities USA "of playing the devil's game of compromise" because its president, Fr. Larry Snyder, sits on the board of trustees of the [America's Promise Alliance](#) [2], a network formed out of a 1997 summit of U.S. presidents to promote childhood success.

The report pinpoints Snyder's role since at least 2010 as a judge in the alliance's "100 Best Communities for Young People" competition. According to [the alliance's website](#) [3], the competition "rewards and recognizes communities making extraordinary efforts to reduce dropout rates and provide outstanding services and supports their youth."

The American Life League, however, saw other criteria common among winners.

"There's no mistaking it -- the America's Promise Alliance is promoting homosexual activism and birth control," said Michael Hichborn, director of the league's Defend the Faith project, in the report.

"A Catholic priest has no business compromising Catholic principles by attaching the Catholic name of his \$4.6 billion charity to an organization that celebrates birth control and homosexual activism the way the America's Promise Alliance does," Hichborn said of Snyder, who has served as Catholic Charities president since 2005.

Catholic Charities USA declined comment on the report, but communications director Patricia Cole referred *NCR* to a [statement on its website](#) [4]:

"Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) follows the teachings and ethical practices of the Catholic Church and as we and other Church institutions have done for decades, we engage in coalitions focused on reducing poverty in our nation. We do this with a mutual understanding that we cannot and will not endorse the public policy statements of any coalition that are inconsistent with our teachings and ethical practices."

That statement came as part of a larger response to a LifeSiteNews.com report criticizing the poverty-focused organization for its ties to the Coalition on Human Needs. In recent years, Catholic Charities has become a frequent target of conservative pro-life groups who argue it must end its ties with groups that support abortion rights.

The league based its latest accusations against Catholic Charities and its America's Promise Alliance partnership on a review of previous "best communities," finding a dozen examples of towns offering family planning ("which is code for artificial birth control," the league's video said) and outreach to lesbian, gay, bisexual and

transgender youth.

Among those highlighted in the report were four-time recipient Houston/Harris County, Texas, which the league said won in 2010 for giving "a homosexual activist organization access to teens in two high schools," and six-time winner Bellevue, Wash., which in 2011 won in part because a youth counseling center "produced a homosexual propaganda film that won Best Local Film at the Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival."

In the descriptions of both communities on its website, the alliance recognized each for other achievements as well: promoting literacy and academic readiness; training mentors to help struggling students stay in school; and establishing a youth court to include their voice in the juvenile justice system.

The league also chastised the alliance for allowing past president and current senior adviser Marguerite Kondracke to speak at a 2011 gay rights advocacy group's biannual conference and for promoting a 2009 campaign started by a partner organization, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, aimed at [curtailing homophobic remarks among teens](#) [5].

Hichborn told *NCR* that by sitting on the board of trustees and the "100 Best Communities" selections committee, Snyder is "giving prestige to organizations that are acting antithetical to the church."

"He's sending the message that this organization is OK and people should participate and work with it and give it money," said Hichborn, who said he hoped the report would lead Snyder to end his affiliation with the alliance.

When asked if it was possible for the church to operate in the public square without partnering with groups that hold opposing beliefs, Hichborn replied, "It's possible for a community to come together and work for a specific end without really talking about any of the issues involved. The problem comes when the church is giving money and prestige to organizations that are acting directly against the church's teachings."

The America's Promise Alliance formed in 1997 out of the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, attended by all U.S. presidents still alive at the time as well as hundreds of governors, mayors and community and business leaders.

It named former Secretary of State and retired Gen. Colin Powell its founding chairman and defined its mission as making children a national priority through reduced high school dropout rates and greater access for children to resources for success, primarily in five "promise" areas: caring adults; safe environments; health care and healthy habits; effective education; and opportunities for volunteering and leadership.

In addition to Snyder, trustee members include Jim Clark, president of Boys and Girls Clubs of America; T. Charles Pierson, president and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America; Stacey Stewart, U.S. president of United Way Worldwide; and Michelle Nunn, co-founder and CEO of the Points of Light Foundation, the nation's largest volunteer and civic engagement organization.

The alliance's report also denounced Catholic Charities for extending an invitation to Jesuit Fr. Greg Boyle to deliver a keynote address at its 2013 Annual Gathering in San Francisco. Boyle is founder and executive director of the Los Angeles-based Homeboy Industries, the U.S.'s largest gang member intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program. He [drew criticism](#) [6] in 2010 for comments about women's ordination and California's Proposition 8.

Cole told *NCR* in an email that the information cited in the video report was outdated, and "neither Fr. Boyle nor Homeboy Industries will be participating in our Annual Gathering." Catholic Charities announced in May that Boyle was one of several keynote speakers. Current speakers listed include Snyder; Melissa Paulsen, a program

director at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business; and Patrick Lencioni, founder and president of The Table Group.

Earlier this year, the American Life League targeted another social justice wing of the church, the U.S. bishops' conference's Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

In a [June report](#) [7], Faith in Public Life identified the American Life League as the leading organization among a predominantly conservative coalition campaigning against the anti-poverty program. The groups' criticisms of the campaign fall along lines similar to what they say about Catholic Charities: that it partners with or funds organizations that in some way support abortion and same-sex marriage.

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[1] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8k5v7VZOYJA&feature=youtu.be>

[2] <http://www.americaspromise.org/>

[3] <http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/100-Best-Communities-for-Young-People/About-the-Competition.aspx>

[4] <http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/2013/05/as-it-has-for-decades-ccusa-follows-the-teachings-and-ethical-practices-of-the-catholic-church/>

[5] <http://www.thinkb4youspeak.com/>

[6] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHGXe2Oe0qE>

[7] <http://ncronline.org/news/peace-justice/report-conservatives-attacks-threaten-bishops-anti-poverty-organization>

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