

Bishop Morin calls claims against CCHD's work 'outrageous'

Members of the U.S. bishops' subcommittee overseeing the Catholic Campaign for Human Development reassured their fellow bishops and donors that "no group that opposes Catholic social or moral teaching is eligible for funding" from their domestic anti-poverty campaign.

Bishop Roger P. Morin of Biloxi, Miss., subcommittee chairman, stressed in a Nov. 17 report to the U.S. bishops at their fall general assembly in Baltimore that accusations CCHD is "providing funds to groups that are pro-abortion or groups that are not in support of the family ... and other untruths" are "outrageous claims."

The bishop delivered the report on behalf of the other five bishops on the subcommittee and Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., chairman of the bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

In the report, the bishops pledged "ongoing efforts to ensure that all CCHD funds are used faithfully, effectively and in accord with Catholic social and moral teaching."

The campaign has come under attack from a coalition of Catholic groups pushing for a boycott of this year's CCHD collection the weekend of Nov. 21-22. They claim some organizations that receive funding are not in line with church teaching.

In his remarks Bishop Morin said CCHD is "absolutely pro-life from conception to natural death" and is "committed to people" as they seek ways out of poverty, stressing that "supporting people in low-income groups and people living in poverty is also a very dedicated pro-life activity."

He said CCHD does "not ever grant funds to any group that is specifically involved in any activity contrary to church teaching" and furthermore, it has "zero tolerance" for groups that receive funds and then become involved in "any activity contrary to the church's social or moral teaching."

Bishop Morin said CCHD constantly works to make sure groups that receive its funding do not engage in partisan political activity or become involved in actions that conflict with church teaching.

He also said CCHD is looking for new ways to carry out its mission in today's challenging times and amid the changing face of poverty. Much of CCHD's current work, he said, focuses on immigrants and their struggle to live in dignity.

The bishop said "CCHD has suffered greatly" from those who have accused it of supporting groups that act in opposition to church teaching, saying these "particular disturbing" accusations have turned isolated cases into generalities.

"We all know the hurt that results when that happens," he said, noting that "when someone or some few are responsible for some particular mistake or for going astray and the entire group is painted with broad strokes with the same brush."

The subcommittee's report said that if "any CCHD-funded group violates the conditions of a grant and acts in conflict with Catholic teaching, CCHD funding is immediately terminated." Bishop Morin noted that CCHD was the first national organization to cut off all funding to Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, known as ACORN, citing financial irregularities.

The subcommittee report cited three cases - out of 250 funded groups during the last year - in which funding was terminated and the groups were asked to repay any grant funds that were spent.

"However, one case is one too many, and we are committed to strengthening CCHD's review and monitoring processes to assure that all CCHD funds are used in accord with Catholic principles," the report said. "We will continue to review CCHD's processes and guidelines to ensure that CCHD continues to practice what our church teaches on the option for the poor, participation, subsidiarity, solidarity and the dignity of all God's children."

In his remarks Bishop Morin thanked the bishops for all they have done to promote CCHD's annual collection and mission. He said the bishops know firsthand about the work of CCHD in "jobs saved, safer neighborhoods, better schools, strong

community leaders and more vital parishes.”

He thanked them for encouraging Catholics to contribute to the annual collection, stressing that the CCHD is the “Gospel at work and faith in action.”

The CCHD Web site, www.usccb.org/cchd, includes background on when CCHD was founded, information on the collection and how grants are distributed.

Organizers of the boycott against the annual CCHD collection urged Catholics to state their objections by downloading a specially designed coupon and put it in the collection basket instead of a donation.

The coupon explains that the user’s financial putting it instead of support will be withheld this year because of concern that some CCHD-sponsored programs do not fully support church teaching. It says the user will resume donations once the group demonstrates that “it will work only with groups fully in agreement with church teaching on social justice and family and life issues” and when it “publishes prominently on its Web site exactly where all CCHD funds” are distributed.

Rob Gasper, president of Bellarmine Veritas Ministry, one of the groups calling for a reform of CCHD, said in an Oct. 28 statement that he was trying to shed light “not only on the CCHD” but to also promote groups that serve the poor “in a way that is consistent with Catholic teaching.”

“We just think that faithful Catholics in the pews should be able to trust that the money they give to the CCHD is going to reputable organizations that in no way work against the church,” he said.

Stephen Phelan, communications manager for Human Life International, said the reform group supports the Catholic bishops and was confident the bishops will likewise “support this call for greater transparency in the CCHD and to a deep reform in the organization.”

At an evening press conference, Bishop Morin said he believes much of the criticism of CCHD comes from people who “simply are not in favor of the church’s social teaching.”

Bishop Morin said despite the accusations, he doesn't see any "criticism fatigue" on the part of the bishops that is affecting their support for CCHD.

San Francisco Archbishop George H. Niederauer, chairman of the communications committee, said he sees ongoing support from bishops and the Catholic population at large.

He said before he was assigned to San Francisco, he was bishop of Salt Lake City, two dramatically different communities. Yet in both, CCHD was well supported by the people and programs funded by CCHD were doing well, he said.