

Catholic Charities USA warns against fraudulent e-mails on Internet

WASHINGTON - Catholic Charities USA officials have demanded that groups using the Catholic Charities name to solicit funds on the Internet discontinue using the trademark and urged potential donors to research the authenticity of an organization before making a contribution.

"Fraudulent e-mails that are misappropriating the name of Catholic Charities USA and its affiliates are being sent to extract money and/or personal information from unsuspecting recipients and are circulating on the Internet," said Brandon Pinney, spokesman for Catholic Charities USA.

The e-mails are labeled with the subject titles "Grant Notification," "The Catholic Charity," "The Catholic Charity Foundation" and "From the Office of the Cash Grant Program," Mr. Pinney told Catholic News Service Dec. 1.

The name "Catholic Charities" was used within the body of some of the e-mails, said Candy S. Hill, senior vice president for social policy and government affairs at Catholic Charities USA.

The messages - which come from several different e-mail addresses and provide a variety of contact names - ask recipients for detailed personal information, Mr. Pinney said.

In an effort to stop the e-mails, Father Larry Snyder, Catholic Charities USA president, replied Nov. 26 to each of the addresses brought to the organization's attention, insisting the sender stop disseminating such confusing messages or suffer consequences.

"Your unauthorized use of the name 'Catholic Charities' is likely to cause confusion, mistake or deception among the recipients of the e-mail," Father Snyder said in his statement. "We insist that you immediately discontinue all further sending of the

above e-mail.”

In the statement he said he wishes to settle the matter in an amicable way and asked for a reply within seven days to confirm they have halted such e-mails.

As of Dec. 1, Catholic Charities did get one automated response from one of the dozen or so e-mails it sent out, but had not received a reply stating the practice would be discontinued, Ms. Hill said.

“We had a similar situation occur last year, and we sent out an e-mail just like we did this year,” she said. “We didn’t get any replies from them, but those spam e-mails stopped going out. We’re hoping for the same result this time around.”

Catholic Charities USA was working with its general legal counsel on the situation and planned to continue to monitor it, Hill said.

“I hope you appreciate the serious nature of this matter and our interest in ensuring that recipients of the e-mail are not misled by your unauthorized use of the Catholic Charities name and trademark,” Father Snyder said in his correspondence.

“Federal law provides for imposition of severe penalties against those who make unauthorized use of registered trademarks,” he continued. “Among other things, the courts may require a defendant to pay for all damages caused by the infringement, all profits derived from the unauthorized use of the plaintiff’s trademark, court costs and attorneys’ fees.”

A few of the e-mails actually superimposed onto their messages images of the Web sites of Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida and Catholic Charities of Chicago, Hill said.

Catholic Charities USA is “fully prepared to pursue legal action if the transmission of these fraudulent e-mails does not cease immediately,” Pinney said.