

CCHD collection focuses on helping families struggling in bad economy

WASHINGTON - "Families are struggling. Faith is calling" is the theme for this year's national collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which will be taken up in most U.S. Catholic churches the weekend of Nov. 21-22.

"This year, our call as Catholics to bring glad tidings to the poor ... to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free is more important than ever before," said Bishop Roger P. Morin of Biloxi, Miss., who is chairman of the U.S. bishops' CCHD subcommittee.

He made the comments in a letter to parishes asking Catholics to be as generous as possible during the annual collection that is the primary source of support for the U.S. bishops' domestic anti-poverty program.

Twenty-five percent of the proceeds support projects in the diocese where the funds are collected.

"The mission of CCHD is crucial in 2009 - to uplift and embolden all who are one layoff or one medical scare away from the poverty line - and all who are already there," the bishop said.

The nation's current economic crisis has left many families and individuals without the security of a job, health care or a sufficient retirement fund, a press release on the collection noted.

According to U.S. census figures, the number of people currently living in poverty is estimated at 39.8 million, which is almost 3 million more than a year ago. The unemployment rate reached a 26-year high of 9.8 percent in September.

For nearly 40 years, CCHD has funded community groups that create affordable housing, obtain fair wages and provide job training, as well as organizing projects led by low-income individuals to help people and resolve problems in their communities.

CCHD-funded programs “empower the poor and marginalized to make decisions, seek solutions to local problems and find ways to improve their lives and neighborhoods,” according to the agency. CCHD also has educational programs to teach Catholics about poverty and creates opportunities for them to interact with the poor and reflect on a faith response to poverty.

Last year CCHD awarded more than \$7.7 million to 250 grantees throughout the U.S.; 776 Catholic parishes, 18 Catholic charities organizations and 51 religious communities were involved in CCHD-funded groups.

Among the recipients was the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Fla., which received a grant to support the Faith and Action for Strength Together project that involves member parishes and other member congregations in working on issues related to education, transportation and affordable housing.

Another recipient was the Chicago Archdiocese’s Progress Center for Independent Living, which empowers people with disabilities to live full, rewarding lives outside institutions.

The New York Archdiocese received a grant to support Movimiento por Justicia en El Barrio, which works with more than 400 primarily Mexican immigrants to focus on tenant issues and have ongoing negotiations with the Mexican consulate, aimed at improving services to New York City’s Mexican immigrant population.

Other award recipients included the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Detroit Archdiocese and the Diocese of Stockton, Calif.