

Father Snyder defends his role on president's advisory council

WASHINGTON - Despite receiving what he termed "hate mail" that questioned his involvement on the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the president of Catholic Charities USA said he welcomed the opportunity to bring the church's views on serving the poor and marginalized to national discussions aimed at solving deepening social problems.

The correspondence raised doubts about his role and "why I would associate with a contemporary Hitler," Father Larry Snyder told more than 500 people who work in social ministry gathered Feb. 23 for breakfast during the annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington.

He said the notes he received "also told me that I would probably go to hell for accepting this appointment."

Father Snyder was named to the council Feb. 5 along with two dozen other faith-based and community leaders.

The comments about the priest's appointment apparently came because of President Barack Obama's promise to keep abortion safe and legal. He also has pledged to seek common ground to reduce the incidence of abortion.

"There can be no doubt that Catholic Charities is a firmly pro-life organization," Father Snyder said. "Anyone who doubts this calls into question the thousands of women facing an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy who are given services from free prenatal care to parenting or adoption services to support a woman in this crisis."

“Let me assure you the administration is well aware of where we stand on this issue,” he said.

Father Snyder reminded the gathering that Monsignor John O’Grady, who led the national Catholic Charities operation for more than 40 years, worked with the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to develop a social safety network during the Great Depression.

Monsignor O’Grady is credited with influencing the development of the Social Security Act, which Father Snyder called the most successful anti-poverty program in U.S. history.

“I believe we must take every opportunity to improve the lot of the poor in this country whenever we can. God will not forgive us for not speaking up about the rights of the unborn,” he said.

“But I believe God will also not forgive us for missing any opportunity to promote the care of the poor and vulnerable in this country,” he continued. “We will be faced with opportunities to do so with the Obama administration and Catholic Charities will take them.”

Father Snyder thanked people for their notes of congratulations following his appointment.

He also reminded the group that Catholic Charities will be observing its 100th anniversary in 2010 and, just as during its early days, the agency’s efforts will remain focused on overcoming poverty among all Americans.