

Pope says Catholics must help Latin America spiritually, materially

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In the face of poverty, secularization and the spread of sects in Latin America, Catholics around the world must form strong communities of faith ready to help them spiritually and materially, Pope Benedict XVI said.

The pope met June 14 at the Vatican with members of the “Populorum Progressio” Foundation, which funds small development, education and health care projects aimed at assisting poor indigenous, mixed-race and black farming communities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Since 1992, the foundation established by Pope John Paul II has distributed more than \$20 million in grants using funding provided primarily by the Italian bishops’ conference.

Pope Benedict said that in setting up the foundation Pope John Paul wanted to assist “those peoples whose ancestral customs were threatened by a postmodern culture” and who risked the destruction of their “traditions, so open to accepting the truth of the Gospel.”

With six Latin American bishops and one Vatican official on the foundation’s administrative council, the pope said, funding decisions are “in the hands of those who know best the problems and concrete needs of those populations.”

The pope said the foundation also recognizes that development aid must assist the whole person and not just aim at relieving material poverty.

“Often, a person’s true poverty is a lack of hope” and of faith that gives meaning to life, he said.

“Latin America is a part of the world that is rich in natural resources, where the differences in standards of living must give way to a spirit of sharing goods,” the pope said.

“In the face of secularization, the proliferation of sects and the indigence of so many of our brothers and sisters,” he said, “it is urgent to form communities united in the faith, like the Holy Family of Nazareth, in which the joyful witness of those who have encountered the Lord is the light that enlightens those who are seeking a more dignified life.”