

A Model for Reforming CCHD

In recent years the Catholic Campaign for Human Development has come under a great deal of scrutiny and criticism. CCHD had a relationship with the national organizing group ACORN that was problematic, and when a variety of problems were discovered with ACORN the national CCHD office took steps to defund the organization. Yet, the relationships with community organizing groups across the country have been the fundamental problem with many CCHD grants in all parts of the country. Many have called on bishops to cease their support of the collection entirely, and some bishops have chosen that path for a variety of reasons. Others have called for a reform of CCHD, and in response to those requests the U.S. Bishops established a review board last fall to examine all aspects of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. This November the bishops will receive a report from this committee and recommendations will be made on the future of the campaign.

While we pray for the work of this review board and await the outcomes, it may be fruitful to look at one possible model of reform that we have established in the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. This model was established last year after a thorough review of the history of CCHD in our diocese and careful reflection on current funding decisions by the Human Rights Office of the diocese, the office charged with oversight of CCHD by Bishop Robert Finn, bishop of the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.. In addition, Bishop Finn met with his fellow bishops in November to hear their experiences and to obtain their advice. What follows is the result of these two processes.

I. The Negative Decision

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development offers two possible national grant opportunities: community organizing grants and economic development grants. In studying the various problems with CCHD grants nationally, we noticed that the problematic grants all fell under the community organizing grants. These organizations have traditionally attempted to create a voice for populations that have historically had no voice in the political and economic decisions of society. This goal is laudable in itself, but as time progressed the nature of organizing evolved. Many organizing groups began to develop a partisan edge to their work. What is more, many organizing groups began to advocate for causes that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, most notably in the areas of abortion, same sex marriage, and health care reform.

Our first decision, then, was to cease funding all community organizing projects in our diocese and not to grant such requests in the future. While the diocese still supports the concept of providing a voice to those who lack a voice in our society, we believe that there are a variety of mechanisms to achieve such a goal that can take place without funding community organizing groups that offer positions contrary to Church teaching. In the Church's political advocacy work, we believe in the following principle: no permanent enemies, no permanent allies. Funding community organizing groups gives the impression that we are permanent allies when in fact we are not. We welcome alliances with such groups on particular issues, and we recognize that we will have to be

on opposing sides on other issues. The decision not to fund community organizing groups enables the Church to maintain her autonomy as well as respecting the autonomy of these groups.

The Church will continue to advocate for the voiceless in our society, and we will do so using our diocesan offices, state Catholic Conferences, and the work of the laity. It is not necessary to outsource our advocacy work to organizations that may not agree with our principles in all areas of Catholic Social Teaching.

II. The Positive Decision

Our focus for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, then, is in the area of economic development. In our experience, we have found that economic development is an effective tool in combating poverty and in developing authentic community throughout the diocese. This focus enables the diocese to promote a fundamental principle of Catholic Social Teaching – the importance and the right to work. The surest way to overcoming poverty is providing jobs for people, and the economic development grants of CCHD have provided us the opportunity in our diocese to help organizations develop jobs for people so that people can help themselves.

In our review of CCHD grants nationally and locally we discovered that in all the controversy around CCHD grants that no grants to economic development organizations were problematic in any way. We also discovered that these projects were highly successful in the work they do in providing jobs for people living on the margins of society. Furthermore, our diocese has had a great deal of success in the area of economic development grants to various organizations. We have seen first hand businesses and jobs created through this work, and it led to the discovery that people need and want to have a job more than they need and want to be organized into the work of agitation.

III. The Outcomes

This year of grant funding represents the first year of our new model for CCHD in our diocese. Our diocese chose to recommend national grant awards to two organizations – the Kansas City Urban Youth Center, and Northwest Missouri Enterprise Facilitation. KCUYC provides after school programs for urban youth who live in the poorest apartment complexes in our city. These programs include tutoring, athletics, community gardening, and organizational skills. This work enables young people to be successful in school and life, providing the surest way for a group of people to break the cycle of poverty in which they find themselves. NWMEF began as a project of the diocesan Human Rights Office and became its own non-profit several years ago. This organization provides people with business mentoring so that low income people who want to start their own business can do so, or if someone wants to expand their business they can receive the help they need to do so successfully. This work takes place in rural counties of Northwest Missouri and it has created a great number of jobs. The success of this work is being recognized by the State of Missouri, who would like to expand this work to other rural communities across the state.

The diocese also selected four organizations to fund with local CCHD money that comes from our share of the national collection as well as a private endowed trust we have for such local diocesan grants. The organizations are as follows:

1. Missourians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty: This organization works for the abolition of the death penalty in Missouri, as well as advocating for restorative justice programs in our prisons. Ending the death penalty would save the state of Missouri millions of dollars that could be spent on needed programs for the poor in our state. Restorative justice programs seek to rehabilitate offenders and help them to become productive members of society again.
2. Amethyst Place: This facility is a residential and treatment center for women overcoming drug and alcohol dependence. Women in the program have children and are single parents. They can live at Amethyst Place for up to two years, all the while receiving treatment for their addiction, job training, and counseling. The children attend school and receive free medical care.
3. Troostwood Youth Gardens: This organization operates a community garden in one of poorest neighborhoods of Kansas City. Volunteers recruit and train young people to plant and develop the garden, market the sale of the fruits and vegetables grown at the garden, and to be responsible for the reinvestment of the sales receipts into the garden project. This program has taught young people valuable skills of self-reliance that provides them a path out of the cycle of poverty.
4. Seton Center: The Seton Center is a Catholic social service agency that provides a food pantry, clothing pantry, a free dental clinic, an alternative high school for troubled youth, senior citizen programs, and a community action network for the neighborhood association. The work of the high school provides an educational path for troubled young people that will enable them to escape the cycle of poverty. The other services of Seton Center enable people to have access to dental care and other needs not available to them, leading them to create a path out of poverty.

There are many other worthy organizations in our diocese deserving of such funds, and we hope to help them in future years with our CCHD funding model.

The reform of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development is a goal to which our diocese is committed. We believe that we have demonstrated that not only is reform possible, but that it is happening here in the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Our hope is that our model will provide the national office and other dioceses a framework for the work of CCHD across the country.