

November 15, 2009

Next Sunday, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, Catholics throughout the United States are asked to make a generous contribution to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. It is the anti-poverty effort of the bishops of the United States to help the tens of millions of Americans struggling below the poverty line – struggling to better their lives and meet the needs of their families. Our faith calls us to work for an end to the injustices of poverty.

Of the nearly 37 million people in the United States struggling below the poverty line, 13 million are children. Over a ten-year cycle, about 40 percent of the United States' population experiences poverty at some time. Poverty is caused not simply by the lack of financial resources, but by the lack of quality education, affordable housing, health care, child care, fair wages, and vocational training.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is our attempt to break the “cycle of poverty” in urban neighborhoods and rural communities in dioceses across our nation. It is how we together practice what the Church teaches about the option for the poor, solidarity and subsidiarity, the principle of participation, the dignity of work, and the rights of workers. It is an important way that we Catholics in the United States carry out Jesus' mission “to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, and to set the downtrodden free” (Luke 4).

Each year there are questions raised about the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. It is important to know that the grants are pre-screened by staff from the Bishops' Conference, reviewed and endorsed by the local bishop, and overseen by a committee of U.S. bishops. I served on that committee for a number of years.

The bishops on the CCHD subcommittee, along with the bishops' staff, safeguard our grants with regard to areas of Church teaching, financial and organizational accountability, and partisan political activity. All grant applications are screened so that funds are provided only to projects with objectives and actions that are fully in accord with the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. Partisan activity is strictly prohibited.

More than a year ago, there was some concern expressed about our funding any organizations that were somehow affiliated with ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). We had questions and problems around ACORN's organizational integrity, competence, and non-partisanship. Therefore, all CCHD funding was cut off from any organizations associated with ACORN. Thus, no CCHD grants were given to such groups from 2007 and 2008 CCHD collections, and no funds will go to such groups from this year's collections.

As we approach Thanksgiving, we reflect upon the abundant ways that God has blessed us and our families. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development is a very concrete and worthwhile way for you to share your blessings with others. Please be generous!