

## ARE CHARITIES MISUSING YOUR DONATIONS?

by David Rippe

For many years, faithful Catholics have noticed a disturbing trend in certain well-known charities operating as "Catholic" entities. Some of these agencies are involved (either directly or by association) in activities with a distinctly secular flavor, one often clearly at odds with Church teaching.

The concerns have not escaped the Vatican. In November of 2012, Benedict XVI issued a motu proprio titled *De Caritate Ministranda* (On the Service of Charity) in which he stated the problem and strongly directed the bishops to ensure that Catholic charitable agencies exemplify the life of the Gospel in their activities and ministries, and that they remain in line with Church teaching and with the intentions of the faithful who make donations. The pope wrote, "The Church's charitable activity, at all levels, must avoid the risk of becoming just another form of organized social assistance."

Recent evidence suggests Benedict's directive has not yet been fully implemented.

In the September 2013 issue of *Catalyst*, Catholic League President William Donohue offers advice to those seeking charities that are truly Catholic. "Helping the poor is a noble cause," writes Donohue, "but it can become a fool's errand. We need to ask who the intended beneficiaries are, and what, if anything, can be expected of them in return. We need to know how much of the money goes to administrative costs, and how much is spent on the target group. We need to know if there is a face-to-face relationship between donors and recipients, or just a money transfer. We need to know about fraud and dishonesty."

Administrative and fundraising costs vary among charities. The most efficient, spend less than 5% on them. However, comparing charities strictly on the basis of these expenses can be misleading. Boiling the critical criteria down for Catholics seeking a worthy charity might yield these questions: What are the organization's goals? How successful is it in achieving them? Is the rendered material aid accompanied by the Gospel message of Jesus or does it instead pay homage to bogus political correctness and secular, materialist values?

Charity Navigator and the Better Business Bureau are helpful for assessing a charity's history and overall ethical and financial accountability, but their ratings aren't governed by Catholic values. The conscientious Catholic will benefit from due diligence in his research.

Before donating to any charity, Catholics should learn about the organizations with whom it associates. Cooperator networks often involve alliances between Catholic agencies and secular entities. Passive or third-party involvement is no excuse for committing money and support to evil or wasteful work. Donors should look for political undercurrents in any charity's

mission statement and goals. For instance, a charity that assists poor Africans to adapt to natural climate variations is clearly making better use of donations than one dedicated to the alarmist cause of halting (scientifically unproven) human-induced climate change by protesting fossil fuel burning. Charities that attempt to assign blame for poverty, or who urge the poor to see themselves as victims, should be viewed with suspicion, as should those who cite exaggerated hunger statistics or who liken American deprivation to the abject poverty of the Third World.

Donors should be wary of any mention of population control or of collaboration with goals of the United Nations or any of the large "progressive" foundations that tout abortion, sterilization and condom campaigns as poverty reducing measures. If the charity's mission statement reads like a socialist manifesto, one can be certain his donations will not be used to serve the Gospel message.

True charities either perform or facilitate hands-on work with the needy. Political groups merely posing as charities will instead apply donated money to activism that perpetuates the legitimized poverty that we know as the welfare state. Among the code words to watch for in their promotional materials are such distorted and misused terms as: *social justice, environmental justice, inequality, empowerment, and sustainable*. Political agitation, more commonly referred to as "community organizing," is a favored tactic of these agencies for exploiting the poor in order to advance a "social justice" (actually *socialist*) agenda. The economic destabilization accomplished through community organizing was one cause of America's recent financial and housing collapse. The poor need food in their stomachs, a roof over their heads and the Spirit of God in their souls. What they do not need is to be agitated into political movements, especially movements that will ultimately harm them and the society or culture. Such activism serves neither the dignity of the person nor the common good and thus is not grounded in Catholic social doctrine.

Donors should be cautious with regard to charities that routinely accept money from the federal government. Federal funding always comes with strings attached. As Catholics have seen with Obamacare and recent executive orders, the conditions accompanying federal grants may demand that Catholics subordinate their faith to the government's social agenda. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), one of the best known Catholic charities, has a distinguished record of accomplishment, especially with the poor overseas; however, according to one watchdog group, CRS receives 70% of its funding from the government through USAID. Population Research Institute, which has been investigating complaints from Catholic clergy in Madagascar about CRS' alleged involvement in un-Catholic activity there, says USAID is "the world's largest promoter of contraception, sterilization and abortion."

CRS has also come under fire from American Life League president Judie Brown. In an open letter in 2013 to CRS and the Catholic bishops, she wrote, "I simply do not understand why CRS is so devoted to funding organizations driven by the idea that the elimination of children is the solution to the problem of poverty."

Writing in Spero News (Oct. 4, 2013), Stephanie Block, author of *Change Agents: Alinskyian Organizing Among Religious Bodies*, observes that CRS began receiving funding under USAID as early as 1961. The relationship soon evinced that goals and strategies of church and government were not always in synchrony. "The problems caused by this partnership," writes Block, "were further compounded in 2001 when CRS announced that its single minded focus on 'direct services' would be expanded to include political advocacy initiatives, helping to 'evolve a more just society.'"

Each year, usually in November, a collection is taken up in churches across the country for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), a high-profile charity purporting to address poverty and injustice in America. Three-fourths of the donated money goes to the national CCHD office at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, where it is apportioned into grants to agencies claiming to be involved in anti-poverty efforts.

CCHD is a charity that continues to undergo scrutiny from concerned Catholics, and with good reason. If CCHD simply applied its collected donations to the ground level work of reversing poverty and injustice, there would be no complaints. But CCHD's legacy is a long history of ties to radical political groups, many of whom pursue goals that undermine the Church's mission. For years, disreputable grantees have milked the CCHD cash cow to the tune of millions in grants. Money awarded to such un-Catholic agencies has been diverted to enable abortion, contraception, homosexual behavior and Marxist political agitation. Despite assertions from the bishops' conference that the grant list has been purged of offenders, such applicants still managed to cart away nearly \$2.9 million (38% of the total grant money) from CCHD in 2011-2012, according the watchdog group Reform CCHD Now. The problem continues because screening the applicant list is not the solution – it merely treats the symptoms. The root of the problem, the chronic infection, is in the well-documented origins and framework of CCHD which make it an ongoing magnet for corruption.

In accord with the seldom-cited Catholic principle of subsidiarity, poverty and injustice are best treated at the source. Conscientious Catholics who want their contributions used to actually help the needy (rather than to promote a "progressive" political agenda) should consider making donations within their own dioceses to local, hands-on charities. This not only makes sense by keeping the money and the decision-making in the community, but it also eliminates the layers of bureaucracy that must be traversed before a donation given to a big national charity like CCHD can reach its professed recipients. Many local charities within dioceses work face-to-face with individuals and families and can see to it that donations are applied where they will do what the donors envisioned - and they can do it with the Gospel message, rather than a political slogan.

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