

Moral theologian voices concern over CCHD grant process

by Kathleen Gilbert

WASHINGTON, D.C., October 26, 2011 (LifeSiteNews.com) - A prominent moral theologian has concurred with an independent review of the U.S. bishops' social justice arm finding that, while Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) grant guidelines are 'morally sound,' their implementation is problematic.

Dr. William Marshner, a moral theology professor at Christendom College and noted Catholic apologist, reviewed the Reform CCHD Now Coalition's report released this month presenting evidence that several recipients of funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) are out of compliance with essential Catholic moral teaching.

"The CCHD policy is morally sound. But its implementation is another story," wrote Marshner in a letter to American Life League Executive Director and coalition member Paul Rondeau and published on the coalition website.

Marshner said that 11 of the 14 groups named in the report are "cases in which prima facie the grantee has done or promoted an immoral activity." "In every one of these cases, the grantee has behaved in such a way that continued funding puts the Church in a position of formal cooperation (or in the apparent and proximate danger of formal cooperation) with moral evil," he wrote.

The remaining three organizations Marshner grouped with 40 others that were found by the authors of the report to be members of questionable coalitions.

Guidelines the CCHD set forth in September 2010 state that "no group that advocates or acts in opposition to fundamental Catholic social and moral teaching is eligible for or will receive CCHD funding," and that the CCHD also will not fund "groups that are members of coalitions which have as part of their organizational purpose or coalition agenda, positions or actions that contradict fundamental Catholic moral and social teaching."

The theologian emphasized that his analysis did not stem from a negative opinion of CCHD's stated priorities. "I worked for several years in journalism and was published in periodicals distinctly critical of what many churchmen accepted as 'renewal' in the decade after the close of Vatican II. Since then, I have come to accept the pastoral wisdom of the Church's 'preferential option for the poor,' of which the CCHD is a striking expression," wrote Marshner.

"I therefore undertake this review with sincere personal sympathy for the Campaign and sincere respect for its guiding principles."

Earlier this month, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said it had rejected as a CCHD partner a New York group caught distributing condoms after the group had misrepresented its position on contraception to the bishops.

CCHD officials had initially said that the coalition report was "without substance" except for one case, poorly investigated, and a recycling of old accusations from individuals who disagreed with CCHD's mission.

Recently, the coalition released a detailed response refuting the claim that researchers oppose the principles behind CCHD, and again calling on the organization to give specific responses to the evidence of grantee non-compliance uncovered in the report.

“ALL [American Life League] made clear that it has never disagreed with ‘the CCHD mission as set forth by the bishops,’” it states. “ALL is only concerned with the funding of organizations whose actions, agendas, and ideologies are antithetical to Catholic moral and social teaching: advancing abortion, homosexuality, birth control, and Marxism contrary to the CCHD mission as set forth by the bishops.”