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Vatican imposes new controls on charity federation

John L. Allen Jr. | May. 2, 2012

Image taken from the Caritas website.

ROME -- After moving last year to block the reelection of the first lay woman to head *Caritas Internationalis*, the Rome-based confederation of Catholic charitable agencies around the world, over an alleged ?lack of coordination? with papal aides, the Vatican today imposed sweeping new rules that effectively tightens its control over Caritas' finances and global operations.

Among other points, the rules require the top officials of Caritas to make promises of loyalty before a Vatican official, including "Christian obedience" to church leaders.

Aside from its direct importance for Catholic charities, today?s Vatican move is also interesting for the recently decreed overhaul of the Leadership Conference for Women Religious in the United States, the country?s main umbrella group for superiors of women?s orders.

Like LCWR, Caritas Internationalis is a juridical person under church law recognized by the Vatican. The new rules are thus a further indication that the Vatican is in earnest about tightening its grip over groups that enjoy official status and, in some sense, represent the church.

The rules came in the form of a ?General Decree,? released today in the name of Italian Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican?s Secretary of State.

Composed of nine articles, the rules specify that:

- The Vatican office which oversees Caritas is the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, and it has the power to approve in advance ?any text with doctrinal or moral content or orientations,? which may also be submitted to the review of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.
- Cor Unum will appoint an ecclesiastical assistant to Caritas, whose role will be to ?promote its Catholic identity.?
- Cor Unum must approve any cooperative agreements between Caritas and non-governmental organizations, except in cases of dire humanitarian emergencies. (In the past, Caritas had been criticized for entering into agreements with NGOs whose approach to issues such as population control differs from that of the Catholic church.)

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