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Poverty program defended against 'outrageous' attacks

by Jerry Filteau



Jeff Latta picks pumpkins outside his house in Albany, Ohio, in early September. He grows them and sells them for extra money to help him stay current on his mortgage. This fall's Catholic Campaign for Human Development collection will focus on helping families still struggling in tough economic times. (CNS/Reuters/Nick Carey)

BALTIMORE -- On the eve of this year's Catholic Campaign for Human Development collection in U.S. parishes, the bishop in charge of overseeing the campaign publicly defended it against a new round of "outrageous claims that the bishops are funding abortion, attacks on the family and other untruths."

The collection was to take place in most U.S. parishes at weekend Masses Nov. 21-22. (See related story.)

Speaking Nov. 17 to the U.S. bishops gathered in Baltimore, Bishop Roger Morin of Biloxi, Miss., chairman of the bishops' subcommittee overseeing Catholic Campaign for Human Development, said that the campaign welcomes legitimate questions and criticisms and carefully reviews every grant "at both national and diocesan levels."

"No group that acts against Catholic social or moral teaching is eligible for [campaign] funding. Where

problems are discovered, we act swiftly and decisively," he said.

He noted that when organizational, fiscal and other problems with ACORN -- the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now -- began to surface, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development was the first national organization to cut off all funding -- long before the federal government and other groups did the same. The federal government cut off ACORN funding earlier this year; Morin said the campaign is now entering its third year of not even considering funding for any ACORN group at any level.

He said groups that attack the campaign with exaggerated claims of infidelity to church teaching are "the same voices that constantly insist that we [bishops] are unfaithful in our teaching or do not care about the poor."

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development "is a preeminent example of what Pope Benedict XVI calls "the institutional path" of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly," he said.

Established in 1969 as the bishops' domestic antipoverty program, the campaign collection has become one of largest yearly national collections in the U.S. church. One-fourth of what is collected in each diocese remains under local diocesan control. Every grant distributed by the national office must also have the approval of the local bishop where the grant recipient is located.

Morin thanked the bishops for consistently supporting the campaign's efforts. "This is the Gospel at work. This is faith in action," he said.

Jerry Filteau is NCR Washington correspondent.

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