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National collections hurt when dioceses drop or combine them

by Jerry Filteau

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Baltimore — When dioceses drop or combine national collections, the effect is about \$3 million a year lost to important parts of the church's mission at home and abroad, Bishop Kevin Farrell of Dallas, chairman of the U.S. Catholic bishops' National Collections Committee, told the bishops Nov. 13.

Farrell, reporting on the decline in national collections in recent years on the second day of the bishops' annual fall meeting in Baltimore, urged the bishops not to drop or combine those collections.

In part of a written report he submitted to the bishops before the meeting, he said that just the act of combining two or more national collections into one has cost those collections an average of \$1.4 million a year over the past three years.

By latest count, there were 64 ways in which dioceses combined two or more national collections, making it difficult to track the net negative effect on any given collection ? but in general when any two national collections are combined in second collections in parishes, both end up with lower contributions than when each is given separate treatment.

The committee's written report to the bishops was far more detailed in charting how the dropping of certain national collections by some dioceses between 2005 and 2011 has hurt the contributions of U.S. Catholics to causes they have long supported:

- Six dioceses that contributed more than \$122,000 to the Catholic Communications Campaign in 2005 gave nothing in 2011.
- Twenty dioceses that in 2005 gave a combined total of more than \$700,000 to the Catholic

Campaign for Human Development, the bishops' chief domestic anti-poverty program, gave nothing in 2011.

- Catholic Relief Services lost more than \$103,000 when the diocese of Oakland, Calif., and the Archdiocese for the Military Services dropped that collection.
- Twelve dioceses whose people together contributed more than \$184,000 for aid to churches in Eastern and Central Europe back in 2005 gave nothing in 2011.
- Even Catholic home missions, long a mainstay of financial support especially for rural and southern dioceses with special financial needs, suffered a hit of more than \$100,000 as seven dioceses who took up the collection in 2005 did not do so in 2011.
- Eleven dioceses that took up a collection in 2005 for the Church in Latin America did not do so in 2011, and the hit from their nonparticipation was more than \$260,000.

Patrick Markey, executive director for national collections for the U.S. bishops' conference, told *NCR* that while the figures show that a diocese dropping a collection or combining it with others leads to lower donations, the entire picture is more complicated.

He noted that recent years have seen several extraordinary events such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the massive earthquake in Haiti and most recently the catastrophic effects of Hurricane Sandy in New York, New Jersey and neighboring states, along with the economic effects of the 2007-08 recession, which can skew annual collection donation figures.

Nevertheless, he said, when a diocese drops a national collection or combines it with another, it hurts the church's effort to meet the needs that collection is addressing.

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