

REPORT OF BISHOP ROGER MORIN, CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ON
CCHD and ACORN

For nearly 40 years, THE CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT has practiced what the Church teaches about the option for the poor, subsidiarity and solidarity in helping people living in poverty defend their dignity and work for greater justice. Local CCHD funded groups have made real differences on safer neighborhoods, better schools, decent wages, and affordable housing and immigrant rights. Because the mission of CCHD is so important, the Bishops work very hard to promote it and protect it by careful review and monitoring of CCHD grants to make sure they comply with CCHD's guidelines and Catholic teaching.

This report covers the steps CCHD and our Conference have taken and are taking to address our serious concerns regarding controversies involving the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, known as ACORN. In the past, CCHD has funded proposals from local organizations affiliated with ACORN when those activities conform to the CCHD guidelines and when the local diocesan CCHD director and the local diocesan bishop explicitly approve the proposal. Many of these local ACORN groups have done impressive work preventing home foreclosures, creating jobs opportunities, raising wages, addressing crime and improving education.

Last June, CCHD cut off funding to all ACORN groups when we learned about a major case of embezzlement eight years ago that was covered up by ACORN staff leadership. This theft and cover-up raised serious concerns about national ACORN's financial accountability, transparency, governance and organizational integrity. Even though CCHD was only funding local ACORN organizations, and not these national structures, we felt it was necessary to cut off CCHD funding and review support of all ACORN groups.

More recently, the Subcommittee also became concerned about widespread reports of ACORN involvement in alleged voter registration fraud and political partisanship. As a result of the cut-off earlier this year, no CCHD funds were involved in any of these activities. However, the allegations intensified our questions and problems around ACORN's organizational integrity, competence and non-partisanship. Therefore, we extended the cut off of CCHD funding of any ACORN organizations.

The Bishops' CCHD Subcommittee met November 8-9 and reviewed this matter at length and discussed it in depth. The Bishop members of the Subcommittee voted unanimously to reaffirm, extend and formalize the decision to end CCHD funding of ACORN organizations because of serious concerns about financial accountability, organizational performance and political partisanship. While not all the specifics can be known, we simply had too many continuing questions and concerns about these serious matters to permit CCHD funding of ACORN groups. Dioceses have told us about the good work done by local ACORN affiliates and we regret that they will not be able to receive CCHD support. We simply could not be absolutely sure that CCHD resources would be used in a manner consistent with our criteria and funding guidelines. This cut off means that no CCHD grants were given to ACORN groups this year (using funds from the 2007 CCHD collection) and no funds from the coming collection (to be taken up in on November 23-24 in many dioceses) will go to ACORN in any place or at any level.

In addition to this funding cutoff, the CCHD Subcommittee and staff have taken a number of other steps:

- I chair a special working group within the Bishops' CCHD Subcommittee to monitor and act on this continuing situation.
- CCHD and the USCCB have secured the services of specialists in forensic accounting to help determine if any CCHD money was taken or misused. This investigation is thorough and ongoing.
- CCHD, USCCB staff and I have met with ACORN leaders to express our serious concerns and to seek answers to specific questions.
- We continue to consult with our CCHD Diocesan Directors to seek their guidance.

The Subcommittee also voted that CCHD should work with others to assist low-income community organizations to adopt and model best practices in areas of financial accountability, organizational management and effective governance. The Subcommittee believes that these efforts can help community organizations and CCHD to carry out more effectively our essential mission of empowering and assisting low-income communities in pursuing economic and social justice.

CCHD's current criteria and guidelines prohibit partisan activity and funding of any group that engages in activities contrary to Catholic moral teaching, whether or not those activities are funded by CCHD. These criteria are actively enforced and have led CCHD to deny funding to many groups and to quickly terminate any group that violates these prohibitions. The Bishops' CCHD Subcommittee and staff are reviewing these existing CCHD's policies, grant agreements, and other safeguards in order to reaffirm and strengthen our protections in areas of Church teaching, financial and organizational accountability, and partisan political activity. We are also examining ways to affirm and articulate the continuing efforts of CCHD in language clearly reflecting the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, which are at the heart of our mission.

Supporters of CCHD can be reassured for the way CCHD has responded to these challenges and take pride in the impressive and creative ways CCHD carries out the values of the Gospel and the principles of our Catholic faith in rural communities and urban neighborhoods across our nation. Everyday countless numbers of our brothers and sisters are able to say they have been lifted from the scourge of poverty and are able to achieve self sufficiency.

CCHD is fully committed to protecting and carrying out our essential mission "to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind and to set the downtrodden free." (Luke 4) That was Jesus' mission on earth and that is CCHD's mission today.