



Department of Social Development and World Peace
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on Faith Based Initiative
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ISSUE

Overcoming poverty in our country will require the shared roles and responsibilities of religious groups, community organizations and government. The President's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives proposal has drawn attention to this partnership in bringing attention to and addressing the scandal of so much poverty in a rich nation. Sadly, it has resulted in partisan and ideological conflict rather than a new focus and new resource for overcoming poverty.

In many communities where disinvestment and discrimination exacerbate the problems of addiction, family disintegration, and violence, churches and community-based charities are often the only institutions still there and able to address the pervasive poverty of their neighbors. We must help charities, faith-based or secular, have access to the private and public resources they need to serve the “least of these.” Matt. 25.

BACKGROUND

White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives: The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives takes the lead in promoting, strengthening and expanding grassroots and faith-based services to overcome poverty. There are similar offices at several cabinet agencies, including Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Education, Labor, Agriculture and the State Department’s Agency for International Development. These Offices review policies and programs to remove unnecessary obstacles that may prevent faith-based and community organizations from entering partnerships with the federal government on the same terms as other groups.

Regulatory Actions: The Administration has amended or proposed amending regulations affecting programs at several agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services (Community Services Block Grant, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services) and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Justice, Education and Veterans Affairs. The changes are intended to clarify that religious entities are able to participate in these programs on the same basis as other organizations.

Legislative Actions: On August 17, 2006 the President signed into law H.R. 4, the Pension Protection Act, which included several tax provisions from the Charity Aid, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act. For several years, the bishops’ conference has worked on the CARE Act, which would provide crucial new resources to the faith-based and secular charities that serve our needy brothers and sisters, through \$1.3 billion in new funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), tax-code changes to allow non-itemizers to take a tax deduction for a portion of their charitable contributions (a proposal long supported by the Conference) and creation of a Compassion Capital Fund to provide technical assistance and capacity

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building for faith-based and community organizations. The future of these provisions, none of which were included in H.R. 4, and the rest of the CARE Act, is uncertain in the 110th Congress.

Staff continues to monitor bills affecting the right of religious organizations to be able to hire members of their own communities. Preserving this long-standing ability to hire, recognized in our federal civil rights law, is a continuing priority for the bishops' conference and other Catholic institutions

USCCB POSITION

The USCCB has been supportive of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives proposal because we hope it could put new tools in the hands of those struggling daily to overcome the most difficult problems in our communities: persistent poverty, violence, substance abuse, inadequate housing, and obstacles faced by those entering the job market. We regret that this has led to more ideological conflict than new energy and resources to overcome poverty.

Catholic social teaching and the principle of subsidiarity have long stressed the importance of small and intermediate-sized communities or institutions in exercising moral responsibility. The USCCB supports increased resources for faith-based and community-based mediating institutions that are pursuing creative, responsive and effective solutions with the potential to help people gain independence from violence, addiction and poverty. Faith-based groups should be allowed to participate in federally-funded programs to meet social needs on the same terms as other groups, without changing their fundamental nature or facing discrimination because of their religious identity.

See *Economic Justice For All, Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform* and USCCB statements on the faith-based initiative. (Go to www.usccb.org/sdwp).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Strongly urge your Senators and Representatives to support bills that will encourage additional private giving to charities and provide additional public resources (for example, by increasing Social Services Block Grant funding) for faith-based and community groups that serve low-income families, abused and abandoned children, persons with disabilities, and the frail elderly.
- Urge your Senators and Representatives to preserve the ability of faith-based and community groups to partner with the federal government in serving our neediest citizens, without giving up their identity or existing hiring protections.
- Stay in touch with USCCB for Action Alerts on new bills as they are introduced this year.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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