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Faith-based

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empower and expand the work of faith-based and other community organizations.

Its responsibilities would include mobilizing public support for faith-based initiatives; encouraging private charitable giving to such efforts; eliminating "unnecessary legislative, regulatory and other bureaucratic barriers that impede effective faith-based and other community efforts to solve social problems"; and ensure the organizations meet "high standards of excellence and accountability."

The offices would be established in the departments of Justice, Education, Labor, Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development. HUD has actually had a Center for Community and Interfaith Partnerships since 1997. Until he was required to resign his political appointment with the arrival of the new administration earlier in January, it was headed by Jesuit Father Joe Hacala.

"This is a collection of some of the finest America has got to offer," said Bush of his audience, "people who lead with their hearts and, in turn, have changed the communities in which they live for the better. This meeting is a picture of the strength and diversity and compassion of our country."

Bishops, nuns and directors of Catholic charitable programs large and small met with Bush Jan. 31. The session at the Old Executive Office Building was one of a series Bush was holding to hear ideas and build support for his plan to encourage charitable giving and make it easier for faith-based institutions to get federal funding for their social service programs.

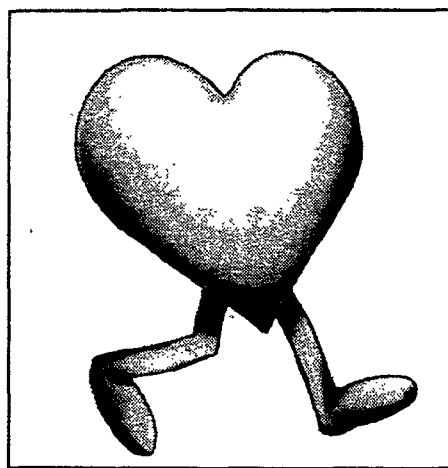
The meeting was closed to the press except for a brief statement by Bush, but afterward several of the participants described it as very encouraging.

"We listened to him and he listened to us," said Cardinal-designate Edward M. Egan, archbishop of New York. "The meeting was a dialogue, a conversation. The president is anxious to include everyone serving those who are in need."

He said he came away with the impression that Bush is anxious to "make it possible for all groups that are committed to helping those who are in need have a chance to have what he calls 'a level playing field.' He wants to see to it that no community group, no faith-based group is left out or excluded from support from the government in order to serve the needy."

Meanwhile, leaders of the People for the American Way and of Americans United for Separation of Church and State have warned that Bush's proposal holds dangers both for the government and for religious groups that accept its funding.

"Once churches, temples, mosques and



synagogues are being financed by the public, some of their freedom will be placed in jeopardy by the almost-certain regulation to follow," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of American United, and a United Church of Christ minister.

Tom Chabolla, director of the Los Angeles Archdiocesan Office of Justice and Peace, said while the initiative recognizes the work that faith-based organizations do, he is apprehensive about it being used as a way to "lessen the commitment the federal government has to providing basic safety nets," he told *The Tidings*, the newspaper of the archdiocese.

Denver Archbishop Charles J. Chaput noted that two of the pillars of Catholic social teaching are commitment to the dignity of the individual and commitment to the common good. In the way government responds now to social needs, those two principles "never really clicked," he said.

But the archbishop said that he can see how both those principles may be linked with more of a partnership between faith-based organizations and the government.

"There's a natural fit between what President Bush is proposing and what we do in many of our Catholic social service agencies," he said.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and other religious leaders met with Bush Dec. 20, and said later that Bush "wants to bring people together."

The bishop said he believed the Catholic Church, for one, had great experience helping the nation's poor, particularly through the work of such agencies as Catholic Charities. The church's experience could be utilized by the Bush administration and church officials look forward to such collaboration, he said.

In the Rochester Diocese, the majority of funding for Catholic Charities' Catholic Family Center already comes from the government, noted Rita Augustine, the center's executive vice president.

"We're not sure whether we will have the opportunity to do more because of what President Bush has done," she said. But the agency's professional certifications,

whether for drug treatment or child welfare services, have positioned it well in the past to receive government grants, she noted.

Jack Balinsky, director of Rochester diocesan Catholic Charities, said more would be known when the federal budget is announced.

"I think it's unclear at this point if even Catholic Charities or Catholic Family Center could get additional funding," he said.

In his public comments at the meeting, Bush said he has been impressed "by not only the quality of leadership of the men and women who make up the great strength of the Catholic hierarchy, but also the unwavering commitment to the poor and to the disadvantaged, and to those who are unable to defend themselves."

That kind of compassion, drawn from love, can't be created by the government, he said. "But what government can do is fund and welcome programs whose sole intent is to change lives in a positive way."

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, superior general of the Sisters of Life, said she came away impressed with the president's understanding of the need for a nonbureaucratic approach to social services.

"The way in which the president spoke of the needs of those in distress displayed a tremendous sensitivity and an understanding of the dignity ... and the love that should be given to all," she said. Her New York-based order of 40 sisters provides a home for pregnant women.

She said the Sisters of Life are not interested in getting federal funding for their work because of the strings that might come with the money. But she does see her order benefiting from the tax benefits Bush has proposed — allowing taxpayers who don't itemize to take deductions for contributions to charities.

In addition to Cardinal-designate Egan and Archbishop Chaput, Miami Archbishop John C. Favalora and Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Va., attended the Jan. 31 meeting.

Archbishop Favalora said it was Bush, rather than the Catholic charity representatives in the room, who raised the criticism his proposal has received from those who fear it would bring inappropriate entanglement of religion and the government.

"He believes it is not going to be a major issue," Archbishop Favalora said. "The point is simply not to allow proselytizing."

He also was pleased that Bush and his staff members seemed to understand charities will not be able to take on all the responsibilities of providing social services.

"This is not to say the churches should do all of this instead of the government ... religious groups cannot do all of it," Archbishop Favalora said.

Capuchin Brother Bob Smith, president of the 510-student Messmer High School in Milwaukee, said his first concern about the faith-based initiative is that the country get past the discussion about whether

churches should have that kind of collaboration with the government.

"My first concern is that we stop apologizing for being a nation of believers, whether that be Catholicism or Muslim or Jewish," Brother Smith said.

"For the last 40 years we've been cowering and always apologizing when we talk about religion and I think it's important for the president — and he's done it masterfully — to say we're not going to apologize anymore and we're not going to create something special," he said. "We're simply saying we want the religious organizations to be partners in the revitalization of this country."

Brother Smith also wants to see Bush's plans for education programs and for his faith-based initiative be part of a comprehensive approach to the nation's problems.

"There's no way any of these pieces will work unless you look at the whole," he said.

Father Val Peter, executive director of Girls and Boys Town in Nebraska, said he felt his concerns about faith-based initiatives were heard and understood by the administration. Besides their time with Bush, the group also had a discussion with three Cabinet members and John DiIulio, the director of the new White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

Father Peter went into the meeting wanting to be sure the initiative requires quality programs, with good, demonstrable outcomes and accountability.

"Otherwise, it's just a bunch of pious do-gooders," he said.

In an earlier interview, he noted that collaboration between the government and faith-based organizations is nothing new, and actually dates back to the beginnings of the nation, when churches established hospitals, orphanages and settlement houses.

But in the last few decades the pendulum has swung away from the government encouraging collaboration with church-based organizations, and in favor of secular entities, he said, adding that he welcomed a swing back in the other direction.

Ken Hackett, executive director of Catholic Relief Services, a veteran of collaboration with the government in funding relief programs, said he sees several indications that might mean significant improvement for agencies such as CRS.

"There's change in the mind-set," he said. "Over the last 15 years there's been a movement in international relief toward more private contractors, competing with private, voluntary organizations."

Now, it sounds as though Bush wants to move away from contracting relief work to agencies that don't have the kind of links to everyday Americans that CRS does, Hackett said.

"When you move through contractors you lose that 'constituent' link," he said. "When it's through church organizations, you keep the link. That direct exhibition of American compassion is important."

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