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Hiring by faith

Some question whether religion should become a prerequisite for a job

WASHINGTON — Capuchin Franciscan Brother Vincent Reyes, director of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen in Detroit, did not pay a lot of attention to the June 24 appeal by the Bush administration urging Congress to clear the way for federally funded religious groups to hire employees based on religious beliefs.

Brother Reyes oversees soup kitchens at four different sites, serving 60,000 people a month, and makes sure those in need get clothes, furniture, employment assistance and help overcoming addictions. With 61 employees, he has never once considered faith to be a prerequisite for the job and doesn't plan to make it a consideration even if Congress makes it easier to do.

"We're Franciscans. We hold very strictly that we only preach with our actions," he told Catholic News Service.

The 74-year-old Capuchin Soup Kitchen is one of many faith-based organizations that receives some federal funds — a \$30,000 federal grant, specifically earmarked for its residential center for men with addictions. But the grant is just a small portion of the organization's annual \$8.2 million working budget.

Over the past two years the Bush administration, through its White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, has been trying to help faith-based social-service providers gain better access to federal funds. Last December, President Bush signed an executive order saying faith-based groups wouldn't be denied government funds simply because they had a religious word in their name or they displayed religious symbols on their walls.

But the latest obstacle for faith-based groups, as the Bush administration sees it, involves hiring practices, particularly for groups that wish to hire those of the same faith beliefs.

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File photo

Catholic Family Center's refugee resettlement program, which receives federal funds, helped Sadia Shinwari and her family move from Pakistan to Rochester in 2000. The Bush administration wants Congress to allow faith-based social-service organizations that receive federal funds to be able to hire employees based on religious beliefs.

Story by Catholic News Service

