

Alberta Bishops to release donations to Development and Peace, with conditions

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Alberta have decided to forward to Development and Peace the donations they previously withheld because of questions about some of its international partners, but there are conditions – and fears of lasting repercussions among D&P members.

In Edmonton, Archbishop Richard Smith shared the decision initially with about 30 local members of Development and Peace at a meeting on Dec. 9. He also committed to keeping Development and Peace as part of the Archdiocese's annual *Together We Serve* appeal in 2019. The next day he announced the news to the people of the Archdiocese in a joint letter he signed along with Archbishop Gerard Pettipas of Grouard-McLennan, Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary, and Bishop Paul Terrio of St. Paul.

Restoring the funding, Smith said, is dependent on a pledge by Development and Peace that none of the money will go to 52 different partner agencies currently under review by joint committees of D&P and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Alberta bishops have also requested a full accounting of the way in which the 2018 funds are eventually distributed. As well, they are holding D&P to its commitment to review and revise its partnership policy and selection criteria.

D&P members had already learned of the moratorium on funding the 52 agencies in a Nov. 16th letter from Serge Langlois, the organization's executive director.

The Archbishop explained that the decision to withhold donations was made last April, after the Western Canadian Bishops received a CCCB brief that suggested some D&P partners showed signs of conflict with Catholic moral and social teaching, in particular around respect for the sanctity of human life.

"To say that we were shocked would be an understatement," he said. Part of the reason for that shock was the fact that such questions about partner agencies had been raised as far back as 2009, and the bishops believed the issues had been addressed.

"We thought, 'How can this be? How did the ball get dropped? Was this taken seriously or not?' So at the meeting of Western Bishops, the decision was made then and there to take steps to make sure this would not happen again."

Martin Blanchet, a longtime member of Development and Peace who serves on the organization's national council, thanked the Archbishop for releasing the funds.

"We appreciate your continued leadership and especially your challenge to us to

be better followers of Christ,” Blanchet said. “Our 2018 campaign fell short by about \$1 million, so all amounts from the dioceses are significant to us.”

Blanchet noted that D&P works through 180 partners in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, funding about 200 different projects, and there has never been any question about the actual work being supported. “At all times, all 200 projects are in conformity with moral and social justice principles accepted by the Catholic Church,” he said.

“Development and Peace was founded by the Bishops of Canada on solid Catholic social and moral doctrines. It will certainly continue to be true to that mission.”

He welcomed the challenge to examine D&P’s relationship with partners more deeply and to seek more transparency and open communication with bishops, members, and the Catholics of Canada.

“With the help of the Holy Spirit, a strong dialogue and continuous search for truth will lead us to the end of the tunnel,” Blanchet said. “I refuse to call it a crisis; I call it a growth process.”



Bob McKeon

Although the news was welcome for D&P’s bottom line, some members at the meeting worried about the continuing uncertainty and the organization’s ability to recover the confidence of Canadian Catholics.

“Every day it goes on, it does damage to D&P, and it will leave scars that will take years to heal,” said Bob McKeon, an Edmonton professor, social activist and Development and Peace member for more than 40 years.

“For any charity or any organization, especially when the focus is on social justice, reputation is so important,” he explained later.

“When the reputation is questioned over time by those in high authority, there has to be damage and it has to create doubt, and it has to raise questions about ongoing commitment. Especially in an organization like the Church and the parishes, where a lot of people

don't know all the details, they trust their authorities."

Smith said the bishops are still pushing for answers, and he defended his decision to withhold donations, saying continuing doubts about partners could not go unaddressed.

"Clearly that was a train heading for a cliff, and the existence of Development and Peace was at risk," he told the members.

"We're at a critical moment here. My sense is that not grappling with the issues is going to lead to more suspicion."

Among the outstanding questions for D&P supporters are the identity and precise nature of the complaints about the 52 potentially problematic partners. The cases were apparently detailed and defended in a 250-plus-page report to the CCCB, but it arrived just as the bishops were beginning their plenary meeting in October, so for most bishops, there wasn't time to review it in any detail. Since then, the CCCB has requested further work to be done on the partnership policy and selection criteria.

"It was explained why certain details haven't been published, but when the critiques and the criticism are very general – partners are not supportive of the Church's broader moral vision – it's hard to put a handle on that," said McKeon. "You don't really know what it is. It's easy to think the worst, you know, we're funding expansion of abortion delivery or something – which we're not."

Other members suggested that people need to hear that the Archbishop still supports the work of D&P.

"To the degree that I can, I will express my support for Development and Peace," he said.



Bishop McGrattan

In the Diocese of Calgary, Development and Peace is supported through the *Together In Action* appeal. Bishop McGrattan conceded these are "difficult times" but said he looks forward to a resolution.

"I have witnessed the commitment of our local D&P members in Calgary," McGrattan said via email.

"They are deeply passionate in their advocacy for the integral development of the people and communities in the global South. At the same time, they desire that D&P adheres to the Catholic moral and social teachings of the Church, so that they can in good conscience witness to their Catholic faith through their involvement in this Catholic organization's outreach."

He noted that Development and Peace has been extremely effective in their use of educational material and in engaging young people in their witness of faith. "It is important that this good work continues and remains tied to the international Caritas family throughout the world."

Like Archbishop Smith, Bishop McGrattan was cautiously optimistic.

"This has also pointed to other issues of governance and administrative practices that will call for much greater accountability and transparency in the future," he said.

"I hope that this change will begin in a spirit of honest dialogue and a willingness to engage in steps of renewal and transformation of D&P. My confidence in this taking place will be strengthened if it begins within each diocese of Canada and through a greater involvement and empowerment of the local D&P membership working in collaboration with the Canadian bishops."

Archbishop Smith told Grandin Media his aim with the meeting was to inform members about the issues and "really to encourage them to take this whole issue in hand and make sure that this does not happen again."

He said other bishops across Canada were also reaching out to local D&P membership, in accordance with a resolution passed at the CCCB plenary.

"Development and Peace is a member-led organization, always has been, and I think it's important that the members, once they're informed, act to preserve the identity and the mission of Development and Peace precisely as a Catholic outreach agency, a Catholic agency that's dedicated to the works of charity, dedicated to social justice, dedicated to being the voice of the voiceless."

He also stressed his gratitude for the dedicated service of the local D&P staff and volunteers.

"The bishops have always found that the people with whom they work locally are just excellent. They're totally committed to the cause. Many of them have been involved with Development and Peace for years ... they're deeply committed to this, and they want to be working in collaboration with their bishops."

At least 12 dioceses across Canada, including the Archdiocese of Toronto, had withheld funds collected during their 2018 Share Lent or diocesan appeals. It is expected that all will be forwarding those funds to D&P by the end of the year. In the Alberta-Northwest Territories region, the Ukrainian Eparchy of Edmonton does not hold a parish collection for D&P, and the Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith had not withheld funds.

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace is the official international development organization of the Church in Canada, and one of 160 members of Caritas Internationalis, the second-largest non-governmental organization in the world. Development and Peace was established by the Bishops of Canada in 1967 to foster justice and integral human development in the southern hemisphere.

Parishioners in the Archdiocese of Edmonton have been generous supporters over the years. In 2017, the Archdiocese forwarded a total of \$239,670 to Development and Peace, raised through donations to the annual *Together We Serve* appeal.