

# Development and Peace pledges moratorium on funding of 52 partner agencies under investigation

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace has agreed to withhold funding from 52 of its partner organizations that continue to be investigated for alleged connections to abortion, artificial contraception and other contradictions with Catholic teaching.

While the probe by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) continues, Development and Peace – the Canadian arm of Caritas Internationalis – hopes the decision will persuade bishops to support its 2019 Lenten fundraising drives.

“Caritas Canada will not use 2018 Share Lent funds for the 52 partners under review, so long as the situation of the partners is not clarified,” executive director Serge Langlois wrote in a letter to Development and Peace members on Nov. 16. “And we have placed a temporary moratorium on the financing of the partners in question.”

In the Archdiocese of Edmonton, Archbishop Richard Smith said he had not yet been informed of the decision as of Nov. 22. Last April he announced that all donations made to Development and Peace through the 2018 *Together We Serve* annual appeal would be withheld “until such time as we receive clear assurance that funds received from present and future *Together We Serve* collections will be used only by agencies whose mission, values and practices cohere with the teachings of the Catholic Church and with the criteria of Caritas Internationalis.”

In 2017, the appeal raised \$239,671 for Development and Peace, one of 11 charitable partners in *Together We Serve*. Several other dioceses also withheld donations, including Toronto, where about \$800,000 was contributed to D&P in 2017 as part of the *ShareLife* campaign.

Archbishop Smith confirmed that no funds from the 2018 appeal have been transferred to Development and Peace. He said he plans to share his decision on the 2019 appeal with local D&P members at a meeting in Edmonton in December.



Deputy director Romain Duguay

“We are very sure that it’s not going to find that we have promoted such a thing as abortion,” Romain Duguay, deputy director of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, told *The Catholic Register*. “We are sure we haven’t done anything wrong.”

The *Register* reported that 10 of the 12 bishops who had previously withheld funds have now released them to Development and Peace.

Since April, Canada’s Catholic aid agency has been working with the CCCB on an ethical audit of its partners operating in poor countries throughout Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. An April CCCB web search of Development and Peace partner organizations raised questions about more than 40 partner organizations, and the concerns were brought up at a meeting of the Assembly of Western Catholic Bishops.

Results of that initial CCCB search led Archbishop Smith to suspend transfers of Lenten donations to D&P. His decision was quickly followed by other bishops, primarily in Western Canada.

Since the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace was established in 1967 it has always chosen to deliver aid with and through organizations formed by and for poor people in their own countries. Rumours that some partner organizations have either supported abortion access or worked for more liberal abortion laws within their own countries have dogged the organization since 2008.

None of the rumours has been proven. Canadian bishops investigated accusations against several partner organizations in 2009 and cleared Development of Peace of any wrongdoing.

After questions emerged again in 2017, D&P worked with CCCB staff to produce a 200-plus page report on its partnerships, which was delivered to the bishops' conference in Ottawa in August.

The report did not meet the unanimous approval of bishops at the September plenary, Langlois wrote in his Nov. 16 letter to D&P members.

"Regrettably, we understood the request differently than what was seemingly expected, and following the recent bishops' plenary we were asked to again provide additional analysis, particularly on the criteria we use to select our partners," Langlois wrote.

Many of the partners on the list of 52 organizations still under investigation are also partnered with other Catholic development agencies throughout Europe, Duguay said. The Caritas Internationalis network is aware of the discussion between Development and Peace and Canada's bishops, but has no concerns about Development and Peace's policies or partner choices, he said.

"We respect all the criteria Caritas has," Duguay said. "It's not even a question for them."

Names of the organizations under review in Canada have been kept out of the press to protect the reputations of people and organizations who have not been proven to have worked against Catholic teaching and values, Duguay said.

The wide-ranging investigation of Development and Peace's partners goes beyond abortion and includes such questions as public statements and positions organizations might have taken on same-sex marriage, gay rights and gender theory.

While the investigation continues, with no deadline for its completion, the Catholic Women's League of Canada is instructing CWL councils across Canada to "not collect donations on behalf of CCODP, but instead redirect donations to any of the other national, voluntary funds that support development work, either within Canada or abroad."

Money already collected by the CWL for Development and Peace and held in trust will be immediately forwarded to Development and Peace, the CWL said in a Nov. 17th press release.

"The national executive believes this is a temporary but necessary measure while the audit continues, so that the CCODP can effectively support communities that strive for justice and peace in the global south," the CWL statement read.

*-With files from Grandin Media*