

Guidelines on Cooperation with Third-Party Charities

Introduction

Over the last couple of years a number of queries have been raised by parishes and individuals within the diocese about co-operation with third-party charities. These queries have been concerned with situations where parishes or other groups within and under the auspices of the diocesan charitable trust have been asked to collect money or goods for, work with or receive donations from other charities. Examples of this would include Parishes being asked to organise collections for Disaster relief, to seek volunteers to work with charities in the healthcare sector or receive donations from charities engaged in the relief of poverty.

The Bishop and Trustees now wish to outline guidance for parishes when faced with these questions. These guidelines are intended to provide criteria which can be applied to specific circumstances and, where parishes find it difficult to resolve their questions in particular cases, to provide both a mechanism whereby they can refer the question to the Bishop and Trustees for a decision, and to set out the principles that the Bishop and Trustees will have in mind in coming to a decision. In issuing these guidelines, the Bishop and Trustees are mindful of their moral, canonical and civil obligations. These guidelines are to be applied in all cases where co-operation with third-party charities is proposed and, for the avoidance of doubt, parishes and other groups within the diocese should examine all existing arrangements in the light of these guidelines within the next twelve months. Questions regarding these guidelines should, in the first instance, be referred to the Secretary to the Trustees.

Examples of Situations where these Guidelines are intended to be of utility.

It may be helpful to outline a number of scenarios where these guidelines should be applied.

1. A parish is approached by another charity to solicit donations from parishioners and more widely for the work of that charity. Although the charity claims to operate according to "Christian principles", it is known that the work of the charity in development and disaster relief includes programmes which engage in or closely co-operate with initiatives to promote the use of or have recourse to contraception and even abortion, contrary to Catholic teaching.
2. The Confirmation Candidates in a Pastoral Area have been asked, as a group, to undertake a work of faith in action as part of their preparation for the Sacrament. They have been looking at a number of options, one of which includes volunteering for a non-Catholic Charity working with homeless people and ex-offenders.
3. A charity has approached a team within the Framework for Collaboration saying that it has resources for use in education - both within schools and parishes - regarding domestic dispute resolution. The charity has recently won an award from Stonewall for its relationship guidance services and for the work it does with same-sex couples, gender issues and including therapeutic work concerning sexual activity and transgender programmes. The material does not relate to these areas of the charity's work.

Fundamental Principles to be applied:

Catholic Moral and Social Teaching

1. All proposed courses of action must be in accord with the Church's teaching as revealed in natural law and Divine Revelation, as expressed in Sacred Scripture, Holy Tradition and the authentic Magisterium of the Church. All individuals or groups in the diocese should strive to ensure that their acts promote the good news of Jesus Christ and serve an evangelisation new in its ardour, methods and expressions aimed at creating intentional disciples of Jesus Christ within His Body the Church. If any proposed course of action involves intended or foreseen acts which do not serve that new evangelisation or are in themselves gravely contrary to teaching of the Catholic Church they must not be pursued by any individual or group in the name or under the auspices of the diocesan charity.

2. In assessing whether a particular course of action may involve intended or foreseen consequences which are contrary to the Church's teaching, the Catechism of the Catholic Church is an invaluable resource for establishing authoritatively what that teaching is. It is never permissible to co-operate with acts which are gravely contrary to the Church's teaching or the natural law. It may be permissible, in certain circumstances, to undertake a proposed course of action which has as one or a number of its foreseen (but not intended) consequences, acts which, though contrary to the Church's teaching or the natural law, are not gravely so, provided the co-operation involved is not proximate, formal and material. These terms have particular meaning within the context of Catholic Moral and Social Teaching and they are explained below.

a. Gravity

How seriously does the proposed course of action contradict the Church's teaching? Certain acts are, in themselves, always gravely morally wrong. These would include but not be limited to, murder, procured abortion, contraception, sexual activity outside marriage, acts which undermine the dignity and sanctity of human beings (for example the exploitation of workers, migrants, the weak and the elderly) from conception to natural death, corrupting the young, heresy and sacrilege.

b. Proximity

This term covers the extent to which an act is immediately, directly or closely connected with a foreseen outcome. Where an outcome is gravely morally wrong and may be seen to be an immediate, direct or close consequence of a particular act or course of action, then that act or course is always wrong and no individual or group acting under the auspices or in the name of the diocese may engage in it. If the foreseen consequence is, however, remote, indirect or distant from the act or course, that act or course may be permissible, provided it involves neither formal nor material cooperation in that foreseen consequence.

c. Co-operation

The particular involvement in any morally wrong act can take a number of concrete expressions. Where it involves the explicit sanctioning of that act, for example by the participation in it through giving expressed assent to it, that formal co-operation is never right. Even where the co-operation does not involve giving expressed assent to the morally wrong act, it may still be wrong if the extent of the co-operation given is of such significance that the act is substantially dependent upon the support given or that the support given constitutes a significant proportion of the act.

How might these principles be applied to the examples given above?

Example 1

Moral Principles

The issue here is that the charity engages in or closely co-operates with initiatives to promote the use of or which have recourse to abortion acts which are, in and of themselves, gravely morally wrong. That the charity does many other things which we might find good and in accordance with Catholic teaching does not alter the fact that any co-operation with this charity constitutes co-operation with that grave moral evil. In seeking to solicit funds for that charity, we would be engaged in an act which would directly result in a foreseen outcome that was gravely wrong. In attempting to raise funds for the charity, we would be seen to endorse its acts - both those that were good and those that were bad - and this would constitute formal co-operation with that grave moral wrong. Since our entire co-operation consisted in seeking funds to support the charity, it could be seen as material co-operation as well. For these reasons it is not right for groups or individuals acting in the name or under the auspices of the diocese to accept the approach.

The virtue of prudence requires that, in the event of an approach from a third-party charity, in order properly to apply these criteria, full enquiries into the activities of that charity be undertaken. If, indeed, the charity's activities include acts whose morality is not immediately apparent, further assistance should be sought from the Bishop's office.

Example 2

Having made enquiries of the charity for the homeless and ex-offenders, it becomes apparent that its activities are in three main groups: it runs a Sunday night soup-kitchen for the homeless, provides temporary accommodation for recently released ex-prisoners and it runs a small Foodbank for the homeless which, in addition to the food items in the boxes, also includes various toiletries and condoms, together with information on how to obtain medical advice, including the procuring of abortions. You understand that the confirmation candidates are going to volunteer to assist at the soup-kitchen and with the redecoration of the temporary accommodation.

The activities with which we are being asked to engage, are in no way morally objectionable, nor are the foreseeable consequences of those activities. However, the provision of contraceptive devices and information about how to procure an abortion are gravely morally wrong and any co-operation with the third-party charity would need to both definitively exclude participation in those activities and, in order to avoid scandal, would need to be accompanied by a clear public statement distancing the confirmation candidates from these activities of the charity.

Example 3

The material provided by the charity has its name prominently displayed upon it, together with a logo indicating their recent award from Stonewall. Although not proximate co-operation in the activities approved by Stonewall or in Stonewall's activities, the implicit endorsement of the charity, and by extension, Stonewall, could be seen to constitute formal co-operation in gravely immoral acts. In the circumstances, any material supplied, would need to omit any reference to Stonewall or to the activities of the charity which related to relationship guidance services for same-sex couples, gender issues and therapeutic work concerning sexual activity and transgender programmes. It may be the case that it is impossible to so dissociate the co-operation with the charity from these issues or that the charity itself is so influenced by them in its other activities or thinking that, even where the co-operation was remote, not formal or material, that, once again, the virtue of prudence would counsel against any co-operation with them.