

Churches should stay away from ‘faith-based initiatives’

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=4231#more-4231>

A number of years ago, I worked with a church client who owned several very successful retirement centers. Well-run and with a long waiting list of elderly that wanted to live at the centers, it was an important ministry to their community.

Their only mistake was that they had obtained mortgage guarantees through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

At first, it was not a problem, but by the early 90’s, the hysteria over separation of church and state had reached a level where HUD could no longer tolerate the ministry aspect of the projects. When HUD told the church that they could no longer use their facilities for ministry, they sold them.

Last week I wrote about a report entitled, “President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.” Obama has decided to not only keep the faith-based initiative that was created by President Bush, but to enhance it with his agenda as well.

The council of advisors who wrote the report clearly see churches as a tool for accomplishing two major agenda items, the first being the distribution of social services, and second, addressing “climate change.”

The council recognizes that many of the 370,000 churches in America are interested in or already operate various charitable ministries that provide the same kind of help that is available from the federal government. The council also recognizes that churches are more adept at distributing multiple kinds of social services than the Federal Government is, and that they are more connected to the kinds of people who need assistance. As a result, the council has recommended to Obama that the federal government involve faith-based organizations to help streamline the distribution of government assistance by using churches as a single-site access point for multiple government services.

The council even recommends that the “Federal Government should mandate the alignment of resources and partnerships between” faith-based organizations, learning institutions and public and private employers in order to provide education and training for green jobs.

The council places great emphasis on the need for the development of green jobs and that those who are “disadvantaged” and “disconnected” be trained to fill those green jobs created by stimulus funding.

The council said that they see “great potential for engaging faith- and community-based groups in environmental stewardship, with a special focus on how to include those most disadvantaged

in our communities,” and that there should be an emphasis on “addressing environmental issues and climate change as a moral issue.”

To accomplish the involvement of churches, the council recommends that the president form an “Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships” and that in order to “mobilize faith- and community-based organizations to preserve the environment and reduce the impact of climate change,” the White House should work “with the EPA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Energy (to) convene regional conferences to ... promote local and regional action on environmental sustainability and energy efficiency.”

The council notes that faith-based organizations are unaware of the resources that the Federal Government can provide to them, including access to financing for projects that include “greening” their facilities, and that agencies should actively inform them of options available to them.

One of the activities that the council wants to encourage is “collaboration for sustainable, community gardening and small-scale agriculture.” Where do they suggest this be done? On church property, of course.

The council states, “community gardening groups seek opportunities to expand the amount of land in urban / suburban areas under cultivation. Many faith-based institutions have land available to them... Furthermore, religious institutions provide a ready-made market for small-scale, sustainable farmer’s produce” and “local foods decrease carbon emissions associated with transporting food...”

This is so transparent it’s almost too embarrassing to warrant a comment. This is an attempt by Obama to gain control over our nation’s churches, as he has said that churches won’t be able to use government funding to proselytize or to discriminate in hiring practices (read last week’s article).

Churches need to stay far away from this deal. Churches that provide help to those in need don’t need help from the federal government, and can certainly do it much better without their interference.

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