

OKAY TO FUND CHURCHES OVERSEAS; NO MONEY FOR D.C. VOUCHERS

On June 4, President Obama's Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships met for the first time via conference call.

The only item of real interest to the Catholic League was the agency's commitment to extend foreign aid to such civil institutions as churches, mosques and temples. We commended them on this proposition, but noted that it smacked of hypocrisy: United States taxpayers are expected to foot the bill for religious institutions overseas but there is no money for poor kids down the block from the White House who would like to have a voucher to attend a Catholic school.

The argument that we have a Constitution to deal with at home is a canard: vouchers are not unconstitutional. Moreover, if helping civil institutions, including religious ones, is a proper goal for the U.S. to pursue abroad, why is it not a proper one to pursue at home? To be sure, constitutional issues must be respected, but the Constitution does not put a straightjacket on the right of government to offer assistance of all kinds to religious institutions. Indeed, the very establishment of this agency is testimony to this point.

In other words, if the Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships initiative is to succeed, then it must be judged by what it does at home, as well as abroad.