

The Christian and the United Way

As we approach the holiday season once again, we'll hear countless pleas to help the needy in our community. Here's some encouragement for each of us to respond to these opportunities as we have the ability. Christians have a moral responsibility to be good neighbors and relieve the suffering of those who are less fortunate (Luke 10:25-37). But what about donating to the United Way? The United Way got its start in 1887 in Denver, CO by religious leaders who raised funds for twenty-two separate charities. From these humble beginnings, the United Way of America has grown into perhaps the most well known charitable organization in our country. Today, it consists of over 1,400 independent United Ways throughout the country. Their work is simple. Each local chapter of the United Way serves as a fundraising apparatus for a number of community charity organizations. The number and focus of these organizations varies by each community. The member agencies share in the budget of the local United Way, and United Way donations can become a primary source of their funding.

It is very simple to donate to the local United Way using payroll deduction. Even though the United Way says it is a person's individual choice to donate, employers often encourage/pressure their associates to donate—wanting 100% participation. Some can testify to intense peer pressure to give. Others speak of being placed on “guilt trips” when refusing to donate.

When one gives to the United Way, his money is deposited into a general fund that is divided proportionally among the member agencies. The decision on how these funds are spent is determined by a board of directors made up of local business and community leaders. Their decisions can be influenced by political and social issues of the day. Some think that if they “designate” their United Way donation to go directly to the agency they desire they can get out of supporting charities they disagree with. But, why should one do this when he can **give directly** to the charitable organization he wishes to support? Documentation has proven that while some local United Ways claim to allow persons to “designate” funds for certain member agencies—money is still placed into the general fund and dolled out proportionately. The “designation” is nothing more than a play on words.

Some local chapters of the United Way have generated great controversy over the last few years over funding certain organizations. For example:

- “ The Boy Scouts of America cumulatively receives more than \$80 million from local United Way offices across the country, but some of those offices have pulled their funding over the Boy Scout's policy of not admitting homosexuals as members or leaders. (www.family.org/cforum/feature/a0012664.cfm) The United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI) supports local boy scout councils in the six county metro area (www.uwci.org/agencies.htm). UWCI says their board has spent hundreds of hours discussing an issue which “has no easy answers.” They will continue to support the boy scouts “because of the good done for the youth of our communities here in Central Indiana.” **Could UWCI's statement of there being “no easy answer” give us some insight on how far political correctness has taken over our society?**
- “ The United Way is a primary source of funding for Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), a mentoring program for troubled youth. BBBSA recently required all 490 local chapters to accept homosexuals as mentors for children. (www.family.org/welcome/press/a0024745.cfm) Locally, the United Way supports Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Indiana. **Should the Christian choose to contribute knowing part of his donation will go to an organization that assists in pushing the homosexual agenda?**
- “ Some local United Way organizations support Planned Parenthood. While actual abortion procedures are not funded, Planned Parenthood initiatives such as communicable disease prevention, family planning, and public awareness campaigns are funded. Nationally in 1999, local United Ways distributed an estimated \$3 million to Planned Parenthood agencies. Of that total, approximately one third of these dollars were designated to the agency by individuals. (national.unitedway.org/aboutuwa/pos_pp.cfm) The United Way of Central Indiana does not support any planned parenthood agencies (www.uwci.org/agencies.htm).
- “ The United Way of Central Indiana DOES contribute money to a variety of religious based charities in our community. These include, *The Salvation Army, Lutheran Child & Family Services, Catholic Social Services, and the Catholic Youth Organization.* **In all good conscience, should a New Testament Christian financially support a religious organization he is doctrinally opposed to?** Although these religious organizations are out in the community doing good, they are also busy teaching those who use the charity their religious practices and doctrine. 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 calls for us to *come out and be separate* which means we should have no fellowship with religious bodies that do not adhere to the doctrine of Christ (2 Jhn 9). This would include making financial contributions to these organizations.

So what to do? We understand the moral responsibility we have to help others. We are incredibly blessed and know that by helping others we can demonstrate the love of Christ (1 Jhn 3:17-18). When you feel compelled to give, make your donation **directly** to your favorite charity. This ensures your funds will not be sent to organizations you cannot conscientiously support. This also allows 100% of your donation to go to the charity and not have a portion lost in funding the bureaucracy of the United Way. While the idea of the United Way is commendable, and it is undeniable that they do good in the community, the Christian should

refrain from giving to an organization that supports charities that embrace religious and moral error.

Matthew Allen
mhallen@sbcglobal.net