



Week of November 1, 2009

ICCR takes lead in shareholder advocacy filings to impact policies at key firms

The New York-based Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility is a partnership of over 75 diverse religious organizations which was created in 1971 when a number of Protestant churches joined together to challenge the role of banks and companies doing business in apartheid South Africa. Now the ICCR has as its core members both progressive and conservative Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious and health care organizations. Its mission is to change the way companies conduct themselves in order to evolve into “good” corporate citizens, both in the products they sell and the human resources policies they implement on behalf of their employees, including affordable health care and fair pay. Last year one third of all shareholder resolutions filed in the U.S. were initiated by ICCR members. Members argue that shareholder advocacy (and in particular, proxy voting), which is one of the three main prongs that comprise socially responsible investing, is perhaps the most effective tool at their disposal to enact real change in corporate cultures. Since 2004, the ICCR has participated in 166 corporate engagements with 100 companies to question the growing usage of credit default instruments as well as to protest the widespread distribution of credit cards to teenagers and college students, as well as the explosion in subprime and predatory lending. The ICCR has also been pivotal in affecting change in corporate policies at companies like Wal-Mart, Pepsico, Dell, and Exxon Mobil. Many members who attend shareholder meetings are progressive orders of nuns actively involved in encouraging social justice and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Said one priest who is also an active member of the ICCR: “Many of these CEOs went to parochial schools, and when a nun gets up at the annual meeting to protest a particular policy, they tend to listen.” Another member who is a rabbi added, “It’s really about fiduciary capitalism” in promoting the long-term more responsible vision of the company. (Ellen Taylor)