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## Plight

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really can't get places and certainly not be on time all the time," she said.

On top of that, a working person needs decent clothes and toiletries to keep them looking sharp, she explained. Those who have these things may be shocked to realize that there are people living among them who lack them, she noted, adding that this year's dramatic increases in utilities bills nationwide have hit the poor hard, forcing them sometimes to choose between feeding their families and heating their homes.

## Poverty USA

Father Robert J. Vitillo, executive director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, echoed many of Caroscio's insights on the plight facing the poor. Since its inception by the U.S. bishops in 1970, CCHD has funded scores of community-based self-help and advocacy programs throughout the United States. Funding recipients have included Interfaith Action Inc. of Rochester, an alliance of Monroe County area congregations and businesses that has advocated with local and state government officials on such issues as the rising cost of pharmaceutical prescriptions and the zoning of adult businesses.

In a phone interview from his office in Washington, D.C., Father Vitillo noted that he planned to share the results of a recent survey about national attitudes toward poverty with the National Press Club Jan. 9, kicking off a new effort to highlight the plight of the poor.

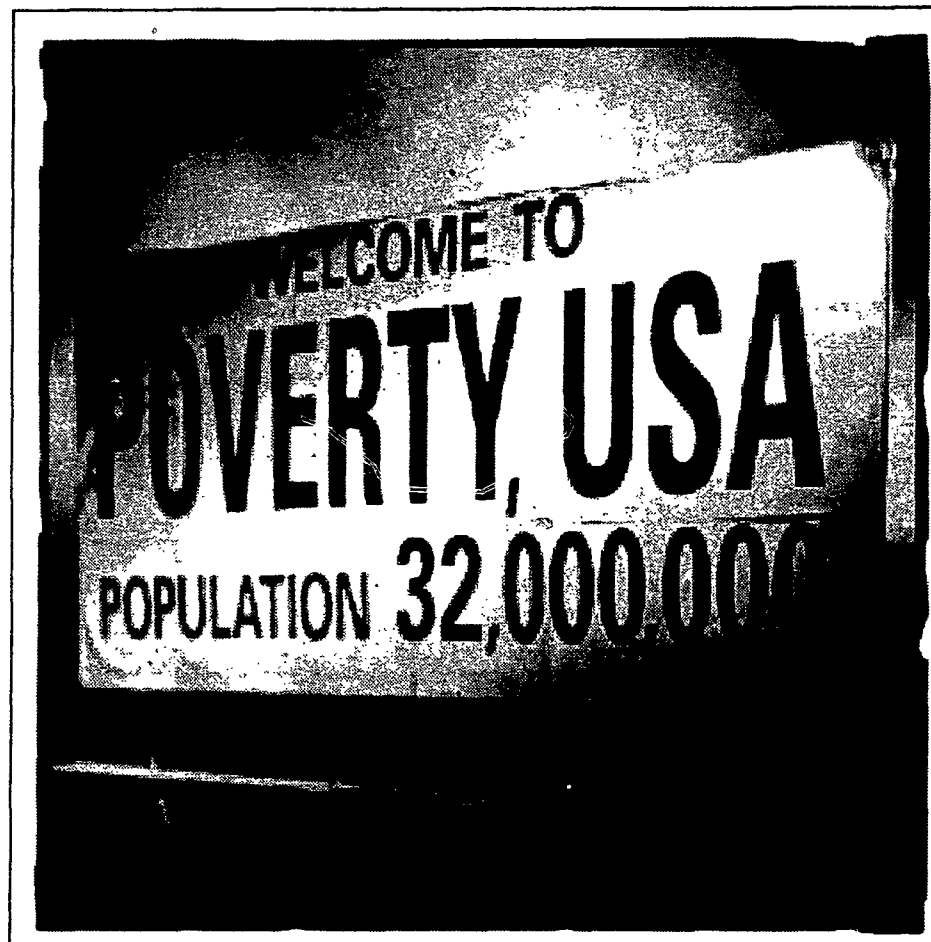
CCHD released some of the survey results on a preliminary basis to the *Catholic Courier*. For example, of more than 1,000 people randomly surveyed by telephone, 87 percent said they care about poverty when the issue is raised before their eyes, but only 3 percent think about the issue without prompting.

On a heartening note, 44 percent give to organizations that help the poor. Forty-one percent have been poor or know someone who is poor. Most blamed "laziness" first, then "lack of education" for making people poor.

Meanwhile, a separate survey of 400 low-income people served by CCHD-funded projects found the majority blamed a lack of education for their plight.

The press conference was also to mark the beginning of a national advertising and education campaign by CCHD titled "Poverty USA." The agency is calling upon the nation to consider January as "Poverty In America Awareness Month." Father Vitillo added that readers could learn more about the campaign by visiting its Web site at [www.povertyusa.org](http://www.povertyusa.org).

He explained why CCHD picked January to raise the issue of poverty in the United States.



"In January, we kind of go back to the routine and forget about these feelings we had about (poor) people toward the end of the year," he said. Although he expressed gratitude for the generosity of people toward the poor during the holiday season, Father Vitillo said CCHD wants people to examine more closely why they have to give in the first place.

"Certainly, there's been a slight improvement in the numbers of people being poor," Father Vitillo said, referring to the current economy. "Still, it's astounding that we have 32 million Americans living in poverty."

Those citizens live in "Poverty USA" according to CCHD, which created the fictional state to dramatize the numbers of those living at or below the federal poverty level of \$17,834 for a family of four.

"Poverty USA is bigger than Texas, Florida or New York," reads the campaign Web site. "More people live within its boundaries than in the states of Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey and Nevada combined."

New York, the site notes, has the eighth largest percentage of poor people of the 50 states, with almost 16 percent of its population impoverished. New Mexico is first, with more than 20 percent of its citizens living in poverty.

The Web site also contains these tidbits of information:

- One in 11 families, one in nine citizens and one in six children is poor.
- Almost 10 percent of those over age 65 live in poverty.
- Half the children living in female-head-

ed households are poor. Almost 80 percent of children in poor families have a member in that family who works.

• Poverty touches all ethnicities and races: more than 20 percent of African-Americans and Hispanics, almost 11 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders and almost 8 percent of white non-Hispanics.

Father Vitillo blamed a number of factors for keeping the nation's poor where they are, among them poor education, a lack of access to health care and, in the case of minorities, racial discrimination in housing situations. Caroscio also blamed a lack of affordable housing and the fact that when federal welfare reform was implemented five years ago little machinery was in place to follow up on people dropped from the welfare rolls.

Interestingly, according to the U.S. Catholic Conference, welfare enrollment dropped 44 percent nationwide after the federal government reformed public assistance in 1996.

Meanwhile, in New Jersey at least, a Rutgers University study found the abortion rate among women on welfare climbed 14 percent after welfare reform limited the amount of children eligible for benefits in a poor family.

## Reform renewal

The U.S. Congress is set to consider reauthorizing the welfare reform legislation this year, and social justice advocates are looking at this year as a chance to renew public interest in the fate of low-income citizens. One such group is Interfaith Alliance, a national public policy and civic

advocacy organization with a chapter in Rochester made up of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim believers.

The Rev. Dr. Peter W. Peters, rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Fairport, chairs the local chapter's 16-member Poverty Task Force, which he said is working on a video to be released this spring on poverty in Rochester. More than one out of four Rochesterians — twice the national average — are poor, he noted. The video will include interviews with such city residents struggling to survive.

In part, he said, the video will examine how low wages have impacted the poor in an economy with low unemployment that some say should have reduced poverty. That's a viewpoint that needs to be explored more, according to Jacquelyn Martin Turner, program supervisor of Catholic Family Center's Community Resource Services in Rochester. The agency provides emergency and other services to low-income clients.

"Food is constantly going up," she said of prices. "Clothing is going up. Everything is going up except (the income) it takes to maintain your family."

Although Catholic social justice advocates tend to blame the system more than the poor themselves for their plight, Caroscio said some low-income people manifest self-defeating behaviors. For example, she said, some poor people could use mentoring in how to stretch their food budget by cooking low-cost meals.

And over and over again, the church's social ministry workers emphasized that poor people need to strive for as much education as possible. Bobbi McGarrity, emergency services caseworker for Turner's office, noted that "nine times out of 10" the agency's clients lack high school degrees, and that the agency encourages its clients to get their high school equivalency diplomas.

Indeed, CCHD's Poverty USA Web site asks visitors to consider mentoring individuals seeking to escape poverty, and to think about sponsoring the education of a poor child.

But all the social ministry advocates pointed out that middle- and upper-class citizens need to first imagine themselves in the shoes of the poor if they are to understand how to help them.

For example, Caroscio said many of her clients carry a legacy of emotional and sexual abuse or have had struggles with drug and alcohol addictions. Pile on a lack of affordable housing, day care or transportation, and it's no wonder her clients sometimes get discouraged, she noted.

"We're trying to see Christ in the other person," she said. "From our perspective, (the poor) have a right to be treated with dignity — even when it's not easy."

"Everyone is not capable of taking care of themselves despite what we may think or want to believe."

Related stories on Pages 8-9 discuss how seniors with low incomes may obtain help.

## Doctor

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The Vatican press office had no immediate comment on the article in the Italian magazine.

"The Holy Father's physique is very muscular like a swimmer's which, together with the treatments, has sustained him; but without the help of God he would not be able to remain fully active," Fineschi

told the magazine.

The doctor said he absolutely does not believe Pope John Paul will resign from the papacy.

"I hope he will continue with the same ability, the same determination and the same diligence to do what he has been doing up until now. He has done very well, but it is not enough in a world which needs him so much," he said.

In addition to performing the 1994 surgery after the pope broke his femur, Fineschi was part of the team of doctors operating on the pope after he was shot in 1981 because of damage to his elbow, and he treated the pope in 1993 when he fell and dislocated his shoulder.

"Every time the pope leaves on a trip or tires himself during an official event, I fear for him," Fineschi said.

"As a doctor, I should order him to rest, but it would be useless," he said. The pope carries out his mission "even at the cost of great suffering, with total altruism."

"I worry even more when the Holy Father is in situations which are dangerous for any elderly person, when it is very hot, for instance," he said.

Fineschi said it was difficult to keep the pope resting even after the hip-replacement surgery.

"To force the pope to stay away from his work is impossible, so he left the hospital after just two weeks," the doctor said.

"To have him as a patient was a unique and moving experience because of the dignity and temperament with which the pope endures physical suffering, which is particularly strong with an orthopedic operation," he said. "During his recovery, he never lost his smile, and he refused every painkiller."

Fineschi said that for "a long time" he had lunch with the pope every Wednesday and was struck by his "fascinating personality" and his sense of humor.

The doctor said his reverence for the pope and his awe in his presence did not prevent the development of a real friend-

ship.

In the interview, Fineschi said the pope had made comments to him about papal meetings with a variety of world leaders, including Poland's former communist president, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski; the former Chilean dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet; and U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The doctor quoted the pope as saying, "Jaruzelski told me: 'I am Catholic, but in the face of the Red Army, that counts for nothing.'"

Fineschi said the pope told him he had advised Pinochet to resign. Although the dictator remained in office, "after our meeting he sought, within his limits, to mitigate the harshness of his regime," the doctor quoted the pope as saying.

After one of his meetings with Clinton — Fineschi did not say which meeting — he said the pope told him: "The only one I wasn't able to dialogue with was Clinton. I spoke and he looked at the wall, admiring the frescoes and the paintings. He was not listening to me."

Look for the marriage issue on January 18.

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