

CCHD shines light on poor

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development launched its fourth-annual media campaign this month to highlight the challenges low-income people face in America.

CCHD is the U.S. bishops' domestic anti-poverty agency, and it has funded a range of efforts covering such areas as housing and economic development to living-wage campaigns and disability-rights efforts. In a statement, Father Robert Vitillo, CCHD's executive director, noted that this year's campaign employs radio, TV and print advertisements as well as updates on its Web site at www.povertyusa.org.

"The new print campaign employs this country's greatest symbols of freedom and unity — the Liberty Bell, Old Glory and the Statue of Liberty — to illustrate how we as a nation can rally with those living in need, to help them break the bonds of poverty once and for all," Father Vitillo said of the advertisements.

As part of its campaign, CCHD released a poll Jan. 12 during a press conference in New Orleans, La. The poll measured attitudes toward — and awareness of — poverty in America. Almost all of those surveyed — 96 percent — believe it's important to address poverty in the

United States. However, survey respondents grossly underestimated the number of poor people, with respondents saying between 1 million and 2 million are poor. Actually, 34.6 million people live below the federal government's poverty level of an annual income of \$18,400 for a family of four, CCHD said.

Judy Taylor, who coordinates advocacy and communications for Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Rochester, said CCHD funded the following initiatives in the diocese during 2003:

Monroe County:

- **Sweat-free Schools**, a program of the Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition, which is working with youth groups to become advocates for purchasing school uniforms not made in-sweatshop conditions.

- **Raise a Roof**, a project of the Interfaith Action community organization seeking to expand home ownership, improve public safety and revitalize commercial districts near Jones Park and Lyell Ave in Rochester.

- **Walk with You**, a Catholic Family Center initiative connecting teams of volunteers with families in transition from welfare to work, grandparents raising grandchildren or individuals recovering from chemical addiction in the Rochester area.

- **Women's Coffee Connection**, a job-training program at the Women's Coffee Connection Coffee Shop in Rochester for women in substance-abuse recovery.

Finger Lakes:

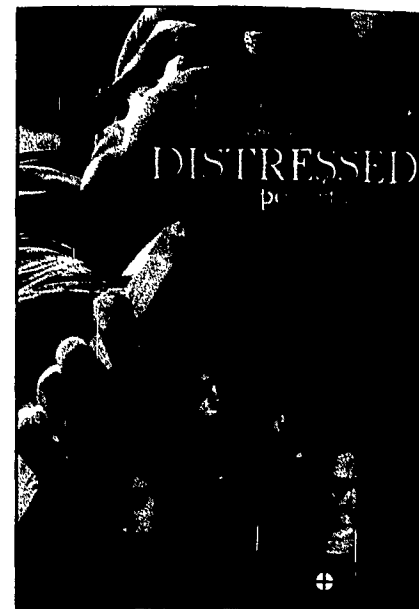
- **The Farmworker Women's Institute** — which also serves women in Monroe County — is working to develop confidence and leadership skills in farm-working women by improving English-language skills and setting up mini-businesses. The institute is expanding its services to farm-worker women and their families in several areas.

Southern Tier:

- **The Tompkins County Living Wage Coalition's Workers' Rights Center** for low-income working people. The center's goal is to empower low-wage workers to change existing laws and employer behavior with respect to fair treatment of workers in the workplace; to provide information, referral, advocacy and support for workers.

Diocesan parishes collect donations for CCHD each September, Taylor said. The donation total for the 2003 collection is still being finalized, she said, but as of last count, \$73,883 was collected.

In 2002, she said, diocesan parishes contributed \$74,144. Seventy-five percent of that total, or \$55,608, went to CCHD's national office for



national distribution. The remaining \$18,536 collected was distributed to the following diocesan agencies: Catholic Family Center in Rochester, \$9,082.64; Catholic Charities of Livingston County, \$556.08; Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier, \$4,819.36; and Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes, \$4,077.92. Regional committees distribute grant money, she added.

Taylor urged diocesan Catholics to continue to support CCHD.

"Giving to CCHD is putting your money where your faith is, supporting an effort that recognizes the face of Christ in all; bringing rich and poor together to work to change the things in our world that keep anyone from enjoying dignity and justice," she said.

McQuaid priest cleared of charges; reinstated

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Jesuit Father John Costello, chairman of the religion department at Brighton's McQuaid Jesuit High School, has been cleared of sexual-abuse charges and reinstated to his position and to his priestly ministry.

In a press statement, Jesuit Father Gerald J. Chojnacki, provincial of the New York Province of the Society of Jesus — who currently is out of the country — said the alleged victim had been informed that Father Costello had been cleared. Father Chojnacki added that the province welcomed the conclusion of the investigation.

"We lament the very trying time that this has been for Father Costello, and we pray that he be well-received by his many supporters and friends back into active ministry," he said.

Jesuit Father Richard Galligan, acting provincial during Father Chojnacki's absence, said the person who originally had made the abuse allegation against Father Costello

subsequently has withdrawn it. Meanwhile, Father Galligan added, investigators concluded the allegation lacked substance.

School officials announced Father Costello's reinstatement during a Jan. 7 student assembly. They said students gave a five-minute standing ovation to Father Costello, who was present for the assembly.

"If there were any people who had doubts (about Father Costello), they weren't in this building," Father Philip G. Judge, McQuaid's principal, remarked at a press conference the same day.

In mid-November, the Jesuit province placed Father Costello on administrative leave pending investigation of the charges, which had been brought by a person who — almost 24 years ago — was a minor attending New York City's Regis High School, where Father Costello was serving as a priest-in-training. Father Galligan said a former Jesuit priest who worked at Regis at the same time also has been accused of sexual abuse by the same person. Al-

legations against the former priest are still being investigated, he said.

During his suspension, Father Costello was not allowed to function as a priest or teacher, nor was he allowed to work with children or young adults.

Statements from McQuaid and the Jesuit province said an independent investigation of the charges had found a lack of "reliable or credible evidence to substantiate the allegation made against Father Costello." The province added that Father Costello had fully cooperated with the investigation.

McQuaid officials noted that Bishop Matthew H. Clark had been informed of the province's decision to reinstate Father Costello and had agreed with it.

Officials from McQuaid and the Jesuit province said they were pleased that Father Costello's name had been cleared.

"We are delighted that Father Costello is returning to McQuaid Jesuit," McQuaid President James E. Whelehan said in a statement.

"Through the process of due diligence, Father Costello was cleared of any wrongdoing and his good name and reputation have been restored."

Father Costello "emphatically denied" the charges all along, McQuaid had noted in a previous statement. The Jan. 7 McQuaid statement quoted the priest as expressing gratitude for the support he had received during the investigation.

"I am greatly relieved that my name and reputation have been cleared," Father Costello said. "It was an extremely stressful and difficult time for me. I thank God and all who worked on my behalf to clear my name. And, I am grateful for all the prayer and support I received during these months."

McQuaid staff members had been informed of Father Costello's reinstatement on Jan. 6, school officials said. Parents and McQuaid trustees were notified by letter of the investigation's conclusion, according to Francine Patella Ryan, McQuaid spokeswoman.