

Bishops agency seeks to raise poverty awareness

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Catholic Campaign for Human Development has been waging a new media campaign to raise awareness in the nation, especially among the nation's Catholics, about the extent and impact of poverty in America.

"Right now in America 37 million people are working to become independent while struggling to afford the very basics necessary for survival — food, shelter, clothing, child care and medical care," said Timothy Collins, CCHD executive director.

"It's a bitter fact that 13 million of our nation's poor are children," he added.

With January designated as Poverty in America Awareness Month, CCHD has launched print and broadcast public service ads to help bring home the message that one out of every eight Americans is living below the poverty line.

The print ads — including 46 black-and-white ads of different sizes and shapes and the same ads in duotone — feature images of men, women, children and whole families dangling in midair, hanging desperately to a rope labeled the "poverty line," coupled with messages in English and Spanish about who is affected by poverty in America.

"The ads are intended to break in January 2007, during Poverty in America Awareness Month, and continue running all year," Collins said in a message to advertising directors.

He noted that since 1970 the Catholic Campaign for Human Development has supported more than 4,000 self-help projects for the poor.

These, he said, are "projects that know no racial or religious boundaries, projects that offer permanent solutions, that help to create jobs and opportunities, to improve neighborhoods, to end poverty for good."

The image of people hanging below the poverty line "reminds readers of the difficult

choices some people must make in order to hang onto their jobs and their homes while trying to keep their families fed," he said.

On its Web site — www.povertyusa.org — CCHD has also placed six banners and e-stickers and their linking codes, which Web site owners can easily download to place a message about poverty on their own Web sites.

The annual ad campaign is in its seventh year. Collins said CCHD regularly gets positive feedback on the ads, and the amount of donated public service time and space given to them over the past six years has been valued at nearly \$57 million.

CCHD was established by the U.S. bishops in 1969 and is funded by an annual collection taken up in the parishes of every U.S. diocese. Seventy-five percent of the collection is forwarded to the national office for distribution in the form of grants nationwide. The other 25 percent stays in the diocese for distribution to local projects or programs.