

Bishops call charges against USCCB official false, ridiculous

WASHINGTON - Bishops who work closely with John Carr, who oversees the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, say new claims against him and the agency are false and “totally ridiculous.”

Bishops William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., and Roger P. Morin of Biloxi, Miss., spoke with Catholic News Service Feb. 3 about recent allegations of “a systemic pattern of cooperation with evil” by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops because of Carr’s past involvement with the Center for Community Change.

“I’m concerned about these attacks on John Carr and I know they are false and I think they are even calumnious,” said Bishop Murphy, who chairs the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, by telephone to CNS. “I am taking this to be a very sad, sad commentary on the honesty of some people in these pressure groups.”

“Personally I think (the claims) are totally ridiculous,” said Bishop Morin, who chairs the USCCB subcommittee that oversees CCHD, the bishops’ domestic anti-poverty initiative, in a separate telephone interview.

A report released Feb. 1 by the Reform CCHD Now Coalition, a group that includes the American Life League, Human Life International and Bellarmine Veritas Ministry, said the Washington-based Center for Community Change “has lodged itself into the highest places of power in the USCCB while working to promote abortion and homosexuality.”

Carr, executive director of the USCCB’s Department of Justice, Peace and Human

Development, said he stepped down as chairman of the center's board in February 2005, and the board never addressed those issues during his tenure.

"My experience with CCC was that it focused on poverty, housing and immigration and had no involvement in issues involving abortion and homosexuality," Carr said. "When I served, the board never discussed or acted on any position involving these matters, and if they had, I would have vigorously opposed any advocacy for access to abortion or gay marriage."

Carr was interim CCHD executive director from 2007 to early 2008. With the USCCB restructuring in 2008, he took over a department that consolidated CCHD and the former Department of Social Development and World Peace.

Carr said the CCHD Web site had recommended the Center for Community Change for its anti-poverty work, but when the coalition's report disclosed that the center supported abortion ("It was news to us," he said), the recommendation was removed.

The American Life League and Human Life International are Virginia-based groups that oppose abortion and advocate on other pro-life issues. Bellarmine, based in Texas, describes itself as "a Catholic grass-roots organizing ministry dedicated to truth and action."

The Center for Community Change says its mission is to "build the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low-income people of color, to change their communities and public policies for the better."

According to the Reform CCHD Now Coalition, 31 organizations that have received CCHD grants are among the more than 150 groups that have "partnered" with the Center for Community Change.

Carr said no one from American Life League or Bellarmine had contacted him or anyone else at the CCHD or USCCB before the report was issued.

“I have spent my personal and professional life defending human life and dignity and Catholic teaching, including current efforts to keep abortion funding out of health care reform,” he said.

“I regret that once again the failure to contact me or CCHD has led to unfair allegations in attempts to undermine the essential work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development,” Carr added.

Bishop Morin said he also has been subject to attacks “almost from the time I became chairman” of the CCHD subcommittee.

“You can have one person with a Web site call you a left-wing radical, and my family is asking me, ‘What’s going on?’ ” he said. “We’re doing the same thing we’ve always been doing - what is right and good and just.”

Bishop Morin said that although Carr’s primary focus over the years has been on social justice issues, “that does not take away one bit from his commitment to the sacredness of human life.”

Carr also received support from Thomas Grenchik, executive director of the USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

In a Feb. 2 letter to diocesan pro-life directors and state Catholic conference leaders, Grenchik called Carr “staunchly pro-life” and “a partner in USCCB pro-life efforts.”

“He worked diligently to keep abortion out of the many recent health care reform efforts,” Grenchik added. “Were it not for his efforts and those of others, our country

would now be funding abortion and health plans that provide abortion, on a massive scale. ...

“This challenge is far from over, and John remains steadfast in his effort to advocate for health care reform that protects human life,” he said.