

Former bishops' communications official dies

WASHINGTON – Robert B. Beusse, a former secretary of communications for the U.S. bishops who was instrumental in establishing the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Catholic Communication Campaign, died Aug. 14 at his home in Caldwell, N.J. He was 77.

His funeral Mass was scheduled for Aug. 17 at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Roseland, N.J., with interment to follow at Gate of Heaven Cemetery in East Hanover, N.J.

“He took great pride in the fact that both CCHD and CCC not only survived but thrived,” said Timothy F. Collins, who recently retired as executive director of CCHD, in a telephone interview with Catholic News Service Aug. 15.

“He was a superb communications professional,” Collins added. “He had an incredible gift of putting together a vision of what the church should be doing with the direction the bishops wanted to go.”

Beusse hired Collins in 1970 at what was then the U.S. Catholic Conference and National Conference of Catholic Bishops to staff a task force charged with developing the first promotional campaign for the Campaign for Human Development, the domestic anti-poverty program established by the bishops earlier that year. “Catholic” was added to the program’s name in 1998.

In annual national collections on Thanksgiving weekends, CCHD has raised nearly \$300 million for distribution to self-help projects that fight poverty. The CCC, established in 1979, funds media development projects.

Before joining the bishops’ twin conferences, Beusse had a varied career in the print media and in broadcasting.

After serving as an Army officer in the Korean War from 1952 to 1954, he joined Better Living magazine, part of the McCall Corp., as a promotion manager in 1954. He became assistant director of public relations at McCalls magazine in 1955 and moved to the Schering Corp. as assistant director of advertising in 1957.

From 1960 to 1967, Beusse served as vice president of WOR, a television and AM and FM radio station in New York. He was director of administration and public affairs for the movie studio RKO General in 1968-69.

He was secretary of communications for the bishops' twin conferences from 1970 to 1979.

Beusse was appointed by two popes to the Pontifical Commission (now Council) for Social Communications – Pope Paul VI in 1972 and Pope John Paul II in 1984.

After leaving his post with the bishops' conferences, Beusse became president of Robert B. Beusse Inc., a consulting firm, where he worked until retiring in 1989.

Beusse, who earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Fordham University in New York, served on the university's board of directors, 1968-70.

President Lyndon B. Johnson named him a White House aide to the President's Council on Youth Opportunity in 1966 and to the President's Council on Defense Department Legislation in 1968.

His other civic involvement included posts as finance chairman of the Public Service Satellite Consortium; national television chairman of the National Conference for Christians and Jews; educational chairman for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences; and board member of Red Cross of Greater New York, North American Vatican Radio Foundation, New York Board of Trade, Our Sunday Visitor Inc., and the Office of Substance Abuse Ministry in New York.

Beusse and his wife of 54 years, the former Patricia Welsh, had four daughters and three sons, including one who predeceased him.

When Beusse became secretary of communications, "one bishop told him that this was not a job for a family man" because of all the travel involved, Collins recalled. "And it was true – he was gone on the road more than he was at home, and at that time they had seven young children."

But he took on the challenge nevertheless, Collins said. "Nothing about Bob Beusse was halfway; he always gave 110 percent, 120 percent of his time, energy and competence."

As secretary of communications, Beusse convinced the U.S. bishops to open their general meetings to media coverage. He also helped to coordinate the media coverage of the deaths of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I and the election of Pope John Paul II, which received what was up to then unprecedented media attention.

"Through the watershed decade of the 1970s, Bob Beusse has been a dynamic force for progress in many areas of the church's communication effort," said then-Bishop (now retired Archbishop) Thomas C. Kelly at the time of Beusse's retirement. Bishop Kelly was then general secretary of the bishops' twin conferences.

The two conferences were combined and renamed the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in July 2001.

In addition to his wife and children, Beusse is survived by a sister and 15 grandchildren.