

2009–2010 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

*Government is instituted for the common good;
for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness
of the people; and not for profit, honor, or private
interest of any one man, family, or class of men.*

—John Adams, *Thoughts on Government*, 1776

Every two years the Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors approves an advocacy agenda for the forthcoming legislative session. Coordinated and implemented by Conference staff, the advocacy agenda for the 95th legislative session concentrates on eight policy categories:

- Religious Freedom
- Human Life
- Children and Families
- Health Care
- Education
- Economic Justice and Regulatory Policies
- Restorative Justice
- Federal Issues

Weaving through these categories is the fundamental principle that all human life, regardless of its stage, must be promoted and protected. This teaching, preached and applied by the Church for centuries, concerns the infant

in the womb as well as the parent in search of a proper education for a child, an immigrant seeking to live with dignity, and a family without health care that cannot make ends meet.

While imperative to fight vigorously the “Culture of Death”—human embryo destruction, abortion, assisted suicide and the death penalty—the Church is also mandated to promote life between its earliest and last stages. Adequate funding of the state’s Medicaid budget, just immigration policies, conscience protections, upholding the traditional family, and ensuring the civil rights of prisoners are among those issues that must be brought to the attention of Michigan’s elected officials.

This edition of FOCUS explores the eight categories previously mentioned, and presents specific policy issues that are of interest to the Michigan Catholic Conference in the 2009–2010 legislative session.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

State entities and faith-based organizations have a valued relationship providing critical services to those in need. Indeed, the state that guarantees the free exercise of religion is the one that allows its citizens the greatest opportunity to administer charity and to serve others. In order to uphold the freedom of religion, MCC supports the following:

- The rights of faith-based providers and all individuals to conscience protections in the delivery of services, and
- The equal application of the law to all persons and institutions regardless of their faith.

HUMAN LIFE

Under all circumstances human life must be protected and cared for from conception until natural death. From the fundamental right to life, and the corresponding right to live with dignity, flow all other indispensable civil and human rights that enable a democracy to flourish. In the public policy arena, the Conference supports:

- State initiatives that provide alternatives to abortion and assistance to pregnant women,
- Legislation that seeks to protect the lives of unborn children,
- Regulations on human research to uphold the life and dignity of the human person,
- Opposition to insurance regulations mandating coverage for abortion or contraception,
- Upholding the ban on human cloning,
- Upholding the ban on assisted suicide, and
- Upholding the constitutional ban on the death penalty.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Children and youth are being exposed to rising levels of violence, sexual content and harmful images at increasingly younger ages. To combat these cultural tides, and to recognize and maintain their vulnerability, children must be given the strongest opportunity to grow within a family life that nurtures the development of the child. Thus, policies that strengthen and promote traditional marriage and the family must be encouraged. MCC supports:

- Upholding the traditional definition of marriage and the family,
- Policies that protect the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family,
- Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws, and
- Policies to streamline foster care services and payments to ensure critical services are provided to children in need.

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HEALTH CARE

A lack of health care for all constitutes a moral failure in our state and our nation. Justice demands that adequate and ethical health care be available for every citizen, especially the poor and vulnerable. Attempts to reform health care must focus on access, availability and the dignity of the person and families in need of care. In the area of health care, the Conference supports:

- Expansion of health coverage for low-and moderate-income uninsured individuals and families,
- The protection of Medicaid funding,
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the institutional integrity of faith-based providers, and
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the Certificate of Need process.

EDUCATION

Parents have the primary right and responsibility to educate their children how they best see fit. Yet Michigan faces unique challenges in the area of education reform because of discriminatory constitutional language. In order to recognize and support a parent's right to educate their child, any education reform must ensure access to educational choice. The Conference supports:

- Mandatory consultation between public school districts and the non-public schools located within their jurisdiction regarding the appropriate distribution of federal program dollars,
- Protection of existing public school choice for all parents,
- Fair treatment of non-public school students regarding eligibility for college scholarship and financial aid programs,
- Protection of non-public schools from excessive regulation,
- Protection of virtual learning experiences and course content that includes dimensions of faith,
- Providing for expanded science and technology learning opportunities,
- Safe and adequate transportation for all students, and
- An end to the state constitutional ban on aid to non-public schools.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE & REGULATORY POLICIES

A clear indication of the moral strength of a society lies in how well it cares for those most in need. In Michigan, this measure exists partly within the departments of Human Services and Community Health, both of which fund programs that assist the state's vulnerable population. Thus, the state budget must be crafted each year in a manner that ensures the health and safety of the poor and disadvantaged. Similarly, those who are struggling to survive in an increasingly hostile economic climate must not be adversely affected by regulatory policies. The Conference supports:

- The allocation of scarce budget resources to preserve essential services for vulnerable persons,
 - Affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly-funded services,
 - Providing limited immunity for private human service providers for the provision of services otherwise provided by the state,
 - Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for not-for-profit organizations,
 - State identification card, drivers' license, and marriage license policies that respect the dignity of residents who live in our State regardless of citizenship,
 - Affordable housing for low and moderate income families and individuals,
 - Policies that encourage workplace justice, including adequate wages for childcare workers,
 - Affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers, and
 - Increasing the Unemployment Insurance multiplier.
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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Our task as a society should be to restore a sense of civility and responsibility to everyday life, and promote crime prevention and genuine rehabilitation. The Michigan legal system must hold offenders accountable and challenge them to change their lives, reach out to victims and reject violence, restore a sense of community, and resist the violence that has engulfed so much of our culture. In an effort to advance restorative justice, the Conference supports:

- Adequate and professional legal representation to all accused individuals regardless of economic status,
- The right of faith-based providers in the delivery of services to incarcerated individuals, regardless of citizenship,
- Reforming and enhancing the provision of health care services provided in Michigan prisons, including end of life care,
- A comprehensive approach to prisoner rehabilitation and re-entry programs that includes continuing education, adequate personal identification, transportation, housing and employment assistance, and
- Sentencing guidelines and parole practices that reflect an individual's potential threat to society, including amending Michigan's mandatory minimum sentencing statutes impacting juveniles and certain drug offenses, and elimination of life without parole for juveniles convicted as adults.

FEDERAL ISSUES

When addressing federal issues, the Michigan Catholic Conference works in collaboration with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Only when the USCCB has taken a position on an issue will the MCC engage with the Michigan congressional delegation.

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