



FREEDOM TO SERVE

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Faith informs and drives Catholics—and other people of goodwill—to love their neighbor, to be concerned for the well-being of others, and to provide assistance that uplifts the dignity of every person. St. Teresa of Calcutta said that “faith in action is love—and love in action is service.” There are many lived examples of this in the Catholic Church, where individuals are guided daily by their faith. For example, motivated by Jesus’s call to “serve the least of these,” Pope Francis has housed refugees at the Vatican, celebrated his birthday with the homeless, and provided encouragement to those in prison. More locally, individuals are living their values in the community through efforts such as hosting clothing drives, donating personal needs items, and visiting the sick.

Staff and volunteers at Catholic agencies provide services daily to those most in need. Health care, immigration and refugee assistance, food pantries and soup kitchens, foster care and adoption, and addiction and domestic counseling, are just a few of the services Catholic individuals and organizations have provided for decades—without regard for one’s race, religion, or ability to pay. The Church’s impact is also largely felt through its schools, where teachers and staff provide a high quality, faith-based curriculum for all who desire a Catholic education. In fact, after the government, the Catholic Church is the largest provider of education, health care, and social services across the country and across Michigan—an accomplishment that would not be possible without the many employees and volunteers who live the Catholic faith in a very real way.

The significant number of individuals and institutions of faith present in the public realm is protected by the nation’s

longstanding commitment to religious freedom. Unfortunately, too often this cherished American right is misunderstood, reduced simply to the freedom of worship. Rightly understood, religious freedom protects the right to exercise freely one’s religious beliefs, including their freedom to serve others. It allows individuals to conduct their lives in accordance with their faith, *free from government coercion*, including in the political process and daily work.¹

During a 2015 visit to the United States, Pope Francis recognized that various religious denominations “have greatly contributed to building and strengthening society.” This **focus** publication examines why protecting the Freedom to Serve in the public realm is important for the common good, and how the people of Michigan—especially the vulnerable and marginalized—rely on the education, health care, and charitable services provided by the Catholic faithful and entities across the state. ■



1. Holly Taylor Coolman, *Religious Freedom: It Is More Than Worship*, 6/29/17, <https://goo.gl/Q9hTyv>

PROMOTING THE FREEDOM TO SERVE IN MICHIGAN

Across Michigan, the Catholic Church regularly exercises its Freedom to Serve, especially in the areas of education, health care, and charitable service. In February 2017, Michigan Catholic Conference and the seven arch/dioceses in Michigan—Detroit, Gaylord, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Marquette, and Saginaw—produced a series of short films and television commercials in an effort to highlight the assistance Catholic agencies and their staff provide to others, especially the most vulnerable. These films and commercials can be viewed at CatholicsServe.com. Each of Michigan's eighty-three counties witness the impact of religious service toward others, through schools, health care centers, charities, hospitals, parishes, and other efforts.

EDUCATION

Catholic education in the United States dates back to the Franciscans, who opened a school in present-day St. Augustine, Florida in 1606. In Michigan, Catholic schools have educated children since the early 1800s. Most Holy Trinity Elementary School in Detroit is one of the state's oldest schools with nearly 200 years of teaching students.² Today, approximately 222 Michigan Catholic schools, through their dedicated teachers and staff, provide strong academics, close-knit communities, and opportunities for service that help students grow. Together, Catholic schools and their personnel emphasize values-based education, serving families of all races, faiths, and income levels. According to National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) data, in 2016 approximately twenty percent of the students educated in Michigan Catholic schools were minority students, and over thirteen percent

were non-Catholics. Additionally, seventy-two percent of Michigan Catholic schools—from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron, from the Upper Peninsula to Michigan's southern border—participated in federal nutrition programs, serving thousands of free meals each day to disadvantaged students.



"I don't know how we could have dealt with [the deaths of three students] without being able to talk about faith."

Mike Khoury, Detroit Cristo Rey High School President

HEALTH CARE

Across Michigan, staff of Catholic health care centers, hospitals, and hospice programs provide quality, person-centered care to millions annually.³ Motivated by their religious mission, these agencies and their staff welcome people of all faiths and backgrounds, providing special attention to the vulnerable and persons in poverty. Catholic health care has a long tradition of serving others, especially during difficult times. Detroit's St. Frances Cabrini Clinic began in 1834 as a medical facility for cholera epidemic victims and continues to

IS THERE A "WALL OF SEPARATION" BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE?

In an increasingly secular culture, pressure against faith-based institutions and individuals to leave the public realm has grown more frequent, in part due to misconceptions about American rights. One major misconception arises from the manner by which society has come to understand

the phrase "separation of church and state." Where does that term, which is so widely quoted in political discussions today, come from? This phrase is not included in the U.S. Constitution or the Declaration of Independence, despite what many believe. The term dates back to 1802, in a letter President Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptists Association. In this statement, President Jefferson said: **"I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof thus building a wall of separation between church and State."**

serve those in need today.⁴ In 1845, members of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul converted log cabins into a free hospital for the poor within the city of Detroit, which later offered “charitable, nonsectarian care” as a military hospital during the Civil and Spanish-American wars.⁵ During the influenza epidemic of 1918, “every available sister [of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Nazareth] reported for duty” at Borgess Hospital in Kalamazoo to care for the suffering. The sisters even volunteered their own beds so more patients could be treated.⁶ In each of Michigan’s seven Catholic arch/dioceses, religious orders have shaped and staffed health care institutions. Working alongside lay Catholics, they are committed to the value of every patient and upholding their dignity as human persons.



“I can’t separate my life as a physician and my life as a sister because I am one composite being.”

Sr. Mary Gretchen Hoffman, RSM, MD

CHARITABLE CARE

A central part of the Church’s mission is to treat all people as Christ would treat them. Catholic charitable agencies

In this writing, Thomas Jefferson speaks of “the wall of separation” in order to *protect people of faith* from an intrusive government. His aim was not to eliminate religion from having a public presence in society. In fact, the legacy of the nation’s third president, throughout his public career, shows that he himself did not keep the two entities entirely separate. As governor of Virginia, for example, he called for a public day of thanksgiving and prayer “to Almighty God,” asking Him “for the continuance of his favour and protection to these United States.”⁷ The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, in stating that Congress cannot make a law respecting an establishment of a national religion,

and parishes live out that mission daily through the efforts of their staff and volunteers. Most have existed in Michigan for decades and have provided critical services to their communities, including food, clothing, shelter, counseling, adoption and foster care services, employment training, legal assistance, refugee resettlement, and more. Additionally, the employees and volunteers at these agencies adapt, adjusting services based on current needs. In fact, Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee Counties became one of the largest suppliers of fresh water to those affected by the Flint water disaster. Dioceses and parishes have also responded to the presence and needs of minority populations, such as Native Americans in the Leelanau Peninsula and migrant workers in Ottawa County. Catholic entities serve as inclusive and diverse components of local communities, motivated by faith in the spirit of ‘loving thy neighbor.’ ■



“Catholic Charities...became one of the largest suppliers of fresh water to those afflicted by the Flint water crisis.”

2. Most Holy Trinity School, *About Us*, accessed 7/31/17, <https://goo.gl/YnYKRj> 3. 2016 *Official Catholic Directory*, P.J. Kenedy & Sons 4. St. Frances Cabrini Clinic, *History*, accessed 7/28/2017, <https://goo.gl/wDtTRQ>

protects the rights of all people to exercise their faith beliefs, without government interference. People and institutions of different faiths have enjoyed and exercised this right for centuries. The time has come for a proper understanding of Church and State to reinsert itself in society. ■

5. St. Mary’s Hospital, *Historic Detroit*, <https://goo.gl/5xKaXb> 6. Suzy Farren, *A Call to Care: The Women Who Build Catholic Healthcare in America*, page 111 7. Thomas Jefferson, *Proclamation Appointing a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer*, 11/11/1779, <https://goo.gl/FdWxwN>

CATHOLIC PRESENCE IN MICHIGAN

CHALLENGES TO THE FREEDOM TO SERVE



The U.S. bishops have said that when religious freedom is respected, religion itself flourishes and, in turn, society flourishes.⁹ Regrettably, in the last decade burdensome and unnecessary federal mandates attempted to place restrictions on the very religious agencies that serve the immediate needs of vulnerable persons in communities across the country. These unprecedented mandates, which have especially challenged those who work in Catholic child placement services, schools, hospitals, and other charitable services, have forced Catholic agencies to choose between their deeply-held religious beliefs and their mission to serve others. Within Catholic agencies, staff and volunteers bring faith to all they do. Faith is a critical part of a person's identity, not something that can simply be left at the door. Rather than celebrating the contributions of people and institutions of faith to the nation, federal regulations have hindered their Freedom to Serve.

The Catholic Church is committed to continuing its public work in a manner consistent with its faith mission. The Church will continue to speak to the importance of the Freedom to Serve. Here are a few ways that Michigan Catholics can help support this effort:

Watch and share the Freedom to Serve videos at **CatholicsServe.com**

- Donate/volunteer at a local Catholic school, health care center, charitable agency, or parish.
- Bring faith beliefs into the public discourse by joining the Catholic Advocacy Network, an email platform that allows individuals to stay informed about current issues and to contact their elected officials about those issues. Sign-up at micatholic.org/can/. ■

8. Specialized homes include institutions that house youth, unwed mothers, the handicapped, or battered women, or that serve as places for drug rehabilitation

9. U.S. Bishops, *Freedom to Build Stronger Communities*, <https://goo.gl/cJmGFj>

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