



Michigan's 7 Catholic bishops urge state leaders to remember needy

5:34 PM, Apr. 14, 2011

The seven Catholic bishops of Michigan sent a letter this week to Gov. Rick Snyder and legislative leaders that asks them to pay “greater attention to the needs of the poor, the unemployed and other vulnerable persons.”

The letter is part of an attempt by Catholic leaders in Michigan to prevent budget cuts and tax changes that they say would harm the needy in Michigan. It was signed by Archbishop of Detroit Allen Vigneron and bishops from Gaylord, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Saginaw and Marquette.

But the spokeswoman for Gov. Snyder said that cuts are necessary to balance Michigan’s budget.

“Extremely difficult decisions had to be made with this budget unfortunately,” said Geralyn Lasher. “When you’re facing a \$1.5 billion deficit, you have to make very difficult decisions. We’re not in good times, and so we have to make good choices. If the fiscal picture was different, many of these difficult decisions would not have to be made.”

The Michigan Catholic Conference, a lobbying group, said the letter was probably the first time since 2003 that all the bishops of Michigan have teamed up to write such a letter. In 2003, they were advocating against partial-birth abortion.

The new letter, sent Monday, says: “It is a well-known fact that a very clear indicator of the moral strength of any society is in the way its neediest citizens are treated. As such, budget priorities are significant moral choices.”

The bishops said they have “serious concern” about the budget proposed by Snyder.

In particular, the bishops said they’re concerned about the proposed elimination of the Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit, the creation of a 48-month hard deadline for public assistance, and the elimination of assistance programs for those with past drug-related offenses.

But Lasher said that the elimination of the tax credit would help preserve Medicaid programs. Also, she said the proposed elimination of programs for those with past drug-related offenses will no longer be proposed by Snyder.