



## MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 2003-2004 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

*“It is important to keep in mind that when the Church involves herself in social action, she does so as the flowering of her life of Faith. We are impelled to this course because the convictions of the Faith that we profess in word and deed demand that we be actively concerned about justice in our society.”*

John Cardinal Dearden  
Founding Chairman  
Michigan Catholic Conference

Since 1963, the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) has served as the official voice of the seven Catholic dioceses in Michigan on public policy issues. For forty years, the MCC has served as the coordinating unit in this regard so that the official Catholic Church position on public policy matters may be presented with one voice to the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government.

The staff of the Michigan Catholic Conference assists the bishops of the seven Roman Catholic Dioceses in the State of Michigan by giving witness to Gospel values in public affairs. Under the direction of the MCC Board of Directors, the MCC will:

- Take positions on public policies and programs affecting the common good of all Michigan residents and the interests of Catholics;
- Speak for the Roman Catholic Church in Michigan before all branches of state government and before groups concerned with social policy;
- Identify needs in areas of morality, health, welfare, education, religious liberty, human and civil rights, and determine ways to meet those needs;
- Foster public understanding of the Church’s teaching on social issues.

At the beginning of each legislative session the MCC issues a set of legislative priorities. These priorities flow from the basic belief in the inherent dignity of each person and in society’s responsibility to ensure that dignity, the Catholic Church’s teachings and traditions as they apply to today’s political environment, and the fundamental principle of justice for all people.

They have been prepared in consultation with the MCC Education and Social Policy Committees and reflect the stewardship of their responsibilities. The priorities also reflect the collaborative efforts of Conference associates identifying issues that will strengthen the Church’s position with one voice.

The MCC’s 2003-2004 legislative priorities are not a catalog of the Conference’s position on every important issue that may arise over the next two years. Rather, they are intended to communicate a sense of what state government’s

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top priorities should be in order to foster the common good. The MCC's priorities for the 92<sup>nd</sup> Legislature target six categories: religious freedom; human life; education; health care; families, children and social justice; and fiscal and regulatory policy. They were approved by the MCC Board of Directors on March 12, 2003 and are presented here.

## **Religious Freedom**

Freedom of conscience and of religion is a primary and inalienable right of the human person. Insofar as it touches the innermost sphere of the spirit, one can even say that it upholds the justification, deeply rooted in each individual, of all other liberties. The MCC has an interest in legislation that protects religious freedom, limits government intrusion into religious matters, and allows for reasonable collaboration between public and religious entities. In advancing religious freedom.....

### **The Conference Supports:**

- The rights of faith-based providers and all individuals to conscience protections in the delivery of services;
- The equal application of the law to all persons and institutions regardless of their faith;
- The enactment of a state religious freedom protection act.



## **Human Life**

In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. From the point of conception to the point of natural death, all human beings are sacred, deserving of respect, and worthy of government protection. In the public policy arena.....

### **The Conference Supports:**

- State initiatives that provide alternatives to abortion;
- State initiatives that promote and facilitate adoption;
- Insurance regulations that do not mandate coverage for abortion or contraception;
- A ban on aborted children research;
- The prohibition on assisted suicide;
- The constitutional prohibition of the death penalty.
- The prohibition on cloning;



## **Education**

All children, by virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to a quality education. Parents have the right to choose how that education is provided. Any effort to improve schools must include a commitment to educational choice. Continued educational reform must be linked to support for school choice in order to provide access to educational excellence for all, and to insure that no child is left behind. Therefore.....

### **The Conference Supports:**

- Removing the cap on charter schools;
  - Expansion of existing public school choice;
  - Safe and adequate transportation for all students;
  - Full implementation of the Federal "No Child Left Behind Act";
  - Appropriate distribution of federal program dollars;
  - Enactment of the Federal "Education Freedom Act";
  - An end to the state constitutional ban on aid to non-public schools.
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## **Health Care**

Equitable, accessible and ethical health care is an essential safeguard of human life. Health care is a basic human right, and genuine health care reform, recognizing the dignity of persons and the unique needs of the poor, is a matter of fundamental justice.



## **Children, Families, and Social Justice**

Children are among the most vulnerable members of the human family. As policies are advanced to help children, they must support families, since children's lives are nurtured or neglected, enhanced or diminished, by the quality of family life.

Since the family is the primary, indispensable, and essential unit of society, policies must maintain and promote marriage, and strengthen the family. Of key concern too, is ensuring that economic policies are advanced that are shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good. In order to put children and families first.....



## **Fiscal and Regulatory Issues**

The state budget is a moral statement for the people of the State of Michigan. Through it, the values of the state are expressed. With it, basic needs of citizens are guaranteed. By it, the mandate to work for a just society comes closer to realization. Similarly, the challenges to care for an environmentally rich Michigan also offer fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

### **The Conference Supports:**

- Expansion of health coverage for low and moderate-income uninsured individuals and families;
- Expansion of MI-Child health program to include unborn children;
- The protection of adequate Medicaid funding;
- Reform of the small group health insurance market;
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the institutional integrity of faith-based providers.

### **The Conference Supports:**

- The traditional definition of marriage and the family;
- Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws;
- State identification card and drivers' license policies that respect the dignity of residents who live in our State regardless of citizenship;
- Humane visitation rights for people who are incarcerated;
- Affordable housing for low and moderate income families and individuals;
- Affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers;
- Increasing the unemployment insurance multiplier;
- Opposition to enactment of legislation banning local living wage ordinances.

### **The Conference Supports:**

- The allocation of scarce budget resources to preserve essential services for vulnerable persons;
  - Regulation of the payday loan industry;
  - Affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly-funded services;
  - Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for not-for-profit organizations;
  - Creation of a State Earned Income Tax Credit.
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## **Federal Issues**

When addressing federal legislative issues, the Michigan Catholic Conference will work in collaboration with the United States Catholic Conference. Only when the USCC has taken a position on an issue will the MCC engage with the Michigan Congressional Delegation and federal agencies.



In these difficult times for state government, it is important to recall the words of Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat when she said, "It shows weakness of mind to hold to the beaten track through fear of innovations. Times change and to keep up with them, we must modify our methods."

It is in this spirit that the Michigan Catholic Conference participates in the ongoing dialogue surrounding the issues presented here. The range of issues is diverse, but the Catholic community brings to the public debate its rich tradition of service to the poor, education of the young, and care for the sick in its pursuit of the common good.



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