

MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 1999-2000 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

“Our democratic form of government is a system, a means, and not an end in itself. As such, the moral value of any democratic government depends on its conformity to the values of the natural law and the God-given structure of human life. These values begin with respect for the dignity of every human person, the most fundamental criterion for all political life and the necessary and obligatory starting point for all civil law.”

— His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida
Homily at Gubernatorial Inaugural Mass
January 1, 1999

The Michigan Catholic Conference is the public policy voice for the Catholic Church in the State of Michigan. In this capacity, the MCC is the sole representative of the public policy positions of the Church to the legislative, executive and judicial branches of state government, as well as to the Michigan Congressional delegation. In cooperation and coordination with parish and school organizations, diocesan offices, and other religious and non-sectarian associations, it advocates on a wide range of public policy issues that affect the moral and physical well-being of the people of Michigan.

The principles used to develop this legislative agenda for the Michigan Catholic Conference 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.

The Michigan Catholic Conference Legislative Agenda for 1999-2000, prepared in keeping with the missions of the Social Services and Education Committees of the Conference, was approved by the MCC Board of Directors on December 2, 1998. The agenda also reflects the collaborative efforts of Conference associates identifying issues that will strengthen the church’s position with one voice.

The issues identified here represent the principal focus for the 1999-2000 Michigan legislative session. It is understood there will likewise be involvement in additional ongoing issues and new issues as they arise.

Children and Families

Policies and state programs must support the stability of families. While no government can love a child and no policy can substitute for a family's care, government can either support or undermine families as they cope with the moral, social, and economic stresses of caring for children and holding families together. The emphasis on continued welfare reform should be reducing poverty and dependency and must be done in concert with protecting human life and human dignity. The Michigan Catholic Conference will advocate for policies which strengthen family life while preserving a safety net for the vulnerable.

Priority Issues:

- ◆ Strengthen Family Life
- ◆ Children in Poverty
- ◆ Hunger
- ◆ Housing

Education

The Catholic Church is committed to ensuring that all of Michigan's children obtain a quality education, regardless of where that education takes place. This commitment to excellence in education means that the Michigan Catholic Conference will continue to work for a just educational system where the right of parents to choose the educational setting which is best for their children is recognized and that all students are able to learn in safe, nurturing environments.

To this end, the Michigan Catholic Conference will support initiatives which recognize parental rights, make better use of the state's limited resources, or improve all of Michigan's schools by making them safer. The MCC will also advance the principle that non-public school students and professional staff have the right and opportunity for equitable participation in all federal government programs administered by the State Department of Education, especially those which address the needs of the educationally, economically, and socially disadvantaged. Conversely, MCC will oppose any efforts to undermine the gains made by parents who choose to educate their children outside the traditional public school setting, or represent frivolous regulation or intrusive government intervention into the lives of non-public school parents and students.

Priority Issues:

- ◆ Educational Choice
 - ◆ Removing the Cap on Charter Schools
 - ◆ Safe and Adequate Transportation for All Students
 - ◆ Appropriate Distribution of Federal Program Dollars
 - ◆ End to the Constitutional Ban on Aid to Non-Public Schools
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Health

Health care must be promoted and supported by the cooperative efforts of the public and private sectors for the good of the individual and society as a whole. The Michigan Catholic Conference holds that necessary health services are a provision rooted in a basic human right. Any reform must be premised in a belief in this basic human right and hold to the consciences of individuals and institutions.

Priority Issues:

- ◆ Access to Basic Health Care Services
- ◆ Pain Management
- ◆ Hospice Care
- ◆ Community-Based Public and Mental Health Systems

Life

All human life is sacred. Consistent with this belief is the commitment to the legal protection for human beings from the unborn to the dying. State policy should ban the barbaric practice of partial-birth abortion, should prohibit public expenditures for abortion, and should stand firm with the ban on assisted suicide. Conversely the death penalty, in any form or fashion, must be opposed as a direct attack on human life. While society has a right to protect itself, there are better approaches to protecting people from violent crime than state sanctioned killing. As the single most influential institution in society maintaining a consistent pro-life ethic, the Catholic Church will continue to address these issues with reason and passion.

Priority Issues:

- ◆ Abortion
- ◆ Death Penalty
- ◆ Assisted Suicide

Taxation and Finance

All state economic decisions and tax policies must be judged in light of whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Decisions regarding these issues must flow from sound policies based on the principle of distributive justice. The Michigan Catholic Conference will advocate for a human services budget which continues to strengthen Michigan families and for a state Earned Income Tax Credit that ensures that working families will not have to raise their children in poverty. In addition, the MCC will continue its advocacy against the unfair burden of taxation upon Church entities through direct taxation or the imposition of fees, for these dollars are best used for the purposes for which they were donated and should not be seized by the state or local government.

Priority Issues:

- ◆ Michigan State Budget
 - ◆ Tax Policy
 - ◆ Maintenance of the tax-exempt status of not-for-profit organizations
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Federal Issues

When addressing federal legislative issues, the Michigan Catholic Conference works in collaboration with the United States Catholic Conference. Key issues of importance are: education saving accounts, Lethal Drug Abuse Prevention Act, health care reform, Charitable Giving Relief Act, partial-birth abortion, environmental issues, immigration and Social Security for clergy.

As Pope John XXIII said, "The dignity of the human person involves the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one's part to the common good of the citizens." It is in this spirit which 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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