

MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 2001-2002 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

“The Church has a unique role in the political life of society. While confusion and controversy often surround the participation of religious groups in public life, it is clear that major public issues have moral dimensions and religious values have significant public consequences. Spirituality and politics are distinct but they are not separable for political judgments are inevitably permeated with moral and religious assumptions.”

-His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida

Since 1963, the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) has served as the official voice of the seven Catholic dioceses in Michigan on public policy issues. The MCC serves as the coordinating unit in this regard so that the official Catholic Church position on public policy matters 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.

The Catholic community is first and foremost interested in the common good and the role government plays in creating a culture that respects and cherishes life and the dignity of every human person. The Church has not only the right, but also a serious obligation, to speak out on public policy matters. In its engagement in the political process, the Church connects moral principles to current issues. It is in this spirit that the Michigan Catholic Conference offers these legislative priorities for the 2001-2002 legislative session.

The principles used to develop 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.

The issues identified here represent the principal focus for the 2001-2002 Michigan legislative session. It is understood there will likewise be involvement in additional ongoing issues as they arise.

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:

- Abortion-free insurance coverage
- State appropriations for life affirming organizations and programs
- State initiatives that promote and facilitate adoption
- Informed consent for women seeking abortion-inducing drugs
- The prohibition of assisted suicide
- The constitutional prohibition of the death penalty



Education

All children, by virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to a quality education. Parents have a primary duty and right to participate in the education of their children; as such, they have the right to choose how that education is provided. The state is bound by the principle of distributive justice to ensure that public funding for education is available so that parents are freely able to choose schools in accordance with their conscience. Therefore.....

The Conference Supports:

- Removing the cap on charter schools
- Regular testing of teachers in their academic subjects
- Safe and adequate transportation for all students
- Appropriate distribution of federal program dollars
- An end to the constitutional ban on aid to non-public schools



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.

The Conference Supports:

- Expansion of health coverage for low-and moderate-income uninsured individuals and families
 - Expanded access to primary health care services for under-served low-income school-age children and pregnant women
 - Protection for the conscience of health care providers
 - Opposition to legislation which threatens the Catholic health care mission
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Children and Families

Our children's future is shaped both by values of their parents and the policies of our state and nation. The Church has traditionally supported policies that strengthen the quality of life, with particular attention to families with special needs. In order to put children and families first.....

The Conference Supports:

- The traditional definition of marriage and the family
- Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws
- Quality, affordable, subsidized child care opportunities for low-income families



Basic Human Needs

Catholic tradition calls us to put first the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Because human beings are sacred, we must help to ensure that all persons have a safe place to live, food to eat, and clothes to wear. The economy must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.

The Conference Supports:

- Preservation and expansion of essential services for vulnerable persons
- Affordable housing for low and moderate income families and individuals
- Affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers



Fiscal Policies

Society as a whole, acting through the partnership of public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights. Decisions regarding budget and tax issues must flow from sound policies based on the principle of distributive justice. Recognizing that neither private charity nor government alone can meet all human needs.....

The Conference Supports:

- 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
 - A State human services budget which continues to strengthen Michigan families
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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.



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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