

2007–2008 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

In our common situation, rendered difficult by the secularized culture, let us seek to understand the mission entrusted to us by the Lord and to carry it out as best we can.

—Pope Benedict XVI
November 2006

From education to economic justice, to the protection of human life and the promotion of the dignity of every individual, the Michigan Catholic Conference each legislative session addresses dozens of public policy issues that significantly influence the common good of the State of Michigan. It is the task of the Conference, therefore, to evaluate every measure that is introduced in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate, and to examine with great scrutiny its effect on the residents of Michigan and on the Church herself.

With this background, the Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors has approved an advocacy agenda for the 2007–2008 legislative session. Armed with a wide array of critical issues that address the Church's belief in the inherent right of all parents to educate their child how they best see fit; issues that work to ensure every resident of the state is provided health care as a fundamental right; issues that speak to the sanctity of every human

life from conception until natural death, Michigan Catholic Conference staff brings to the legislature, as well as the executive and judicial branches, sound public policy positions that are rooted in the Beatitudes and the principles of Catholic social teaching.

In the pages that follow, this FOCUS essay will itemize those policy issues that the Conference will advocate for or against in the 94th legislative session. Of specific concern to the Church is upholding the state's ban on human cloning and the prohibition of destructive embryonic research, as well as working with the executive and legislative branches to bring health care coverage to all Michigan citizens. Numerous other issues, including the protection of immigrants, proper allocation of critical state dollars for programs that benefit the poor and vulnerable, and protecting the religious freedoms upon which our nation was founded, are detailed here in the Michigan Catholic Conference's advocacy priorities for the 2007–2008 legislative session.

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 an effort to advance religious freedom, the Conference supports:

- The rights of faith-based providers and all individuals to conscience protections in the delivery of services, and
- The equal application of the law to all persons and institutions regardless of their faith.

Human life must be respected and protected from the moment of conception until natural death. From the first moment of existence, a human being must be identified as a unified individual endowed with human nature and as such is the proper bearer of fundamental human rights. Every life is sacred because the person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of God. In the public policy arena, the Conference supports:

Human Life

- Policies that promote and fund adult stem cell research,
- Legislation that protects the lives of unborn children,
- Regulations on research in order to uphold the life and dignity of the human person,
- State initiatives that provide alternatives to abortion and assistance to pregnant women,
- Opposition to insurance regulations that mandate coverage for abortion or contraception,
- Upholding the ban on human cloning,
- Upholding the ban on assisted suicide, and
- Upholding the constitutional ban on the death penalty.

Children & Families

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. In order to put children and families first, the Conference supports:

- Upholding the traditional definition of marriage and the family,
 - Policies that protect the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family,
 - Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws, and
 - Policies to streamline foster care services and payments to ensure critical services are provided to children in need.
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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. The Conference supports:

- Expansion of health coverage for low- and moderate-income uninsured individuals and families,
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the institutional integrity of faith-based providers,
- The protection of Medicaid funding, and
- Reforming and enhancing the provision of health care services provided in Michigan prisons.

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. The Conference supports:

Education

- Mandatory consultation between public school districts and the non-public schools located within their jurisdiction regarding the appropriate distribution of federal program dollars,
- Protection of existing public school choice for all parents,
- Protection of non-public schools from excessive regulation,
- Protection of virtual learning experiences and course content that includes dimensions of faith,
- Providing for expanded science and technological learning opportunities,
- Safe and adequate transportation for all students, and
- An end to the state constitutional ban on aid to non-public schools.

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Economic Justice & Regulatory Policies

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. Of key concern as well is ensuring that economic policies, shaped by moral principles, are advanced. 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. The Conference supports:

- The allocation of scarce budget resources to preserve essential services for vulnerable persons,
- Affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly-funded services,
- Providing limited immunity for private human service providers for the provision of services otherwise provided by the state,
- Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for not-for-profit organizations,
- State identification card and drivers' license policies that respect the dignity of residents who live in our state regardless of citizenship,
- Amending Michigan's mandatory minimum sentencing statutes impacting juveniles and certain specific drug offenses,
- 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, and
- Preservation of Consumer Choice regarding public utilities.

Federal Issues

When addressing federal legislative issues, the Michigan Catholic Conference works in collaboration with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Only when the USCCB has taken a position on an issue will the MCC engage the Michigan congressional delegation.

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Staff Contact: David Maluchnik, Director of Communications
dmaluchnik@micatholicconference.org

For additional free copies of this FOCUS, contact the Public Policy Division at
(517) 372-9310 or FAX at (517) 372-3940

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