

Focus

2015-2016
ADVOCACY
PRINCIPLES

A Blueprint for the Common Good

“...the obligation to teach about moral values that should shape our lives, including our public lives, is central to the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ.” —Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB

AT THE BEGINNING of each session of the Michigan Legislature, which runs over a two-year period, Michigan Catholic Conference lays out its advocacy principles to promote the common good of the state. In light of the Catholic Church's teaching to defend human life from conception through natural death, and to promote human dignity at all times, these principles extend to a wide-range of public policy categories. Legislative advocacy is necessary to encourage a just society, one that seeks to eradicate poverty through strengthened family life and quality educational opportunities for all students. To promote justice and to elevate the moral fiber of the state, Michigan Catholic Conference staff interacts on a daily basis with elected officials of both parties, their staffs, members of the administration, and supporters from organizations seeking to accomplish similar policy goals.

Following the November general election, Republicans will govern the state with an increased majority in both chambers of the Legislature and continued control of state government. Senate Republicans will hold the largest majority the state has witnessed since 1954, with a 27-11 advantage over Democrats. In the 110-member House of Representatives, 63 members are Republicans with 47 Democrats within the minority. At the Executive Branch, the Republican Governor, Attorney General, and Secretary of State all won re-election last fall. Michigan's 14-member congressional delegation retains a 9-5 Republican advantage, with GOP newcomers including John Moolenaar, Mike Bishop and David Trott; Brenda Lawrence and Debbie Dingell represent the incoming Democratic congresswomen. After the retirement of long-serving United States Senator Carl Levin, former congressman Gary Peters will join fellow Democrat Debbie

Stabenow as Michigan's representation in the congressional upper chamber.

The focus of the 98th Michigan Legislature will likely be on economic matters as legislative leaders and the administration continue their efforts to bolster the state's finances. As legislation is crafted to move Michigan forward, it is critical for elected officials to remember the poor and the vulnerable in their public policy discussions. Michigan Catholic Conference has long stated that the clear indicator of the moral strength of a society is the manner by which it cares for its most needy citizens. Last session, gains were made as important policies that benefit low-income persons in the areas of legal counsel, health care, and energy assistance were signed into law. More work will be necessary however, especially within the state budget, as shortfalls for both the current and forthcoming fiscal years are projected. Attentiveness toward a proposed Department of Health and Human Services and how its work to assist the state's poor population can strengthen and promote family life will be necessary.

State budget and pro-family policies have long been priorities for Michigan Catholic Conference. Likewise, the Conference looks forward to working with elected officials to strengthen religious freedom in Michigan and to ensure Catholic institutions are legally able to operate according to the teachings of the Church. The Conference's continued advocacy to promote quality education will remain essential as choice in education and options for families are among the greatest anti-poverty tools that can be employed. This **focus** publication highlights specific policy issues of interest to Michigan Catholic Conference for the 2015-2016 legislative session. ■

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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

“Religious freedom is not simply freedom of thought or private devotion. It is the freedom to live according to ethical principles, both privately and publicly, consequent to the truth one has found.” —Pope Francis

AS AMERICANS, we are truly blessed with constitutionally-protected freedoms that make our country unique. First among these freedoms is the ability to speak and believe for ourselves. We have the right to freely exercise our religious beliefs and to listen to and act according to our conscience. Over the course of our history, these bedrock principles have been defended time and time again. More recently, actions taken by the federal government and in some states have challenged our ability to follow our collective conscience and to provide services to the general public in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. To that end, the Conference supports:

- The rights of faith-based providers, institutions, and all individuals to conscience protections in the delivery of services and in their practices,
- The equal application of the law to all persons and institutions regardless of their faith,
- Opposition to insurance regulations mandating coverage for abortion, or contraception, or sterilization, and
- Adoption of a state Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE & REGULATORY POLICIES

“Poverty is a plague against which humanity must fight without cease.” —Pope Benedict XVI

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING reminds us that “there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter,” as well as the right to education and employment, among others (*Gaudium et Spes*, par. 26). In all places and at all times, Christians are called upon to uplift the poor and to help create opportunities through which our brothers and sisters may carve their paths in life. The Conference supports:

- Amending tax policies that negatively impact the working poor,
- The allocation of scarce budget resources to provide essential services for vulnerable persons,
- 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,
- Affordable housing for low and moderate income families and individuals, and
- Affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers.

EDUCATION

“As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions.” —Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2229

A QUALITY EDUCATION is essential for the development of the human person and a necessary tool to eliminate poverty. Our society depends upon an educated citizenry. As the primary educators, it is essential that parents have as many educational options as possible in order to choose what is best for their children. Article VIII, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution, which prohibits state aid to non-public schools and prevents elected officials from considering effective and proven policies, is contrary to that principle. Michigan’s school children deserve excellent schools of all kinds. To this end, the Conference supports:

- Reimbursement to non-public schools for state mandated, non-educational services,
- Expansion of shared time services to include kindergarten instruction,
- Continued equitable participation of non-public schools in federal programs in districts that are undergoing reform efforts,
- Policies that seek to improve the quality of public education,
- Requirement that all public school districts have open enrollment policies,
- Protection of non-public schools from excessive regulation,
- Adequate funding for the Michigan Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs, and
- Amending Article VIII, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution to allow the Michigan Legislature greater flexibility for necessary education reforms.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

“It is necessary to emphasize the right of children to grow up within a family, with a father and a mother able to create a suitable environment for their development and emotional maturity.” —Pope Francis

UNITING ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN together for life within marriage is vital to a healthy society. Through these marriages, children are united with their mother and father, who each uniquely contribute to the raising of the next generation. While marriage is the building block of the family, families, in turn, provide the necessary foundation for all society. A strong society requires strong families. Therefore, policies that strengthen and promote traditional marriage and the family must be encouraged. The Conference supports:

- Promoting the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman,
- Policies that protect the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family,
- Policies that strengthen the long standing relationship between the State of Michigan and non-profit agencies in the provision of child placement services,
- Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws, and
- Policies that combat human trafficking.



HEALTH CARE

"The credibility of a healthcare system is not measured solely by efficiency, but above all by the attention and love given to the person, whose life is always sacred and inviolable." —Pope Francis

THE CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING of health care requires medical assistance be readily available for all, including and especially low-income populations. Legislative efforts to protect Medicaid funding for poor and elderly persons will be critical, as will ensuring that health care policies do not

threaten life or restrict the right to conscience. In the area of health care, the Conference supports:

- Protection of health coverage for low and moderate income individuals and families,
- Appropriate Medicaid funding to ensure adequate coverage for recipients and payments to providers, and
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the integrity of institutional and individual faith-based providers.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

"Contribution, restitution and rehabilitation can better serve the cause of justice than simply punishment for the sake of punishment."

—U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EMPHASIZES repairing the damage done by crime rather than focusing on retribution. Our system of justice should focus on rehabilitation of the offender, repairing the harm done to victims of crime, and restoring a sense of safety to communities. Criminal offenders must be punished, but in a way that enables them to return to the community as productive members of society. Victims of crime must receive restitution that includes physical and emotional health services. Citizens should feel safe in their communities and not live in fear of crime and violence. In order to advance restorative justice, the Conference supports:

- Policies that seek to reduce violence in society, including the reduction of gun violence,
- Policies that provide just compensation to crime victims, and treatment for their physical and emotional injuries,
- Policies that incentivize intensive probation programming in order to reduce recidivism,
- Adequate state funding to ensure accused indigent persons receive professional legal representation,
- Sentencing guidelines and parole practices that reflect an individual's potential threat to society, and
- Elimination of life without parole sentencing for juveniles convicted as adults, and the opportunity for a parole hearing for those sentenced as juveniles prior to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Miller vs. Alabama*.

HUMAN LIFE & DIGNITY

"All life has inestimable value, even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation." —Pope Francis

WHETHER ONE is elderly or infirmed, living with a disability or in desolation, whether a child yet to be born, or a convicted felon evaluating past choices in life, every person has inherent dignity. Recognizing this truth, it is imperative that Catholics continually work to provide a growing awareness of the irreplaceable value that is every person. Changing hearts and minds, one by one, will yield an increased respect for life and the worth of all our brothers and sisters. Therefore, the Conference supports:

- State initiatives that provide and expand alternatives to abortion and assistance to pregnant women,
- Measures to limit abortion and promote the safety of women,
- Regulations on human embryo research, and
- Upholding the constitutional ban on the death penalty and the statutory ban on assisted suicide.

IMMIGRATION

"All, therefore, belong to one family, migrants and the local populations that welcome them, and all have the same right to enjoy the goods of the earth whose destination is universal." —Pope Benedict XVI

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH teaches that each person has dignity and the right to basic human necessities. Individuals therefore have the right to migrate in order to secure those needs for themselves, and their families. At the same time, immigrants must also respect and abide by the laws and traditions of the countries in which they reside. Immigration policy is a federal responsibility, yet the United States Congress has failed in recent years to enact much needed

reforms. This does not, however, mean that the state should pursue policies more appropriately addressed by the federal government and Congress. Should our state policy-makers pursue immigration legislation, their deliberations must:

- Uphold the human dignity of all persons and work against any injustice which would compromise the dignity of immigrants, and
- Recognize and promote the values that immigrants provide to Michigan's culture and economy.

FEDERAL ISSUES

WHILE MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE focuses primarily on state issues, federal matters may be addressed in collaboration with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). MCC will engage Michigan's congressional delegation if requested to do so by the USCCB. Federal issues of immediate concern include:

- Efforts to overturn the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services mandate that requires all employers to add objectionable services to health benefits offered to employees,
- Legislation that extends full legal protection to individuals and institutions regarding conscience rights in health care, child placement services, and employment decisions,
- Comprehensive immigration reform that promotes family unity, streamlines the process for legal immigration, includes a path for low-skilled workers to work in the United States, and includes a path toward citizenship for undocumented persons already in the U.S., and
- Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), with equitable participation of non-public school students and teachers in all federal educational programs.

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this **focus**, contact the Michigan
Catholic Conference at:

Phone: (800) 395-5565
Fax: (517) 372-3940
bstarrak@micatholic.org

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