



## MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 2005–2006 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

*As a Church, we feel compelled to address issues in the public square not solely for theological reasons, but rather because our message about life is fundamental to all that we hold, believe, and treasure as American citizens.*

*—His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida*

Each legislative session thousands of bills are introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Only a small percentage of those bills become law, but all of them require analysis of content and study of their implication for positive and negative effects on the people of the State of Michigan and specifically the Catholic community.

Michigan Catholic Conference public policy staff acutely dissects the daily flow of legislative information based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and advocacy priorities established by the Conference at the beginning of each legislative session. Such priorities are intended to communicate a sense of what state government's top priorities should be in order to foster the common good.

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 MCC Board of Directors, the Michigan Catholic Conference will:

- Take positions on public policies and services affecting the common good of all Michigan residents and the interest of Catholics;
- Speak for the Roman Catholic Church in Michigan before all branches of state government and 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; and
- Foster public understanding of the Church's teaching on social issues.

Michigan Catholic Conference advocacy 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.

With the start of the 2005–2006 legislative session the Michigan Catholic Conference Board of Directors has approved an agenda that will guide the Conference's advocacy work through the 93<sup>rd</sup> Legislature. This agenda includes public policy issues in the areas of religious freedom, human life, children and families, education, health care, and economic justice and regulatory policies.

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## Religious Freedom

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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,
- The equal application of the law to all persons and institutions regardless of their faith, and
- The enactment of a state Religious Freedom Protection Act.



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## Human Life

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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:

- Legislation that seeks to protect the lives of unborn children,
- Informing women of the risks of abortion and the impact on both her and her child,
- Regulations on human research that uphold the life and dignity of the human person,
- State initiatives that provide alternatives to abortion and assistance to pregnant women,
- State initiatives that promote and facilitate adoption,
- Insurance regulations that do not mandate coverage for abortion or contraception, and
- Upholding statutory bans on human cloning and assisted suicide, and the constitutional ban on capital punishment.



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## Children and Families

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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,
  - The protection, especially of children, against dangers such as pornography and drugs, and
  - Supporting policies that streamline foster care payments to ensure critical services are provided to children.
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## Education

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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 ensure that no child is left behind. Therefore...

### THE CONFERENCE SUPPORTS:

- Full implementation of the Federal “No Child Left Behind Act,” with mandatory consultation between public school districts and the non-public schools located within their jurisdiction regarding the appropriate distribution of federal program dollars,
- An end to the state constitutional ban on aid to non-public schools,
- Protection of existing public school choice for all parents,
- Protection of non-public schools from excessive regulation,
- Additional Share-Time opportunities for non-public schools, and
- Safe and adequate transportation for all students.



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## Health Care

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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,
- The protection of adequate Medicaid funding, and
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the institutional integrity of faith-based providers.



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## Economic Justice and Regulatory Policies

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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 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.

### 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,
  - Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for not-for-profit organizations,
  - Creation of a state Earned Income Tax Credit,
  - State identification card and drivers’ license policies that respect the dignity of residents who live in our State regardless of citizenship,
  - Affordable housing for low and moderate income families and individuals,
  - Affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers, and,
  - Preservation of Consumer Choice regarding public utilities.
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## Federal Issues

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When addressing federal legislative issues, the Michigan Catholic Conference will work 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 with the Michigan Congressional Delegation and federal agencies.



Let us recall the words of the United States Bishops in their document *Faithful Citizenship*, “One of the greatest blessings in the United States is our right and responsibility to participate in civic life. Everyone can and should participate. Even those who cannot vote have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their communities.”

It is in this spirit that the Michigan Catholic Conference participates in the political process which surrounds the issues presented here. The range of topics 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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## FOCUS

Volume 33, Number 2, April 2005

FOCUS is published by the Michigan Catholic Conference  
510 South Capital Avenue, Lansing Michigan 48933  
[www.micatholicconference.org](http://www.micatholicconference.org)

Staff Contact: David Maluchnik ([dmaluchnik@micatholicconference.org](mailto:dmaluchnik@micatholicconference.org))

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517.372.9310 or FAX at 517.372.3940

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