



BLUEPRINT FOR THE COMMON GOOD

A CATHOLIC PROPOSAL FOR PUBLIC POLICY IN MICHIGAN

Working for the common good is something most people agree should be done. But what is the common good?

The Church describes the concept as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”¹ And, at its very essence, “underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person.”²

Public policy—which is directed toward advancing the common good—must be evaluated through the lens of how it advances or diminishes the life of the individual person.

It is through that lens that Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) presents the *Blueprint for the Common Good* in this edition of **focus**. The *Blueprint* lays out the principles and policies on which MCC will advocate during the 2023–2024 Michigan legislative session.

Each policy within each advocacy category has a single thread that connects them all: Upholding and maintaining the dignity of human life.

The principles of this document flow from Catholic social teaching, the Church’s application of the Gospel values to the world’s affairs. MCC shares these policies for consideration to advance the overall common good for Michigan and to protect and uphold the dignity of every human person in this great state.

“A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good—the good of all people and of the whole person—as its primary goal.”

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*³

PURPOSE FOR THE BLUEPRINT

MCC’s *Blueprint for the Common Good* is comprised of nine advocacy principles that originate from Catholic social teaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Within each principle are specific policy priorities MCC brings to dialogue that occurs at the state Capitol. The MCC Board of Directors, comprised of the diocesan bishops in Michigan and appointed lay and religious members, approves the content of the *Blueprint* for each two-year legislative session. MCC staff then work with members and staff of both political parties in accordance with the principles outlined in the *Blueprint* to advance public policy in the Legislature. As Pope St. John Paul II has stated before, “The Church proposes; she imposes nothing.”⁴ ■

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Why Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society.

How Because human life is sacred, every person—regardless of his or her stage of life or condition—has a universal right to live. Upholding the dignity of life applies to every person in every circumstance throughout life, from conception to natural death.

What To uphold and protect the dignity of every human person, MCC supports:

- Recognizing and protecting the value of every person's life from conception to natural death.
- Initiatives and pregnancy care programs that provide and expand alternatives to abortion, as well as assist pregnant and parenting women with prenatal, postpartum, and adoption services.
- Eliminating abortion and promoting the health and safety of women.
- Prohibiting or regulating policies that violate the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life, including embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, and upholding Michigan's surrogacy laws.
- Seeking to reduce violence in society, including the reduction of access to guns and increase in access to mental health and addiction treatment for high-risk groups and individuals.

Expanding and improving end-of-life care through a person's natural death.

MCC advocates for defending the principle for each person to have the right to live with dignity through each day of life. To that end, families and caregivers must be provided support and resources for difficult end-of-life scenarios. Catholic organizations such as the Mother Teresa House in Lansing provide comfort and care to the terminally ill. For family members of the residents at these places, the attention and friendship staff and volunteers give individuals at the end of their life is a great blessing.

- Supporting the authentic nature of the human person and recognize the inherent biological differences between males and females.
- Addressing racial injustice and promote racial harmony. ■

"The common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination."

Pope St. John Paul II⁵

PROVIDING FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

Why All people must have access to basic human needs to ensure they can live in a dignified manner, with a particular concern for the poor, the vulnerable, and anyone who goes without those basic needs.

How Whether through government programs or private social services providers, caring for the poor must be prioritized in setting policy and state budget spending.



Fr. Tim McCabe, SJ, is executive director of the Pope Francis Center, a Detroit-based Catholic homeless outreach facility at the Jesuit SS. Peter and Paul Parish. *Photo credit Detroit Catholic.*

What To provide for the poor and vulnerable and ensure basic human needs are available for all, MCC supports:

- Tax policies that support marriage, families, and low-income residents.
- The allocation of state budget resources to provide critical services for vulnerable persons, especially health care, food, and home heating assistance.
- Energy policies and regulations which promote competition, support for low-income ratepayers, and foster environmental stewardship.
- Affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly funded services.
- Regulatory legislation that will protect the faith-based mission of churches and institutions.
- Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for nonprofit organizations.
- Access to safe drinking water and fresh food for families and individuals.
- Fair and adequate working conditions for all employees.
- Policies that foster and promote employment opportunities.
- Opposition to policies that prey upon the vulnerable, such as predatory payday lending. ■

Affordable, accessible housing and transportation options for low- and moderate-income Michiganders.

MCC last session joined a coalition of groups that backed a \$1.65 billion plan to improve access to affordable housing in Michigan, in accordance with the Church's belief that decent housing is a basic human need. MCC is prepared to continue that advocacy this session.

“Man has the right to live. He has the right to... food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services.”

Pope St. John XXIII⁶

PROTECTING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE FREEDOM TO SERVE

Why Faith-based organizations provide services to the needy and contribute to the common welfare of society through institutions like schools and hospitals. Faith is what animates these providers to serve and is the foundational dimension of their identity.

How In accordance with the freedom to exercise religion enshrined in the U.S. constitution, faith-based providers should be free to operate according to their religious beliefs when serving in the public square.

What To protect the freedom to serve inherent in the right to religious liberty, MCC supports:

- Opposition to government regulations and mandates that violate the long-standing religious practices of faith-based organizations and individuals.
- Policies that proactively promote religious freedom.

Freedom for faith-based providers, institutions, and individuals to serve the general public according to their religious tradition and without interference from the government.

MCC speaks out on religious liberty matters to remind Michigan policymakers about safeguarding the freedom to serve. For instance, MCC recognized a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court ruling from 2021 that said faith-based agencies providing child placement services in the public square with fidelity to their religious teachings are constitutional exercises and, as such, may continue providing those services within their faith tradition. ■

SUPPORTING STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, AND PARENTS

Why Education is essential for the betterment of society by providing opportunities for children and adults to reach their fulfillment.

How Parents are the primary educators of their children and should have the freedom to determine the education that best suits their child. Schools of all kinds should be supported by the state so families can select from quality education options.

What In its advocacy to support students, schools, and parents, MCC supports:

- Reimbursement to nonpublic schools for state-mandated, non-instructional services, including policies which protect the health, safety, and well-being of students.
- Maximizing opportunities for nonpublic school students to participate in comprehensive shared time services.
- Improving the quality of public education and ensure parental rights within the public school setting.
- Parental rights regarding the education of their children in general.
- State policies that enable Michigan residents to take full advantage of federal school choice programs.
- A requirement that all public school districts have open enrollment policies.
- Protection of nonpublic schools from excessive regulation.
- Continued participation of nonpublic schools in school safety and non-core extra-curricular grant opportunities.

Inclusion of nonpublic schools, students, faculty, and staff in funding programs or initiatives, whenever appropriate.

When federal aid was provided to schools during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was done so with the recognition that the pandemic affected students of all types—public and nonpublic. In much the same way, MCC advocates for nonpublic schools to be included in funding programs and initiatives in the interest of promoting opportunity for all students. Recent examples include MCC advocating for nonpublic high school graduates to be included in \$10,000 Future Educator fellowships for attending public or private college teacher prep programs, as well including private college teacher prep programs in a program for \$9,600 student teacher stipend payments.

- Adequate funding for the Michigan Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs.
- Amending Article VIII, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution, which prohibits any state educational funding to nonpublic schools or their students, to allow the Michigan Legislature greater flexibility for necessary education reforms.
- Policies and funding that foster and promote education and job training for the skilled trades, including information technology support positions, especially for students in low-income families. ■



Students and their teacher at St. Valentine Catholic School in Redford.

Photo credit Detroit Catholic

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES

Why Marriage and family life is the core social institution, directed toward establishing a foundation of success for children.

How The institution of marriage between one man and one woman and the raising of children should be encouraged and supported. At the same time, attention and resources should be directed toward situations where the family structure has broken down and negatively impacted children.

What To strengthen marriage and family life and promote the wellbeing of children in all circumstances, MCC supports:

- Promoting the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.
- Protecting and promoting the stability of marriage and the institution of the family, including protecting parental rights.
- Combating human trafficking, domestic violence, and abuse of vulnerable persons.
- Supporting and promoting adoption and improving foster care.

Strengthening the long-standing relationship between the State of Michigan and nonprofit agencies in the provision of child placement services.

MCC advocated for legislation signed into law in 2015 that solidified decades of effective collaboration between the State of Michigan and religious providers to move children from the state's foster care system into permanent homes. That law was effectively upheld in a legal settlement reached between the state and St. Vincent Catholic Charities in 2022, which MCC noted would ensure agencies like St. Vincent can continue to "serve Michigan children and families of varying religious, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds." ■

"Economic and social policies as well as organization of the work world should be continually evaluated in light of their impact on the strength and stability of family life."

Economic Justice for All⁷

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Why Access to affordable and adequate healthcare is a basic human necessity required for upholding the dignity of human life.

How Whether provided by the state, employers, or by faith-based institutions, healthcare must be extended to the poor, uninsured, unemployed, and other vulnerable populations.

What To improve access to affordable and adequate health care for all, MCC supports:

- Protection of health coverage, including preventative care, for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.
- Upholding the mission of faith-based institutions and the conscience of individual faith-based providers.
- Ensuring access and adequate resources for physical and behavioral health care, including telemedicine and treatment for addictions and substance abuse.
- Ensuring patients are treated with dignity and respect.

Appropriate Medicaid funding to ensure adequate coverage for recipients and payments to providers.

MCC was a supporter of expanding the state's Medicaid program to provide healthcare to more of the state's poor and has advocated for continuing the program. MCC over the years has worked to promote access to Medicaid, such as a bill to expand access to telemedicine for Medicaid recipients. ■

PURSuing RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Why The human dignity of both the crime victim and the offender should be acknowledged within the criminal justice system when considering punishment and the capacity for rehabilitation.

How Restorative justice solutions should foster fairness and rehabilitation, improve public safety, and encourage accountability and healing.

What To secure restorative justice for those affected by crime, MCC supports:

- Policies that respect crime victims, including provision of just compensation and treatment for their physical and emotional injuries.
- Incentivizing intensive probation programming to reduce recidivism.
- Adequate state funding to ensure accused indigent persons receive competent legal representation.
- Comprehensive reentry services to assist the formerly incarcerated in becoming productive members of society, including job training for the skilled trades and information technology support positions.

Sentencing guidelines and parole practices that reflect an individual's potential threat to society.

MCC has been actively engaged on numerous criminal justice reform efforts from the past few sessions, including on the "Raise the Age" legislation to provide judges more discretion in sentencing seventeen-year-olds, as well as bills to eliminate incarceration as a penalty for several types of low-level misdemeanors.

- Elimination of life without parole sentencing for juveniles convicted as adults.
- Mediation between victims and offenders during the sentencing process to assist healing for victims through the accountability of offenders. ■

WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Why The human dignity of the immigrant, the refugee and the asylee—regardless of personal circumstances, background, or even legal status—must not be forgotten when considering how to manage immigration practices.

How While immigration policy is considered a federal issue, Michiganders still have a responsibility for welcoming the strangers who find their way here, and to seek to improve access to education and basic services for immigrants and refugees.

What To provide welcome to immigrants and refugees here in Michigan, MCC supports:

- Upholding the human dignity of all persons and working against injustices that compromise the dignity of immigrants.

Promoting access to state identification and Michigan drivers' licenses.

MCC's long-time support of this policy change across several legislative cycles is rooted in the belief that it upholds immigrants' and refugees' dignity by allowing for work and to take care of children. It also ensures people can legally and safely transport themselves and their children to the doctor, the grocery store, school, and to visit family.

- Policies that welcome refugees and asylees to the state who have been admitted by the federal government, as well as policies that provide financial assistance using public and nonprofit organizations to help serve those in need.
- Recognizing and promoting the value that immigrants and refugees provide to Michigan's culture and economy. ■



CARING FOR CREATION AND PRESERVING NATURAL RESOURCES

Why Environmental stewardship has a moral dimension, particularly in the recognition of the impact that environmental deterioration has on people, families, and the poor.

How Protecting vulnerable people from harm should be a driving factor in setting policy to protect the environment and preserve the world's resources.

What To better care for creation and preserve the state's natural resources, MCC supports:

- Improving access to safe and affordable drinking water and promoting responsible stewardship of natural resources.
- Protecting Michigan's lakes, natural resources, and public lands.
- Promoting sustainable practices in food production, waste management, and transportation.
- Recognizing the disproportionate effect that climate change and pollution have on the poor and vulnerable and working to mitigate those disproportionate effects.

Encouraging use of sustainable sources of energy.

Recognizing that sustainable energy production protects the environment and conserves natural resources, MCC has previously supported legislation that promoted continued investment in renewable energy sources in Michigan, such as a proposal to remove the limit on how much residentially produced solar power can enter the larger electric grid, as well as another proposal to encourage the creation of community solar projects. ■

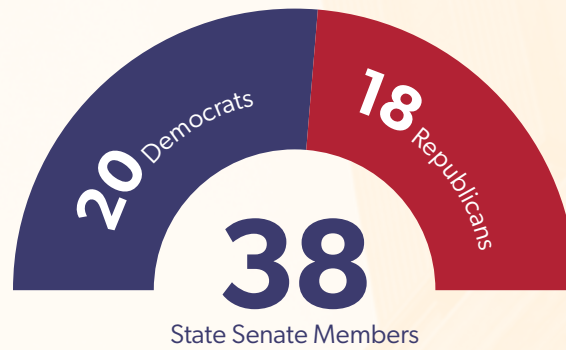
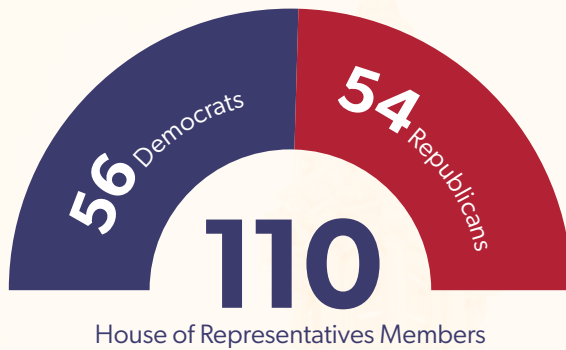
“Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person”

Pope Benedict XVI⁸

CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY

MCC primarily focuses on advocacy at the state Capitol in Lansing. MCC will engage Michigan's congressional delegation at the request of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops when a critical issue arises at the federal level. ■

THE 102ND MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE BY THE NUMBERS



MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AT THE CAPITOL: JOIN THE CATHOLIC ADVOCACY NETWORK

Lawmakers need to hear from the constituents they represent. MCC offers a free, email-based platform to connect Catholics with elected officials when important policies are up for debate. Join the Catholic Advocacy Network to stay informed on legislative topics of interest to Catholics and for opportunities to advocate for the principles outlined in this document.

For more information and to sign up, visit MCC's website at micatholic.org/can.



Purpose for Advocacy

Michigan Catholic Conference serves as the official voice of the Catholic Church in Michigan on matters of public policy. In communion with and in accordance with Church teachings, MCC promotes a social order that respects human life and dignity and serves the common good through public policy advocacy.

"In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation."

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship⁹

1. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 164. 2. Pope Francis, *On Care for Our Common Home*, No. 157. 3. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 164. 4. Pope St. John Paul II, *On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate*, No. 39. 5. Pope St. John Paul II, *On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful*. 6. Pope St. John XXIII, *Peace on Earth*. 7. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Economic Justice for All*, No. 93. 8. Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth*, Nos. 48, 51. 9. USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, No. 13.



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