

# A Blueprint <sup>for the</sup> Common Good

2017-2018 ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES

“We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good.” —Pope Francis, *Speech to the U.S. Congress*, 2015

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POLITICS, public service, and local engagement are vehicles through which individuals can create better communities and promote the common good. Elected officials have significant opportunities as well to defend the dignity of all and to elevate the moral fiber of the state. Public officials, however, are not alone in the responsibility to carry out this work. Each person has a role to play, offering their talents and experiences to create better opportunities for future generations. To assist, Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) brings the voice of the Catholic community to all levels of state government, including and especially the legislative branch.

MCC, the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state, advocates for policies that assist the marginalized and forgotten, and those that uphold the dignity of human life wherever it may be compromised. MCC's advocacy is guided by the principles found in this publication. They include human life and dignity, preferential option for the poor and regulatory policies, religious liberty, education, children and families, health care, restorative justice, and immigration and refugees. These principles are informed by Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. They are deliberated and approved by the organization's Board of Directors prior to commencement of the biennial legislative session.

In order to promote the policies found within each category, MCC engages with elected officials and their staff on both sides

of the aisle, Democrat and Republican. In Michigan as well as Washington, D.C., Republicans hold a majority in both chambers of the Legislature and Congress. Republicans also maintain a nine to five majority in the state's congressional delegation, while both of Michigan's U.S. Senators are Democrats. Importantly, the bishops of the United States remind us in their document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, that regardless of which political party or which elected officials are in power, people of faith should engage, "guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group."

MCC's 2017-2018 advocacy principles, which present *A Blueprint for the Common Good*, speak to community needs beyond partisan politics. While deeply informed by the wealth of social teaching from the Catholic Church, the intent of these policies can be embraced by people of goodwill. Regrettably, the nation has continued its sharp turn against cooperation, understanding, and tolerance. The recent presidential election has emboldened this divide. As such, elected officials at all levels are encouraged to lead by example, to cooperate, to listen to the needs of other communities, and to speak to one another with respect and appreciation for one another's dignity. Michigan Catholic Conference is eager to assist in this effort, and looks forward to another legislative session with hope for good policy-making that uplifts the vulnerable while protecting the life and dignity of all. ■

## HUMAN LIFE & DIGNITY

THE GREATEST AND MOST PRECIOUS of all the resources in the world is the life within each and every person. Consider what one individual means to another, and the capacity that exists within each for love, friendship, caring, and protection. Whether one is elderly or frail, living with a disability or in desolation, whether a child is yet to be born, or a convicted felon evaluating past choices in life, every person has inherent dignity. When the irreplaceable value that is every person is finally recognized, hearts and minds will change. The culture will develop a respect for life and appreciate the worth of, and its need for, each and every person. To achieve this end, MCC supports:

- State initiatives that provide and expand alternatives to abortion and assistance to pregnant women, including adoption,
- Measures to limit abortion and promote the safety of women,
- Regulations on research policies which violate the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life,
- Policies that seek to reduce violence in society, including the reduction of gun violence,
- Upholding the constitutional ban on the death penalty and the statutory ban on assisted suicide, and
- Policies that expand and improve palliative care.

## PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR & REGULATORY POLICIES

CATHOLICS ARE CALLED to uplift the poor and work to ensure that every person has access to critical human needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and access to health care. These goals for basic human dignity may be carried out not only through works of charity, but also through the pursuit of good public policies. The weakest, the infirm, the destitute, and other vulnerable members of society must be considered during policy deliberations and budget discussions. To this end, MCC supports:

- Tax policies that support low-income residents,
- The allocation of scarce budget resources to provide critical services for vulnerable persons, especially health care, food, and 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,
- Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for nonprofit organizations,
- Affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families and individuals, and
- Affordable and accessible transportation options for low- and moderate-income workers.

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

OF THE MANY PROTECTIONS afforded by this great nation, few are as cherished and unique as the freedom of speech and the ability to freely exercise religious beliefs according to an individual's conscience. Over the years too many have mistakenly been led to believe that the First Amendment provides a "separation of church and state" or a "freedom to worship". These phrases appear nowhere in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. The free exercise of religion is explicit and guarantees citizens the right to follow their conscience, not only at a worship site, but throughout their daily lives. In recent years, harmful and burdensome policies pursued by the federal government and special interest groups have



shown great hostility to these bedrock principles. Accordingly, MCC supports:

- Freedom for faith-based providers, institutions, and all individuals to serve the general public according to their religious tradition and without interference from the government, and
- Opposition to government regulations and mandates that violate the long-standing religious practices of faith-based organizations.

## EDUCATION

**EMPOWERING PARENTS** to direct the education of their children is a key element of sound education policy. Children of all backgrounds deserve a great education which, along with a healthy family life, Michigan Catholic Conference believes is the best path out of poverty. Article VIII, Section II of the Michigan Constitution, which prohibits state aid to nonpublic schools, prevents elected officials from considering effective policies implemented across the nation. High quality schools, both public and nonpublic, should therefore be encouraged by the State. To this end, MCC supports:

- Reimbursement to nonpublic schools for state mandated, non-instructional services, including policies which protect the health, safety, and well-being of students,
- Appointment of a state ombudsman within the Michigan Department of Education to ensure equitable participation of the nonpublic school community in federally funded programs,
- Maximized opportunities of nonpublic school students to participate in comprehensive shared time services,
- Policies that seek to improve the quality of public education and ensure parental rights within the public school setting,
- Requirement that all public school districts have open enrollment policies,
- Protection of nonpublic schools from excessive regulation,
- Adequate funding for the Michigan Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs, and
- Amending Article VIII, Section II of the Michigan Constitution to allow the Michigan Legislature greater flexibility for necessary education reforms.

## CHILDREN & FAMILIES

**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. MCC supports:

- Promoting the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman,
- Tax policies that protect and promote the stability of marriage and the institution of the family,
- Policies that strengthen the long-standing relationship between the State of Michigan and nonprofit agencies in the provision of child placement services,
- Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws, and
- Policies that combat human trafficking, domestic violence, and abuse of vulnerable persons.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

**THE PEOPLE OF MICHIGAN** deserve a justice system that prevents crime, reduces the violence that plagues too many communities, and cares for those who have been victimized. Offenders should be punished, but with the goal of returning them to the community as rehabilitated and productive members of society. The common good suffers when security, fairness, and a true sense of correction are replaced by fear and vengeance. To promote restorative justice, MCC supports:

- Policies that provide just compensation to crime victims, and treatment for their physical and emotional injuries,
- Policies that incentivize intensive probation programming to reduce recidivism,
- Adequate state funding to ensure accused indigent persons receive competent legal representation,
- Comprehensive services to assist the formerly incarcerated to become productive members of society,
- 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.

# IMMIGRATION & REFUGEES

MICHIGAN HAS WELCOMED immigrants throughout its history. The Catholic Church teaches that individuals have the right to migrate to obtain basic human needs for themselves and their families. Those who migrate must abide by the laws and customs of their new country. Refugees face tremendous challenges when fleeing a life surrounded by religious persecution, terrorism, or warfare. While security screening is necessary, immigrants and refugees should be treated with dignity. Immigration is inherently a federal responsibility, not a role that the state should assume. In order to welcome and assimilate immigrant families into Michigan's communities, lawmakers should pursue policies that:

- Uphold the human dignity of all persons and work against injustices that compromise the dignity of immigrants, including access to state identification,
- Continue to welcome refugees to the state who have been properly admitted by the federal government, and
- Recognize and promote the values that immigrants provide to Michigan's culture and economy.

# HEALTH CARE

THE CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING of health care requires medical assistance be readily available for all, including and especially low-income populations. Health care should also encompass the whole person, addressing both physical and behavioral health needs. As Congress looks to rewrite the Affordable Care Act, legislative efforts to protect Medicaid funding for poor and elderly persons will remain critical in the state, as will ensuring that health care policies do not threaten life or restrict the right to conscience. In the area of health care, MCC 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,
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the mission of institutional and individual faith-based providers, and
- Policies that ensure adequate resources for behavioral and physical health care, including addictions.

# FEDERAL ISSUES

WHILE MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE focuses its efforts primarily on state-level advocacy, federal policies are 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 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,
- Expansion of federal school choice policies into Michigan,
- 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
- Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure the equitable participation of nonpublic school students and teachers in all federal educational programs.

## focus

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