

# focus

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*St. Thomas More: Patron Saint  
of Statesmen and Politicians*

# ADVOCACY 2011-2012 PRIORITIES

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*“It is important to keep in mind that when the Church involves herself in social action, she does so as the flowering of her life of Faith. We are impelled to this course because of the convictions of the Faith that we profess in word and deed demand that we be actively concerned about justice in our society.”*

John Cardinal Dearden  
MCC Founding Chairman

**I**n its role as the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state, Michigan Catholic Conference brings to the public square the Church’s rich tradition of service to the poor, promotion of human dignity, education of the young, and care for the sick—all in pursuit of a just society. The Church has a unique role in the political life of society. While confusion and controversy often surround the participation of religious groups in public life, it is clear that major issues have moral dimensions and religious values have significant public consequences. Spirituality and politics are distinct, but they are not separable.

The Conference’s pursuit of justice and promotion of the human person in the public square is rooted in the spirit of the Beatitudes. The teachings of Jesus Christ impel those who seek the Kingdom of Heaven to “do for the least of these” and to “love thy neighbor as yourself.” These universal teachings bear significant guidance for the critical work that must be accomplished by the 96th Michigan Legislature, a body of elected officials whose primary task will be to balance responsibly a \$1.85 billion budget deficit. It is this budgetary responsibility to which the Conference calls specific attention as its advocacy priorities for the 2011–2012 legislative session are released.

Such a sizeable state budget deficit presents significant concern for those agencies and organizations that advocate for the least among us. In years past, large budget deficits have been alleviated by the influx of hundreds of millions in federal dollars. With those federal resources likely unavailable for this and forthcoming years, the preservation of state funding for programs that benefit the poor is critical. While better economic days may be ahead, elected officials are urged to frame the state budget as a moral statement—one which recognizes that a society is only as strong as its weakest members. The following pages detail Michigan Catholic Conference’s advocacy priorities for the 96th Michigan Legislature. ■

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In an 1804 letter to the Ursuline Sisters of New Orleans, President Thomas Jefferson promised Sister Marie Theresa Farjon de St. Xavier that religious institutions would receive every protection that his office could give. President Jefferson's promise to uphold religious freedom in the United States stands as a hallmark constitutional right, where faith-based institutions must be allowed to carry out their charitable mission without being subject to unnecessary state interference. To that end, **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
- Opposition to insurance regulations mandating coverage for abortion or contraception.

## HUMAN LIFE

Whereas the commandment "Thou Shall Not Kill" has become lost on much of today's culture, the right to life, an inalienable American right affirmed by the Declaration of Independence, must be afforded to all citizens from conception until natural death. The unborn, the infirm and frail, elderly and embryonic, are deserving of civil legislation that upholds their dignity as human persons made in the image and likeness of God. In the public policy arena, **the Conference supports:**

- State initiatives that provide alternatives to abortion and assistance to pregnant women,
- Legislation that seeks to ban partial-birth abortion in state law,
- Regulations on human embryo research, and
- Upholding the constitutional ban on the death penalty.

## EDUCATION

Policies that allow for parents to educate their children as they see fit are essential. Michigan's discriminatory prohibition on state aid for non-public education, Article VIII, Sec. II of the Michigan Constitution, harms not only those who seek true educational choice, but also the

state itself, as every child enrolled in a non-public school saves the state thousands of dollars. Education reform that benefits all students in public schools, along with equal treatment under the law for non-public schools, must be recognized and pursued. To this end, **the Conference supports:**

- An end to the state constitutional ban on aid to non-public schools,
- Protection of non-public schools from excessive regulation,
- Mandatory consultation between public school districts and the non-public school districts located within their jurisdiction regarding the appropriate distribution of federal program dollars,
- Protection of virtual learning experiences and course content that includes dimensions of faith,
- Providing for expanded science and technology learning opportunities,
- Policies that seek to improve the quality of public education, and
- Preservation of the Michigan Tuition Grant Program.

## CHILDREN & FAMILIES

The permanent and loving relationship between one man and one woman through the bond of marriage stands as mankind's most significant and vital institution. Open to the creation of offspring for the sake of future generations, originated by history and not religion, the sacrosanct covenant of marriage allows for family and community life to thrive within a society built on justice for all. Thus, policies that strengthen and promote traditional marriage and the family must be encouraged. **MCC supports:**

- Upholding the constitutional definition of marriage,
- Policies that protect the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family,
- Amending Michigan's no-fault divorce laws.

## HEALTH CARE

Along with food, clothing and shelter, health care is a necessary means for the proper development of life. Justice demands that medical assistance be easily available for all, including and especially low-income populations. Under no circumstance should the availability of health care threaten life itself or place restrictions on the right to exercise one's 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,
- Legislation that prohibits abortion funding in all health plans, and
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the institutional integrity of faith-based providers.

## ECONOMIC JUSTICE & REGULATORY POLICIES

The social teachings of Jesus Christ and that of the Catholic Church have for two thousand years called upon man to work for those least among us. The widening gap between the well-off and the poor is a wound on the soul of contemporary society. Programs that provide

essential support for the destitute must be protected from the need to alleviate the structural imbalance that plagues Michigan's economy. Thus, the state budget must be crafted in a manner that ensures the health and safety of the poor and the disadvantaged. **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,
- Policies that seek to promote the dignity of all human persons, regardless of citizenship,
- 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,
- Affordable housing for low and moderate income families and individuals, and
- Affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Our task as a society should be to restore a sense of civility and responsibility to everyday life, and to promote crime prevention and genuine rehabilitation. The common good is undermined by criminal behavior that threatens the lives and dignity of others, and by policies that give up on those who have

broken the law. The Michigan legal system must hold offenders accountable and challenge them to change their lives, reach out to victims and reject vengeance, restore a sense of community, and resist the violence that has engulfed so much of our culture. In an effort to advance restorative justice, **the Conference supports:**

- Adequate and professional legal representation to all accused individuals regardless of economic status,
- The right of faith-based providers in the delivery of services to incarcerated individuals, regardless of citizenship,
- Reforming and enhancing the provision of health care services provided in Michigan prisons, including end of life care,
- A comprehensive approach to prisoner rehabilitation and re-entry programs that includes continuing education, adequate personal identification, transportation, housing, and employment assistance,
- Sentencing guidelines and parole practices that reflect an individual's potential threat to society, including amending Michigan's mandatory minimum sentencing statutes impacting juveniles and certain drug offenses, and
- Elimination of life without parole for juveniles convicted as adults.

## FEDERAL ISSUES

When addressing federal 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 with the Michigan congressional delegation. ■

### focus

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