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2018 Public Policy Priorities

In faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks to create a culture that respects the sanctity and dignity of all human life, especially the most vulnerable among us. The MCC and the Missouri bishops call government officials, legislators and all citizens to a respectful discourse about the challenges facing our state and nation. This agenda does not reflect all of the MCC's concerns, but those that require attention at this time.

Protect Human Life

Recognizing the right to life is the foundation for all other human rights, the MCC will defend against direct attacks on human life, such as genocide, abortion, euthanasia, destructive experiments on human embryos, and the death penalty. The MCC will support a culture of life that provides alternatives to abortion for mothers who choose life for their children, and alternatives to the death penalty, such as incarceration that protects the public. *"It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop."* (Saint John Paul II, *Gospel of Life*, par. 101)

Welcome and Accompany Immigrants and Refugees

The MCC will bear witness to the God-given human dignity of all immigrants and refugees, including the undocumented and those displaced by war and persecution, reminding lawmakers of the right of people to migrate to other countries while respecting the right of nations to have secure borders. The MCC will urge Congress to enact the DREAM Act, comprehensive immigration reform, and funding for refugee resettlement. *"Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age."* (Pope Francis, 2017 Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees)

Advance Social and Economic Justice for All

Pope Francis calls for all people to hear the cry of the poor and to reform "unjust social structures" that deny basic necessities and opportunities for social and economic advancement. The MCC will support: adequate funding and reform of Medicaid and mental health services; laws that promote a living wage; and, stronger consumer protections, including payday lending reform. The MCC will also support healing of racial and cultural divisions while working to build vibrant communities that serve the common good. *"Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on."* (Catechism, par. 1908)

Uphold Marriage and Family

Family is the basic cell of human society and the foundation of civilized life. Presently, the institutions of marriage and family are threatened by a culture that has lost sight of the importance of authentic marriage and stable families. The MCC will support funding for the following initiatives: encouraging two-parent families and providing assistance to single parents and their children; promoting responsible parenthood; assisting victims of domestic violence; and, helping families who are poor or have children with health problems or disabilities. *“The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family.”* (Catechism, par. 2210)

Defend Religious Liberty

The Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council affirmed the dignity of every human person, including the God-given right to peaceably and lawfully exercise his or her faith, be it Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or other religious tradition. No person should be forced to act in a manner “contrary to his conscience,” (*Dignitas Humanae*, par. 3). The MCC will oppose unjust discrimination against people of faith, including the targeting or registering of any particular faith, and will support religious liberty protections in all human rights laws. *“[T]he right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.”* (*Dignitas Humanae*, par. 2)

Promote Educational Opportunities

All parents should have the right and financial ability to choose the schooling most beneficial for their children and which stands in accord with their moral and religious convictions. The MCC will support educational opportunities for all children in all school settings, be it public, private, or religious. The MCC will support financial assistance so families can meet their children’s educational needs, and support the repeal of Constitutional provisions (Blaine Amendments) that discriminate against children who attend private and religious schools. *“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, par. 2229)

Reform Criminal Justice

The Catholic Church supports a criminal justice system in which the offender is held accountable, the victim receives support, and the community assists the offender in successfully re-entering society. The MCC will support meaningful reforms, such as raising the age for juvenile jurisdiction to the age of 18, ensuring prisoners are not exploited for profit, and setting realistic parole and sentencing policies that take into account the inmate’s rehabilitation efforts. *“We believe that both victims and offender are children of God. Despite their very different claims on society, their lives and dignity should be protected and respected. We seek justice, not vengeance.”* (U.S. Bishops, *A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*)

Restore Civility and Faith in the Democratic Process

St. John Paul II said that democracy needs wisdom and virtue if it is to flourish. Pope Francis told Congress that the chief aim of politics is the common good. The MCC will encourage civility and bipartisan cooperation among elected officials, strong ethical standards for those in public office, respect for the rule of law, and measures that allow citizens to more fully participate in their government. *“[R]esponsible authority also means authority exercised with those virtues that make it possible to put power into practice as service (patience, modesty, moderation, charity, efforts to share), an authority exercised by persons who are able to accept the common good, and not prestige or the gaining of personal advantages, as the true goal of their work.”* (Compendium, par. 410)