

## **2021 Public Policy Priorities**

In faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks through education and advocacy to create a culture that respects the sanctity and dignity of all human life, especially the most vulnerable among us. In the light of the moral teaching of the Catholic Church, 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 calling for action at this time.

### **Protect Human Life**

Recognizing the right to life is the foundation for all other human rights, the MCC will defend against violent attacks on human life, such as genocide, abortion, euthanasia, experiments involving the destruction of human embryos or the use of aborted fetal remains, 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. The MCC will urge Congress to enact the DREAM Act, immigration reform, and provision 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 expansion of and adequate funding for access to Medicaid and mental health services, protection of social programs that benefit the poor, care for creation and the environment, 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 and Strengthen 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 no longer values authentic marriage and stable families. The MCC will support legislation and funding for programs that encourage two-parent families and provide assistance to single parents and their children; promote responsible parenthood; assist victims of domestic violence; and, help 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 proclaimed that the freedom to exercise one’s religious faith without threat of coercion is grounded in the dignity of the human person and that 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.”* (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*, par. 2)

## **Support Educational Opportunities**

All parents have the right, and should have opportunities to receive assistance when necessary, 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 they public, private, or religious. The MCC will support financial assistance so families can meet their children’s educational needs, and repeal of Constitutional provisions, such as Missouri’s 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 allowing greater judicial discretion in criminal sentencing, along with reasonable possibilities for parole, and ensuring offenders have realistic opportunities for employment upon their release. *“We believe that both victims and offender[s] 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*, Nov. 2000)

## **Promote Civility and Faith in the Democratic Process**

Saint 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)