
MISSOURI CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
MESSENGER



October 2009

"... for
we
walk
by
faith,
not
by
sight."

- 2 Corinthians 5:7



Americans are undergoing the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Now more than ever, Catholic citizens need to trust in God and work for the common good.

Legislation Just Over the Horizon

By all current accounts the 2010 session of the Missouri General Assembly will be dominated by issues relating to economic recovery and funding the state budget. Legislation and programs with high fiscal costs will have a difficult time securing passage.

The economic downturn will not prevent the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) from advocating for issues that protect the sanctity of human life and uphold the dignity of every human being. Below are some issues of importance that the MCC will be working on in the upcoming session.

ALTERNATIVES TO ABORTION (ATA): Many women have daunting challenges when faced with pregnancy. The ATA program provides services during pregnancy and for one year after the birth of the child including prenatal care, medical and mental health care, parenting skills, education services, housing, clothing, food supplies related to pregnancy, newborn and infant care and adoption assistance. Catholic Charities of St. Louis and Catholic Charities of Kansas City - St. Joseph are among a consortium of faith-based agencies that provide these vital services. ATA was appropriated \$1.9 million in the FY2010 budget but cuts were proposed by the Missouri Department of Health in June in response to budget shortfalls. In August, Governor Nixon committed to fully funding the program for FY2010. The MCC will be working to at least maintain current funding levels for the next fiscal year.

INFORMED CONSENT/COERCED ABORTION: Women are often not fully informed about the abortion procedure or the consequences.

This legislation provides women with detailed information about abortion, including the risks associated with the procedure, information about the development of the unborn child, a list of organizations that will provide assistance to help carry the child to term and an offer to allow women to view an ultrasound of the unborn child and hear the heartbeat.

The legislation also seeks to stop coerced abortion. Commonly told stories of coerced abortions tell of pregnant women who were threatened with divorce, loss of homes and support, loss of college scholarships or were abused if they did not abort their unborn child. Statistics indicate 40 percent of all women seeking abortions are victimized by domestic violence.

In 2009, the Missouri House of Representatives approved legislation to require informed consent and to stop coerced abortions. The Senate removed the coerced abortion provisions and weakened the informed consent language. The bill died before the House and Senate could reconcile differences. The MCC will be working with Rep. Cynthia Davis (R-O'Fallon) to ensure that meaningful legislation is passed to protect women and their unborn children.

MORATORIUM/STUDY COMMISSION ON THE DEATH PENALTY: Missouri's death penalty statute has been on the books for over 30 years, yet the state has never done a thorough study of the system to ensure it is fair and innocent people are protected from a death sentence. This legislation would impose a two year moratorium on executions while a study commission examines aspects

of the death penalty system including the experience levels of defense lawyers and prosecutors, the cost of the death penalty, issues of racial disparity and the interests of families of victims. The commission would make recommendations to Governor Nixon and the General Assembly. In 2009, a study commission that looked at the system was approved by the House of Representatives, but not in the Senate. A moratorium/study commission bill will be introduced again in 2010 by Rep. Bill Deeken (R-Jefferson City) and Sen. Rita Days (D-St. Louis).

PAYDAY LOANS: Payday lending targets people unable to access traditional financial services and those least able to pay the exorbitant interest rates. This legislation changes the laws regarding unsecured loans of \$500 or less, referred to as payday loans, and allows the Attorney General to maintain an action to enforce compliance. Missouri has some of the most lenient payday loan laws in the nation. All of the states bordering Missouri - Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee - prohibit renewals of payday loans. In Missouri, a payday loan can be rolled over up to six times. A person can end up paying interest charges that amount to 75 percent of the original loan. Rep. Mary Still (D-Columbia) and Rep. John Burnett (D-Kansas City) will sponsor legislation in 2010 to strengthen the regulation of the payday loan industry.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE: Many people work for employers that do not provide health coverage. Working parents in these situations can apply for Medicaid health coverage, but in

Missouri the Medicaid eligibility level is so low (22 percent of the federal poverty level) that many working parents do without health care. During the past several sessions the MCC has worked to expand access to Medicaid health coverage for low-income Missourians by raising the eligibility levels of the state's program. If federal legislation on health care reform is passed this year, it is likely that state legislation will be introduced in 2010 to address issues involved in the new law.

EDUCATION: Catholic teaching supports the fundamental right of parents to select schools that meet the needs of their children and that is in accord with their convictions. Accordingly, the MCC has supported tax deductions and other financial assistance to parents who send their children to private, parochial or home schools. With the current budget crisis it will be exceedingly difficult to pass any legislation that takes funds from state coffers. The MCC believes greater success can be found in ensuring that all students, including those attending Catholic schools, have equitable access to programs available to public school students. In 2009, the MCC was successful in allowing children in private, parochial and home schools to have access to virtual school courses provided by their local public school district. The MCC will be seeking similar opportunities in education legislation introduced in 2010.



Visit the Missouri Catholic Conference online
www.mocatholic.org



Is "Budget Cliff" Around the Bend?

Despite Gov. Nixon's vetoes and fund withholdings earlier this year, many observers of the Missouri state budget see big trouble ahead. To them Missouri's budget resembles a train heading round a mountain bend for a yawning chasm no longer bridged by any sound fiscal policy.

The ink was barely dry on the legislature's proposed state budget for fiscal year 2010 last summer when Gov. Nixon vetoed over \$100 million in spending and withheld spending for another \$325 million. In October, due to declining sales tax revenues, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources cut 100 state park positions.

Symptomatic of a deeper problem is the constant raiding of the state piggy bank known as the budget reserve. Since the beginning of fiscal year 2010, which began July 1, state officials have raided the piggy bank three times to address cash flow problems. In July state officials borrowed \$125 million, in August they borrowed \$75 million and in October they borrowed another \$150 million. Now, only \$170 million is left. By law this money must be paid back

into the fund by May 15, 2010. Missouri's fiscal situation would be much worse if the state had not received a massive injection of federal stimulus money. Absent the federal bailout, Missouri would have faced a \$1 billion shortfall in its fiscal year 2010 budget. The federal money has cushioned the blow of the current recession, the worst economic downturn since the 1930's Great Depression, but unless Congress authorizes another bailout, Missouri gets only one more year of federal help.

Without more federal help, or a dramatic improvement in the economy, Missouri state government faces in fiscal year 2012 what has become known in Jefferson City as the "budget cliff." Unlike the federal government, Missouri is required by its constitution to balance the state budget. Deficit spending is not an option and there is little political will to raise taxes. Unless tax revenue collections pick up, major cuts in state programs are inevitable.

While Gov. Nixon and legislative budget writers are well aware of the impending budget cliff, most

Missouri citizens are not. They may think state budget problems are mainly a problem for a few state employees in Jefferson City. In fact, state government reaches into every corner of Missouri.

Almost 900,000 children, including many Catholic children, attend the state's K-12 public schools. Over 850,000 Missouri citizens, including the elderly and disabled, receive health coverage through Medicaid. Sheltered workshops offer jobs to the disabled, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources addresses toxic chemical spills and other environmental threats, the Missouri Department of Health contracts with Catholic Charities of St. Louis and Catholic Charities of Kansas City - St. Joseph to provide alternatives to abortion services.

All this and much more is in jeopardy. Tough decisions will have to be made. In this crisis, it will be vital for Governor Nixon and legislative leaders to work in a bipartisan fashion because the stakes are too high for politics as usual.

Deficit Spending Versus Frugality

In a recent issue, *The Economist* reported that American households are now spending less and saving more. Savings rose to 5% of disposable income by the end of the second quarter of 2009. The increased frugality is a common sense response by families trying to weather the current recession. But when households spend less, businesses sell less and workers are laid off. This can lead to economic contraction.

In responding to the present recession, both the Bush and Obama administrations have taken a page from the playbook of a British economist who died in 1946. John Maynard Keynes

supported deficit spending by government in order to fill the demand gap left when households and businesses lose confidence and stop buying consumer goods and investing in business ventures.

But even Keynes acknowledged that too much deficit spending can lead to runaway inflation, undercutting the value of the currency and exploding government deficits. While many economists support deficit spending in deep recessions, there is vigorous debate about how much is enough and how much is too much.

The Catholic Church does not

claim expertise in technical aspects of economics but it insists that policies be grounded in "a transcendent vision of the person," as Pope Benedict XVI puts it in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. When the Church sees systems placed over the welfare of people, it will and does register disapproval. No person should be sacrificed for some five year plan, as people put in labor camps were in the former Soviet Union, and no private corporation should be given license to exploit its workers or befoul the environment.

BUDGET:

A Moral Document

In the past the MCC has urged state legislators to base their decisions not on politics but on the good of all Missouri citizens. Here are several guiding principles the MCC has continually set before legislators:

Uphold the sanctity of human life: Services like the Alternatives to Abortion program that save human lives should be given priority;

Protect the most vulnerable: The very poor, those with severe disabilities, the frail elderly, all warrant special consideration in framing the state budget;

Respect the dignity of work and workers: Government upholds the dignity of worker and workers when it requires safe working conditions, a living wage and offers health coverage for workers whose employers don't offer health benefits;

Call for Common Sacrifice: When a family goes through economic difficulties, all family members sacrifice together. In government no program should be exempt from scrutiny to determine whether it is necessary and being operated efficiently;

Practice Good Stewardship: Public officials have an obligation to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. Waste in government programs coupled with excessive taxation can undercut the ability of families to support themselves and undermine investment and job hiring by businesses;

Empower local communities: Government cannot solve all problems and there are times when government can be most helpful by partnering with local communities and churches;

Ensure government resources are adequate: Government must have sufficient revenue to do its job properly. Raising taxes is one option when funding is inadequate for the legitimate purposes of government.

Don't Walk Alone. Get Involved. Make a Difference.



The Missouri Catholic Conference believes...

- in strengthening the family as the foundation of society.
- in the sanctity of all human life.
- in empowering the poor and protecting the vulnerable.
- in showing care and respect for God's creation.
- in the dignity of work and the rights of workers.
- each person has fundamental rights and responsibilities.
- that we must promote the common good.

We have people, persuasion and prayer and that is why we need YOU to join our Citizen Network.

The Citizen Network is a network of Catholics working to making a difference in society. It is people just like you writing letters, making phone calls and visiting with your public officials.

The Citizen Network is a way for you to stay informed and alerted on important issues. By joining our network of Catholic citizens you will receive MCC's monthly newsletter, *Good News*, a personal invitation to the MCC Annual Assembly, up-to-date information on current legislation and tools to actively participate and influence public officials.

YOU can truly make a difference!

Cut along dotted line and mail to: Missouri Catholic Conference, P.O. Box 1022, Jefferson City, MO 65102

Citizen Network Enrollment Form

YES! I would like to join the Missouri Catholic Conference Citizen Network.

Title: (Circle one) Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms./Rev./Bro./Sr./Dr.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Telephone: (home) _____

E-mail: _____

Parish: _____

You can also register online at the Missouri Catholic Conference Web site www.mocatholic.org

Getting Help in Hard Times

If you or someone you know has been adversely affected by the current economic crisis, these agencies could be of assistance.

St. Louis Catholic Charities

This organization has a number of different agencies providing a variety of services including legal, refugee, family, housing and much more. For more information about the different agencies contact the St. Louis Catholic Charities at 314.367.5500 or go online to www.ccstl.org/.

Kansas City & St. Joseph Catholic Charities

This organization offers many services including: adoption, mental health, emergency assistance, housing, senior care and much more. For more information or getting help contact the Kansas City, St. Joseph or Warrensburg Catholic Charities offices.

KC Catholic Charities

816.221.4377

www.catholiccharities-kcsj.org/

St. Joseph Catholic Charities

816.232.2885

Warrensburg Catholic Charities

660.747.2241

Other Kansas City Area Assistance - These locations offer food, clothing and employment assistance.

Bishop Sullivan Center

<http://www.bishopsullivan.org>

816.231.0984

St. James Place

816.561.8515

stjames@bishopsullivan.org

Central Missouri Assistance

These organizations provide services including: food, clothing, school supplies and much more.

Samaritan Center

Jefferson City, Mo.

573.634.7776

Christo Center

Moberly, Mo.

660.263.0278

SERVE, Inc.

Fulton, Mo.

573.642.6388

Open Door Ministries

Sedalia, Mo.

660.827.1613

GRACE

Rolla, Mo.

573.368.5577

Springfield/Cape Girardeau Diocese

Springfield - Cape Girardeau is currently forming a Catholic Charities agency, however, if you need assistance please contact Don Emge with the Diocese of Springfield/Cape Girardeau at 417.866.0841.