

# Good News

Bringing the light of Christ to Missouri.



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"As religious leaders across a wide variety of faith communities, we join together to affirm that marriage in its true definition must be protected for its own sake and for the good of society. We also recognize the grave consequences of altering this definition. One of these consequences - the interference with the religious freedom of those who continue to affirm the true definition of 'marriage' - warrants special attention within our faith communities and throughout society as a whole."

*Marriage and Religious Freedom: Fundamental Goods That Stand or Fall Together, An Open Letter From Religious Leaders in the United States to All Americans, Jan. 12, 2012*

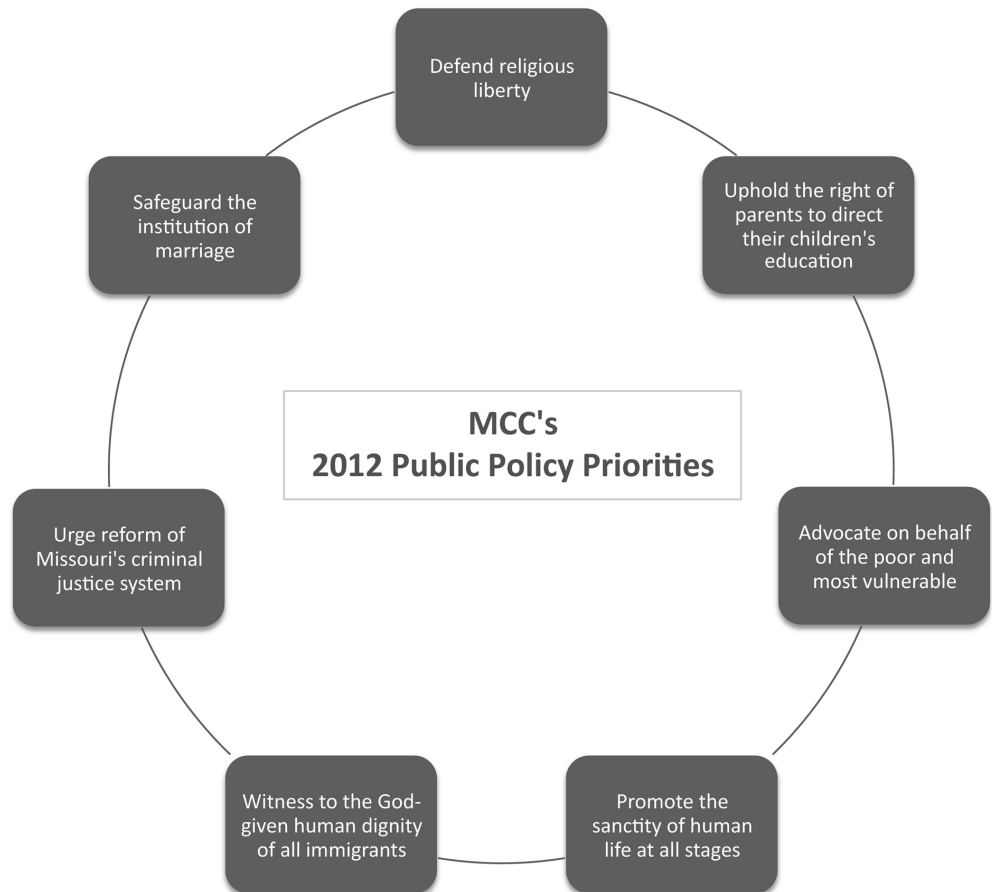
## MCC Sets Public Policy Priorities

Recognizing the fragile economy and recent challenges to the sanctity of marriage, the MCC announced that advocating on behalf of the poor and most vulnerable and safeguarding the institution of marriage were among its public policy priorities for 2012. Also tabbed as a top priority is upholding the rights of parents to direct their child's education (see the last page of this *Good News* for more).

As part of advocating on behalf of the poor and most vulnerable, the MCC will seek

reform of the financial services industry so that low-income Missourians have access to credit on reasonable terms. The MCC will also seek to protect funding for programs that provide vital assistance to Missouri's most vulnerable individuals.

The staff of the MCC and the members of its Public Policy Committee create the priorities, which are reviewed and approved by the Bishops of Missouri. The priorities do not reflect all of the MCC's concerns, but only those that require urgent action.



# 2012 Public Policy Priorities

In faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks to engage Missourians in creating a culture of life and compassion through the enactment of public policies that protect the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life. Speaking together as the MCC, the Missouri bishops call 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 urgent action at this time.

## **Defend religious liberty, including the right of both individuals and institutions to follow the dictates of their conscience while participating in public programs providing health care, education, and social services.**

Our country was founded on the principle that all people have a right to hold their own religious and moral convictions. However, recent government actions violate these rights. A new federal regulation will force religious institutions to provide health coverage for contraceptives, sterilization procedures and drugs that can cause abortions. Some states, such as Illinois, are forcing Catholic Charities out of adoption programs because they will not refer children to homosexual couples. The MCC will vigorously oppose all government efforts to ignore religious liberty or to abridge rights of conscience.

## **Uphold the right of parents to direct their children's education in accordance with their own moral and religious convictions.**

Parents have the God-given right to direct their children's education in accordance with their moral and religious convictions. Public authorities have an obligation to ensure that parents have the means to exercise this right (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 2229). At present, many parents lack the financial means to educate their children in a school of their choosing. The MCC will support state income tax credits and deductions that offer financial assistance to all parents regardless of whether they wish to send their children to a public, private, parochial or home school.

## **Advocate on behalf of the poor and most vulnerable.**

The test of a civilized society is how well it addresses the needs of the less fortunate. His Holiness, Benedict XVI, observes: "The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more we effectively love them" (*Caritas In Veritate*, 2009). The MCC will seek to protect funding for programs that have a proven track record of providing vital assistance to Missouri's most vulnerable individuals. The MCC will seek reform of the financial services industry so that the poor have access to credit on reasonable terms.

## **Promote the sanctity of human life at all stages of human development.**

No human rights are safe if the right to life is not protected. The right to life is the first of the fundamental rights (*Evangelium Vitae*, 1995). In 2012 the MCC will: sup-

port efforts to ensure that public programs or publicly sponsored health insurance do not promote abortion or other unethical treatments; seek adequate funding of alternative to abortion services; and urge lawmakers to re-examine the death penalty by considering alternatives that respect the sanctity of all human life.

## **Witness to the God-given human dignity of all immigrants, including undocumented persons, and defend the Church's right to minister to immigrants.**

"We must never forget that many immigrants come to this country in desperate circumstances. Some have fled political persecution, war, and economic devastation ..." (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, U.S. Bishops, 2000). The MCC will witness to the God-given human dignity of all immigrants, including undocumented persons, and remind lawmakers of the right of people to migrate to other countries. The MCC will vigorously defend the right of the Church to minister to all immigrants without government interference.

## **Urge reform of Missouri's criminal justice system with special attention to rehabilitating offenders through restorative justice programs that involve both the offender and the local community.**

Pope John Paul II forgave his would-be assassin and visited him in prison. Christians must hope for the reformation of all sinners, including those in prison for criminal acts. The MCC will support reform of Missouri's criminal justice

*Continued on next page*

# Continued: 2012 Public Policy Priorities

system, including establishing restorative justice programs that bring the offender and the local community together so the offender can repair the damage done and resume a responsible place in the community.

## **Safeguard the institution of marriage.**

Marriage is a comprehensive union

of man and woman, a total, permanent, faithful, and fruitful sharing of lives between husband and wife. This union is a great and unique good in itself and is critical for the common good. In 2004, Missouri voters passed by a 70 percent margin an amendment to the Missouri Constitution declaring that marriage shall exist only between a man and woman. On the federal

level, however, Congress is considering repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which recognizes for federal purposes that marriage is a union of one man and one woman. The MCC will seek to safeguard the institution of marriage and oppose efforts to redefine marriage or to in any way to undermine it.

## Legislators Advance Corrections Reform Legislation

**A**mong the legislative priorities this session is a bipartisan effort to pass corrections reform legislation. Spurred on by the continuing state budget crisis and the realization that Missouri's prison population has doubled and corrections spending has tripled during the past 20 years, state leaders this summer created the Missouri Working Group on Sentencing and Corrections.

Composed of legislative leaders from both political parties as well as members of various government departments, the working group conducted extensive analysis of state data trends and reached consensus on a package of reforms they think will improve public safety, hold offenders accountable and contain corrections costs by strengthening community supervision. The Pew Center on the States and the U.S. Department of Justice provided technical assistance and research for the working group.

Among the recommendations put forth by the working group in De-

ember are 1) creating a system of earned discharge from probation and parole; 2) giving probation and parole officers the authority to send offenders who have technical violations (i.e. a failed drug test) to short jail stints rather than returning them to prison; 3) using 120-day shock prison incarceration for the first technical revocation; 4) encouraging legislation to rewrite Missouri's Criminal Code; and 5) strengthening and centralizing the process of collecting restitution for crime victims.

This corrections reform package is estimated to reduce the prison population by between 245 to 677 people by fiscal year 2017 and save between \$7.7 and 16.6 million.

The MCC thinks this corrections reform package is a step in the right direction.

Catholic teaching has long supported a restorative justice approach to crime and punishment in which the injury to victims is repaired, offenders are held accountable, and the

community is part of the healing and restoration. This reform package promotes restorative justice principles by ensuring limited use of imprisonment, utilizing community alternatives and addressing the needs of victims.

In their 2000 statement, "Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," the U.S. bishops note that restorative justice is not "soft on crime," but reflects our values and tradition. "Our faith calls us to hold people accountable, to forgive and to heal." The bishops continue, "We seek justice, not vengeance. We believe punishment must have clear purposes: protecting society and rehabilitating those who violate the law."

Legislation containing these corrections reform measures will soon be filed in both chambers of the Missouri General Assembly.

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# Time to Say “Goodbye” to Mr. Blaine

Blaine Amendments appear in 40 state constitutions, including Missouri’s. They are vestiges of anti-Catholic sentiments that were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America as large immigrant Catholic populations moved to the new world seeking a better life for themselves and their children. Named for James G. Blaine, a speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives who first championed the idea in 1875, the amendments provide that no school funds or benefits shall be expended in aid of “sectarian” (read Catholic) sects or denominations.

Blaine Amendments were popular at a time when some saw the building of Catholic schools as a papal plot to take over America. It is time to politely say goodbye

to Mr. Blaine. His idea has stymied meaningful school reform and frustrated the desire of parents to educate their children in a school that corresponds to their own moral convictions. In the 21st century, people expect to have some choice in their children’s education, just as they have some say in who their health care provider will be.

The old distrust of Catholic schools is rapidly vanishing. Even in areas of the state where Catholics are a distinct minority, they are a welcomed part of communities. Meanwhile, support for giving parents more choices in their children’s education is growing. Perhaps it is fitting then that this year the sponsor of an amendment to repeal Blaine is State Rep. Shane Schoeller, a Baptist from Southwest Missouri.