



Good News

Bringing the light of Christ to Missouri.

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“Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church par. 1930.

MCC Announces 2013 Public Policy Priorities

Defending religious liberty, protecting human life at all stages of development and ensuring economic justice for all are among the policy priorities adopted by the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) for work in 2013.

Creating more access to affordable health care will be another MCC priority. The Missouri General Assembly will consider whether to expand Medicaid, the joint federal-state program that offers health coverage for low-income individuals and families. The MCC will also work on federal issues, especially efforts to enact comprehensive immigration reform.

What follows is the formal statement of the MCC 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.

The Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council affirmed the right to religious liberty, stating that “religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.” (*Dignitas Humanae*, par. 2). The Church further affirmed that no person should be forced to act in a manner “contrary to his conscience.” (*DH*, par. 3).

However, recent government actions violate this basic civil right. The recent contraceptive mandate issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) forces religious institutions, as well as private employers, to provide health coverage for contraceptives, sterilization procedures, and drugs that can cause abortions. In addition, several Catholic Charities organizations around the country have lost contracts to provide much needed social services due to their refusal to re-define marriage to include unions between persons of the same sex.

The MCC will vigorously oppose all government efforts to ignore religious liberty or to abridge rights of conscience. In the 2013 session of the Missouri General Assembly, the MCC will

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specifically focus on rights of conscience for healthcare workers and institutions.

Uphold the right of parents to direct their children's education in accordance with their own moral and religious convictions and ensure that all parents have access to schools of educational excellence.

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). As part of its responsibility of maintaining the common good, government must make accessible to individuals those things necessary to lead a truly human life, including education (*Catechism*, par. 1908).

The schooling offered to children should be of high-quality and prepare them for the social and civic responsibilities they will face as adults. In furtherance of these principles, the MCC will support the maintenance of high quality elementary and secondary schools in communities throughout Missouri and policies that respect the right of parents to direct their children's education.

Advocate economic justice for all, especially on behalf of the poor and most vulnerable.

Catholic teaching offers no blueprint for social and economic development, but calls for structures that will respect the dignity of each human person. (*Catechism*, par. 2426). Workers have the duty to contribute their talents and seek to support themselves and their families, while

employers must not discriminate and must offer a just wage. (*Catechism*, par. 2433, 2434). The freedom of economic initiative must be protected but the full development of society requires the reduction of dire poverty. (*Catechism*, par. 2429, 2441).

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 support the following: stronger consumer protections in the payday lending industry; greater access to affordable healthcare, especially for very low-income working parents and adults; and adequate funding for programs that assist the most vulnerable of our state.

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). Catholics are called to defend life from conception to natural death.

In 2013 the MCC will: promote ethical research using adult stem cells and oppose research that destroys human life, including research that involves the use of embryonic stem cells; reauthorize tax credits for pregnancy resource centers; seek adequate funding of alternatives to abortion services; oppose laws which seek to encourage a "right to die" mentality; 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, including immigrants, 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.

The MCC, in conjunction with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, will urge Congressional action to enact comprehensive immigration reform, including a way for undocumented persons living and working in the United States to earn U.S. citizenship, and immigration policies that will allow families to reunite here in the United States.

Urge reform of the criminal justice system to promote restorative justice principles.

According to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, punishment for criminal activity should; 1) preserve and protect the common good, 2) restore public order, and, 3) restore or convert the offender. (*Catechism*, par. 2265-2267). This restorative justice approach allows the offender to be held accountable and repair the damage done while involving the community in helping the offender resume a

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The Missouri Schoolhouse Initiative

A framework for dialogue on how to improve educational opportunities for school children.

The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) is opening a dialogue with public and private school officials, school parents and others about how our state can improve the education provided to Missouri school children. As a basis of this discussion, the MCC invites input on the Missouri Schoolhouse Initiative – a community-based approach for enhancing educational opportunities for all children.

Local public school districts which choose to participate in the Missouri Schoolhouse Initiative would decide how best to use the assistance provided to them for improving their academic programs, such as computer and science labs, foreign languages, mathematics, arts and literature, and professional development for teachers. The initiative would also offer financial assistance to children for attendance at an accredited private or parochial school. This assistance would allow children who learn best in non-public school settings to attend those schools.

The Missouri Schoolhouse Initiative

A Tax Credit That Can Fund K-12 Education

The schoolhouse credit would allow taxpayers to reduce their taxes while improving the funding for public schools and providing financial assistance to students who learn best in non-public school settings.

Tax credits directly reduce the tax bill. If you claim a tax credit for \$300, that credit reduces your tax bill by \$300. If you claim a \$1,000 credit, that reduces your tax bill by \$1,000.

A tax credit like the one proposed

provides its assistance without raising taxes on any Missouri taxpayers; instead taxpayers would be able to claim a tax credit for any donation made to a “Missouri Schoolhouse Foundation.” Missourians would be able to establish Missouri Schoolhouse Foundations, or have existing foundations declared Missouri Schoolhouse Foundations. Using the tax credits as an incentive for giving, these foundations would be able to raise funds for schools and students.

Such foundations exist now. For example, here in Jefferson City, where the MCC is headquartered, foundations already are in place that provide assistance to the public school district and to Helias Catholic High School. The tax credit offered through the Missouri Schoolhouse Initiative would encourage more donations to these foundations and allow them to provide more funds to schools.

Of the total amount of tax credit funds offered statewide in any year, sixty (60) percent would be used to assist public elementary or secondary school districts in improving their

can generate K-12 school funding. In its present form, which is under discussion, the tax credit would be for 40% of whatever you donate. If, for example, you donated \$500, you would get a \$200 tax credit.

The tax credit is public “seed” money that leverages far greater amounts of private money. When Missouri state government appropriates, say \$500, for K-12 schooling, then \$500 of funding is provided. But under the schoolhouse initiative \$500 of K-12 school funding is generated by using

academic programs. Forty (40) percent of the tax credit funds would be used to provide financial assistance to children for attendance at accredited private or parochial schools.



The Missouri Schoolhouse Initiative is intended to supplement (not replace) the state funding of public schools. State aid to a school district would not be reduced because of any funds received from a Missouri Schoolhouse Foundation. The initiative invites local communities to form Schoolhouse Foundations to support their local schools by leveraging private dollars that will supplement the funding provided by the state of Missouri and local tax levies. The initiative seeks to revitalize community commitment to local schools.

The MCC welcomes creative ideas and input. Contact the MCC at mocatholic@mocatholic.org or call the MCC at 573-635-7239.

only \$200 of government money; the other \$300 comes from private donations.

No one is suggesting, and the schoolhouse initiative does not propose, that this credit should take the place of adequate public funding of K-12 schools. The proposed tax credit is intended to supplement (not replace) the traditional public funding of schools. Still, in these times of tight government budgets, a tax credit can be a powerful way to maximize the use of public dollars.

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responsible place in the community.

To promote restorative justice principles, the MCC supports reforms in Missouri's criminal justice system, including revision of the criminal code and the adoption of criminal justice practices that enhance fairness and accuracy within the system.

Safeguard the institution of marriage and the family.

Marriage, the comprehensive union of one man and one woman is "ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring." (*Catechism*, par. 1601). It is a covenant between baptized persons which Christ the Lord

has raised to the dignity of a sacrament. (*Catechism*, par. 1601). 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 a woman. On the federal level, however, court challenges to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which recognizes for federal purposes that marriage is a union of one man and one woman, threaten to eviscerate state law.

The MCC will seek to safeguard the institution of marriage as defined in the Missouri Constitution, and oppose laws that undermine the vitality of the family or that seek to redefine marriage.