

Good News

Bringing the light of Christ to Missouri.



May/June 2013

Vol. 32 No.3

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***"If we step outside
ourselves, we will
find poverty,"***

***Pope Francis,
May 18, 2013***

The MCC Celebrates Pro-life Victories

The 2013 legislative session started with an early pro-life victory when the Missouri House and Senate overcame their differences and passed Senate Bill 20, a bill that re-authorizes tax credits for donations made to pregnancy resource centers (PRCs).

These centers provide vital services, such as pregnancy testing, ultrasounds (at some facilities), counseling, education, clothing and other items to women facing crisis or unplanned pregnancies. The Missouri General Assembly failed last year to renew these credits due to disagreements between the House and Senate as to how to reform Missouri tax credit programs as a whole, so the PRC credit expired.

Over the last year, Missouri PRCs saw their donations decrease due to the expiration of these credits. Extension of the PRC tax credit was a priority for sponsor Sen. Bob Dixon (R-Springfield), who worked with social service agencies during the interim to build a coalition to get the PRC and other benevolent tax credits reauthorized this year. After the bill passed the general assembly earlier this year, Governor Jay Nixon signed the bill into law, so these credits will now be available until December 31, 2019.

Towards the end of the session, the general assembly passed House Bill 400 (see votes in this *Good News*), which will effectively prohibit chemical abortions from being performed in Missouri via telemedicine. Other states, including Iowa, allow chemi-

cal abortions using the drug RU-486 to be performed via video conferencing.

RU-486 is a drug that will terminate an unborn child in the womb by starving the uterus of progesterone, the hormone that allows the uterus to develop and provide support for the developing child.

In states that allow these horrible procedures to occur, a physician speaks with the pregnant woman via video-conference technology. After the video consultation, the abortion drug is dispensed to her at the remote location where she happens to be. HB 400 would require that the physician be physically present when the drug is given to the woman.

At a hearing on this bill earlier in the session, a former Planned Parenthood employee from Iowa testified that Planned Parenthood of Iowa added clinics after starting a telemedicine abortion practice there, increasing the number of Planned Parenthood clinics in Iowa from five to 17. House Bill 400 will prevent the spread of the evil of abortion in this manner in Missouri.

Finally, the general assembly appropriated \$1.5 million to the Alternatives to Abortion (ATA) program. ATA provides funding for public and private agencies that assist women in carrying their pregnancies to term and for one year after birth. The general assembly also appropriated \$50,000 to help boost awareness of this program throughout the state.

The Poor Fare Poorly in 2013 Session

Few lobbyists line the Capitol halls or negotiate with legislators on behalf of Missouri's most vulnerable citizens. The result is that the needs of the least fortunate can be forgotten. The 2013 session of the Missouri General Assembly saw efforts to remove assistance now available to the low-income elderly and disabled while legislators turned aside proposals to expand health coverage to the working poor.

As the session opened, Governor Jay Nixon said he would sign legislation repealing a tax credit now available to low-income renters. Eligible for the credit are the elderly (65 and older) or disabled who have household incomes of \$27,500 or less if single, or \$29,500 or less if married. Over 104,000 Missourians from all corners of the state receive this assistance, which averages \$534 annually.

The governor hoped the repeal of the renters' credit would be accompanied by comprehensive tax credit reform. But as the session unfolded, hopes for tax credit reform dimmed, while the governor began to hear from advocates about how the credit provided vital assistance to the poor.

Meanwhile, legislators, following up on the governor's recommendation,

filed bills to repeal the low-income renters' credit. Repealing the credit would mean the state would save about \$57 million in general revenue. Budget writers penned in the projected savings for funding a new Senior Services Protection program. However, in the closing weeks of the session, Governor Nixon announced he had changed his mind and did not support repeal of the credit.

By this time Senate Bill 350, the bill repealing the renters' credit, had already passed the Missouri Senate and awaited action in the House. The Missouri Catholic Conference joined with other advocates in urging the House to put aside the bill and not pass it. In a letter to legislators, the MCC urged legislators "to first consider the needs of the least fortunate" when addressing tax credit reform.

Lou DeFeo, a former executive director of the MCC who now provides legal and tax services to the poor at the Jefferson City Samaritan Center, met with legislators to provide first-hand accounts of how the credit assists veterans and many others in Central Missouri. But legislators involved in writing the state budget for FY 2014 were upset with the governor for his abrupt change of course and decided to move forward with repealing the renters' credit.

The House passed Senate Bill 350 (see vote in this *Good News*) but at the urging of the MCC and others the governor vetoed the bill. The poor narrowly averted this misfortune but a major disappointment came when legislators failed to reform Medicaid and accept millions of federal dollars to expand health coverage to 260,000 uninsured Missourians.



Rep. Jay Barnes

Rep. Jay Barnes (R-Jefferson City) spent most of the session trying to find consensus on a Medicaid Transformation bill (House Bill 700) that would both reform and expand the program. The MCC supported House Bill 700. The bill called for more personal responsibility from recipients through co-pays and modest premiums for those who could afford it. The bill also provided Medicaid health coverage to many of the working poor who could not obtain a health insurance plan from their employer.

At present Missouri has one of the stingiest Medicaid programs in the nation. For example, in most circumstances, a working mother with two children is ineligible for Medicaid if her income exceeds \$4,584 annually. These eligibility guidelines mean that many of the working poor go without health coverage, either because their employer does not offer a health plan or the plan is too expensive.

While Rep. Barnes worked to develop consensus on Medicaid reform, the Missouri Senate largely ignored the issue. In the end, no bill passed and Medicaid reform must wait for another day. The events of this session show just how important it is for public officials to hear from ordinary citizens who care about the poor and expect public policies to reflect that concern.



The Samaritan Center in Jefferson City helps some of the area's neediest people throughout the year with tax preparation, legal services, food, clothing, and more.

MCC Speaks up for Veterans, Ex-Offenders, and Death Row Inmates

Ending the death penalty and ensuring fairness in the criminal justice system have long been MCC legislative concerns. The 2013 session of the general assembly saw both successes and defeats for these issues.

Legislators passed a bill authorizing veteran's courts in Missouri for military personnel. The MCC supported these specialized courts because they address the unique needs of veterans who commit certain low level crimes. Based on the drug court model, these courts have proven successful in other states. The courts help veterans struggling with addictions or serious mental illness. Several bills establishing veteran's courts were introduced and each moved steadily through the process. But it was Senate Bill 118, sponsored by Sen. Will Kraus (R-Lee's Summit), that was ultimately passed and sent to Governor Jay Nixon. By giving veteran's courts statutory authority, judicial circuits that establish these programs will be able to receive federal money for needed services for veterans.

The MCC also successfully pursued a change in how juveniles are sentenced. Senate Bill 36, sponsored by Sen. Wayne Wallingford (R-Cape Gi-

ardeau), extended the age to 17 ½ years old that a juvenile could remain under the jurisdiction of Division of Youth Services (DYS). Missouri's DHS is recognized as a national leader for its successful juvenile justice program in rehabilitating young offenders. Also known as Jonathon's Law, this bill was filed in response to a 17-year-old from southeast Missouri who committed suicide shortly after being sentenced to an adult correctional institution. While this six-month extension may appear to be a simple change in law, the MCC believes this will have a positive impact on the lives of many troubled youth in our state.

One legislative disappointment was the failure of the general assembly to pass a bill to allow ex-drug offenders to receive food stamps. This issue, which has been around for several years, has its origins in the 1996 Federal Welfare Reform Act that placed a lifetime ban for food stamps on anyone convicted of a drug crime. However states could opt out of the ban and Missouri is now only one of nine states that still have the restriction. The MCC viewed lifting the ban as a matter of fairness as all other ex-offenders are eligible for food stamps.

While many lawmakers see lifting the ban as the morally right thing to do, the bill is just not a priority with most legislators. This year Rep. Paul Wieland (R-Imperial) sponsored House Bill 838 to lift the ban. The bill had a late hearing in which numerous individuals and organizations testified to the unfairness of the restriction and the economic benefits Missouri would enjoy if it lifted the ban. In the last

weeks of the session the language of the bill was added as an amendment to several bills, unfortunately none of these bills received final approval. The MCC will continue its advocacy for this issue again next session.

Repealing the death penalty in Missouri remains one of the MCC's greatest challenges. This year several lawmakers, including Rep. Paul Wieland (R-Imperial), Rep. Penny Hubbard (D-St. Louis), and Sen. Gina Walsh (D-St. Louis) introduced measures to end the death penalty in the state. However, none of these bills ever had a hearing. Measures to bring about reforms to the death penalty system fared little better. The MCC was among the groups advocating for reform legislation sponsored by Rep. Rory Ellinger (D-St. Louis), and Sen. Joe Keaveny (D-St. Louis), that would ensure more fairness and accuracy with Missouri's death penalty system, such as, establishing standard eye-witness identification practices. Sen. Keaveny's bill (SB 162) did have a hearing, but no committee vote. The only death penalty bill that did receive some legislative traction was Senate Bill 61, also sponsored by Sen. Keaveny. This bill would have required the state auditor to do a report to determine how much death penalty cases were costing the state of Missouri. The bill was passed out of committee and had debate on the Senate floor before being stalled.

Standing up for death row inmates and ex-offenders is not a popular position and few lobbyists take on their concerns. The MCC, however, will continue to advocate for both accountability and mercy for these individuals.



Sen. Wayne Wallingford sponsored Senate Bill 36 and House Bill 400.

Missouri Catholic
Conference
PO BOX 1022
Jefferson City, MO
65102-1022

RETURN SERVICE
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Phone: (573) 635-7239
Fax: (573) 635-7431



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Conference



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“Francis, Rebuild My Church”

The theme of the MCC’s 2013 Annual Assembly, which is scheduled for Saturday, September 28, in the Missouri State Capitol, will be “Francis, Rebuild My Church.”

Our new pope has taken his name from St. Francis of Assisi. He has said: “For me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation ... ”

This year’s MCC Annual Assembly will explore how the Gospel values celebrated by St. Francis can revitalize the Church’s mission to evangelize the world in the 21st Century, especially in the public policy arena.

Look for more information this summer on the MCC website - www.MoCatholic.org.

