



Missouri Catholic Conference

Good News

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Bringing the Light of Christ to Missouri.

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“Find new ways to spread the word of God to every corner of the world.”

—Pope Francis

2014 Missouri General Assembly Open for Business

The second regular session of the 97th Missouri General Assembly convened on January 8th in Jefferson City. The 2014 session should prove interesting, with a number of compelling, if not controversial, matters to be debated and considered.

Since 2014 is an election year for all state Representatives, and for many state Senators, it is uncertain how productive the legislature will be this session. However, there are several matters that the MCC will be following in the coming months that are of note.

Senator David Sater (R-Cassville) has pre-filed SB 519, a bill which would extend the required waiting period for an abortion from 24 to 72 hours in order to give women facing an unexpected pregnancy more time to consider their decision. Similar legislation has recently been passed in South Dakota. It will likely face strong opposition, but will be a bill that the Missouri Catholic Conference supports and watches closely.

Medicaid Ex-

pansion will also be a matter up for debate in both chambers of the general assembly. Governor Jay Nixon has indicated his intention to pursue Medicaid reform and expansion as a high-priority issue this legislative session. In a press conference late last month, Governor Nixon said he hopes legislators who opposed Medicaid expansion during the 2013 legislative session will reconsider their position this year, as other states have taken advantage of the offer of federal funds to pay for the program during the first three years of the expansion.

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Legislation to expand and revise the present state Medicaid program was proposed during the 2013 legislative session by Representative Jay Barnes (R-Jefferson City), but met opposition from a number of members of the Republican-led legislature. Interim Senate and House Committees on Medicaid Transformation met during the summer and fall in hopes of providing a more transparent look into Medicaid reform for lawmakers. The Senate Committee produced a report stating they would consider Medicaid expansion only after a “transformation of the entire Medicaid program.” The House panel has yet to produce a report. The prospects for passage of a reform and expansion bill are likely remote, but the MCC will be tracking this legislation.

Senator Joe Keaveny (D-St. Louis) plans to introduce a bill that would reform certain criminal justice procedures in the hopes that such reform will prevent wrongful convictions. The bill is expected to feature three primary components: 1) a provision to standardize best-practice eyewitness identification procedures for law enforcement departments to follow around the state; 2) a provision requiring law enforcement officers to record interrogations of any suspects of a serious crime while in their custody; and 3) a provision

directing law enforcement departments around the state to adopt standardized best-practice techniques to collect, identify, preserve, and store biological evidence.

All of these provisions would serve the best interest of the public to help insure accuracy in seeing that individuals who have committed violent crimes are held accountable, while innocent individuals are not wrongly convicted.

There has been a bi-partisan effort in the Missouri General Assembly to reform Missouri’s criminal code the last few years; this reform is expected to be proposed this year as well. Many hours have been spent on this effort, and the changes proposed are expected to be minor, but necessary, for the ongoing effort to reduce the prison population while also making the criminal process operate more smoothly, humanely, and justly.



Photo courtesy: Tim Bonnell, Missouri House Communications

Lawmakers Close Their Eyes to Catholic School Options

As the 2014 session of the Missouri General Assembly proceeds, legislators are trying to find solutions for how to educate children in failing school districts. Missouri law allows students to transfer out of unaccredited districts but only to other public school districts. No option is given for students to transfer to nonpublic or religious schools. Why not change the law?

The Archdiocese of St. Lou-

is has offered to make thousands of seats available to transfer students but so far state legislators are not taking up the offer.

Some fear this would breach the wall that supposedly must separate Church and State. In fact, the U.S. Constitution, while prohibiting the establishment of a state sanctioned religion, does not erect any “wall” between Church and State. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld programs

that allow public school students to receive publicly funded scholarships to attend religious schools.

The Missouri Constitution is more restrictive than the federal constitution, but it can, and should, be amended so that the state of Missouri can utilize all the tools at its disposal to provide education to our children.

The refusal to consider the use of Catholic schools has had perverse consequences. Instead of allowing transfer students to attend Catholic schools in their neighborhood, these students have been bused, sometimes for over an hour, to other public schools.

Why Losing Catholic Schools Would Diminish Us All

Many of you will receive this *Good News* during the course of Catholic Schools Week, which runs this year from January 26 to February 1. This is a good time to recall the importance of Catholic schools to the faith formation of our children. It is also a good time to recall how Catholic schools educate children of many different faiths, ethnic, and racial backgrounds—including the very poor.

Presently, Catholic schools face many financial challenges. Some suggest it is too expensive to operate Catholic schools and that parishes should opt for providing Catholic instruction in non-school settings. Others wonder if it would not be better for Catholic schools to convert to charter schools so they can obtain financial help from the state of Missouri.

The trouble with these suggestions is that so much would be lost, not just for Catholics but for families of other faith traditions who seek out Catholic schools not just for the education provided but for the moral and religious formation offered to their children.

Students in Catholic schools are taught that God should be at the center of their lives. Prayer is not



a private affair but an experience shared in common daily by all students and teachers. In fact, it is the everydayness of this religious and moral climate that gives Catholic schools their distinctive feature.

*“It’s not the filling of a pail but
the lighting of a fire.”*
-William Butler Yeats



Education reformers can get very obsessed with academic standards, teacher tenure, school governance, and curriculum issues. There can be a tendency to talk about the quality of the “school product” and whether graduates have acquired the skills to take on the job challenges of a fast-changing economy. But there is much more to education than mastering work skills.

We need scientists who will ask not just can it be done but should it be done. We need doctors and other medical professionals who care for the whole person, including those emotional and spiritual dimensions so important to healing. We need lawyers, judges, and lawmakers who are not so much clever in legal learning as wise in practicing their knowledge for the good of all.

How do we encourage this kind of education? It starts by understanding that education, as the Irish poet William Butler Yeats once put it, “is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.” For Catholic schools that fire begins and ends in forming children to receive and pass on the light of Christ to all the world.

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St. Elizabeth Ann Seton: Pioneer of Catholic Education

The first native-born American canonized a saint by the Catholic Church was Elizabeth Ann Seton, who established the first free Catholic School in the United States in the wilderness near Emmitsburg, Maryland on February 22, 1810. Its mission was to educate needy girls of this frontier region.

Elizabeth Ann Seton came from a socially prominent family that belonged to the fashionable Trinity Episcopal Church, located on Broadway in New York City. During a trip to Italy she made friends with a devout Catholic couple, which inspired her to examine the Catholic faith. Her husband fell ill during this trip and died. Ann Seton was left to care for five children. Upon returning to America, she decided to become a Catholic, incurring the ire of many of her friends and family.

Leaving New York with her still living three daughters, Ann Seton formed a new religious community modeled on the French community of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. In time her Sisters of Charity established Catholic parochial schools all along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. The Sisters of Charity also established orphanages and hospitals as part of their mission to bring God's love and mercy to the poor.

*To visit the shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
visit www.setonheritage.org*

