



Missouri Catholic Conference

# Good News

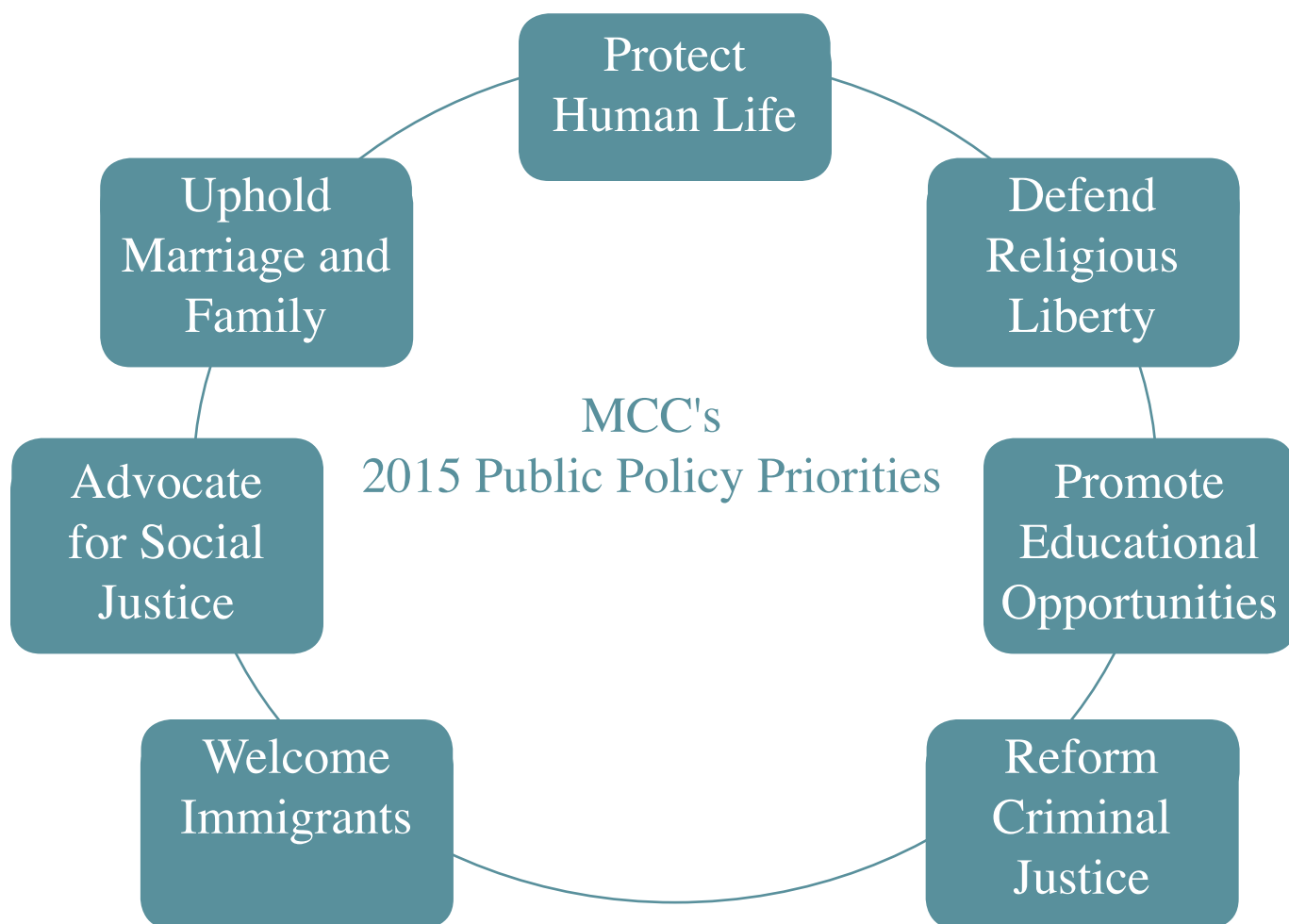
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*Bringing the Light of Christ to Missouri.*

## MCC Announces 2015 Public Policy Agenda

Protecting human life in all stages of development, ensuring early intervention help for infants and toddlers, and defending religious liberty are among the policy priorities adopted by the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) for 2015. The public policy agenda below outlines what the MCC believes are the most important legislative issues for the 2015 legislative session. This agenda does not reflect all of the MCC's concerns, but those that require action at this time.

The MCC will also seek to promote public policies that uphold the institutions of marriage and family and oppose laws that undermine the vitality of the family or that seek to redefine marriage. The MCC will advocate for social justice, calling for reform to unjust social structures that deny the poor basic necessities. The MCC will also seek to reform the criminal justice and support legislation that welcomes immigrants.



## **2015 Public Policy Priorities**

In faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks to create a culture that respects human life and upholds the dignity of all human persons including the poor and most vulnerable. 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.

### **Protect Human Life**

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. The MCC will work for a culture of life that promotes the sanctity and dignity of every human life. Toward that end, the MCC will support funding for Alternatives to Abortion (ATA) services and the Show-Me Healthy Babies program, inspections of abortion clinics, and legislation that promotes ethical research using adult stem cells. The MCC will oppose laws that promote experiments on embryonic stem cells, which destroy human life in its earliest form. In addition, the MCC will oppose leg-

islation that encourages a "right to die" mentality. As part of the effort to create a society that respects the dignity of all human life, the MCC will support efforts to re-examine, scale back, and repeal the death penalty.

### **Uphold Marriage and 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 of the Catholic Church*, par. 1601). It is a covenant between baptized persons which Christ the Lord has raised to the dignity of a sacrament, (*Catechism*, par. 1601). Family is the basic cell of human society and the foundation of civilized life. Presently, the institutions of marriage and family are threatened by a culture that no longer values authentic marriage and that seeks to raise children outside of marriage or to redefine marriage in a way contrary to natural law. The MCC will seek to promote public policies that uphold the institutions of marriage and family and oppose laws that undermine the vitality of the family or that seek to redefine marriage.

### **Defend Religious Liberty**

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). The 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, the redefinition of marriage and purported "non-discrimination" statutes threaten the religious freedom of Catholic institutions and individuals. The MCC will vigorously oppose all government efforts to ignore religious liberty or to abridge rights of conscience.



## **Promote Educational Opportunities**

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). The MCC will promote public policies that uphold parental rights and choices in education. This includes educational opportunities for all children, such as early intervention services for infants and toddlers, A+ scholarships for secondary students in Catholic schools, and financial assistance so families can choose suitable education for their children. The MCC will support repeal of Constitutional provisions (Blaine Amendments) that hinder children's educational opportunities.



## **Advocate for Social Justice**

Pope Francis calls for all Christians to hear the cry of the poor and to reform "unjust social structures" that deny the poor basic necessities. The Holy Father cautions against treating the free market as a false god that will automatically address the concerns of the poor; both financial and political leaders must seek a "more humane social order," (*Evangelii Gaudium*, pars. 53-60). The MCC will support: expansion and reform of Medicaid; an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for the working poor; adequate funding of pro-

grams that assist the needy; and stronger consumer protections in the lending industry. The MCC will also promote measures that seek to heal racial and cultural divisions while building vibrant and just communities.

## **Welcome 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 and remind lawmakers of the right of people to migrate to other countries. The MCC will defend the right of the Church to minister to immigrants and their children without punitive government interference. The MCC will also support the right of schools and other institutions to serve children without being forced to screen them for immigration status or to hinder their educational opportunities. The MCC, in conjunction with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, will urge Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform, including a way for undocumented persons living and working in the United States to earn U.S. citizenship, which allows for the reunification of families.

## **Reform Criminal Justice**

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*, pars. 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 responsible place in the community. Toward that end, the MCC will support meaningful reforms that allow juvenile offenders in homicide cases to re-enter society where appropriate and compensation for those individuals who have been wrongly convicted.



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## How You Can Stay Involved

The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy agency for the Catholic Church in Missouri. The Missouri bishops serve as the MCC's Board of Directors. The bishops appoint a 15 member Public Policy Committee to provide input to the MCC on an ongoing basis.

The MCC is actively involved in all levels of government, especially state and federal issues, and advocates for legislation that upholds the sanctity and dignity of all human life.

As a current MCC Citizens' Network member you can stay involved by reading *Good News* and our weekly email updates. You can also help by responding to MCC action alerts and easily contact your legislators on key legislation.

You can stay informed on a regular (even daily) basis by visiting MoCatholic.org. At the MCC website, you can review progress report on MCC tracked legislation, find out the contact information for your legislators, review news releases and other MCC documents, and even begin the process of registering to vote.

Become active in public policy and make a difference. Thanks for adding your voice to the thousands of others joined together in making Missouri a place that respects human life and the dignity of all persons.



Photo Credit: Tim Bommel, MO House of Reps.