

focus

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MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE COMMON GOOD

2021–2022 ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES

The mark of “a truly human and fraternal society,” according to Pope Francis, is its ability to ensure “that each of its members is accompanied at every stage of life.”¹ Traveling together involves more than meeting basic needs. Echoing further the words of the Holy Father, it also calls for “enabling them to give the best of themselves,” whatever their capabilities. Catholics are called to a life of charity and justice; a component of which is engagement in the democratic process that shapes communities and the common good.

In January, members of the Michigan Legislature took their oath of office and began the 2021–2022 legislative session. The session kicks off amid a global pandemic and lingering acrimony from last year’s national election that inflamed existing political, class, and racial tension across the country and in Michigan. Meanwhile, families are separated or are grieving loved ones taken by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many others have lost jobs or businesses and are having a difficult time making ends meet. Countless people are struggling to find hope. During these significant societal,

familial, and personal challenges, the role and experience of Catholics to care for others—including through the development of good public policy—provides recourse for the lost and struggling.

The wisdom of the Church clarifies how people of faith can and should respect and promote every person as a child of God, including the unborn, the elderly, the imprisoned, the immigrant, and those experiencing poverty, sickness, or other challenges. Whereas public policies have a significant impact upon human life at all stages, Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) exists as the advocacy voice of the Church to engage in the legislative process and to advocate for justice and dignity.

This **focus** publication highlights MCC’s guiding advocacy principles for the 2021–2022 legislative session. The following pages also share information about the Michigan Legislature and ways Catholics can become involved in advocacy. ■

Founded in 1963, MCC serves as the official voice of the Catholic Church in Michigan on matters of public policy. MCC testifies on legislation before state lawmakers, speaks with media, and prepares information about current issues and legislation from a Catholic perspective. Through its work, MCC promotes a social order that respects the dignity of the human person and serves the common good in the spirit of the Beatitudes and in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Conference’s advocacy seeks to highlight the needs of the vulnerable in the policy-making process, especially those who do not have the opportunity or the energy to consistently lift their voices.



**“GOD CREATED MANKIND
IN HIS IMAGE”**

GENESIS 1:27, NAB

The Catholic Church is present in society to assist human-kind through life’s many challenges: supporting mothers during unexpected or difficult pregnancies, assisting parents through foster placements and adoptions, and helping the elderly or infirm with terminal illnesses and end-of-life care. MCC will support policies this legislative session that uplift and protect the dignity of human life, especially the unborn and those marginalized by economic challenges. MCC will also encourage policies that care for vulnerable women and families, mitigate violence, seek greater racial understanding, and promote life-affirming palliative care. The Conference further supports:

- Policies that recognize the value of every person’s life from conception to natural death.
- Policy initiatives and pregnancy care programs that provide and expand alternatives to abortion, as well as assist pregnant and parenting women with prenatal, postpartum, and adoption services.
- Measures to eliminate abortion and promote the health and safety of women.
- Prohibiting or regulating research policies which violate the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life.
- Policies that seek to reduce violence in society, including the reduction of gun violence.
- Upholding the constitutional ban on the death penalty and the statutory ban on assisted suicide.
- Policies that expand and improve end-of-life care through a person’s natural death.
- Policies that support the authentic nature of the human person and recognize the inherent biological differences between males and females.
- Policies that address racial injustice and promote racial harmony. ■

“OPEN YOUR MOUTH, JUDGE JUSTLY, DEFEND THE NEEDY AND THE POOR!”

PROVERBS 31:9, NAB

The Church calls for Catholics “to promote the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.”² Across the state, too many Michiganders are struggling to find work, access to educational opportunities, and even basic needs. Policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic intended to stop the virus have produced high unemployment and shuttered businesses, devastating local families and exasperating social concerns such as addiction and abuse. Legislative policies will likely arise out of the pandemic to assist those who have been impacted. Within the legislative process, MCC will support:

- Tax policies that support marriage, families, and low-income residents.
- The allocation of state budget resources to provide critical services for vulnerable persons, especially health care, food, and heating assistance.
- Energy policies and regulations which promote competition, support for low-income ratepayers, and foster environmental stewardship.
- Affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly-funded services.
- Regulatory legislation that will protect the faith-based mission of churches and institutions.
- Maintenance of the tax-exempt status for nonprofit organizations.
- Affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families and individuals.
- Affordable and accessible transportation options for low- and moderate-income workers.
- Policies that support fair and adequate working conditions for all employees.
- Policies that foster and promote employment for Michigan residents.
- Opposition to policies that prey upon the vulnerable, such as predatory payday lending. ■

“FOR FREEDOM CHRIST SET US FREE ... SERVE ONE ANOTHER THROUGH LOVE”

GALATIANS 5:1 & 13, NAB

Faith-based organizations have operated as a humanitarian presence in local communities for decades, offering support and assistance to those that walk through their doors. Catholic organizations exist to serve those most in need, including neighbors in search of clothing, food, and housing. The COVID-19 pandemic has yet again highlighted the significance of charity agencies, which continue to provide hope for those experiencing devastating losses. MCC will advocate for policies that protect the right of faith-based organizations to serve others in the public square. To this end, MCC supports:

- Freedom for faith-based providers, institutions, and all individuals to serve the general public according to their religious tradition and without interference from the government.
- Opposition to government regulations and mandates that violate the long-standing religious practices of faith-based organizations.
- Continuing to seek policies proactively that promote religious freedom. ■

A *Blueprint for the Common Good* arranges MCC’s legislative interests into ten policy categories that flow from the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. This *Blueprint* demonstrates how each principle is interconnected with one another. For example, advocating for resources that assist those experiencing financial hardship protects the dignity of an adult, as well as the dignity of their children or an expecting mother’s unborn child. Calling for increased health care access for those with little or no resources promotes the Freedom to Serve, as religious institutions play a significant role in health care delivery. MCC encourages religious persons and communities to ask: which policies will elevate the common good? Continual reflection on this question will help policy makers develop a state that values and encourages accompaniment. In Lansing, MCC works with elected officials toward this outcome.



“TRAIN THE YOUNG IN THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO; EVEN WHEN OLD, THEY WILL NOT SWERVE FROM IT”

PROVERBS 22:6, NAB

Providing a quality education for the next generation of leaders is essential toward improving the lives of Michiganders. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that parents have both the right and responsibility to act as the first educators of their children. Therefore, each family must choose the schooling that best fits their needs: public or non-public, religious or non-religious, online or in-person, at home or in a school building. To ensure excellent educational options for all, to respond to the cries of the poor for better options, and to help Catholic schools thrive, MCC supports:

- Reimbursement to nonpublic schools for state-mandated, noninstructional services, including policies which protect the health, safety, and well-being of students.
- Maximized opportunities of nonpublic school students to participate in comprehensive shared time services.
- Policies that seek to improve the quality of public education and ensure parental rights within the public school setting.
- State policies which enable Michigan residents to take full advantage of federal school choice programs.
- A requirement that all public school districts have open enrollment policies.
- Protection of nonpublic schools from excessive regulation.
- Continued participation of nonpublic schools in school safety and noncore extra-curricular grant opportunities.
- Adequate funding for the Michigan Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs.
- Amending Article VIII, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution to allow the Michigan Legislature greater flexibility for necessary education reforms.
- Policies that foster and promote education and job training for the skilled trades.
- Inclusion of nonpublic schools, students, faculty, and staff in school-based funding programs and initiatives, whenever appropriate. ■

“WHOEVER DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR RELATIVES AND ESPECIALLY FAMILY MEMBERS HAS DENIED THE FAITH”

1 TIMOTHY 5:8, NAB

Family is *the* critical societal structure. It is where an individual’s values and character are first formed, where children learn about love and happiness, where memories and traditions begin and continue into future generations. It is also where individuals learn to resolve differences, to express their emotions in a healthy way, to recognize unhealthy behavior, to respect others, and to apply virtues. Recognizing the role a committed husband and wife in marriage play in the lives of their family and the community as a whole, MCC supports:

- Promoting the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.
- Policies that protect and promote the stability of marriage and the institution of the family.
- Policies that strengthen the long-standing relationship between the State of Michigan and nonprofit agencies in the provision of child placement services.
- Amending Michigan’s no-fault divorce laws.
- Policies that combat human trafficking, domestic violence, and abuse of vulnerable persons. ■

“FOR I WAS ... ILL AND YOU CARED FOR ME”

MATTHEW 25:35–36, NAB

The importance of health care resonates with all Michiganders. Unfortunately, too many low-income families are forced to make tough decisions between financial resources and accessing proper care. Such obstacles may include a lack of local providers, transportation issues, and the rising cost of care and prescriptions. The Church teaches that access to health care is a basic human right that flows from the dignity of the human person. Special consideration should be given to the voices of the poor, uninsured, unemployed, and other vulnerable populations.³ When considering health care legislation, MCC supports:

- Protection of health coverage, including preventative care, for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.
- Appropriate Medicaid funding to ensure adequate coverage for recipients and payments to providers.
- Opposition to legislation that threatens the mission of institutional and individual faith-based providers.
- Policies that ensure access and adequate resources for physical and behavioral health care, including telemedicine and treatment for addictions and substance abuse. ■



“MAKE JUSTICE YOUR AIM: REDRESS THE WRONGED, HEAR THE ORPHAN’S PLEAS, DEFEND THE WIDOW”

ISAIAH 1:16–17, NAB

Crime has a far-reaching impact. It affects families, law enforcement, the wrongly accused, and certainly the victim. When discussing criminal justice reforms, solutions should foster fairness and rehabilitative outcomes. The Catholic concept of restorative justice promotes policies that improve public safety, encourages accountability and healing, and contributes, when possible, to rehabilitation. MCC supports:

- Policies that respect crime victims, including provision of just compensation and treatment for their physical and emotional injuries.
- Policies that incentivize intensive probation programming to reduce recidivism.
- Adequate state funding to ensure accused indigent persons receive competent legal representation.
- Comprehensive reentry services to assist the formerly incarcerated to become productive members of society.
- Sentencing guidelines and parole practices that reflect an individual’s potential threat to society.
- Elimination of life without parole sentencing for juveniles convicted as adults. ■

“YOU SHALL LOVE ... YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF”

LUKE 10:27, NAB

The Catholic Church for decades has called for federal immigration reform and state policies that treat immigrants and refugees with respect. People of faith are called to welcome the stranger among them, and “to be present to those in need of help, regardless of whether or not they belong to our social group.”⁴ Being present includes a willingness to advocate for measures that recognize the worth of immigrants, migrants, and refugees; supporting policies that keep families together; and reviewing legislation that addresses the root causes of migration. In 2021–2022, MCC will support:

- Upholding the human dignity of all persons and working against injustices that compromise the dignity of immigrants.
- Policies that prevent the separation of families.
- Policies that promote access to state identification.
- Continuing to welcome refugees and asylees to the state who have been admitted by the federal government.
- Recognizing and promoting the values that immigrants and refugees provide to Michigan’s culture and economy. ■

“GOD THEN TOOK THE MAN AND SETTLED HIM IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN, TO CULTIVATE AND CARE FOR IT”

GENESIS 2:15, NAB

The natural environment is a gift from God. Across the state, it offers notable beauty and provides necessary resources for Michigan communities. Enjoying these resources, however, also comes with a responsibility to cultivate and care for the Earth. Because those in poverty are disproportionately impacted by pollution and waste, public policies are enhanced when the health of the environment and the health of individuals are discussed.⁵ With these considerations in mind, MCC supports:

- Engaging in policies that reflect Catholic Social Doctrine on the environment in state policy, including access to safe and affordable drinking water and the responsible stewardship of natural resources. ■

“YOUR EVERY ACT SHOULD BE DONE WITH LOVE”

1 CORINTHIANS 16:14, NAB

Michigan Catholic Conference is a statewide organization that primarily focuses on advocacy at the State Capitol in Lansing. However, MCC will engage with Michigan’s congressional delegation at the request of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops when a critical issue arises at the federal level. Such engagement may include:

- Legislation that extends full legal protection to individuals and institutions regarding conscience rights in health care, child placement services, education, and employment decisions.
- Promotion of ethical medical research and the elimination of federal funding for research that uses aborted fetal tissue.
- Ensuring that global assistance from the United States does not promote abortion.
- Protecting liberty, privacy, and parental and individual rights through policies that support the authentic nature of the human person and recognize the inherent biological differences between males and females.
- Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure the equitable participation of nonpublic school students and teachers.
- Expansion of federal school choice policies to benefit Michigan families.
- Legislation that would codify the Deferred Action Against Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program for individuals who were brought to this county when they were children.
- Comprehensive immigration reform that promotes family unity, does not separate family members, streamlines the process for legal immigration, includes a path for low-skilled workers to work in the United States, and includes a path toward citizenship for undocumented persons already in the United States.
- Equitable access for nonprofit and faith-based organizations to federal financial assistance during times of national crisis or local emergencies.
- Policies that encourage collaboration between federal and nongovernmental organizations for prudent and coordinated allocation of international aid. ■

THE 101ST MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE

ENGAGEMENT MATTERS YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



"THE PROCESS OF BUILDING FRATERNITY, BE IT LOCAL OR UNIVERSAL, CAN ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN BY SPIRITS THAT ARE FREE AND OPEN TO AUTHENTIC ENCOUNTERS."

POPE FRANCIS, *FRATELLI TUTTI*, 2020

The Michigan Legislature is comprised of 148 elected officials. This includes 110 in the House of Representatives and 38 in the State Senate. The 101st Legislature, which will be in office through December 2022, includes 83 returning members and 27 newly elected representatives. The Senate was not up for reelection in November 2020. ■

As lawmakers debate policies that impact residents across the state, it is important for them to hear from their constituents. MCC offers an easy email platform that helps individuals connect with their state lawmakers: the Catholic Advocacy Network (CAN). Through CAN, Michiganders receive weekly emails about policy issues of concern, relevant court cases, and other critical updates. Members of CAN will also find opportunities to participate in advocacy and easily contact their elected officials. CAN is a simple but valuable tool. Anyone with an email can join at micatholic.org/can. ■



To find your elected officials, visit bit.ly/3a3Ou26 or legislature.mi.gov to learn more about their work.

1. *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis, 2020: bit.ly/37mOQ2a 2. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB, 2019 version: bit.ly/2CY57yl 3. "Letter to Congress on Moral Framework for Healthcare During COVID-19 Pandemic," USCCB, May 7 2020, bit.ly/3ajJgzl 4. Same as citation 1. 5. *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis, 2015: bit.ly/2JPfep3

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