



Michigan Catholic Conference leader says cutting Earned Income Tax Credit is a moral issue

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By **Paul R. Kopenkosky | The Grand Rapids Press**

GRAND RAPIDS — Would Jesus care if low-income families in Michigan continue to receive a tax credit on their income? Paul Long doesn't need to think twice for his answer.

Long, president and CEO of the Lansing-based Michigan Catholic Conference, said recently at the Cathedral Square Center downtown that it is crucial the Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit remain intact.

"We are called to set the downtrodden free, to be leaven in society," Long said. "All are created in the image and likeness of God, and they have inalienable rights and dignity.

"The gospel is the norm for a just society."

Founded in 1963, the MCC's mission is to influence state legislation and public policy issues and serve the seven dioceses in Michigan.



Paul Long

The Catholic Charities of West Michigan's Parish Social Ministry Connection and the Grand Rapids Diocese hosted Long's talk, which looked at what social justice entails through the lens of Catholic teaching.

When it comes to Gov. Rick Synder's budget proposal to eliminate the EITC, among other tax credits, Long sees justice lacking.

It gets even more discouraging because, Long said, he knows some Republican lawmakers consider the tax credit, which took effect in 2008 and provides a refund equivalent to 20 percent of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, a token boost in income for the working poor.

Although Michigan has a "massive state budget problem," the solution isn't balancing the budget on the backs of low-income people who endure the stranglehold of poverty, Long said.

"For a single mother of two who works for \$8 an hour, her \$700 return in tax credit is significant," Long said. "Keeping this tax credit intact is our top priority because it lifts people up."

Other policy issues on MCC's radar include banning partial-birth abortion in state law, opposing insurance regulations that mandate coverage for abortion or contraception, upholding the constitutional definition of marriage, ensuring health care coverage for low- and moderate-income people and providing affordable housing and transportation.

And MCC will continue its watchdog role of keeping track of a biennial average of 600 bills proposed in the state Legislature.

"We should be mindful of the fact the state shouldn't be doing things contradicting our faith," Long said.

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