

CAPITOL

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REPORT



The Newsletter of the
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Stem Cell Research: Serve All, Sacrifice None

On April 29, Wisconsin's Roman Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter strongly affirming the value of scientific research and endorsing the practice of stem cell research when it does not involve the destruction of human embryos.

John Huebscher, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), explained that this educational effort is not tied to any pending legislation or policy proposal. Rather, it reflects the bishops' commitment to advancing science wherever it upholds human life and dignity.

The letter reminds Catholics that "we are called to harness new developments at the cutting edge of science in ways that respect the dignity of all human life, especially in its most vulnerable stages."

The bishops emphasize that religious faith is not opposed to science. They note a person can be "both faith-filled and scientific."

"This Catholic teaching is not an example of faith absent science, but rather faith supported by science," they observe. "It is scientists who have demonstrated that the single cell, or zygote that re-

sults from fertilization, contains the complete genetic information necessary for the development of a unique human being. It is scientists who have shown us that human development is a continuous, uninterrupted process, from zygote, embryo, fetus, infant, child, to adult."

"Faith builds on these scientific facts by acknowledging that our Creator endows our human nature with an innate dignity that does not depend on our size, beauty, intelligence, wealth, or any other attribute," they write. "Human life is ultimately a gift of God, of which each of us is a steward. And it is a gift that began and developed for all of us in exactly the same way."

The bishops also say they understand concerns that opposition to embryonic stem cell research could delay or hamper efforts to cure fatal and debilitating illnesses.

"Like you, we fear crippling injuries and chronic disease, and we have experienced the anguish of seeing a loved one suffer. We long for the day when scientists can find treatments and cures for these conditions. But we cannot agree with those who suggest that respecting the inviolability of a human

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Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

June 1 is not only the beginning of Dairy Month in Wisconsin. In even numbered years, June 1 is also the date on which candidates for county, state, and federal offices begin circulating nominating papers. Thus, the 2008 campaign season is underway.

This means Catholics focus anew on the ongoing responsibilities of their vocation as "faithful citizens." This vocation involves several responsibilities. First, we need to reflect on the state of the world in which we live. This means we consider the problems, opportunities, and challenges facing our communities, our state, and our nation. This in turn leads us to identify those issues and policy questions that can change for better, or for worse, the conditions and environment that influence the common good locally and globally. Then we need to assess those seeking office to discern if their talents, capabilities, and policy priorities are a good fit for the offices they seek and the issues they will confront.

Most of us will be studious observers. Some will be active participants as candidates, campaign workers, and shapers of opinion. These caring men and women deserve our thanks for what they undertake. We may not agree with them. Indeed, we may vote against some of them. But as we do so, we need to recognize that our system of self-governance would not exist without them.

For our part, we at the WCC will provide educational and formational materials to help Catholics who want to reflect on how their faith and the political issues of the day intersect. These materials will not answer every question or probe every issue of concern to faithful citizens. But they will offer a place to start. I hope you find them useful, and that they help Catholics become among the most informed and engaged citizens this election year.

2008 Voter Education Resources

In 2008, as in past election years, the WCC has prepared a series of resources to help voters meet their duties as faithful citizens. The materials will be available later this summer to diocesan offices for distribution in the parishes.

The materials include a nine-week series of bulletin inserts. The series opens with a joint letter from the bishops of Wisconsin and goes on to cover the main points found in the U.S. bishops' 2007 statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*. Four of the weekly inserts discuss the principles of Catholic social doctrine and their application to the political sphere. These four inserts will cover:

- Right to Life & Dignity of the Human Person
- Family Life & Participation/Rights & Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor & Vulnerable/Dignity of Work & the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity/Care of God's Creation

Two additional inserts will explain the importance of developing a well-formed conscience. Another insert will provide the latest edition of the *WCC Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics*.

The WCC has also developed a question card that voters can use when questioning candidates running for state or local office.

Copies of all the WCC's voter education materials are available on the WCC website or from your local diocesan office responsible for issues of social concern.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS Catholics at the Capitol 2009



March 31, 2009

**Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center
Madison, WI**

Registration will begin at 8:15 am.

Please join us for this day-long event.

More details will follow in upcoming *Capitol Reports*.

WCC staff are available for parish-based presentations on *Faithful Citizenship* and Catholic social teaching. If you are interested in a presentation for this fall, please contact the WCC office at 608-257-0004 or email us at office@wisconsinatholic.org.

2007-08 Legislative Session Wrap-up

Due to this session's protracted deliberations over the budget and because each party controlled one chamber, lawmakers passed fewer bills than in past years. The following is an overview of the legislation which the WCC either supported or opposed.

LIFE ISSUES

The WCC and other pro-life groups were successful in preventing the passage of some significant bills during the session. These included a bill to repeal Wisconsin's criminal abortion statute; a bill to legalize assisted suicide; and a proposal to restore the death penalty. Pro-life forces also defeated a measure to require every state pharmacist and pharmacy to promptly dispense FDA-approved contraception.

The WCC supported several proposals that did not advance this session. They included preventing coerced abortions, and bringing the state partial-birth abortion ban into line with federal law.

HEALTH CARE

The state budget bill included a provision to expand the BadgerCare program. The new BadgerCare Plus program, which the WCC supported, has already provided health insurance to an estimated 60,000 additional people.

The WCC also supported a mental health parity bill, but it failed to pass.

EDUCATION

It was a "status quo" session for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program since no bills related to the program passed the legislature. The WCC and other allies successfully opposed efforts to regulate the program beyond the existing accreditation requirements. They unsuccessfully supported expanding the Choice

program to schools in Milwaukee county.

With the help of other religious and independent school advocates, the WCC successfully opposed plans to limit school busing for children in private schools all across the state.

The WCC backed a proposal to require employers to provide limited unpaid leave for parents attending school activities, but it did not advance.

SOCIAL CONCERNS

The WCC supported a state ban on human trafficking, which was enacted into law as 2007 Wisconsin Act 116.

The WCC also supported a number of proposals that failed to pass. They included regulating the payday loan industry; increasing the minimum wage and indexing it for inflation; returning 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system; and divesting state investments from Sudan.

The WCC opposed a proposal to permit employers to discriminate against ex-felons, which did not advance.

OTHER

The WCC and other groups successfully opposed proposals to remove the statute of limitations for past and future civil actions involving sexual abuse.

The WCC also worked with the authors of 2007 Wisconsin Act 58 to modify the laws governing funeral arrangements. A collection of religious advocates persuaded the authors to clarify the role of clergy in helping families make funeral arrangements.

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embryo devalues the lives of the ill and infirm because it may deny them a treatment or a cure. On the contrary, when we value vulnerable life in one context we strengthen the case for valuing it in others.”

The bishops reaffirm past support for stem cell research using “adult stem cells” because it does not require the destruction of human embryos. They observe that such stem cells have already helped many individuals suffering from serious ailments.

In addition to the letter, the bishops have authorized other educational materials, including a Questions and Answers publication and a 14-minute DVD to help inform parishioners on the science and ethics of stem cell research. The WCC has shared these with Catholic parishes and institutions across Wisconsin as part of a long-term educational effort.

The bishops conclude their letter by saying, “We encourage all of you to study the educational materials that accompany this letter, seek out additional scientific information, and engage our fellow citizens in truth and love during this vital civic conversation over stem cell research. May we together strive to use our scientific knowledge in ways that serve all and sacrifice none.”

Ethical Stem Cell Research Resources

are now available in Spanish at
www.wisconsincatholic.org.

New WCC Resource on Health Care

The WCC has prepared an educational brochure on health care reform that is designed for use by parishes and other Catholic groups that want to sponsor community-based discussions on the issue. The brochure, called *A Call for Health Care Reform*, approaches the topic from a Catholic perspective. The resource reviews the principles for health care reform that the bishops have identified as necessary for the development of a just and equitable health care system.

The WCC document also provides a brief overview of health care statistics in Wisconsin. It notes some of the concerns faced by employers, providers, and patients in securing access to health insurance. The document poses questions to consider when measuring proposals for reform and suggests ways in which individuals can become engaged in the health care debate.

WCC staff prepared the resource in response to growing interest in the topic by Catholics around the state.

If you would like to receive a copy of this brochure, or to learn about other resources designed to foster discussion on health care reform, please visit the WCC’s website at www.wisconsincatholic.org, or contact the WCC at 608/257-0004.

Copies are also available through the diocesan offices responsible for issues of social concern.