

CAPITOL

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REPORT



The Newsletter of the
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Bishops Champion Catholic Schools, Urge Support

The bishops of Wisconsin have published a letter to Catholics affirming the vital role Catholic schools play in their communities and urging a renewed commitment to their success. The letter, entitled "Catholic Schools and Our Church: Faith Moving Forward," has been distributed throughout the state in conjunction with this year's annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week, January 30 through February 5, 2011.

In the letter, the bishops emphasize the unique approach of Catholic education. "A Catholic school is not a building, but an experience dedicated to the formation of the whole person in mind, body, and spirit. Our Catholic schools cultivate strong communities, joining parishioners, families, staff, and neighbors behind the indispensable task of teaching children to draw from their God-given gifts and share those treasures with others."

The bishops note that the "strength of our Catholic identity, our parishes, our religious education programs, and our community are closely aligned with our Catholic schools." They continue by cautioning that the

"community suffers when these schools close" and urge "the entire Catholic community to commit its time, talent, and treasure to support them."

The bishops also observe that Catholic schools serve the wider Wisconsin community, explaining that those in Catholic schools today are only part of the story.

"Many thousands more in Wisconsin are themselves a product of Catholic schools, and they have enriched our state with their contributions as parents, citizens, and community leaders. Their lives affirm that Catholic schools nurture spiritual strength as well as intellect, impart values as well as knowledge, and foster a human excellence that bears fruit through service to others."

With 325 Catholic schools serving nearly 60,000 Wisconsin students, Catholic schools are a significant part of the state's education system, especially in inner city and rural areas where serving families of limited means remains a focus of the Church. Catholic schools in Wisconsin and across the nation

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Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

For those who engage the policies by which we govern ourselves, the beginning of an odd-numbered year is a time for defining a vision. Governors set their vision with their state of the state message and their budget address. Legislators do it by their "priority bills." The Wisconsin Catholic Conference does so by sharing its Public Policy Positions (see page 3) for the new session and through our *Catholics at the Capitol* event, which takes place on April 5th this year.

The vision of the WCC's Public Policy Positions is one of enduring hope. Our themes and priorities read the signs of the times, but they aren't swayed by elections or headlines. They are grounded in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and the values they uphold. These are timeless. So, as in other sessions, the WCC's positions reflect:

- An uncompromising commitment to uphold the value of human life and dignity of all people;
- A commitment to family and community, and the right of all to participate in the life of the community;
- A reminder that human rights are linked to our responsibility to develop and give of our gifts for the good of others;
- A reminder that a fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with people who lack the resources and opportunities available to most of us;
- An affirmation of the dignity of work and the people who do that work;
- A recognition that we are one human family and that the principle of solidarity binds people of all races, nations, and economic strata to each other;
- A vision of stewardship that commands us to care for that which God has entrusted to us since the dawn of our creation.

So, when our fellow citizens review our legislative testimony and the content of our *Catholics at the Capitol* "breakout sessions," they will find an invitation to embrace these values and weave them into the fabric of our laws and public policies over the next two years.

Catholics at the Capitol 2011

On Tuesday, April 5, 2011, Catholics from around the state will meet at the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center in Madison, Wisconsin, for *Catholics at the Capitol 2011*. Sponsored by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) in cooperation with numerous Catholic organizations, this biennial event is a day of education, advocacy, and fellowship.

The theme for this year's event, "Living Faith in the Public Square," embraces the spirit of the day's events, including breakout sessions on a variety of issues such as state budgeting, promoting the dignity of life, food policy and production, human trafficking, health care reform, immigration, parental choice in education, and more. Experts from around the state will be on hand to examine issues that advance the common good, and discuss with participants how to be an effective advocate.

The Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKI, Archbishop of Milwaukee, will provide a keynote address on how faith and religious perspectives elevate public policy debate. This year's event also features a popular session first seen at the 2007 *Catholics at the Capitol*. During the afternoon general session, a panel of bishops and lay faithful will discuss how to witness to hope during uncertain times.

Registration begins at 8:15am, and the day's events start with a prayer service at 9:15am. After the afternoon general session adjourns at 3:30pm, participants are encouraged to walk over to the State Capitol and contact their legislators and staff.

Please consider being a part of this unique event. Deadline for registrations is Monday, March 21, 2011, and for those who register in advance, the registration fee is \$37 for non-students and \$12 for full-time students. Same-day registration is \$40 for all non-students.

For more information, call the Wisconsin Catholic Conference at 608-257-0004 or visit the WCC's website at www.wisconsinatholic.org. Details on how to arrange meetings with legislators, as well as other important information will be provided in the registration confirmation packet.

WCC 2011 Public Policy Positions Grounded in Themes of Social Teaching

As the new legislative session begins, the WCC is sharing its 2011 Public Policy Positions document with Catholics around the state, legislators, and other policy makers.

The document is organized around the major themes of Catholic Social Teaching. Each section begins with a short statement affirming a principle of Catholic Social Teaching and shares the Conference's stance on a number of related policy issues.

An edited version of the document follows. For a complete version, visit www.wisconsincatholic.org.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person. Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected from conception to natural death. People are more important than things, and the measure of every institution is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person, especially the most vulnerable.

- Oppose abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and the death penalty.
- Oppose public funding of stem cell research that destroys human embryos.
- Support alternatives to abortion for women facing unplanned pregnancies.
- Support efforts to halt domestic violence and assist victims.
- Support for the aging, those with disabilities, or those who are chronically or terminally ill.

Family, Community, and Participation. The human person is not only sacred, but social. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life.

- Encourage and strengthen marriage between one

man and one woman.

- Respect and promote family unity in taxation, employment, and welfare policies.
- Protect children from abuse and neglect.
- Support parental choice in education.
- Support strong public education.
- Promote adoption and foster care.
- Require parental consent for medical treatments, including artificial contraception.
- Promote responsible sexuality.
- Assist military personnel, veterans, and their families.
- Support family farms.

Rights and Responsibilities. Every person has a fundamental right to life - the right that makes all other rights possible. Each person also has a right to the conditions for living a decent life - faith and family, food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. We also have a duty to secure and respect these rights not only for ourselves, but for others, and to fulfill our responsibilities to our families, to each other, and to the larger society.

- Support equitable taxation and sound fiscal policies.
- Protect religious freedom and conscience.
- Support healthy lifestyles.
- Support crime victims and restorative justice for offenders.
- Support law enforcement personnel and all who help preserve public safety.

Options for the Poor and Vulnerable. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

- Support affordable health care for all.
- Eliminate hunger.
- Support safe and affordable housing.

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Catholic Schools, *from page 1*

have long been credited with helping children of immigrants integrate into the nation's social and economic mainstream. Their success with children of all economic backgrounds has fueled support for parental choice in Wisconsin and elsewhere.

In the letter, the bishops give special recognition to the staff and faculty of the schools. "To our pastors, principals, and all those who serve in our Catholic schools, we offer our continuing gratitude and remain dedicated to making certain they are equipped with the tools necessary to guarantee an exceptional educational experience."

The letter also praises the faithful who have supported Catholic schools, but stresses the need for continued

contribution. "We also thank all our state's Catholics for all they have done to sustain our schools and urge their continued commitment. We invite those parishes or individuals who do not currently have ties to a Catholic school, to become engaged in the support of a nearby Catholic school community. We encourage parents and students to enroll in Catholic schools and experience the unique integration of spiritual and academic development they provide."

The letter concludes, "Teaching is an act of faith. Ultimately we hope and trust that after we are gone, the seeds of faith we sow will bear fruit in the lives of those we teach. We urge all who read this letter to renew their personal commitment to the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ by supporting our Catholic schools."

Policy Positions, *from page 3*

- Prohibit predatory lending.
- Return 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected.

- Support living wages for workers and their families.
- Remove barriers to employment, including transportation.
- Foster employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Solidarity. We are all one human family and we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be.

- Uphold human rights of immigrants and refugees.
- Support just trade agreements and investment policies.

Care for God's Creation. The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit.

- Support sustainable farming.
- Reduce toxins from our ground, water, and air.
- Encourage conservation and sustainable energy.