

2011 Public Policy Positions

"The Church...cannot and should not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper."

Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, #26, 2006



The Wisconsin Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of Wisconsin's Catholic bishops. The *2011 WCC Public Policy Positions* reflects the seven principles of Catholic social teaching and their corresponding priorities as set forth by the U.S. bishops in their statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*. We urge Wisconsin's citizens and lawmakers to implement these policies for the sake of the common good.

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.

Protect each and every human life. Wisconsin must effectively affirm, protect, and defend each and every human life, including the unborn. We must also oppose all attempts to legalize euthanasia, assisted suicide, and taxpayer funding for abortion.

Affirm the dignity of human life in medical and life science research. Each human life, regardless of the stage of development, must be protected and respected in scientific research. Research that requires the destruction of a human embryo or that clones a human embryo must be opposed and barred from receiving public money.

Reject the death penalty. Pope John Paul II has stated that the death penalty has no place where alternatives are available to protect society. Wisconsin made a similar judgment when it abolished the death penalty in 1854. This policy has served us well and we must retain it.

Support women facing unplanned pregnancies with real alternatives. In addition to adequate financial and medical support, women facing a crisis pregnancy need emotional and wrap-around services that can enable them to parent, or place their child for adoption. The state must also provide high quality childcare and decent housing to women in need, and make it possible for them to continue their education.

Stop domestic abuse. Every attack on human life and dignity must be opposed. All persons experiencing domestic abuse must have ready access to services that can assist them in resolving or escaping their situation.

Support the aging, those with disabilities, the chronically ill, and the terminally ill. Respect for all human life means assisting those with limitations. The state must ensure these individuals receive the necessary support and services, including transportation and quality care.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage – the lifelong commitment between a man and a woman – and family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life, and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.

Encourage and strengthen marriage. Lifelong marriage between one man and one woman is essential to the continuation of the human race, to the total development of the human person, and to the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family and society. Wisconsin must promote marriage and evaluate all public policies in light of their impact on marriage and families.

Respect and promote family relationships. Wisconsin must design and implement policies in the areas of taxation, employment, and welfare that foster family unity and reward personal responsibility. Whenever possible, parents must be given the option to care for their young children at home or place them in quality day care programs. Parents must also be allowed limited unpaid leave to attend their children’s day care or school functions.

Keep children safe. Public policies must promote the safety and well-being of our children, protecting them from all forms of abuse and neglect. We must continue to advance programs that protect children, such as the Catholic Church’s *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

Support choice in education. Parents are the primary educators of their children and have the right to send their children to the school of their choice, whether public, religious, or independent. Initiatives like the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program must be available to all families. Social justice further demands that government resources be provided to poor families so that they may choose the educational path best suited to their child’s success.

Strengthen support for education. Education is the surest path to full participation in the social, economic, and political life of our nation. Wisconsin must therefore sustain its public commitment to strong elementary and secondary schools. In particular, it must make greater efforts to ensure that all our children remain in school and achieve their highest academic potential.

Promote adoption and foster care. Wisconsin must maintain support for state-sponsored adoption awareness campaigns, adoption counseling, and tax credits for adoptive parents. Parents adopting or fostering children, especially those with special needs, must receive the necessary supports to help their families thrive.

Require parental consent for medical treatments. Parents have primary responsibility for ensuring the health, well-being, and education of their children. Government funding must not undermine parents by supporting programs that provide medical treatment, abortion, and artificial contraception to children without parental knowledge or consent.

Promote responsible sexuality. The most effective sex education in schools requires the participation of parents, not their replacement. School curricula must teach children how and why they should not be sexually active, and be developed with local parental involvement.

Assist veterans, their families, and those affected by armed conflict. Wisconsin must ensure that veterans and their families receive proper support as they return to civilian life. Wisconsin must also assist refugees and others whose lives have been harmed by military conflict.

Support family farms. Family farms form the backbone of Wisconsin’s rural economy. University research dollars as well as state grants and loans must help existing family farmers maintain their operations and encourage the creation of new 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. Our political institutions are responsible for securing the social conditions that enable each of us to share our gifts and reap the benefits of life in community. Taxes, though unpopular, are essential if government at all levels is to fulfill this responsibility. Citizens have a moral obligation to pay those taxes. Justice also requires that the tax burden be distributed equitably and based on a person’s ability to pay. Fiscal policies must avoid excessive debt that burdens future generations.

Protect religious freedom and conscience protection. Freedoms of conscience and of religion are primary and inalienable rights of the human person. Insofar as they touch the innermost sphere of the spirit, one can even say that they are the source of all other

liberties. Public policy must guard religious freedom by limiting government intrusion into religious matters, allowing for reasonable collaboration between public and religious entities, and protecting the rights of private institutions and employees to serve the community.

Support healthy lifestyles. Binge drinking, smoking, drug abuse, and unhealthy diets take a huge toll not only on individuals, but also on society. Public policies must promote healthy and responsible choices.

Wisconsin’s criminal justice system must reflect the principles in the WCC’s 1999 statement, *Public Safety, the Common Good and the Church*. Specifically, this means: 1) victims of crime, including the community at large, must have opportunities to be healed and restored; 2) policies, even those that enforce strict punishment, must serve the end of rehabilitation; 3) sentencing and inmate release policies must reflect restorative justice principles; and 4) corrections policies must make special efforts to reintegrate poor and marginalized offenders into society.

Support law enforcement personnel and all who help preserve public safety. As *Public Safety, the Common Good and the Church* points out, law enforcement personnel “are truly peacemakers and deserve the public’s respect and support in carrying out duties that are often dangerous and regularly unpleasant.” The state must provide law enforcement with adequate resources to recruit, screen, and train the finest candidates and to carry out their duties safely and humanely.

OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the poor and vulnerable. The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

Make affordable health care available to all. Health care is a basic human right. Small employers, farmers, and the working poor must be able to purchase affordable health benefits. Wisconsin must extend additional quality health care access to the uninsured and underinsured.

Eliminate hunger. Food is a basic human right, yet thousands of Wisconsin residents go hungry every day. For children this is especially harmful, as malnutrition impairs cognitive and physical growth. Public policies must ensure that all residents have access to healthy and affordable food.

Increase funding for safe and affordable housing. Shelter is a basic human right. Wisconsin must ensure that all its residents have access to decent and affordable housing.

Prohibit predatory lending practices. The state recently began regulating payday lenders. It must now carefully monitor the new law and continue to encourage more responsible lending alternatives.

Reform the juvenile justice system. State law treats 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system and places them in adult jails and prisons if convicted. Recent research indicates that placing youth in adult institutions results in higher recidivism and more serious subsequent offenses. Wisconsin must return 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system where they can receive developmentally appropriate treatment.

DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. 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, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected – the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

Provide living wages. All employed persons supporting themselves and their families must be able to afford the basic essentials of food, clothing, shelter, and health care. Minimum wage laws must be indexed to reflect changes in the cost of living.

Remove barriers to employment. Many citizens are willing to work but unable to do so because of discrimination, lack of transportation, and other social barriers. The public sector must work with private enterprise and organizations to remove these barriers.

Foster employment opportunities for people with disabilities. All persons have the right to earn a living, to participate in the economy, and to contribute to the common good. Wisconsin must make every effort to assist persons with physical and mental impairments to find and retain employment.

SOLIDARITY

We are one human family. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that "if you want peace, work for justice." The Gospel calls us to be "peacemakers." Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be "sentinels of peace" in a world wounded by violence and conflict.

Uphold human rights of immigrants and refugees. Immigration reform must be comprehensive and include a temporary worker program, a viable path to legalization, due process, and family unification. Laws aimed at enforcement must distinguish between dangerous criminals and non-violent persons whose only offense is lack of proper status. Our laws must also protect immigrants and refugees from all exploitation.

Participate justly in the global economy. Wisconsin's policies governing our participation in the global economy must respect the dignity of all people. Trade agreements with firms in other countries and investment policies must respect the human rights of workers and their families, and foster sound stewardship of the earth's natural resources.

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. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come. We show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation.

Promote sustainable farming. Agriculture is not just another economic activity; it is vital to human existence. What is grown and how it is grown affects everyone's health and the future of humanity. Wisconsin must promote sustainable farming that provides fair prices so that farmers can make a decent living, raise animals ethically, and maintain sound management practices. For the sake of food security and healthy diets, the state must also promote the production and consumption of local foods.

Support clean land, air, and water. Environmental toxins, such as lead, PCBs, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals are especially a problem for children, born and unborn. Wisconsin must make additional efforts to reduce toxins from our ground and water supply, as well as reduce carbon emissions.

Encourage conservation and sustainable energy. State policies must continue to promote the conservation of our natural resources and the development of alternative sources of energy. Wisconsin must promote the responsible development of wind and solar energy, along with biodiesel (in a manner that does not contribute to rising food costs).

The development of public policy is an ongoing process. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference will monitor and address new issues as they develop. The seven principles outlined in this document provide the guidance, focus, and foundation upon which the WCC will engage new issues.

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