

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

EYE ON THE CAPITOL

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ISSUES IN 2015 CALL US TO WITNESS OUR COMMITMENT TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SOLIDARITY

By John Huebscher, Executive Director

Advocating for the Catholic Conference requires us to articulate the principles of Catholic social teaching in what a lawyer-friend of mine likes to call the “jury English” of everyday conversation. Relating the principle of solidarity to current policy issues is one example of this.

The Principle of Solidarity flows from the truth that human beings created in the image of a Triune God are social by nature. As a result, “we are all in this together.” Communities whose citizens live in solidarity grasp that their citizens can’t think solely of themselves but must also consider the needs of others. Special interests don’t trump the common good.

The language of solidarity is central to our advocacy on the issue of abortion. For standing in solidarity with the unborn calls us to protect lives of human beings we cannot yet see and heal pain we cannot feel.

In 2015 debates over abortion and other issues will invite us to examine our commitment to this principle of solidarity.

Here is a partial list of those issues:

Taxes and spending. What we spend reflects our shared judgment as to what services and programs are necessary for the common good. What we pay in taxes, and who pays those taxes, reflects our belief as to who should shoulder the burden of paying for those services. Deciding these questions tests us our ability to see the value of services we ourselves may not use and challenge us to avoid the injustice of asking those with too little to bear too great a share of the costs.

Disparate treatment of racial minorities. The principle of solidarity and the moral imperative of racial equality go hand in hand. This should be on our minds as we ponder the mounting evidence of racial disparities in our state’s criminal justice system, our schools, and our unemployment data.

Drug testing. Policy makers are mulling a proposal to require recipients of certain public assistance programs and unemployment benefits to submit to mandatory drug testing. It is hard for most people who are not poor to identify with those who are. It is harder still for those who have never suffered from addiction to put themselves in the shoes of people who have. But the principle of solidarity calls us to do both. As we debate this proposal, we need to weigh the justice of asking only the needy and the jobless to submit to such tests, given that drug and alcohol abuse is not limited to lower income people.

Justice in the workplace. It may not be easy for those who enjoy good working conditions and can live comfortably on the income from one full-time job to be in solidarity with those who labor in less safe work places or who need to hold two or more jobs to make ends meet. Yet our commitment to solidarity calls us to do just that. Will we do so as we debate policies like the minimum wage and the rules that govern how workers exercise their right to bargain collectively?

Transportation. Even in the best of times it may be difficult for urban taxpayers to appreciate the value of lightly traveled rural roads that sustain our farms and tourist attractions and for rural taxpayers to recognize the worth of expressways and mass transit so vital to the commercial activity in our larger cities. These are not the best of times. Revenue from the tax on gasoline is falling short of what is needed to maintain our roads, bridges, bus systems and airports. Finding the political will to fund these disparate needs will provide a stern test of our commitment to solidarity.

When we honor the the principle of solidarity, we give witness to Pope John Paul II's reminder that "all are truly responsible for all." Will we give such witness as we decide these and many other issues that will be debated in this brand new legislative session? Time will tell.

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