



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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WCC CELEBRATES UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT VICTORY FOR DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR CATHOLIC CHARITIES BUREAU

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of Wisconsin's Catholic bishops, celebrates today's victory for Catholic Charities at the United States Supreme Court. The Court's 9-0 [decision](#) in *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission* reversed a ruling by the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously held that Wisconsin had violated the First Amendment when it determined that the Diocese of Superior Catholic Charities Bureau (CCB) was not operated "primarily for a religious purpose."

Nationwide, Catholic Charities carry out the Catholic Church's religious ministry to those in need by providing a wide range of services to help people with disabilities, the elderly, and those in poverty. They do this by serving all those in need, regardless of their religious beliefs, and do not proselytize those they serve.

After nearly a decade of legal battles, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision finally recognized the religious freedom of CCB and allows it to properly receive an exemption from paying into the state unemployment program. All of CCB's sub-entities can now participate in the Church Unemployment Pay Program (CUPP), which is the Wisconsin Catholic Bishops' own unemployment program. CUPP provides unemployment benefits that the Supreme Court recognized are "largely equivalent to the state system."

Last year, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that CCB was not exempt in part because it serves all people—not just Catholics. Wisconsin suggested that CCB could qualify for an exemption if it conditioned its service to those in poverty by trying to proselytize, even though the Church teaches against this.

The WCC's amicus brief in the federal case argued that the "Wisconsin Supreme Court's decision interferes with the Church's internal affairs, impedes its sincere religious mission to serve all people in a nonjudgmental, nonproselytizing fashion, and requires courts to become arbiters of religiosity in violation of the First Amendment." True Catholic charity "can't be reduced to just another secular social service."

Writing for the unanimous Court, Justice Sotomayer stressed that "Much like a law exempting only those religious organizations that perform baptisms or worship on Sundays, an exemption that requires proselytization or exclusive service of co-religionists establishes a preference for

certain religions based on the commands of their religious doctrine.” The Court reiterated that a rule of government neutrality between religions is “fundamental to our constitutional order.” The Court concluded that “There may be hard calls to make in policing that rule, but this is not one.”

David Earleywine, WCC Associate Director for Education & Religious Liberty, expressed great gratitude to the attorneys at Becket Law and Gibson Dunn, who worked tirelessly to protect religious freedom, not just for the CCB but for all Americans. “The importance of this case extends beyond Wisconsin. Thanks to the work of these excellent attorneys, American religious liberty has received one of its strongest affirmations yet.”

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