



New York State Catholic Conference 2009 Legislative Agenda

INTRODUCTION

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), Pope Benedict XVI clearly defines the role that religious faith can and must take in politics. Faith purifies practical reason which, by itself, "can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests." He explains:

From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.

In other words, faith helps both the citizenry and our elected officials see clearly so that they may forcefully pursue justice for all and work for the common good. The Church has outlined seven principles of Catholic social teaching to aid us in achieving this task. We are called to look at public policies through the lens of this teaching, because it is through these principles that justice is achieved. We urge all people of good will to reflect on these seven central and enduring themes of the Catholic social tradition:

- Respect for the Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- A Call to Family, Community and Participation
- Recognition of Human Rights and Responsibilities
- Special Concern for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity with Our Brothers and Sisters
- Care for God's Creation

The U.S. Bishops, in the recent statement "*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*," urge Catholics to use these principles to help form and inform their consciences: "With this foundation, Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates' promises and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of the Church in order to help build a better world."

Catholic social teaching provides the framework for our advocacy efforts through the New York State Catholic Conference as we recommit ourselves to carry the values of the Gospel into the public square.

We invite all Catholics to join us in pursuing these moral priorities and the following state legislative objectives for 2009. We urge you to stay informed on the issues by joining the statewide Catholic Advocacy Network. Just go to www.nyscatholic.org and click "Join the Network" or call (518) 434-6195.

--The Catholic Bishops of New York State

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The Catholic Church has long promoted respect for religious liberty, a core value that helps to shape international, national and state policy. The Church supports the fundamental right of individuals and institutions to conduct their activities publicly and privately according to their religious or moral beliefs. These rights are increasingly endangered by intrusive legislation and regulation, and are inadequately protected under current law. The Church strongly affirms the principle of religious freedom in the provision of all publicly funded services.

- ▶ Support the right of religious-affiliated organizations to provide services in accordance with their mission statements and their institutional conscience
- ▶ Oppose efforts to force faith-based institutions to provide or facilitate services and procedures, such as abortion or contraception, which are contrary to their religious beliefs and mission
- ▶ Protect the conscience right of individuals to decline to participate in morally objectionable procedures or activities

FAMILY LIFE/RESPECT LIFE

In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. The life of every human being, from inception through each stage of development to natural death, is sacred, deserving of respect and worthy of legal protection. As we strive to achieve full legal protection for all human lives, we support incremental legislative advances, such as those listed here, as important steps toward this goal.

The Catholic tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage and family are the basic cells of society. We support policies that strengthen the quality of family life, with particular attention to families with special needs.

Restore Respect for All Human Life

- ▶ Oppose efforts to further expand access to abortion
- ▶ Promote adult stem cell research such as umbilical cord blood initiatives, and prohibit human cloning and embryonic stem cell research
- ▶ Repeal the death penalty
- ▶ Maintain the state's current prohibition on physician-assisted suicide

Promote the Rights of Unborn Children

- ▶ Enact the Unborn Victims of Violence Act
- ▶ Restrict the use of state taxpayer funds (Medicaid) for abortion
- ▶ Support a ban on post-viability abortions

Protect the Health of Women and Children

- ▶ Promote adoption as a positive alternative to abortion
- ▶ Ensure informed consent for women seeking abortion and "emergency contraception"
- ▶ Require parental notification for minors seeking abortion
- ▶ Oppose further expansion of "emergency contraception"

Strengthen and Protect Families

- ▶ Oppose efforts to legalize the union of same-sex couples, whether called "marriage" or "civil unions"

- ▶ Encourage efforts to strengthen and preserve marriage, and oppose efforts to weaken marriage such as “no-fault” divorce
- ▶ Reverse the state’s expansion of legalized gambling because of its devastating impact on families and society
- ▶ Increase funding for services for domestic violence victims and their abusers
- ▶ Increase funding for counseling for addicted persons, including compulsive gamblers, substance abusers and their families
- ▶ Promote sexual abstinence education programs
- ▶ Strengthen and enforce laws against obscenity

HEALTH CARE

Equitable, accessible and ethical health care is an essential safeguard of human life. Health care is a basic human right, and genuine health care reform, recognizing the dignity of persons and the unique needs of the poor, is a matter of fundamental justice. The Catholic Conference remains committed to the right of religious-affiliated organizations to provide health care services according to their missions and to the provision of not-for-profit health care services, the maintenance of not-for-profit health systems, and the provision of services on a charity care basis, consistent with available revenues and responsible stewardship.

The Conference supports measures to expand health care access and coverage for low- and moderate-income individuals; adequate funding for appropriate Medicaid services for low-income New Yorkers and for institutions that provide core health care services in poor and underserved communities; the development of the full continuum of health care services in non-institutional settings, including adult care facilities, and community-based long-term care and home health care services; and support for adequate reimbursement for providers, including maintenance of economically sound reimbursement principles and trend factor rate adjustments that adequately reflect costs of health care services.

Ensure Access to Appropriate, Ethical Health Care

- ▶ Monitor implementation of legislation to enhance access to affordable health insurance for low- and moderate-income individuals and families, and support incremental changes in publicly subsidized health insurance programs leading to universal access to health care
- ▶ Support rate increases for hospital emergency room, clinic, and ambulatory surgery services; physician services; community health and school health centers; and dental and behavioral health services, particularly in inner-city and rural areas
- ▶ Support collaborative efforts to address health staffing and health faculty shortages through enhanced salaries and benefits, day care, transportation, health insurance, career promotion, scholarships, and loan forgiveness
- ▶ Support promotion of appropriate pain management, palliative care and hospice care for the suffering and terminally ill
- ▶ Support promotion of research into ethically-derived stem cells and cord blood, including the establishment of an upstate cord blood bank and the provision of adequate financing for education and outreach on the benefits of cord blood banking
- ▶ Promote expansion of home health care, including an increase in payments for home health care workers, and expansion of telemedicine via phone or the Internet, particularly in inner-city and rural areas

Promote Health System Reform

- ▶ Support adequate financing for a reconfigured health care delivery system
- ▶ Support investment in the health care infrastructure and in expansion of health care coverage

- ▶ Enact measures to streamline the administrative processes in health insurance

EDUCATION

All children, by virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to a quality education and parents have the right and responsibility to direct their children's education. The Conference seeks to uphold the rights of all parents in providing for their children's education and endeavors to ensure that educational resources and services are provided fairly and equitably to all students and teachers, including those in independent and religious schools.

- ▶ Help all parents offset the cost of their child's education by providing tax credits for education expenses, including a refundable provision to assist poor families
- ▶ Establish an education investment tax credit to stimulate private donations to all schools and scholarship organizations
- ▶ Restore the state's liability for Mandated Services reimbursement cut from the 2008-2009 state budget
- ▶ Ensure sufficient funds to enable all schools to provide meaningful Academic Intervention Services to eligible students
- ▶ Provide sufficient funding to enable religious and independent schools to address the growing health, and safety and security needs of their facilities
- ▶ Reform and expand school transportation services for all students, including those attending religious and independent schools
- ▶ Provide funding for all schools to establish entry level teacher support programs to assist new teachers in meeting certification requirements and obtaining needed skills
- ▶ Ensure sufficient and quality professional development programs for all teachers

HUMAN SERVICES

Our Catholic social teaching requires that we put first the needs of people who are poor and vulnerable and help foster their economic well being and full participation in our society. Because human beings are sacred, we must ensure that all persons and families have a safe place to live, enough nutritious food to eat, and adequate income to support themselves. Particular care must be offered to those who have special needs because of age, addiction, physical or mental disability, or immigration status.

Recognizing poverty as a "threat to the common good" of our nation, Catholic Charities USA has launched a campaign to cut poverty in half by the year 2020. We affirm this goal and pledge to enhance our education and advocacy efforts to bring about public policies that relieve immediate needs and address the root causes of poverty in New York State.

Provide for Basic Human Needs

- ▶ Establish a State Poverty Commission to develop concrete goals and timelines for reducing poverty
- ▶ Adopt fiscal and regulatory policies that encourage responsible private sector job growth
- ▶ Provide education and training programs leading to gainful employment with adequate benefits
- ▶ Expand supports for low-income working families (child day care, housing, education and training, transportation, health care coverage, and the state earned income tax credit)
- ▶ Use the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) grant to reduce suffering, meet human needs, and foster economic independence

- ▶ Encourage cooperation, incentives and standards to promote economic growth in upstate urban cities
- ▶ Enact policies that meet the special needs (health care, education, transportation, employment and social services) of rural New Yorkers, including farmers and farmworkers
- ▶ Maintain the public-private partnership in the delivery of health and human services through sufficient government reimbursement to community-based providers, especially faith-based organizations
- ▶ Ensure safe, affordable, quality housing for low and moderate income families and individuals
- ▶ Provide affordable and accessible transportation options for low and moderate income workers
- ▶ Provide quality, affordable subsidized child day care opportunities for working families
- ▶ Increase funding for emergency food programs, pantries and food stamp education and outreach
- ▶ Provide funding for essential social service case management services such as client education, information, referral and advocacy
- ▶ Establish a comprehensive interagency program to encourage planning, zoning and other land use and community support for siting of affordable and supportive housing programs

Support Those in Need of Special Services

- ▶ Ensure adequate funding for and access to mental health, alcohol and substance abuse treatment and prevention services
- ▶ Require parity for mental health and substance abuse health insurance benefits
- ▶ Establish initiatives to recruit, train, and retain qualified individuals into the mental health and chemical dependency professions
- ▶ Ensure availability of mental health and chemical dependency services for returning veterans
- ▶ Enact policies that promote economic and social independence among aging New Yorkers
- ▶ Increase assisted living program units and other initiatives to enable the frail elderly to live at home and in the community
- ▶ Ensure adequate funding for and access to services for persons with HIV/AIDS and their families
- ▶ Increase funding for the development and direct care staffing of community residences and resources to serve persons with developmental disabilities
- ▶ Establish permanent state funding for respite care for family caregivers

Welcome Immigrants and Migrants

- ▶ Provide access to essential health, education, housing, employment, just compensation and social services for all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status
- ▶ Protect the rights of migrant farmworkers and undocumented laborers and their families, including just compensation, benefits, services, protection from undue risks, and inclusion under the protection of appropriate state laws
- ▶ Increase access to adult English literacy programs

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The dignity of the human being and the common good of society call us to eliminate all forms of violence, and to foster true justice within the criminal justice system. We support policies to secure public safety and foster restoration rather than retribution.

Foster Restorative Justice

- ▶ Modify the sentencing provisions in the Rockefeller Drug Laws and increase use of addiction treatment programs both in prison and as an alternative to incarceration
- ▶ Ensure humane conditions of prison confinement and appropriate access to worship and ministerial services
- ▶ Increase funding for alternatives to incarceration, e.g., expansion of drug courts, residential programs and substance abuse treatment programs for non-violent offenders, especially parents and adolescents
- ▶ Increase funding for educational and vocational programs for the incarcerated, and a broader array of transitional, rehabilitative and community-based re-integration programs for ex-offenders
- ▶ Support the compassionate release of elderly and/or sick prisoners who no longer represent a threat to public safety, and ensure post-release support including housing, health care and transitional services
- ▶ Enhance the use of “merit time” as an earned rehabilitation incentive for early release of inmates
- ▶ Establish an Independent Public Defender Commission to develop and oversee a statewide public defense system

ENVIRONMENT

The goods of the earth are gifts from God. We have a responsibility to care for these goods as stewards and trustees, not as mere consumers and users. We should be guided both by concern for the health and well-being of others, with a priority for the needs of the poor and vulnerable, and by respect for the intrinsic worth and beauty of God’s environment: the land, water, air, natural resources and all His creatures.

- ▶ Preserve prime farmland for food production to sustain family farms and rural economies
- ▶ Continue efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and other sources and respond to the dangers of global warming/climate change
- ▶ Support measures to protect our watershed and public drinking water supply

FISCAL AND REGULATORY

Society's collective responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights requires collaborative efforts among individuals, public and private institutions, and the opportunity for all citizens to participate equally in public life.

Government regulations and state economic policies should seek to ensure basic justice and provide for the common good. It is the responsibility of public officials to maximize resources for New York State and work toward equitable and appropriate distribution of these resources. It is essential that efforts to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable not be diminished by counter-productive unfunded mandates.

- ▶ Support reforms to ensure an on-time state budget that meets human needs
- ▶ Enact campaign finance reform
- ▶ Maintain the tax-exempt status, including real property tax exemption, for not-for-profit organizations
- ▶ Promote the availability and long-term security of affordable Catholic burial services, free from unwarranted regulation and discrimination

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Join the Catholic Advocacy Network!

Your help is imperative to the success of this Legislative Agenda. Please join the Catholic Advocacy Network today to be kept informed on the progress of these and other important issues of the day. Go to www.nyscatholic.org and click "Join the Network." There is no cost for membership.

Be sure to check the website frequently to read new Action Alerts in the "Take Action Now" section and to contact your legislators or the Governor with a few simple clicks of the mouse. If you don't know who your elected representatives are, our zip code lookup feature will identify them for you and give you their addresses and phone numbers.

Working together, we can make a difference for all New Yorkers.

Contact Your State Government Officials

You can email all of your state and federal elected officials through the Catholic Conference's Action Center at www.nyscatholic.org. Click on the Action Center home page. If you don't have Internet access, you can reach your state officials at the following addresses:

The Governor...

Honorable David Paterson
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224
518-474-8390
<http://www.ny.gov/governor>

Members of the Senate...

Honorable (name)
New York State Senate
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-2800 (Senate Switchboard)
www.senate.state.ny.us

Members of the Assembly...

Honorable (name)
New York State Assembly
Albany, NY 12248
518-455-4100 (Assembly
Switchboard)
www.assembly.state.ny.us