



# New York State Catholic Conference 2012 Legislative Agenda

## INTRODUCTION

In his encyclical "*Caritas in Veritate*" ("Charity in Truth"), Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, "To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them."

One of the ways we as Bishops attempt to fulfill this requirement is through the work of the New York State Catholic Conference, which exists for the very purpose of pursuing justice by working within the legislative arena. The Conference helps to shape public policies that protect and enhance the dignity of all people, from the very beginning of life until the natural end. Such work must not be left to the Catholic Conference alone; all Catholics have a duty to be engaged in the public square and to put the common good ahead of party politics. Catholic teaching cannot be labeled or dismissed as simply conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat. In all things, we must ask, "Does this policy enhance the dignity of the poor, the vulnerable, the sick, the elderly, children, the imprisoned, those least among us?" For as our Lord taught us, what we do to these, we do to Him.

While policy issues can often be complex, our guiding principles are not. Thankfully, the Church has outlined seven easy-to-understand principles of Catholic Social Teaching that guide us in the formation of our positions on public policy matters. They are:

- 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

Examining issues through the lens of these principles provides clarity in what can often be an overwhelming, bewildering and contentious process. In a very real way, we give glory to God when we put these principles to work in our society. The Catholic community brings an important voice to the policy arena, speaking for those who are frequently voiceless. Our methods of advocacy must be characterized by civility and respect, and we call upon all involved in shaping policy to put aside petty differences and party politics to work together to address the genuine needs of the people of our state.

We invite all Catholic New Yorkers to join us in pursuing the moral priorities and legislative objectives for 2012 which are outlined in the following pages. You can easily be kept up to date and contact your legislators to take action, simply by joining the Catholic Advocacy Network at [www.nyscatholic.org](http://www.nyscatholic.org).

*–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 legislation to provide religious liberty protections for religious-affiliated organizations and individuals to guarantee their ability to provide services in accordance with their mission statements and moral beliefs
- ▶ 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

## **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 conception 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.

### **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"
- ▶ Restrict state payments for human eggs used in research

## **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE**

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.

- ▶ Encourage efforts to strengthen and preserve marriage, defined as the lifelong covenant between one man and one woman
- ▶ 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; recognize the importance of the spiritual component of health care, particularly for the frail isolated elderly; 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**

- ▶ Require a comprehensive plan for every nursing home-eligible individual to ensure appropriate institutional, home- and community-based services
- ▶ 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; long-term care 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 just wages and benefits, day care, transportation, health insurance, career promotion, scholarships, and loan forgiveness
- ▶ 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.

- ▶ Provide full reimbursement for all state-imposed mandates, including the MTA tax
- ▶ Establish an education investment tax credit to stimulate private donations to all schools and scholarship organizations
- ▶ 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
- ▶ 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 a just wage and 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)
- ▶ Encourage cooperation, incentives and standards to promote economic growth in upstate urban cities

- ▶ Enact policies that meet the special needs (health care, education, transportation, housing, 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
- ▶ 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, appropriately prepare and assist offenders with re-entry into the community, and restore all, victim and offender, to the fullness of life.

## **Foster Restorative Justice**

- ▶ 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 incarcerated individuals, and a broader array of transitional, rehabilitative and community-based re-integration programs for previously incarcerated persons
- ▶ Support the compassionate release of incarcerated elderly and/or sick individuals 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 incarcerated individuals
- ▶ Establish an Independent Public Defender Commission to develop and oversee a statewide public defense system
- ▶ Support the development of victim awareness programs, which aid in the emotional healing of people who have been victimized and cause offenders to come to a better understanding of the consequences of their actions
- ▶ Reform the juvenile justice system and place greater emphasis on alternative sentencing and community-based programs

## **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
- ▶ Support a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing and a comprehensive legislative package to deal with the effects of such fracturing on the poor, their basic needs, and the environment

## **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](http://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](http://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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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](http://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](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us)