

focus

Published By

Michigan
Catholic
Conference 

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 3
AUGUST 2012

IN THIS ISSUE

Religious Freedom;
Sanctity of Human Life

2

Education; Economic
Justice; Marriage

3

Immigration; Reflection;
Further Reading

4

Every two years Michigan voters head to the ballot box to elect women and men who will lead communities throughout the state. 2012 is no different as several important offices are up for election, including members of the Michigan Supreme Court, the Michigan congressional delegation, the Michigan House of Representatives and a seat in the United States Senate. Michigan will also play an important role in deciding who will lead the United States of America as president for the next four years. As the election draws nearer, political matters will become more prevalent on the television, internet and in the newspapers as candidates present their position on the issues to the public.

From the Catholic perspective, the election season presents an opportunity to discuss and promote the Church's teachings on a wide range of critical topics that help advance the common good, elevate the moral fiber of society and influence the culture. Issues such as religious freedom, the sanctity of human life, poverty, marriage, education, immigration and other matters that impact civil society have long been at the forefront of concern for the Church.

Yet many Catholics find it challenging to identify candidates who share the Church's broad range of teaching. At the same time, while some of the Church's positions may be shared by one political party or another, it is impossible to neatly fit the breadth of Catholic social teaching into a partisan view of political matters. In their 2003 biennial document *Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. bishops addressed such sentiments:

...some Catholics may feel politically homeless, sensing that no political party and too few candidates share consistent concern for human life and dignity. However, this is not a time for retreat or discouragement. We need more, not less engagement in political life. We urge Catholics to become more involved.

THE ISSUES, THE CANDIDATES & YOUR VOTE 2012

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

—President George Washington, Farewell Address
to the People of the United States, 1796

A first step for Catholics to become more involved is by forming one's conscience based on the teachings of the Church. "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."¹

The purpose of this **focus** publication is to expand upon those primary issues of concern to the Church, especially religious freedom, and to present additional information with which Catholics can absorb and research this election season in light of the Church's call to *Faithful Citizenship*. ■

1. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship*, 2011, no. 5

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“Real freedom isn’t something Caesar can give or take away. He can interfere with it; but when he does, he steals from his own legitimacy.”²

At the heart of a democratic society lies religious freedom, the nation’s first constitutional freedom—granted by God and guaranteed as an inalienable right by the Founding Fathers. It is the foundation for all other freedoms. This right must be upheld always and everywhere. 2012, however, may influence how religious freedom and the freedom to serve are defined and practiced in the years to come. When Catholics operate a soup kitchen to feed the hungry; when Catholic agencies facilitate foster care and adoption to provide a home and shelter for abandoned or neglected children;

when Catholics provide health care to anyone and everyone, they do it because they are Catholic, not because those receiving the service are Catholic. Regrettably, the federal government may no longer recognize such outreach as “religious” as Catholic agencies do not meet a current federal test that mandates a religion to serve only its own members. In light of this violation of the authentic meaning of separating the state from the Church, and an unprecedented effort by the federal government itself to define who is and who is not religious, Catholics must ask themselves:

Where does the candidate stand on protecting the constitutional right to religious freedom?

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

“Never tire of firmly speaking out in defense of life from its conception and do not be deterred from the commitment to defend the dignity of every human person with courageous determination. Christ is with you: Be not Afraid!”³

In May 2012, the national polling firm Gallup printed a headline that read “‘Pro-Choice’ Americans at Record Low 41%” along with a subhead that read “Americans now tilt ‘pro-life’ by nine point margin 50% to 41%.” While the increased number of pro-life Americans may be cause for acclaim, Catholics and all people of good will must continue to promote a Culture of Life by changing hearts and minds, one at a time, each and every day. Abortion remains a revered and protected “right” in various and influential sectors of society. Those who hold this position continue to support abortion on-demand by opposing prohibitions on partial-birth abortion, by opposing common sense parental consent measures, and most recently by supporting tax-payer funded abortion—a telling strategy by abortion-rights groups during the 2010 federal health care debate.

In addition to abortion advocates, those who promote assisted suicide have shifted strategy by renaming the old “Hemlock Society” into a more friendly-sounding “Compassion and Choices,” yet the group’s goal of death on demand has not changed. And still today, despite the significant and numerous advances of acceptable adult stem cell research, supporters of embryonic research continue to destroy human embryos in the hopes of individual accomplishments, patented technologies and financial windfalls. Lastly, while its use has been in steady decline over the years, primarily due to continued opposition from the Catholic Church, the death penalty, state-sanctioned killing, can no longer be justified in a society where non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect society’s safety from the aggressor.⁴ Abortion on-demand, assisted suicide, human embryo destructive research and the death penalty must compel Catholics to continue working for a Culture of Life by asking:

- Where does the candidate stand on protecting human life from abortion?
- Where does the candidate stand on protecting human life from assisted suicide?
- Where does the candidate stand on protecting human life from human embryo destruction?
- Where does the candidate stand on protecting human life from capital punishment?

2. Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., Cap., Archbishop of Philadelphia, from a homily given at the closing Mass for the Fortnight for Freedom, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, July 4, 2012

3. Blessed John Paul II, Address to Visiting Bishops, February 3, 2001

4. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2267

5. Michigan Constitution of 1963, Article VIII, Section 1

6. Pope Benedict XVI, Public Audience, October 16, 2005

EDUCATION

Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.⁵

Parents are the primary educators of their children, and education policy must be crafted in a manner that places the needs of the children and the parent first. By expanding school choice options, parents gain additional tools in their effort to select how best they believe their children will be educated. In 2012 Michigan witnessed an expansion of school choice by allowing for a greater number of charter schools and by expanding policies such as shared time and dual enrollment that benefit both public and non-public students. Yet much work needs to be done, such as amending Article

VIII, Section 2 of the state Constitution. While every other Great Lake state allows for a voucher program, tuition tax credit or scholarship program, the Michigan Constitution expressly prohibits such policies. Michigan has fallen far behind, impacting students in both public and nonpublic schools as innovative and proven policies are currently unconstitutional in this state. Greater school choice will lead to better schools and, more importantly, more options for parents. Catholics can work for more educational options by asking:

- Where does the candidate stand on the expansion of school choice opportunities?

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

“Poverty is a plague against which humanity must fight without cease”⁶

In recent months Michigan has moved away from the ominous distinction of having the highest unemployment in the union. As of May 2012, the state’s unemployment rate hovered around 8.5%, nearing the lowest mark it has been since an 8.2% rate in July of 2008. The 2012–2013 State of Michigan budget was passed this year with little to no harm to policies that benefit the state’s most vulnerable populations. This is due to the fact that many critical programs

were significantly cut in the previous year’s budget. While it has been stated that Michigan’s economy is on track, and some numbers may indicate as such, Catholics are called by the Gospel to always work for the poor. Through the state budget, elected officials must allocate available public dollars to programs that ensure the basic needs of the most destitute are met. Catholics working for the dignity of all human persons should ask:

- Where does the candidate stand on promoting policies that protect the state’s most vulnerable citizens?

MARRIAGE

“Sexual differences cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the definition of marriage. Defending the institution of marriage as a social reality is ultimately a question of justice, since it entails safeguarding the good of the entire human community and the rights of parents and children alike.”⁷

No institution or organization has worked more tirelessly than the Catholic Church, locally, nationally or internationally, to articulate and protect the most fundamental and natural building block of society—marriage between one man and one woman. The Church did not create this sacred institution, but in the face of well-financed and well-organized opposition she has continued to teach the truth and the timeless significance of marriage for children, for justice

and for all of society. Since 2004, Michigan has protected marriage through a constitutional amendment, and 30 other states have done likewise. While traditional marriage has been upheld in every state where it has appeared on a statewide ballot, efforts to change the definition of marriage continue both at the state and federal levels. Catholics with a well-formed conscience based on the Bible and the teachings of the Church can ask:

- Where does the candidate stand on marriage between one man and one woman?

7. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Visiting American Bishops, March 9, 2012

IMMIGRATION

“The new immigrants call most of us back to our ancestral heritage as descendants of immigrants and to our baptismal heritage as members of the body of Christ.”⁸

“While...national immigration problems must be resolved, it is unfair and mistaken to blame the undocumented for problems more accurately attributed to a failed policy. The federal government has the responsibility to enact and enforce laws that treat migrant peoples with the same dignity as its native-born citizens. As such, there must be a concerted effort to find a pathway toward citizenship for undocumented persons who live here, who work here, have raised a family here and have contributed to the common good.

“As the national immigration debate lingers, we encourage all Catholics to turn to the rich and long-standing teachings of the Church on immigration and the proper dignity that must be afforded to all human persons. *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Matthew 25:35). We encourage members of the Michigan Legislature to reject measures that impugn immigrants—especially the undocumented; and we encourage the Michigan congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. to contribute to federal efforts that seek to fix the nation’s immigration system.”⁹ Catholics may ask themselves:

Where does the candidate stand on immigration policies that uphold the human dignity of all persons?

REFLECTION

“A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of “right” or “left,” nor the platforms of any party. Our values are often not “politically correct.” Believers are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person—whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.”¹⁰

8. Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. November 2000
9. Michigan Roman Catholic Bishops’ Statement on Immigration, July 2011
10. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility. September 2003

FURTHER READING

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States
www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship

Catholics in Political Life
www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/church-teaching/catholics-in-political-life.cfm

Our First, Most Cherished Liberty: A Statement on Religious Liberty from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty
www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/our-first-most-cherished-liberty.cfm

Love and Life in the Divine Plan: U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Marriage
www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/love-and-life/index.cfm

Visit us on the web
www.micatholicconference.org

Join us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/MichiganCatholicConference

Follow us on twitter
[@MiCatholicConf](https://twitter.com/MiCatholicConf)

focus

Volume 40, Number 3, August 2012

focus is published by the
Michigan Catholic Conference
510 South Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48933

©2012 Michigan Catholic Conference

For additional free copies of this focus, contact the Michigan Catholic Conference at:

Phone: (800) 395-5565
Fax: (517) 372-3940
bstarrak@micatholicconference.org

Design by Blair Miller