

PERSPECTIVE Public Policy

from a Catholic Viewpoint

North Dakota Catholic Conference Goals for 1997-98

Each year, the North Dakota Catholic Conference Board of Directors establishes goals for each of the Conference's four standing committees. The goals provide guidance for the committees, the North Dakota Catholic Conference staff, and the board for the year. Here are the goals for 1997-98.

Education Committee

- Study Title XV of the North Dakota Century Code (the Education title) and make recommendations to the Interim Committee on Education Services for revision of the title.
- Examine how to change the scope of the committee to better apply the church's social teaching to public policy questions affecting the education of all children.
- Explore opportunities to improve the effectiveness of representation of non-public schools in the public policy arena.
- Pursue opportunities to obtain financial support for parental choice in education.

Social Concerns Committee

- Continue monitoring and responding to the implementation of welfare reform in North Dakota and at the federal level.
- Examine and develop initiatives for how the church responds to the "paradigm shift" in the welfare system.
- Continue production of the Creation and Stewardship Video and develop outreach program for use of the video.
- Examine and take action on issues affecting rural life and rural communities.
- Develop a long-range plan for incorporating social justice principles in all aspects of church life.

Holiness of Human Life Committee

- Monitor implementation of the state's plan to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies and statutory rape and pursue opportunities for establishing programs consistent with Catholic social teaching.
- Respond to the issues arising concerning the care and treatment of persons at the end of life.
- Encourage pro-life activities and ministries in areas of unique and special needs currently lacking in North Dakota.
- Research how hospitals are treating the remains of miscarried children and embryos "produced" through assisted reproductive techniques and determine if a public policy response is necessary.
- Educate Catholic community and health care community on the Catholic position on reproductive technologies and the treatment of human embryos.

New Version of Catechism Intensifies Opposition to Death Penalty

The new official version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* strengthens the Church's opposition to use of the death penalty. The new version states that although the death penalty is theoretically permissible when it is "the only practical way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor," such circumstances are "practically nonexistent" in today's world, in view of the resources, such as incarceration, available to prevent criminals from committing violent acts.

The revision reflects the views Pope John Paul II expressed in his pro-life encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*.

Continue to pray and work to keep North Dakota death penalty free.

Portions of the New Definitive Edition of the Catechism on the death penalty:

2265: Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their responsibility.

2266: The efforts of the state to curb the spread of behavior harmful to people's rights and to the basic rules of civil society correspond to the requirement of safe-guarding the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and the duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense. Punishment has the primary aim of redressing the disorder introduced by the offense. When it is willingly accepted by the guilty party, it assumes the value of expiation. Punishment then, in addition to defending public order and protecting people's safety, has a medicinal purpose: As far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party.

2267: Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.

If, however, nonlethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm-without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself-the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity "are very rare, if not practically nonexistent." (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 56)

Expanded Health Care Coverage for Children

About 15,000 children in North Dakota lack coverage

Two Quotes on the Sanctity of Life From Mother Teresa

"I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion."

-- Mother Teresa at the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, DC.

"What you do to these men, you do to God."

-- Mother Teresa speaking to prison officials at California's death row.

for basic health care. A new federal law will help some of those children. With bipartisan support, Congress passed the State Children's Health

Insurance Program last summer. The program provides coverage to uninsured children whose families are within 200% of the poverty level (\$26,000 for a family of three.) States must apply for the funds by October 1998. North Dakota's allocation would amount to \$5,042,037 for fiscal year 1998. The North Dakota Catholic Conference will work with other health care and children's advocates to ensure that the state takes advantage of this opportunity to provide basic health care coverage for North Dakota children.

Neighboring Minnesota Takes Step Toward Recognizing Parental Choice *and* Public Education

In an action that has caught national attention, Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson successfully persuaded the Minnesota legislature to give every family in the state either a tax deduction or a tax credit that can be used for expenses at any public, private, or parochial school of their choice. Although not the expansion of choice originally proposed by the Governor, the legislation is a significant victory for children and parents. Remember, public education and parents' right to choose are *not* mutually exclusive.

North Dakota Catholic Conference Wins National Grant for Rural Creation and Stewardship Project

The North Dakota Catholic Conference has received a grant from the United States Catholic Conference Environmental Justice Program to produce a video and statewide educational program on creation and stewardship from a Catholic perspective that focuses on rural upper-Midwest issues. The United States Catholic Conference Environmental Justice Program provides regional grants for environmental network building and public policy agenda development. Initiatives are selected for their uniquely religious response to the environmental crisis and their link to Catholic social teachings.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference project will focus on environmental issues facing rural communities and convey principles of Catholic social teaching relevant to those issues. The video will convey principles from scripture, the church's social encyclicals, the Catholic Catechism, and addresses by Pope John Paul II on creation and stewardship. Once completed, the video will become one part of a package of materials for statewide education on creation and stewardship.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference project also has an ecumenical dimension. Several denominations are sharing resources and video footage to save costs. The final product will consist of several videos, each reflecting a particular religious denomination's perspective.

Perspective: Public Policy from a Catholic Viewpoint

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