

# **PERSPECTIVE** Public Policy

## **from a Catholic Viewpoint**

### ***Bishops Issue Thanksgiving Call to Support Family Farmers and Ranchers***

On the first anniversary of their joint statement on the rural crisis, Fargo Bishop James Sullivan and Bismarck Bishop Paul Zipfel issued the following joint call for support and prayers of thanksgiving for the state's family farmers and ranchers.

### ***Giving Thanks Through Action: One Year Later***

One year ago, as we approached the Thanksgiving holiday, the condition of rural life in North Dakota moved us to offer words of guidance, hope, and gratitude. The statement, *Giving Thanks Through Action*, set forth principles for a just agricultural system, suggestions for action, and challenges for the Church.

One year later, our rural communities still suffer. In some respects, the response to these challenges has been commendable. Communities, families, and our charitable institutions have often acted so that no one would have to bear these difficult times alone. In other respects, much work remains. The fundamental policies that contributed to this crisis remain unchanged. Merely surviving is not enough. We must address the root causes of this crisis by creating a just agricultural system that respects the dignity of family farmers and ranchers and their role as stewards of creation.

As we approach another Thanksgiving, we call attention to our statement of one year ago. The principles and suggestions contained in it still apply. We call upon Catholics, fellow Christians, and all persons of good will to offer their active support and prayers of thanksgiving for our ranchers and farmers.

May God bless all North Dakotans during these difficult times and instill a sense of hope rooted in the risen Christ.

November 16, 1999

CJames S. SullivanCPaul A. Zipfel  
Bishop of FargoBishop of Bismarck

**Every Four Years** the Administrative Board of the United States Catholic Conference issues a statement

on political responsibility. The statement summarizes Catholic teaching on public life and key moral issues.

This year's statement, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium* is available from the United States Catholic Conference Office for Publishing (800-235-8722.)

It is also available on-line at [www.nccbuscc.org/faithfulcitizenship/index.htm](http://www.nccbuscc.org/faithfulcitizenship/index.htm).

### **State Abortion Numbers Rise**

After several years of declining, the number of abortions performed in the state rose slightly in 1998.

While the rise is "statistically insignificant," it is significant on human and spiritual terms.

At this time, it is not possible to tell whether the rise is due to the new abortion center in Fargo, the rural crisis, the roll out of family caps in welfare reform, or a combination of these and other factors. We also do not yet know the abortion *rate* with regards to the number pregnancies or the state's population.

However, the numbers do show that the increase was greater among residents of rural and reservation counties than residents of urban counties -- a fact more significant when one considers the fact that this trend is the opposite of population trends in the state. The trend also shows the need to have crisis pregnancy assistance in all areas of the state.

## **Merger Mania in Agriculture and Food Sectors Raise Concerns**

In comments submitted to the Department of Justice on the proposed merger of Cargill and Continental Grain, North Dakota Attorney General Heidi Heitkamp joined a growing number of observers concerned that today's anti-trust laws and enforcement is insufficient to address the real problems caused by concentration of ownership in agriculture.

Since the proposed merger of Cargill and Continental, more large mergers in agriculture have been announced. Efforts to impose a 18 month moratorium

on food and agriculture mergers failed in the U.S. Senate. The issue, however, is not likely to go away.

Several principles from Catholic social teaching seem relevant here. First, the economy exists for the person, not the other way around. Therefore, every merger should be judged according to how it affects people, not the economy. Second, the goods of creation are destined for all. This principle, called the universal desination of goods in the Catechism (No. 2403) calls us to be concerned about concentration of ownership, especially in the food and agriculture sectors.

## Knowledge of New IDEA Regs Key to Obtaining Special Ed Services

*Parents and schools sometimes find it difficult to obtain special education services for children with disabilities. The following summary of the federal regulations was published in Parent Power, a newsletter of the Office for Catholic School Parents Associations of the United States Catholic Conference and is reprinted here with permission.*

On March 12, 1999, the U.S. Department of Education issued final regulations for implementing the Individuals and Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997. This Federal law (P.L. 105-17) aims at enhancing the educational opportunities of eligible children with disabilities in all school communities throughout our nation.

IDEA governs the way that Federal special education and related services can be accessed for Catholic school students with disabilities. The term “special education” means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of the child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings. “Related Services” means transportation, and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education.

Receiving such Federal special education and related services hinges upon:

- the determination of eligible students, or “child find;”
- the development of a “services plan” to meet the needs of eligible students; and
- the allocation of a “proportionate amount” of *funds based upon a percentage of federal* special education dollars that are required by law to be spent on services for private school children.

Public school districts are mandated by Federal law to determine which private and religious school students are eligible for special education and related services by evaluating all who are suspected of having a disability. Public school districts are also mandated to develop a services plan for all eligible private school students. However, the law does not require ***all*** eligible private school students to be provided with the same (or any) services as if they were enrolled in a public school.

No individual special education entitlement exists for an eligible private school student. Yet, the Federal law does oblige public school districts to furnish private school students, as a group, some level of service through programs comparable to those being provided to public school students.

Determining the number of private school children with disabilities provides public agencies the basis on which they provide services during the next subsequent fiscal year. It is the school district that concludes, after considering the overall needs of private school children with disabilities, which services plans are actually implemented with the available funding. The new regulations have been issued to clarify these and other procedures mandated by the 1997 law.

A thorough knowledge of the regulations, along with active consultation with the local school district, is

necessary for Catholic school officials to help parents obtain IDEA services for their children.

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