

# PERSPECTIVE Public Policy

## from a Catholic Viewpoint

### The Issues, The Candidates, and Your Vote in 1998

The campaign season is here. North Dakotans have an opportunity in November to decide who sits at the North Dakota Legislative Assembly and who will represent our state in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. The stakes, as always, are of great importance. Education, welfare reform, farm issues, rural communities, health care for children, the environment, and threats to human life are some of the issues our elected representatives will have to face.

The ultimate power and responsibility for government rests with citizens. It is, therefore, critical that citizens seek out and carefully review available information about the issues and the candidates.

To assist citizens with knowing where their candidates stand on important issues of morality and justice, we have prepared the enclosed **Issues Card**. It lists some of the important issues of concern to the church facing North Dakota at this time. The list is not exhaustive. Nor do all issues carry the same moral gravity. Each issue, however, concerns matters on which the Catholic Church, through her social teaching, has spoken.

We urge you to use the issues card. We hope it can assist you as you exercise your right and responsibility as a Catholic and as a citizen to inform yourself on where your candidates stand on these

important issues. Please remember to then VOTE for the candidate of your choice.

As a people of faith, it is our faith that must guide all our actions concerning public policy. Religion is not and cannot be a solely private matter. Let us not shed our faith as we enter this political season.

**The Church's social teachings are an essential part of the Catholic faith. Here are brief explanations of why the matters on the Issues Card are important to the Catholic Church.**

#### On Human Life

Human life is sacred and respect for human life must be at the center of all public policy. *Abortion* is the fundamental human rights issue of our day. (*Evangelium Vitae*, No. 58; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2273.) Legislation should protect the life of unborn children from conception, no matter what the reason for the abortion or destruction of human life.

On the *death penalty*, Pope John Paul II said in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, that "punishment. . . ought not to go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: In other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, however, . . . such cases are rare if not practically nonexistent." (No. 5.) The Catechism was recently revised to reflect that

statement.

Respect for human life also demands opposition to threats by *assisted suicide* and *euthanasia*. (*Evangelium Vitae*, No. 65; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2276-2279.)

### **Family Farms and Rural Life**

Catholic teaching has long emphasized the importance of ownership and voice in the subject of one's labor. (See, e.g., *Rerum Novarum*, Nos. 15-16; *Laborem exercens*, Nos. 53, 102; *Economic Justice For All*, No. 233.) Policies should exist that support family farms and a wide distribution of ownership. The call to support rural communities also stems from the recognition that life and dignity of human persons is best respected and fostered in strong communities.

### **Economic Help For Families**

Society has an obligation to support children and families in need. (See *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 26; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1908, 2211.) The Catholic Church has long worked for a welfare system that encourages work, respects human dignity, and provides necessary support. The North Dakota Catholic Conference opposes any measures that denies poor children assistance because of the circumstances of their conception.

### **Education**

Education is a basic human right. (*Pacem in terris*, No. 13; *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 26; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1908.) Moreover, parents have a fundamental right to choose a school for their children and public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of *ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise*. (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 6; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2229.)

### **Environment**

In the encyclical, *Centisimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II said: "It is the task of the State to provide for the defense and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces." (No. 40; see also, *Evangelium Vitae*, No. 10; and Pope John Paul II, *Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*.) Environmental policies should build upon the stewardship granted to landowners by God.

### **Health Care**

Basic health care is a human right that society has an obligation to provide when necessary. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2211, 2288.) The North Dakota Catholic Conference supports initiatives that provide health care to all persons and opposes policies that threaten or limit the ability of Catholic health care institutions to continue their ministry.

## **Issues Briefs**

### ***Family Caps***

"Family caps," a policy that denies welfare assistance to children who were conceived while the mother was on welfare have gone into effect in North Dakota. This means that we must work even harder to ensure that women facing crisis pregnancies receive help. Crisis pregnancy centers should be aware of the

policy's regulations. They can call the North Dakota Catholic Conference for information.

Meanwhile, a study of family caps in New Jersey has shown that they do, in fact, raise abortion rates. Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) plans to introduce legislation in Congress prohibiting states from using a family cap.

### **Child Custody Protection Act**

This congressional bill prohibits persons from taking a minor girl across state lines for an abortion in order to avoid a state's parental notification or consent laws. Thanks to everyone that responded to our Action Alert and called Congressman Pomeroy. The Congressman supported the bill. The bill is now moving through the Senate.

### **Wisconsin Court Upholds Voucher Program**

The Wisconsin Supreme Court issued an important decision upholding the states school voucher program for the Milwaukee area. The court found that the program, which assisted parents choosing a nonpublic, including parochial school did not violate any federal constitutional provisions regarding church and state. Also important, the court found that the policy did not violate the state's "Blaine Amendment." These state constitutional provisions -- North Dakota has one -- usually restrict use of state funds for sectarian schools. They are often cited by opponents of parental choice as a reason for striking down parental choice policies.

### **Legislative Action Network**

Now is the time to get your parish Legislative Action Networks ready. Each pastor has been asked to submit a name for the "captain" of the parish network. If you would like to be that captain, talk to your pastor. If you want to be on the network -- perhaps the best way to get involved in the development of public policy -- contact your pastor or give us a call.

Meetings will be scheduled around the state to familiarize persons with the North Dakota Catholic Conference and the Legislative action Network. Call for more details.

## **Perspective:Public Policy from a Catholic Viewpoint**

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*Remember to Vote*

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