

PERSPECTIVE Public Policy

from a Catholic Viewpoint

A Look at Catholic Teaching on Education Policy

As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing a school that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2229.

This small section from the Catechism conveys all the main principles of a Catholic perspective on education public policy.

At the outset, it reminds us that parents are the primary and principal educators of their children. The Vatican II document on education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, states:

Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs... (No. 3)

The task of educating children, however, is also a task for all of society. *Gravissimum Educationis* continues:

The family which has the primary duty of imparting education needs help of the whole community. In addition, therefore, to the rights of parents and others

to whom the parents entrust a share in the work of education, certain rights and duties belong indeed to civil society, whose role is to direct what is required for the common temporal good. (No. 3.)

In addition it is the task of the state to see to it that all citizens are able to come to a suitable share in culture and are properly prepared to exercise their civic duties and rights. Therefore, the state must protect the right of children to an adequate school education, check on the ability of teachers and the excellence of their training, look after the health of the pupils and in general, promote the whole school project. (No. 6)

Catholic teaching is not, therefore, concerned only with the operation of Catholic schools. Rather, it is concerned with the fundamental right of parents to choose a school of their choice -- Catholic, non-Catholic, public, or home-based. It is concerned with the state's obligation to support that choice, no matter where the child attends school. It is concerned with the content of education, ensuring that education is directed toward the proper formation of the entire human person.

At the heart of all this is always the need for a public policy that respects and defends human dignity. Indeed, *Gravissimum Educationis* states that everyone, regardless of race, condition, and age, has an inalienable right to an education precisely because they enjoy the dignity of a human being. That principle must shape all of our efforts in creating an education policy.

What's Going On . . .

The Commission on the Future of Agriculture

The Commission on the Future of Agriculture is working on a strategic plan for the future of agriculture in North Dakota. In written and oral testimony before the commission, the North Dakota Catholic Conference urged the Commission to foster an agriculture that makes respect for creation, human life and human dignity, rather than solely economic progress, the guiding norm for the future of agriculture in North Dakota.

Abstinence Education Grants

The legislative interim Welfare Reform Committee held hearings on the abstinence education grant program funded by the federal government and administered locally by the Department of Health through the local regional and tribal children's services coordinating committees and public health agencies. The North Dakota Catholic Conference testified that it supported the abstinence education grant program but urged careful review of its implementation to ensure that the funded programs teach abstinence only and focus on reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

Food Stamps for Refugees

The legislative interim Welfare Reform Committee is reviewing a bill draft to provide food stamps to refugees whose eligibility has expired under federal time limits. The North Dakota Catholic Conference testified in favor of the bill draft's purpose but urged the committee to revise the bill so that all legal immigrants, not just refugees, would be eligible for food stamps. The purpose of the food stamp program

is to provide nutritional assistance to those who cannot afford it. Hunger and poverty, however, do not strike according to a family's political classification with the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Children's Health Insurance

Governor Schafer and the Department of Human Services are proposing an insurance program for the children of families who are uninsured but do not qualify for Medicaid. The North Dakota Catholic Conference provided written comments to the proposed plan. Among the conference's concerns: the proposal falls short of covering most of the state's uninsured children, some restrictions on participation are too strict and unnecessary, and the lack of public and professional participation in the development of the plan. A copy of the comments can be obtained from the North Dakota Catholic Conference office and our web site at <http://ndcatholic.org/ndchip.htm>

Welfare Reform Issues Task Force

The task force authorized by the legislature to create plans addressing out-of-wedlock pregnancy, statutory rape, and domestic violence has begun meeting. The task force has divided into subcommittees and hopes to complete its tasks by June 1998. Plans will probably build on existing efforts in these areas while looking at new initiatives, such as fatherhood programs, that can help address these problems.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference now has a toll-free line.

1-888-419-1237

Thank You to all the parishioners that signed the petition thanking Senator Conrad and Senator Dorgan for Supporting the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Bill.

Over 11,500 North Dakota Catholics said “Yes” to the sanctity of human life and “No” to the horrific partial-birth abortion procedure. The signatures have been sent to the Senators. A vote on whether to override President Clinton’s veto of the bill is expected within the next few months.

1998 Fall Legislative Workshop

Rural Life: Challenges and Prospects

Featuring Brother David Andrews, CSC
Executive Director of National Catholic Rural Life Conference

Mark your calendars now for the popular North Dakota Catholic Conference Legislative Workshop. This year’s workshop will explore what Catholic social teaching contributes to the development of public policy addressing rural life issues. Two locations:

Bismarck

October 13, 1998

Holiday Inn

9:30 am

Fargo
October 14, 1998

Holiday Inn
9:30 am

Perspective:Public Policy from a Catholic Viewpoint

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