WCC 2015 Public Policy Positions

Every two years, at the beginning of the new legislative session, the WCC issues its revised Public Policy Positions document and shares it with Catholics around the state and legislators.

The document is organized around the seven principles of Catholic social teaching. A short version of the document follows. The full version is available at www.wisconsincatholic.org.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person. Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person’s life and dignity must be respected from conception to natural death.

• Protect each and every human life.
• Affirm the dignity of human life in medical and life science research.
• Support women facing unplanned pregnancies.
• Stop domestic abuse.
• Support the aging, those with disabilities, the chronically ill, and the terminally ill.
• Reject the death penalty.

Family, Community, and Participation. The human person is not only sacred, but social. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined.

Rights and Responsibilities. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life, and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.

• Keep children safe.
• Encourage and strengthen marriage.
• Respect and promote family relationships.
• Support choice in education.
• Strengthen support for education.
• Promote adoption and foster care.
• Require parental consent for medical treatments.
• Promote responsible sexuality.
• Assist veterans, their families, and those affected by armed conflict.
• Support family farms.

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Director’s Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

When Catholic voices speak up in the public square we regularly confront the suggestion that we are venturing outside our area of expertise. Whether we speak to human sexuality or economic justice or war and peace, some (usually those who disagree with what we are saying) suggest that we lack the experience and competence to engage such matters. They suggest it is better and more suited to our proper place if we confine our comments to matters of faith, morals and religious practice.

Now that Pope Francis is preparing an encyclical on the environment we are hearing such advice again. Once more some suggest that whatever the Pope says can be taken with a “grain of salt” because he won’t be addressing matters of dogma or doctrine.

Such criticism misses the point. Matters of public policy or issues with social implications demand our attention because how we address them does affect human beings. Pope John Paul II reminded us that we must regularly deal with the question of how we choose to live together in the world. The questions of daily life, whether local or global in scope, continually invite us to define who we are and whether we choose to live up to our Gospel values. And Catholics are called to address such matters.

Cardinal John Henry Newman once wrote that every university student should take courses in religion or theology. Students should do so not because they would become theologians, but because whatever their vocation, they should be aware of the religious and moral implications of the choices they would face.

Shortly after I became a state Catholic Conference Director, one legislator told me he valued the WCC’s contribution to issues because, “the Catholic Conference elevates the debate and that can only help us.”

I have no idea what Pope Francis will say in his upcoming encyclical. But I am confident he will “elevate the debate.” Not because he will have all the answers, but because he will invite us to ask the right questions.

Celebrate Catholic Schools Week

Governor Scott Walker has proclaimed January 25 through January 31, 2015, as Catholic Schools Week in Wisconsin. The proclamation coincides with the national observance of Catholic Schools Week and recognizes the nearly 300 Catholic schools in Wisconsin now serving almost 58,000 Wisconsin students.

Noting that Catholic schools in Wisconsin “provide students with an education that emphasizes the formation of moral values and a commitment to community service,” the proclamation recognizes that Catholic schools educate students in preparation for their responsibilities as members of society. The Governor’s words are in keeping with this year’s Catholic Schools Week theme, “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.”

The annual week-long observance celebrates a vital ministry of the Church and a valuable community resource, our Catholic schools. As the Governor’s proclamation acknowledges, “the welfare of our State requires that this and future generations of school-age children be assured ample opportunity to develop their intellectual capacities to the fullest.” For hundreds of thousands of students in Wisconsin, Catholic schools have provided this opportunity and will continue to do so for thousands more.

Catholic schools across Wisconsin host a multitude of events in observance of Catholic Schools Week, including Masses, open houses, and special activities.

Percentage of 12th graders who attend a four-year college

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Citizen's Guide to Wisconsin State Legislature

The Wisconsin State Legislature has redesigned its website (http://legis.wisconsin.gov), making it more accessible to the public.

“A Citizen’s Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature” (http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/publications/citizensguide) provides the following information:

• Introduction to the Legislature
• How to Find Legislative Documents and Follow the Legislative Process
• How to Contact Your Legislator
• How to Testify at a Public Hearing
• Glossary of Common Legislative Terms

The Wisconsin Legislative Spotlight (http://legis.wisconsin.gov/spotlight) provides a weekly overview of the Legislature’s activities.

Citizens can also follow state government by tuning in to Wisconsin Eye (http://www.wiseye.org), the independent, nonpartisan news service that provides uncut video coverage of state government proceedings.

Live coverage of floor debates is also provided by the Legislature’s InSession service (http://insession.legis.wisconsin.gov).

The Wisconsin Blue Book (http://legis.wisconsin.gov/1rb) is the most comprehensive volume on the state and people of Wisconsin. Published in the odd years, once a new Legislature is in place, it lists “the names and biographies of officials and agencies; statutory references and the complete state constitution; assembly and senate district maps; election information; municipal contacts; population, economical and commercial data, and more.” Free copies can be obtained by contacting your state legislators. Paid copies are handled by the Wisconsin Department of Administration’s Document Sales and Distribution Unit.

Finally, the WCC publishes a free bi-weekly electronic newsletter, the Capitol Update, which lists the legislative activity of interest to the WCC. To sign up, please go to our website, www.wisconsincatholic.org, and click on “Join the WCC E-Advocacy Network.”

Notable Speakers Featured at Catholics at the Capitol 2015

The WCC has announced the theme for Catholics at the Capitol 2015, “A Church United in Hope and Love,” along with the schedule of events for this day of reflection, formation, and review of Catholic social teaching.

In addition to the keynote address provided by Dr. Jonathan J. Reyes, Executive Director of the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the day will feature numerous breakout sessions. The morning session will include a discussion of when Wisconsin voters have common ground with Dr. Charles L. Franklin, Director of the Marquette Law Poll. Several pro-life advocates will examine the ways in which both public policy and a “culture of encounter” can help prevent the pain of abortion. Jack Braun, who is the Social Ministry Director for the Holy Family Catholic Community in Fond du Lac, will offer tips on how to conduct a Catholic Charities USA poverty simulation within a parish. Wisconsin State Public Defender Kelli Thompson will discuss corrections policies and some of the proposals and programs designed to address recidivism and Wisconsin’s incarceration rate.

The afternoon session continues the day’s theme of supporting families with a review of the Holy See’s Synod on the Family provided by the only lay woman in North America to participate in the proceedings, Alice Heinzen, Director of the Office for Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of La Crosse. A review of Wisconsin’s political landscape will also continue as Steve Walters, Senior Producer for Wisconsin Eye, will use his over 35 years of experience covering the Capitol to examine what the Legislature will likely tackle in the 2015-16 session. Professor Tom Thibodeau of Viterbo University will discuss what it means to become a servant leader.

The day will feature additional sessions on the causes of poverty, the link between pornography and human trafficking, the role of parish and schools in underserved communities, and more. For a complete schedule of events, see the enclosed registration form.

The day will end with a panel discussion on how the Church and society can give a greater voice to those experiencing poverty and address their needs. For more info, visit www.wisconsincatholic.org.
For up-to-date information, join the WCC’s free e-advocacy network and get the bi-weekly *Capitol Update.*

Visit [www.wisconsincatholic.org](http://www.wisconsincatholic.org) to sign up!

**CAPITOL REPORT** is published quarterly by the WCC to inform Catholics and policy decision makers of the WCC’s activities and positions on state and federal legislation.

**WCC Staff**

John Huebscher, Executive Director
Cathy Coyle-Kaufmann, Admin. Assistant
Barbara Sella, Associate Director for Respect Life/Social Concerns
Kim Wadas, Associate Director for Education/Health Care

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**Public Policy Positions, from page 1**

- Support equitable taxation and sound fiscal policies.
- Protect religious freedom and conscience.
- Support healthy lifestyles.
- Support crime victims and restorative justice for offenders.
- Support law enforcement personnel and all who help preserve public safety.

**Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable.** The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities.

- Make affordable health care available to all.
- Eliminate hunger.
- Increase funding for safe and affordable housing.
- Prohibit predatory lending practices.
- Reform the juvenile justice system.
- Strengthen public transportation.

**Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.** The economy must serve people, not the other way around. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected.

- Support living wages for workers and their families.
- Protect workers’ rights.
- Remove barriers to employment.
- Foster employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

**Solidarity.** We are one human family. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbors has global dimensions in a shrinking world.

- Uphold human rights of immigrants and refugees.
- Participate justly in the global economy.

**Care for God’s Creation.** The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God’s plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit.

- Promote sustainable farming.
- Support clean land, air, and water.
- Encourage conservation and sustainable energy.