

# FLORIDA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

*An Agency of the Catholic Bishops of Florida*

1969



2009

*Advocating Life, Dignity and the Common Good  
for 40 years*

Archdiocese of Miami

Diocese of St. Augustine

Diocese of St. Petersburg

Diocese of Orlando

Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Diocese of Palm Beach

Diocese of Venice

## **2009 Public Policy Issues**

**REGULAR LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

*March 3 - May 1, 2009*

# What is the Florida Catholic Conference?

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## Mission

The Florida Catholic Conference serves as liaison to state government on matters of concern to the Catholic Church in the seven dioceses of the Province of Miami, as a nonpartisan public policy voice on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Florida.

## Vision

The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of his Church guide the work of the Florida Catholic Conference which, through relationships with representatives and agencies of Florida government, analyzes the moral dimension of public policies, proclaims the sanctity of life and dignity of the human person, leads decision makers in reaching just solutions, and provides opportunities for Catholics in Florida to carry out their responsibility to participate in political life.

## Committees of the Conference

Conference personnel coordinate and staff nine standing committees that are engaged in policy and advocacy issues. These committees include: State Pro-life Coordinating Committee; Committee Against the Death Penalty; Prison Ministry Committee; Farm Worker Justice Committee; Immigration Committee; Schools Executive Committee; Florida Catholic Conference Accreditation Committee; Catholic Health Executives Committee and Committee for End-of-Life Care.

## Board of Directors

### President

**Archbishop John C. Favalora**  
*Archdiocese of Miami*

### Vice-President

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**Auxiliary Bishop Felipe J. Estévez**  
*Archdiocese of Miami*

**Auxiliary Bishop John G. Noonan**  
*Archdiocese of Miami*

# Role of the Church in the Political Arena

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The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith, a part of the mission given to us by Jesus Christ. Faith helps all of us see more clearly the truths about human life and dignity that we also understand through human reason. As people of both faith and reason, Catholics are called to bring these essential truths to political life. The Church is involved in the political process but is not partisan. The Church cannot champion any candidate or party. Our cause is the defense of human life and dignity and the protection of the weak and vulnerable. (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, USCCB, Nov. 2007)

*The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. . . The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.*

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 28)

## Participation by the Catholic Faithful

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The Conference maintains an electronic network of individuals interested in applying principles of Catholic teaching through participation in the legislative process. Members receive email action alerts that provide opportunities to send messages to legislators on specific public policy issues. Reports, summaries and additional resources are also regularly provided to members. Individuals can join the **FCC Advocacy Network** by visiting [www.flacathconf.org](http://www.flacathconf.org).

During the Regular Session of the Florida Legislature, Catholics are invited to Tallahassee to participate in **Catholic Days at the Capitol**. Participants attend a legislative briefing before meeting with their elected officials. A luncheon is held for participants, Florida's bishops and legislators. The annual **Red Mass of the Holy Spirit** is celebrated to pray for those working in the three branches of government. 2009 Catholic Days at the Capitol are being held March 10-11, with the Red Mass scheduled for the evening of March 11. Individuals interested in attending the events should contact their diocesan coordinator listed at [www.flacathconf.org](http://www.flacathconf.org).

# Public Policy Advocacy

The principles inherent in the seven themes of Catholic social teaching and the public policy statement of the Florida Catholic Conference serve as a guide for our advocacy.

## Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
3. Rights and Responsibilities
4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
5. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
6. Solidarity
7. Care for God's Creation

## Florida Catholic Conference Public Policy Statement

The Florida Catholic Conference supports public policies that respect all human life, whether unborn, disabled, poor, alien or rejected; on death row or in the family of a victim of crime or violence; well, sick or dying; young or old. It advocates measures to strengthen families, improve the moral climate, and protect religious freedom. It supports legislation which relieves the burden of the poor, aged, children in need, and disabled; contributes to the reform of the criminal justice system; assures the rights of parents in the education of their children, protects the environment for future generations and addresses the needs of farmworkers and immigrant families.

*Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights - for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture - is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.*

(John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 38)

**The following areas of advocacy reflect Conference positions on major issues that may be considered during the 2009 Florida Legislative Session.**

## Life and Death

*The true moral test of society is how the weakest and most vulnerable members are treated. If we do not protect the inalienable right to life of the unborn, the human family will make little progress dealing with the death penalty, poverty, euthanasia and other attacks on human life and dignity.*

### **Abortion**

- Funding crisis pregnancy centers to offer services to pregnant women and their children
- Requiring a guardian ad litem for every minor seeking a judicial bypass of parental notice to obtain an abortion and maturity standards for judges deliberating judicial bypass petitions of minors
- Requiring a 24-hour reflection period before an abortion
- Ensuring state reporting requirements are compatible with the federal Centers for Disease Control data bank

### **Death Penalty**

- Requiring a unanimous jury recommendation for a sentence of death
- Requiring jury recommendation of life without parole as binding on sentencing by a judge
- Seeking a moratorium on the death penalty in Florida with sentences commuted to life in prison without possibility of parole

### **Assisted Suicide**

- Preserving the existing Florida ban on mercy killing, euthanasia, and assisted self-murder
- Preserving and strengthening the existing protections in Florida law related to life-prolonging procedures and advance directives

### **Embryonic Stem Cell Research/Cloning**

- Promoting ethical forms of stem cell research which do not destroy human life
- Prohibiting state funds for research that requires destroying embryonic human beings
- Prohibiting creation of human clones

### **Organ Donation**

- Ensuring that this process is held to the highest ethical standards to preserve respect for human dignity

# Social Concerns

*The Conference supports the belief that all persons have certain basic economic rights and society has a moral obligation to ensure, so far as it is possible, no one among us is hungry, homeless, unemployed or otherwise denied whatever is necessary to live with dignity.*

## Welfare Reform

- Preserving family unity, encouraging self-sufficiency and responsibility, protecting the dignity of individuals, and providing safety for children, but not rigid time limits, “family caps,” or punitive measures for children born while the family receives government assistance

## Affordable Housing

- Removing the cap on the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund, a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing

## Homeless

- Supporting full funding for the Homeless Coalitions and Emergency Financial Assistance Program serving Florida’s homeless children and families

## Domestic Violence

- Recognizing physical, verbal, sexual and psychological violence as unacceptable and unhealthy behavior
- Protecting victims legally and holding perpetrators accountable

## Human Trafficking

- Enforcing laws that aid victims of trafficking imprisoned in forced labor, prostitution or other criminal activities and increasing public awareness of these activities

*For the Lord, your God...befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.*

(Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

## Immigration

- Opposing policies that discriminate against or create punitive measures aimed at undocumented immigrants and their families
- Establishing in-state tuition policies at post-secondary institutions for undocumented students educated in Florida schools

## Disabled

- Funding services that enable persons with disabilities to live and work in their communities

## **Farmworkers**

- Ensuring just wages, safe working conditions, adequate benefits, and quality of life for workers
- Addressing health and safety issues caused by pesticide exposure
- Continuing funding for farmworker affordable housing through an allocation from the state housing trust fund

*We must assume this responsibility as an act of selfless love for all life and for the environment that sustains all life.*

(Florida Bishops' Statement, *Companions in Creation*)

## **Environment**

- Increasing advocacy for responsible environmental policies to protect Florida's resources for future generations
- Encouraging lifestyle changes and choices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions impacting climate change
- Promoting sustainable, efficient alternate energy sources

## **Criminal Justice/Juvenile Justice**

- Promoting the possibility of parole for offenders who were 15 years of age or younger and received a sentence of 10 or more years in adult prison at the time of the offense
- Recognizing the death of an unborn child at any stage of development as a chargeable offense in cases of death and/or injury to a pregnant woman
- Changing laws that incarcerate children nine years of age or younger and sentence juveniles to adult prison
- Advocating for mental health and substance abuse treatment as more appropriate interventions than incarceration

## **Marriage**

- Promoting the committed relationship of a man and a woman as the best environment for nurturing the health and welfare of children
- Ensuring family support networks are in place that emphasize family stability and parental rights

## **Children**

- Preventing child abuse, abandonment and neglect
- Expanding child care slots for the working poor
- Encouraging adoption of children in State foster care and support for adoptive families
- Providing support for youth aging out of foster care and seeking to achieve self-sufficiency through independent living

## **Budget**

- Addressing critical needs for all vulnerable people including children, poor, elderly, disabled, homeless and sick by funding essential services and programs

# Health Care

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*As a basic human right necessary for a healthy and just society, we support comprehensive reform and expansion of the health care system to ensure basic care for all. Reform must be rooted in values that respect life, acknowledge human dignity, and recognize the needs of the poor.*

## **Medicaid Policies**

- Ensuring Medicaid reform pilots are meeting or exceeding desired objectives
- Increasing awareness that Medicaid is an important source of funding for the delivery system that serves all Floridians and that it should better cover the costs of care provided to beneficiaries

## **Children's Health**

- Supporting administrative simplifications to ease enrollment and re-enrollment for eligible families
- Supporting enhanced coordination of KidCare activities, including outreach efforts to increase participation in the program by income-eligible families
- Providing additional funding for the Healthy Start Program and preventing funds from being directed toward family planning

## **Health Policy**

- Expanding meaningful health coverage and improving access to care for the uninsured, especially low-income adults, pregnant women, children, the unemployed and immigrants
- Balancing the need for quality in service delivery with the burdens of regulatory compliance and reimbursement
- Ensuring accessibility of service to vulnerable populations through partnerships with the State and other public, charitable and private sectors
- Alleviating disparities in health status based on race, income and personal characteristics

## **Freedom to Serve**

- Ensuring Catholic entities have conscience clause protection allowing them freedom to provide services and benefits consistent with religious tenets, including protection of human beings at every stage of development
- While engaging in efforts to prevent conception from sexual assault, opposing requirements to provide services that may have an abortifacient effect

## HIV/AIDS

- Continuing funding for research, routine voluntary testing, compassionate care, responsible education, support and dignity for persons with AIDS and their families

## Vaccination

- Ensuring properly informed consent prior to vaccine administration
- Preserving role of parents in vaccination decisions
- Ensuring development of vaccines only from ethical sources (not tissue from fetuses or embryos electively aborted)

## Long Term Care

- Supporting long term care funding enhancements
- Providing a seamless, patient-centered continuum of care for older persons
- Continuing improvement of Florida's alternative long term care system
- Ensuring reimbursement and staffing levels are fair and appropriate
- Opposing increases in scope of nursing home liability

## Budget

- Ensuring an adequate reimbursement structure for Medicaid providers that better covers costs of care, especially for those providers caring for a disproportionate share of uninsured, underinsured and Medicaid patients

*Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them. This love and good will, to be sure, must in no way render us indifferent to truth and goodness.*

(Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 28)

# Education

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*The Conference supports the rights of parents to select the schools they deem best suited for their children and advocates policies for all children, especially the poor and disabled, to receive federal and state services necessary to achieve academically and assimilate socially.*

## **Educational Equity and Equality**

- Allowing eligible nonpublic school children to equitably participate in state scholarship and voucher programs
- Ensuring eligible children in nonpublic schools receive state and federal educational services that are equitable to their public school counterparts
- Protecting against discrimination of disadvantaged and disabled students
- Providing transportation services for the most needy

## **Special Needs Services**

- Allowing children who are physically, emotionally or learning-disabled to receive educational services based on need
- Allowing necessary intervention services for children to become literate and read on grade level
- Allowing gifted children to obtain advanced educational services to accelerate academically and maximize their full potential

## **School Health Services**

- Providing quality health services at the district or county level for all students in public and nonpublic schools
- Preventing distribution of contraceptives and abortion referrals at school-based health clinics

## **Human Sexuality/Health Programs**

- Presenting abstinence as the expected standard for school-aged children
- Opposing programs that reflect any one secular or religious philosophy
- Respecting the conscience of students and parental rights
- Educating in fertility awareness and fetal development

## **Post-Secondary Education**

- Ensuring nonpublic school graduates equal and equitable access to state post-secondary scholarship programs

## **Catholic and Nonpublic School Teachers**

- Allowing nonpublic school teachers who are state certified and teach state-defined critical subject areas to be eligible for a portion of their college loans to be forgiven on par with public school counterparts
- Providing opportunities for nonpublic school teachers to participate in alternative certification programs at district level

## Resource List

Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd ed.), Libreria Editrice Vaticana - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), 2000.

*Christifideles Laici* (Christ's Faithful Lay People), Pope John Paul II, 1988.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004.

*Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), Pope Benedict XVI, 2005.

*Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), Pope John Paul II, 1995.

Florida Catholic Conference, [www.flacathconf.org](http://www.flacathconf.org).

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States, USCCB, November 2007.

*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Vatican Council II, 1965.

Living the Gospel of Life, USCCB, November 1998.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

### Florida Catholic Conference Staff

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# The Catholic Church in Florida

## Catholic People and Places

- ✠ 2,366,715 Catholics
- ✠ 1 Archbishop, 14 Bishops
- ✠ 1,311 Priests, 690 Deacons
- ✠ 133 Brothers, 996 Sisters
- ✠ 7 Dioceses, 470 Parishes, 62 Missions

## Catholic Education

- ✠ 2 Seminaries, 3 Universities
- ✠ 26,952 College Students
- ✠ 36 High Schools
- ✠ 25,087 High School Students
- ✠ 179 Elementary Schools
- ✠ 62,558 Elementary School Students
- ✠ 7 Special Education Schools
- ✠ 570 Special Education Students
- ✠ 7,109 Teachers/Administrators
- ✠ 127,844 Catechesis/Religious Education Students

## Catholic Health Care

- ✠ 7 Acute Care Hospitals
- ✠ 3 Rehabilitation Hospitals
- ✠ 19 Health Care Centers
- ✠ 10 AIDS Centers and Programs
- ✠ 9 Nursing Homes or Centers
- ✠ 1 Hospice Organization

## Catholic Charities

- ✠ 80 Catholic Charities Service Centers
  - ✠ 240,852 People Assisted in 2007
- ✠ 81 Specialized Housing/Day Care Centers
  - ✠ 23,986 People Assisted in 2007

*(Information based on 2008 Official Catholic Directory and reports from Conference staff)*

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