

**PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES**  
**2006 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**  
*March 7 - May 5, 2006*

**Who is the Florida Catholic Conference?**

The Florida Catholic Conference (FCC) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops, established in 1969. It speaks for the Bishops in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the Church and secular agencies. The Bishops of the seven dioceses in Florida constitute its board of directors.

**The Role Of The Church in the Political Realm**

The Church is called to educate Catholics about our social teaching, highlight the moral dimensions of public policies, participate in debates on matters affecting the common good, and witness to the Gospel through our services and ministries. The Catholic community's participation in public affairs does not undermine, but enriches the political process and affirms genuine pluralism. Leaders of the Church have the right and duty to share Catholic teaching and to educate Catholics on the moral dimensions of public life, so that they may form their consciences in light of their faith. (USCCB, *Faithful Citizenship*, 2003)

**Florida Catholic Conference Public Policy Advocacy**

The Florida Catholic Conference supports respect for 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 and addresses the needs of farmworkers and refugee families.

***"...Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40***

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Below by category are major issues anticipated in the 2006 legislative session. Additional information on these issues including Conference position papers may be obtained by visiting the Florida Catholic Conference web site [Legislation Page](#).

***LIFE AND DEATH***

As long as society accepts destruction of its youngest and weakest members, no one is safe. The human family will make little progress dealing with the death penalty, poverty, euthanasia and other attacks on human life and dignity, if we allow the routine destruction of our most helpless and vulnerable sisters and brothers.

**Abortion**

- Supporting legislation to enable a woman to keep her child
- Requiring the physician to notify at least one parent in advance of a minor's intention to obtain an abortion
- Informing women of the risks and alternatives, and requiring a 24-hour reflection period before an abortion
- Reporting requirements compatible with CDC data bank

**Death Penalty**

- Requiring a unanimous jury recommendation for a sentence of death
- Requiring that juries in capital cases be informed that "life without parole" is an alternative to capital punishment in Florida
- Requiring jury recommendation of life without parole as binding on sentencing
- Seeking a moratorium on the death penalty in Florida

[The Church] does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions. Instead, it intends—as is its proper function—to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good. (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 6)

### **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 withdrawal of life prolonging procedures
- Ensure advance directives and other processes for end-of-life healthcare decision-making are appropriate

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

- Support a ban on human cloning and “so-called” therapeutic cloning
- Promoting stem cell research with adult stem cells from bone marrow and umbilical cord blood
- Restricting research that destroys human embryos

### **Organ Donation**

- Ensure that this laudable process is held to the highest ethical standards to secure public support and respect for human dignity

### **Vaccine Development**

- Ensure development of vaccines only from ethical sources (not tissue from fetuses electively aborted)

*“Protecting Human Life” begins with our opposition to abortion and euthanasia, which are pre-eminent threats to human life and dignity, and extends to our opposition to cloning, assisted suicide, and the death penalty, and our efforts to promote peace.*

## **SOCIAL CONCERNS**

The Conference supports the belief that all persons have certain basic economic rights and our society has a moral obligation to ensure that, in 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 is on government assistance

### **Domestic Violence**

- Policies that recognize physical, verbal, sexual and psychological violence as unacceptable, unjust behavior
- Legally protecting victims and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions

### **Affordable Housing**

- Full funding of the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act and Trust Fund as a dedicated revenue source in order to continue serving people in need of housing

### **Homeless**

- Full funding of the Homeless Coalitions and Emergency Financial Assistance Program (EFAP), for Florida’s homeless children and families

### **HIV/AIDS**

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

### **Human Trafficking**

- Protection of victims of trafficking often destined for forced labor, criminal activities or prostitution

### **Children**

- Expanding child care slots for the working poor
- Funding expansion for the Healthy Start Program for women and infants
- Preventing Healthy Start funds from being directed toward family planning
- Protections 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 the poor, children, the elderly, the disabled, homeless, sick, etc.
- Continuing essential services and programs that positively impact people in need

### **Immigration**

- Supporting policies that end discrimination or punitive measures aimed at undocumented or legal aliens and their families
- Eligibility for in-state tuition at post-secondary institutions for undocumented students educated in Florida’s public or nonpublic schools
- Guaranteeing Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income Assistance to poor, elderly, or disabled immigrants
- Providing Food Stamp benefits to immigrants, regardless of age or legal status
- Programs that provide education, health care, and basic human needs for immigrants and their families
- Re-initiating KidCare eligibility for immigrants

### **Farmworker Justice**

- Ensuring just wages, safe working conditions, freedom to organize, adequate personal and family benefits, and a dignified quality of life
- Ensuring that workers have the freedom and capacity to exercise their legal rights and claim the protections guaranteed them by law
- Policies that promote construction of affordable housing for farmworkers, via the commitment of significant state resources and available federal dollars
- Seats and seatbelts required in vehicles weighing less than 10,000 pounds.

### **Criminal Justice**

- Change laws that allow children to be tried as adults
- Allow female inmates to be housed in facility in closest proximity to their minor children

### **Living Wage/State Minimum Wage**

- Increase wages to help bridge the gap between earnings and needs for low-wage workers

### **Environment**

- Increasing advocacy for responsible environmental policies to protect Florida's resources
- Addressing critical environmental issues that negatively impact our communities
- Committing to sustainability efforts for future generations

*“Pursuing Social Justice” requires working for a more just economic life with decent jobs and just wages, providing adequate assistance to poor families, overcoming a culture of violence, combating discrimination, and defending the right to quality health care, housing, and food.*

## **EDUCATION**

The Conference supports policies that recognize the rights of parents and advocates legislation that assures all students an equitable share in state and federal benefits and services. It supports policies that allow Catholic parents to embrace the U.S. Bishops' message, “Whenever possible, parents should send their children to a Catholic school.”

### **Equity in Education for All**

- Children in nonpublic schools who are eligible for state and federal programs should receive educational services that are equitable to their public school counterparts
- Nonpublic school children meeting need based eligibility requirements for state scholarship and voucher programs should be allowed to equitably participate in these programs

### **Voluntary Universal Pre-K (VUPK)**

- Allowing parents to make decisions about participation
- Allowing programs to maintain their religious mission and autonomy
- Protections against discrimination of disadvantaged and disabled students
- Transportation services for the most needy
- Credentialing and class sizes based on accreditation standards

### **Special Needs Education**

- Provisions to allow full participation by providing for *in-school* special education services to eligible nonpublic school students, in the least restrictive environment possible, recognizing that off-campus services are generally disruptive and time consuming

### **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 Programs**

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- Address moral and ethical dimensions
- Do not reflect any one secular or religious philosophy
- Respect the conscience of students and parental rights
- Education in fertility awareness and development of the unborn
- Present abstinence as the expected standard

### **Post-Secondary Education**

- Including nonpublic high school graduates in Florida's *Talented Top 20 Program* that guarantees admission to a state university
- Post-secondary scholarship programs that provide opportunities for children of middle-income and lower-income families to receive a college education

*“Promoting Family Life” focuses on promotion of marriage, parental choice in education . . . and moral and economic supports for families.*

## **HEALTH CARE**

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 Reform**

- Ensure that reform efforts give moral priority to the needs of persons served by this program;
- Efforts to better coordinate patient care are encouraged
- Support increased preventive care and incentives for innovation in caring for vulnerable populations
- Support alleviating disparities in health status across race, income, personal characteristics
- Increase awareness that Medicaid is an important source of funding for the healthcare system that serves us all, and should better cover the costs of care provided to recipients
- Ensure long term care patients can select facilities based on religious preference

### **Health Care Regulation**

- Balancing the need for quality control in regulating health care delivery and the administrative challenge that regulation generates

### Health Care for All

- Increasing public awareness of needed health system enhancement to ensure quality, compassionate care for all
- Expanding health coverage to the uninsured, especially low-income adults, pregnant women, children, the unemployed, and immigrants
- Easing barriers to local community funding for indigent health care

### Freedom to Serve

- Ensuring that Catholic entities are free to provide services and benefits consistent with our religious tenets, including protection of human beings at every stage of human development
- While engaging in efforts to prevent conception from sexual assault, we oppose requirements to provide services when they may have an abortifacient effect

### Long Term Care

- Seek treatment under tort law for nursing homes that is more comparable to hospitals
- Providing a seamless, patient-centered, continuum of care for older persons
- Continuing improvement of Florida's alternative long-term care funding
- Seek appropriate funding for nursing home care
- Ensuring appropriate patient privacy
- Revising Medicaid long-term care eligibility criteria to promote fairness and the common good
- Implementing payment mechanisms to provide staffing levels appropriate for quality patient care
- Ensure long term care patients can select facilities based on religious preference

### Budget

- Ensuring accessibility of services to vulnerable populations through partnerships with state, other public, charitable and private sectors.
- Reimbursement rates that better approximate the cost of care and ensure quality in the delivery system that serves all Floridians

FCC staff represents the Florida Bishops on public policy issues of concern to the Church. Associates work in collaboration with pertinent committees of the Conference to influence legislation and are assigned specific issues as indicated below.

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*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 the truth and goodness. (Gaudium et Spes No. 28)*



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