



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Minnesota's Catholic Bishops Ask Legislature and Governor to Put the Common Good First in Budget Negotiations

St. Paul, Minn—Minnesota's Catholic bishops have been watching the State's budget negotiations unfold with great concern, and hope Gov. Dayton and legislative leaders overcome their differences and achieve a just solution soon.

"As pastors of the over 1.1 million Catholics in Minnesota who operate and labor in small and large businesses; who teach in our Catholic and public schools; who work on farms; who staff government offices; and who are unemployed, it is our responsibility to encourage elected officials to make budget decisions and enact policies that prioritize the needs of the poor and vulnerable, as well as promote human dignity and the common good," said the Most. Rev. John C. Nienstedt, Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

"We do not endorse any particular plan," he explained. "Rather, we propose an ethical and moral framework based on Catholic social teaching in the hope of moving the discussion in the right direction."

In particular, the bishops are concerned that spending cuts needed to balance the budget will fall disproportionately on the backs of the poor and vulnerable—particularly children, the elderly, and disabled.

The Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota, has opposed cuts to the State's General Assistance program—the primary safety net for those who have disabilities and are unable to work—as well as the Minnesota Family Investment Program, which provides cash and food assistance to low-income families with children. Various budget proposals have not provided funding levels that meet projected needs.

"Ensuring the welfare of all Minnesotans is a core function of government," said Jason Adkins, MCC executive director. "Although controlling spending and putting the state on sound fiscal footing are important goals, those with limited means should not be shouldering that responsibility, especially as politicians continue to load budgets with tax loopholes, subsidies, and spending projects that serve narrow special interests."

Similarly, Minnesota's bishops have been discouraged by the view in some quarters that human services spending is out of control because churches have failed in their responsibility to help those in need. It is indeed the primary responsibility of families, churches, non-profits, and charities to address the "root causes" of poverty and alleviate its effects, but it is unrealistic to expect them to do it alone. Government can and does subsidize the work of private charity.

"Our churches and affiliated institutions such as Catholic Charities provide social and health services where the effects of cuts in government support have a real and devastating impact," said the Most Rev. John M. LeVoir, Bishop of New Ulm. "The Church, of course, has a fundamental imperative from her Lord to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless. But the state should, when necessary, support the work of upholding the dignity of her citizens, thereby assuring the common good. In Minnesota, churches and non-profits have a long and fruitful history of collaborating with government to provide support to Minnesotans in need."

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In addition to concern about shortfalls in essential services, MCC has lobbied, on behalf of Minnesota’s bishops, for the following pieces of budget-related legislation:

- An end to taxpayer funding of abortions for women receiving State medical assistance
- Bans on human cloning and State funding for cloning research
- A tuition tax credit for parents of children attending non-public schools
- Opportunity scholarships for students in underperforming public schools to attend private schools

“These policies should be a part of any final budget agreement because they promote both the sanctity of life and educational opportunity for parents and students who could not otherwise afford it,” said Adkins. “Protecting human life from conception to natural death, as well as supporting parental choice in education, has been and will remain priorities for Minnesota’s Catholic bishops.”

The Bishop of Crookston, the Most Rev. Michael J. Hoeppner, summarized the bishops’ perspective when he stated, “The pursuit of the common good demands that power not dominate over justice, that the interests of partisanship not threaten the good of society as a whole, that the basic interests of the poor and most vulnerable not be ignored. We sincerely hope that all parties in the budget negotiations will use all tools at their disposal—spending reductions, program delivery reform, and increased revenue—to meet Minnesota’s budgetary needs and work for the well-being of all Minnesotans.”

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