

Catholic social teaching calls all parishioners to be actively involved in charity and social justice. In addition to giving our time, talent and treasure to charitable causes, we are also to help change systems that have negative effects on the most vulnerable people in our society and across the globe. One of the many ways to seek justice for the vulnerable is to let those who represent us at all levels of government know which laws and policies must be changed or created to reflect Catholic social teaching. Of course, we must first learn about relevant social issues and current legislative initiatives if we are to take this kind of action.

Understanding legislative issues at the state, national and international levels that would affect the poor and vulnerable can be a daunting and time consuming task. Fortunately, there are several organizations that monitor proposed legislation from the perspective of Catholic social teaching and make information available to parishioners. Some of their websites not only explain the issues but also offer draft responses to the President and/or members of congress that you can modify and send easily via e-mail. Timely input to legislative issues is important and several organizations will, if requested, send “action alerts” about critical issues that need parishioner response before congress or the state legislature take action on these issues. Responses must generally be made via e-mail or telephone as traditional mail is often too slow.

Taking the time to express your views to those who shape public policy at the state and federal levels has the potential to create new opportunities for the most vulnerable in our world. Following is a description of several organizations which monitor proposed legislation and policy decisions with guidelines for using their websites. You might find additional organizations on the web through the links provided in those listed below.

**Organization: Montana Catholic Conference (MCC)**

**Purpose/Goals:** The MCC serves as the public policy branch of the Catholic Church in Montana and the liaison for Montana’s Roman Catholic bishops with state and federal government. Inspired by scripture and Catholic social teaching, the conference seeks to advocate for the weak and vulnerable and act as a catalyst for the transformation of society.

**Website Characteristics:** The MCC website contains information about the organization’s mission as well as links to a variety of other sites, including the official Montana state legislature website. Beginning in January 2007, MCC will monitor legislation from the perspective of Catholic social teaching and issue alerts when public input is critical on proposed legislation involving social justice issues. A link to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops will connect with issues of national and international scope (see below).

**Examples of Recent Issues:** Life issues, care for the poor and vulnerable, marriage and family.

**Website Guide:** Find the website at [www.montanacc.org](http://www.montanacc.org). From the home page click on “AlertNetwork Signup” in the blue box on the right side of the page. When the Montana Legislative Alert Network page appears, enter your e-mail address in the space provide at

the right and click on “go”. You will then receive MCC alerts as they are issued. You might want to browse many of the links provided on the home page to learn more about Catholic social teaching and current issues.

**Organization: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)**

**Purpose/Goals:** The USCCB is an assembly of the Catholic Church hierarchy who work together to unify, coordinate, promote, and carry on Catholic activities in the United States; to organize and conduct religious, charitable, and social welfare work at home and abroad; to aid in education; and to care for immigrants. The bishops themselves constitute the membership of the Conference and are served by a staff of over 350 lay people, priests, deacons, and religious.

**Website Characteristics:** The USCCB website contains information regarding all aspects of the organization and its functions as well as links to other sites. The site offers information on Catholic social teaching, social justice and social action. The USCCB Department of Social Development and World Peace monitors national legislative issues and sends action alerts via the web.

**Examples of Recent Issues:** Haiti trade preferences; the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act.

**Website Guide:** Find the website at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). Click on “Social Justice Issues” located on the left quarter of the home page and from the drop-down menu, select “Social Dev. & World Peace” (SDWP). The SDWP home page explains the functions of this department and includes ongoing Catholic campaigns and legislative priorities. To receive action alerts, click on “Receive Our Mailing” on the left side of the SDWP home page and follow the instructions.

**Organization: Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA)**

**Purpose/Goals:** CCUSA is the membership association of one of the nation’s largest social service networks. Catholic Charities agencies and institutions nationwide provide vital social services to people in need, regardless of their religious, social, or economic background. The social policy division advocates for federal policies that reduce poverty and meet the needs of children living at risk, families coping with crisis, seniors struggling to live with dignity, and immigrants striving to make for themselves a better life in a new home.

**Website Characteristics:** The CCUSA website contains comprehensive information about the organization. The Advocacy web page is a clearinghouse of information and resources about CCUSA’s social policy division and its efforts to shape federal legislation. Both the home page and the Advocacy web page have areas to click for “action alerts”. The legislative action page contains links to information about candidates in the current election and legislative issues. Some functions are available only to members (individual membership is \$25.00/year).

**Examples of Recent Issues:** access to health care, affordable housing, just federal budget.

**Website Guide:** Find the website at [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org). From the home page click on “action alerts” in the green block to the right and follow directions. When relevant legislation is pending, examples of suggested letters to legislators are available or suggested e-mails can be edited to suit your needs and sent directly to your senator or

congressman. You can also indicate whether you want to receive e-mail alerts (check box).

**Organization: Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

**Purpose/Goals:** CRS was founded by the Catholic Bishops of the U.S. to assist the poor and disadvantaged outside the country. The policies and programs of the agency reflect and express the teaching of the Catholic Church while giving assistance to persons on the basis on need, not creed, race or nationality. The root causes of world poverty are often connected to international and U.S. policies that perpetuate inequity and injustice. CRS complements its humanitarian and development activities with policy analysis and advocacy that seek to address root causes of poverty, conflict and marginalization by following the principles of Catholic social teaching.

**Website Characteristics:** The CRS website describes all aspects of the organization. Their “Action Center” provides information on current CRS initiatives as well as tools needed to e-mail your senators and representative.

**Example of Recent Issues:** Support Haiti trade preferences.

**Website Guide:** Find the CRS website at [www.catholicreliefservices.org](http://www.catholicreliefservices.org). Click on the drop-down menu titled “Other CRS Sites” in the upper right corner of the home page then click on “Action Center”. Here you will find current issues that need parishioner action. Follow directions to learn about a specific issue and how you can express your views to appropriate members of congress. If you wish to receive action alerts, click on “Sign Up for the Legislative Network” in the box at the right and fill in the required information. To sign up for CRS’s monthly newsletter, click on the “E-mail Updates” in the extreme upper left corner of the Action Center web page.

**Organization: Network, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby**

**Purpose/Goals:** Network is a progressive voice in the Catholic community that uses lobbying and legislative advocacy to close the gap between rich and poor and to dismantle policies rooted in racism, greed and violence.

**Website Characteristics:** The website is straightforward, providing information about Network and links to a wide variety of other advocacy organizations. Current issues on which the organization is working are explained in detail.

**Examples of Recent Issues:** Election 2006, including voting records of senators and congressmen on Network issues. Important topics include the economy, minimum wage, health care, taxes, military spending, Iraq, immigration and trade.

**Website Guide:** Find the Network website at [www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org). Click on highlighted areas to the right of the home page to get legislative updates and action alerts. Other information on the home page will include new items and additional topics. Site visitors are encouraged to become a member of the organization.