



Becoming “a Church that is Poor and for the Poor” A Catholic Message to Congress

Catholic leaders from throughout the country are meeting in Washington, DC for the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering 2014. In solidarity with Pope Francis, we seek to become “a Church that is poor and for the poor.” We urge Congress to make the poor a priority both domestically and internationally and to promote peace.

International: Promoting Peace through Negotiations and Development and Humanitarian Assistance

In speaking about conflicts in the Middle East, Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of dialogue, “In the world, in society, there is little peace also because dialogue is missing... Peace requires persistent, patient, strong, intelligent dialogue by which nothing is lost. Dialogue can overcome war. Dialogue can ... make citizens of different ethnic backgrounds and of different beliefs coexist.”

In addition to supporting negotiations on Syria, with Iran, and between Israel and Palestine, U.S. development and humanitarian assistance provide essential tools for reducing human misery and promoting peace. As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, “a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence.”

Negotiations with Iran

The Church calls for “dialogue” and “joint solutions” regarding Iran, and opposes military action. Pope Francis expressed satisfaction at the “significant progress made in the dialogue between Iran and the Group of 5+1 on the nuclear issue.” The Chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace commended the P5 + 1 interim agreement “that allows continued dialogue with Iran on this crucial issue.” Bishop Richard Pates went on to say, “a diplomatic solution with Iran is greatly preferable to military action, which could have unpredictable and negative repercussions for the region.” In a January 2014 letter to Congressional leaders, Bishop Pates urged “Congress not to take any actions that could undermine the negotiation process.”

Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians

USCCB supports the resumption of talks between Israelis and Palestinians and joins with Pope Francis in hoping that “both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions aimed at finding a just and lasting solution to a conflict which urgently needs to end.” USCCB supports a secure and recognized Israel living alongside a viable and independent Palestinian state. Peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel would contribute to stability in the region. The bi-partisan Iraq Study Group asserted: “The United States will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless the United States deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict.”

U.S. Poverty-focused International Assistance

The Church views international assistance as an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance human security in our world. International assistance is not an optional commitment; it is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these.” Our nation should give priority to programs for the poorest people in the poorest places on earth. Congress restored funding to poverty-focused accounts in FY2012 and increased funding for Emergency Disaster Assistance, Migration and Refugee accounts, and health programs in FY2013. The FY2014 budget, which was passed in January, allocates just over \$20 billion for poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance programs that USCCB and CRS have prioritized. See the attached chart. Poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance represents just over one-half percent (0.6%) of the federal budget, not the 20-25% many Americans believe it constitutes.

More Information these and other international issues: <http://www.usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/>



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Domestic: Moving from Poverty to Flourishing

Poverty is an evil that wounds human life and dignity. Today in America poverty remains painfully high:

- 46 million Americans live in poverty--poverty hasn't been this persistent in close to 50 years.
- Over nine million families suffer in poverty and struggle to live in dignity. Economic insecurity is causing family formation to plummet.

The younger you are in America, the more likely you are to grow up poor.

- 20% percent of all children live in poverty today; for children under six, the rate increases to 25%.

Pope Francis says we all must work “to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor.”

Public policy decisions must protect poor and vulnerable people, families, and communities, foster inclusion, and help them develop more fully and reach their human potential. This means supporting policies that encourage family formation and stability, create decent jobs with just wages, ensure access to safe and affordable housing, and fight the scourge of hunger. It also means:

Criminal Justice Reform: the Second Chance Act

- The bipartisan Second Chance Reauthorization Act (S 1690, HR 3465) would restore people leaving prison and help them reintegrate back into their communities in healthy and productive ways.
- Funding for reintegrating individuals to access education, literacy, job-placement, substance abuse treatment, and other assistance would reduce prison costs and improve public safety.
- Second Chance would serve more people effectively by expanding the role of nonprofit organizations by ensuring that they have equitable access to grants for family-based substance abuse treatment and career training.

More Information on Criminal Justice: <http://bit.ly/LV47Lo>

Finishing the Job on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- **A Path to Citizenship** is not an amnesty--those who qualify would have to pay back taxes, a fine, acquire English proficiency, and wait their turn.
- **Family-Based Immigration** would reduce current backlogs in family categories. Oppose transferring permanent visas from the family categories to the employment categories.
- **A Temporary Worker Program** would allow safe, legal entry and job portability while meeting the nation's economic needs. Low-skill labor deserves appropriate workplace safeguards and an option to earn citizenship.
- **Address the Root Causes of Migration** and seek long-term solutions.
- We do not oppose a piecemeal approach, as long as all the pieces are there in the end.

More Information on Immigration Reform: justiceforimmigrants.org; uscgb.org/mrs

Using our Nation's Resources to Support Life

- No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (HR 7, S. 946) would close loopholes in current law, so longstanding policy against federal abortion funding is permanent and government-wide.
- Women in poverty oppose abortion more than others, yet have highest abortion rate due to social and economic pressures. That rate increases again, and may even double, if abortion is publicly funded.
- Most Americans, including women, oppose public funding, and do not want abortion in their health coverage.
- Even the Supreme Court says abortion is different from other medical procedures because it takes the life of the unborn--government can use its funding power to “encourage childbirth over abortion.”

More Information on Protecting Life: uscgb.org/about/pro-life-activities/