



“Building Community: A Call to the Common Good”

A Catholic Message to Congress



Hundreds of Catholic leaders from throughout our country are in our nation’s capital for the 2018 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering. Pope Francis calls us all to build community and strengthen the common good.

Make Poor and Vulnerable People a Priority in the Federal Budget

Every day, in every corner of the world, the Catholic Church--Catholic Charities, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, and thousands of schools, hospitals, parishes and NGOs--works to draw a “Circle of Protection” around the “least of these.” The federal government is a vital partner in that work. Congress should resist budget cuts and prioritize programs that help people living in poverty, both at home and abroad. After 16 years of war, we have learned that force cannot achieve peace. Catholic Social Teaching tells us that integral development of peoples is the new name for peace and that peace is built on justice and solidarity.

International

- 1. Preserve funding to at least FY 2017 levels for poverty-focused international development and humanitarian programs that save lives, address the root causes of conflicts, and reduce crushing poverty,** including the Complex Crises Fund and the Atrocities Prevention Board. **(See chart for programs supported by USCCB and CRS.)** Protect international assistance from budget cuts that would threaten these efforts. Contrary to popular perceptions that it is 20% of the federal budget; such aid is only about one-half percent (0.55%) of the budget.
- 2. Increase funding to humanitarian accounts (International Disaster Assistance, Migration and Refugee Assistance and Food for Peace)** to assist the record number of 65 million forcibly displaced persons in the world, including 21 million refugees.

The plight of refugees fleeing Syria and Iraq, and conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan are grim reminders of the lives at stake. U.S. international assistance protects human dignity, and is an investment in long-term peace and stability that cannot be achieved through military action.
- 3. Maintain strong and vibrant investments in diplomacy and development** to help developing countries build peaceful and prosperous societies; do not cut these diplomacy and development capacities to increase defense funding.

Domestic

- 1. Preserve funding to health care programs that provide a social safety net to the poor and seniors.** The passage of the tax reform bill could trigger automatic cuts to Medicare by as much as \$25 billion. Moreover, there were several attempts in 2017 to restructure Medicaid in a manner that would defund the program by hundreds of billions of dollars over 10 years. Such deep cuts are unconscionable. As Pope Francis said, “Health, indeed, is not a consumer good, but a universal right which means that access to healthcare services cannot be a privilege.”
- 2. Preserve funding to nutrition programs that alleviate hunger.** The reauthorization of the Farm Bill should not include efforts to defund the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and/or the Commodity Supplemental Food Assistance Program (CSFP). In 2017, approximately 1 in 8 households in the US were food-insecure.
- 3. Increase the value of the housing tax credit and protect tenant-based rental assistance and other housing assistance mechanisms from cuts.** Housing tax credits finance most new affordable housing projects in the US. However, the tax reform bill indirectly decreased the value of these credits. These effects should be offset by increasing their value. Tenant-based rental assistance funding levels should be preserved.

Setting Spending Priorities: Proposals for sharp increases in defense and immigration enforcement spending, coupled with simultaneous and severe reductions to non-defense discretionary spending, particularly to many domestic and international programs that assist the most vulnerable, are profoundly troubling. Such deep cuts would pose a threat to the security of our nation and world, and would harm people facing dire circumstances. When the impact of tax policies are taken into account, the prospects for vulnerable people become even bleaker.

Providing Protection to Dreamers

The Catholic Church believes in protecting the dignity of every human being, particularly that of our children. The Catholic Bishops have long supported these immigrant youths and their families. These youths have grown up in our country, some even choosing to put their lives on the line to serve in our armed forces. They truly exemplify the extraordinary contributions that immigrants can provide to our nation. Dreamers should not be forced to live their lives in constant fear that they will be deported at any moment and separated from their families. It is both our moral duty and in our nation's best interest to protect them and allow them to reach their God-given potential. Ensuring protection for these young people should be the first step in the systematic reform of our outdated immigration laws.

We urge you to work expeditiously and in a bipartisan manner to find a legislative solution for Dreamers. In doing so, we ask you to:

1. **Provide a path to citizenship for these youth.** Dreamers living in our country were brought to the United States as young children and teens. They are contributors to our economy, veterans of our military, academic standouts in our universities, and leaders in our parishes and communities. They know America as their only home and should not be denied the opportunity to obtain U.S. citizenship and participate fully in civic life.
2. **Recognize the sanctity of families and continue to protect children.** As Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, Texas, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration stated: “[W]e caution against introducing unrelated, unnecessary, or controversial elements of immigration policy—especially those that jeopardize the sanctity of families or unaccompanied children—into the bipartisan search for a just and humane solution for the Dreamers.” Family immigration is the foundation of our country and of our Church. A solution for Dreamers cannot be at the expense of other immigrant children or family-based immigration.
3. **Recognize the right of nations to control their borders and balance this right with that of individuals to migrate and seek protection.** Catholic social teaching on migration recognizes and respects the sovereignty of each nation to regulate its borders. This right, however, must be balanced with the right of vulnerable migrants, such as asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking, to access protection. We ask that any border security measures be proportional and humanely implemented, with the inclusion of appropriate training and oversight components.

Additional Resources from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Links to Background Materials:

CatholicSocialMinistryGathering.org

Federal Budget Antipoverty Priorities:

Office of International Justice and Peace: usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/

Office of Domestic Social Development: usccb.org/about/domestic-social-development

Comprehensive Immigration Reform or DACA [need to edit]:

Department of Migration and Refugee Services: usccb.org/mrs

Justice for Immigrants Campaign: justiceforimmigrants.org

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