

YOUR ROLE IN CATHOLIC POLICY

My role in Catholic Policy dates to the late 1980s when I was first a member of the Domestic Policy Committee at USCCB and eventually a full-time Policy Analyst at USCCB from 1991-1995.

I returned to work for the Church with the Archdiocese of Washington as the Executive Director of the DC Catholic Conference from 1996-2011.

Currently, I am a Sr. Director of Government Affairs at Catholic Charities USA since 2011 where I serve as a senior advocate for the CCUSA Mission, which is “to provide service to people, families and communities in need, to advocate for justice in social structures and to call the entire church and all people of good will to do the same.” I advocate policy to Members of Congress on Capitol Hill on behalf of CCUSA.

WHY IS POLICY IMPORTANT TO BLACK CATHOLICS

Issues that impact every American citizen are just as important to Black Catholics as they are to everyone else. My number one Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quote is: “Anything that affects one directly impacts all indirectly.” This alone speaks to why Black Catholics like everyone in the “FAITH” should be concerned as to what is going on with social policy in our daily lives.

Consistent with our firm belief in the Life ethic of Human Dignity, all who are in need, especially those who simply have basic needs, i.e. shelter, food, clothing, and the like, deserve the support of everyone. To wit, for Black Catholics in many instances the disparities of needs have historically been greater. Going back to my years in Mississippi doing Civil Rights advocacy in the 60s and 70s Black Catholic involvement was significant. Many Ordained and Religious led Black Catholics in our quest for justice and equality, for example, the Selma Alabama March, and 1963 March on Washington. In many local communities, especially in the Jim Crow South, there were Priests and Nuns who some even against the will of their Bishops were advocates because they felt the Lord’s call to do what was “Right”!

Back in those days there used to be a saying that when America catches a cold, “Black America gets pneumonia”. Economic disparities for many Black Americans are still a stark reality and while the gap has been closed somewhat it remains a distant reality for many people of color who are still in need. Thus, the involvement of Black Catholics in Policy goes back in history and is well documented. However, the job is never finished and we’re still and will always be involved in being advocates to help those most in need, the least among US.

Black America has consistently been at the bottom in many socio-economic indicators, including education, employment, housing, health care and the list goes on and on. However, Black Catholics and other Blacks in some instances may have fared better in some of these areas primarily because we have been the beneficiary of Catholic Education which has made a significant contribution to many Black Catholic Communities. I share my own personal experience as the 5th of 6 children Catholic School-educated by our parents (6th - 8th grade educated) in Jim Crow Mississippi. All 6 were college educated with 12 degrees among us, including 2 alums (Xavier University) of the only Black Catholic University in the U.S. For my siblings and me a quality Catholic school education was made possible by the many Religious who were committed to serving Black communities and our parents who made the investment to make life better.

If I had my way Catholic Education would be one of the top Social Policy issues for Black Catholics. Notwithstanding, the reality of the times and the challenges of keeping Catholic Schools open and especially Catholic Schools in Black Communities is more than challenging. In my judgment, EDUCATION is number one ticket out of poverty. So, where we can keep Catholic Schools open or at least have access to Catholic Schools for Black Catholics and others in our communities receiving a quality education opportunity is a start, it is the foundation.

However, the reality of the times has made Catholic Education more so for many Black Catholics very challenging, but we still must concentrate on levelling the playing field for equal opportunities and equal access in all areas of society. Currently I believe we are taking major steps backward as many of the gains of the past are being threatened or taken away by unfair policies that not only impact Black communities but all poor people. Clearly, we see policies where those who already have much are getting more and those who don't have much are losing what little they have, and this isn't right. This is even more the reason we need to become more active in our advocacy in letting policymakers know they must do the right thing.

Black Catholics can continue to be advocates starting in their parishes and making their voices heard to policymakers. You can follow the advocacy work on behalf of CCUSA, St. Vincent de Paul, USCCB and other Catholic Social Policy entities who consistently work to make the Catholic voice heard to those who can make a difference. You can write letters, email, phone calls or use social media outlets to make your voice known on the issues impacting all communities in need. We're all in this together and we will only get out by working together to make life better for all.

What we're experiencing as a nation now should make us all remember how powerful our Catholic Faith is for us individually and collectively. Black Catholics have stood on the

power of prayer in ways that from my experience is second to none. We should never be afraid to speak out and act especially to those who do not have our best interest or simply misunderstand what the true needs of our communities are. We must educate our communities to stand up for those who need our help and make Catholic Policy a top priority.