



Office of the President

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3100 • FAX 202-541-3166

Cardinal Francis George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-elect
Presidential Transition Team
Washington, D.C. 20270

Dear Mr. President-elect,

As our nation begins a new year, a new Administration and a new Congress, I write to outline principles and priorities that guide the public policy efforts of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). As President of the Bishops' Conference, I assure you of our prayers, hopes and commitment to make this period of national change a time to advance the common good and defend the life and dignity of all, especially the vulnerable and poor. We continue to seek ways to work constructively with the new Administration and Congress and others of good will to pursue policies which respect the dignity of all human life and bring greater justice to our nation and peace to our world.

As Bishops, we approach public policy as pastors and teachers. Our moral principles have always guided our everyday experience in caring for the hungry and homeless, offering health care and housing, educating children and reaching out to those in need. We lead the largest community of faith in the United States, one that serves every part of our nation and is present in almost every place on earth. From our experience and our tradition, we offer a distinctive, constructive and principled contribution to the national dialogue on how to act together on issues of economic turmoil and suffering, war and violence, moral decency and human dignity.

Our nation now faces **economic challenges** with potentially tragic human consequences and serious moral dimensions. We will work with the new Administration and Congress to support strong, prudent and effective measures to address the terrible impacts and injustices of the economic crisis. In particular, we will advocate a clear priority for poor families and vulnerable workers in the development and implementation of economic recovery measures, including new investments while strengthening the national safety net. We also support greater accountability and oversight to address irresponsible abuses of the system that contributed to the financial crisis.

The Catholic Bishops of the United States have worked for decades to assure **health care** for all, insisting that access to decent health care is a basic human right and a requirement of human dignity. We urge comprehensive action to ensure truly universal health care coverage which protects all human life including pre-natal life, and provides access for all, with a special concern for the poor. Any such legislation ought to respect freedom to choose by offering a variety of options and ensuring respect for the moral and religious convictions of patients and providers. Such an approach should seek to restrain costs while sharing them equitably.

On **international affairs**, we will work with our leaders to seek a responsible transition in an Iraq free of religious persecution. We especially urge early, focused and persistent leadership to bring an end to violent conflict and a just peace in the Holy Land. We will continue to support essential U.S. investments to overcome poverty, hunger and disease through increased and reformed foreign assistance. Continued U.S. leadership in the fight against HIV-AIDS and other diseases in ways that are both effectively and morally appropriate have our enthusiastic backing. Recognizing the complexity of climate change, we wish to be a voice for the poor and vulnerable in our country and around the world who will be the most adversely affected by any dramatic threats to the environment.

We will work with the new Administration and Congress to fix a broken **immigration** system which harms both our nation and immigrants. Comprehensive reform is needed to deal with the economic and human realities of millions of immigrants in our midst. It must be based on respect for and implementation of the law. Equally it must defend the rights and dignity of all peoples, recognizing that human dignity comes from God and does not depend on where people were born or how they came to our nation. Truly comprehensive immigration reform will include a path to earned citizenship with attention to the fact that international trade and development policies influence economic opportunities in the countries from which immigrants come.

We stand firm in our support for **marriage** which is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman and must remain such in law. In a manner unlike any other relationship, marriage makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the common good of society, especially through the procreation and education of children. No other kinds of personal relationships can be justly made equivalent to the commitment of a man and a woman in marriage.

With regard to the education of children, we will continue to support initiatives which provide resources for all parents, especially those of modest means, to choose education which best address the needs of their children.

We welcome continuing commitments to empower **faith-based groups** as effective partners in overcoming poverty and other threats to human dignity. We will work with the Administration and Congress to strengthen these partnerships in ways that do not encourage government to abandon its responsibilities, and do not require religious groups to abandon their identity and mission.

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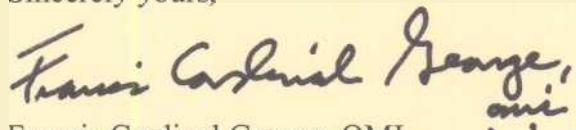
Most fundamentally, we will work to protect the **lives of the most vulnerable and voiceless members of the human family**, especially unborn children and those who are disabled or terminally ill. We will consistently defend the fundamental right to life from conception to natural death. Opposed to abortion as the direct killing of innocent human life, we will encourage one and all to seek common ground that will reduce the number of abortions in morally sound ways that affirm the dignity of pregnant women and their unborn children. We will oppose legislative and other measures to expand abortion. We will work to retain essential, widely supported policies which show respect for unborn life, protect the conscience rights of health care providers and other Americans, and prevent government funding and promotion of abortion. The Hyde amendment and other provisions which for many years have prevented federal funding of abortion have a proven record of reducing abortions. Efforts to force Americans to fund abortions with their tax dollars would pose a serious moral challenge and jeopardize the passage of essential health care reform.

This outline of USCCB policies and priorities is not complete. There are many other areas of concern and advocacy for the Church and the USCCB especially: religious freedom and other civil and human rights, news media and communications, and issues of war and peace. For a more detailed description of our concerns please see *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (USCCB 2008), pages 19-30.

Nonetheless, we offer this outline as an agenda for dialogue and action. We hope to offer a constructive and principled contribution to national discussion over the values and policies that will shape our nation's future. We seek to work together with our nation's leaders to advance the common good of our society, while disagreeing respectfully and civilly where necessary for preserving that same common good.

In closing, I renew our expression of hope and our offer of cooperation as you begin this new period of service to our nation in these challenging times. We promise our prayers for you, that the days ahead will be a time of renewal and progress for our nation and that we can work together to defend human life and dignity and build a nation of greater justice and a world at peace.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Francis Cardinal George, OMI". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small "omi." at the end.

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago
President