

Article for The Harvest

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By Moe Wosepka, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Title: **Public Policy, right or wrong, we are responsible**

In the last issue, we introduced the process for the Montana Catholic Conference (MCC) to assist the Bishops in forming public policy. A policy which serves the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, and promotes the common good. The first step in the process was to surface from the people of Montana, their social justice needs.

Many of you have come forward with your suggestions of public policy issues, and we have spent considerable time listening and learning. You told us your concerns with health issues, the problem of so many who are uninsured in Montana, and the decreasing access the poor have to health care. A couple of you who experienced the disparity in education where the poor, and disadvantaged are adversely affected, have expressed your concerns. You left us with these two disturbing questions 1. Did you know that national studies show those who cannot read by sixth grade are 84% more likely to end up in prisons than those who can? And, 2. Did you know that the greatest percentages of those who cannot read are low income? You have also conveyed your fear that the Meth epidemic in Montana could destroy a generation of our young people.

At the root of all these issues is the knowledge that each of us is a unique part of God's creation, and every person is more important than things. We further believe that the measure of any institution is whether it enhances or degrades the life and dignity of each person within. The message here is to treat all living persons with dignity, and in no way threaten their existence, or promote their demise through abortion, euthanasia, or the death penalty. Life issues define who we are as a society. The impending execution of David Dawson at Montana State Prison scheduled for August 11th will give us cause to reflect on how well we as individuals enhance or degrade the life and dignity of every person, including the life of Mr. Dawson.

We also need to understand that the responsibility to dignify the human person and to protect the rights of all human persons is ours. It is yours and mine, not hers, his, and theirs. Mother Teresa is quoted as saying, "When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed." It is also true of us in our efforts to shape public policy to assist the poor and the vulnerable, and ensure the common good. We need to be involved, to work together for the future of this state for we are ultimately responsible for how well our society treats others.

We at MCC welcome your comments and your ideas. We welcome your passion and frustrations. We welcome your hopes and dreams for yourself and others. Please continue to talk to us. As we prepare to influence public policy we need your input and your prayers. Future articles will discuss opportunities for each of us to be involved in shaping policy which protects the dignity of all Gods people.

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