

## Justice groups start work on 'common good' platform for 2012 election

Dennis Sadowski | Catholic News Service | Nov. 30, 2011

**WASHINGTON** -- With the first votes of the presidential primary season set for Jan. 3 at the Iowa caucuses, Catholic social justice organizations are asking local communities to help draft platforms rooted in church teaching that they hope will enter the discussion on the campaign trail next fall.

Called Election 2012: Catholics Vote for the Common Good, the effort is taking place nationwide, but is specifically targeting six states with significant Catholic populations that political observers expect will play a key role in the election: Florida, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Wisconsin.

Organizers of the effort told Catholic News Service that the polarization that dominates American politics is fueling their plan to put the spotlight on the needs of people struggling under the depressed economy.

The program is being tested in Iowa, where groups of voters are being invited to discuss what they think presidential and congressional candidates should address in their push for votes.

"It just seems like at this time people have forgotten about the common good," said Michelle Knight, advocacy associate with the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, one of the organizations involved in Election 2012. "It seems like there's such an emphasis on what's good for the individual and not thinking about the common good."

In all, more than a dozen organizations have banded together in the endeavor. Sister Simone Campbell, a Sister of Social Service who is executive director of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, said it builds upon a national gathering in 2008 in Philadelphia that led to the development of a broad platform incorporating major Catholic social justice themes.

This time, she said, the national organizations are looking to local communities to identify key concerns that can be included in statewide platforms for distribution to candidates after Labor Day. "Our goal is to focus the Catholic conversation on the whole perspective of the common good," Sister Simone said. "Especially in these economic times the common good is the measure of who we're called to be as Catholics as well as citizens of the United States. It's where our faith and civics go together and demand that our elected officials implement that vision for who we are.

"From our perspective the resistance (by elected officials) to actually governing and making some of the important choices ... is unacceptable. It's like they're running to get a seat so they get a paycheck, but they're not willing to do the work. In these times we cannot afford as a nation to have elected officials unwilling to do the hard work of governing," she added.

Discussions in the six targeted states are expected to begin during Lent.

After the state platforms are drafted, reviewed and finally adopted local leaders will spend the summer asking

voters in general -- but Catholics in particular -- to sign on to it. The hope, organizers said, is to mobilize thousands of people speaking in a unified voice and stressing to candidates that they must develop solutions to the nation's woes rather than remain gridlocked, guided by ideological arguments.

Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, another of the organizations involved, told CNS that the effort also is meant to focus the political conversation on the consistent ethic of life encompassing the full range of justice issues.

"It really is broadening our focus so that we can then have an impact. If we want to change people's minds on abortion then we also need to show we're also consistent on the other side on life issues," Carolan explained.

"We really want to raise awareness in the general Catholic population of the connection between right to life and social justice issues, following through with what every pope has said, what the teachings of Jesus are," he added.

Organizations participating in the effort include the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Institute Justice, Sisters of St. Joseph Federation, Pax Christi USA, Pax Romana Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs USA, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, Catholics United and Unite Here, a labor union.

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