

Cardinal George pledges to work with Obama

Dennis Coday | Jan. 19, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has pledged that he and his fellow prelates will work with the incoming administration of Barack Obama and the 111th Congress to "advance the common good and defend the life and dignity of all, especially the vulnerable and poor."

In a Jan. 13 letter to the president-elect, Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George offered a broad outline of policy priorities that concern the U.S. bishops, ranging from economic recovery that covers all segments of society to protecting the lives of the "most vulnerable and voiceless members of the human family," especially unborn children.

Update: [The cardinal's second letter to Obama](#) [1]: "Don't reverse policies protecting unborn"

A corresponding letter was sent to Vice President-elect Joseph Biden and each member of Congress.

Cardinal George reminded Obama that the bishops approach public policy as pastors and teachers and that the moral principles that guide them have been developed through their experience in caring for people in need.

The cardinal's letter particularly addressed the economic crisis, health care, international affairs and immigration; marriage as the union of a man and a woman; the empowerment of faith-based groups as partners in overcoming poverty and threats to human dignity; and the importance of protecting the vulnerable and voiceless, especially the unborn.

Cardinal George restated the church's long-held opposition to efforts to expand abortion or to fund abortion with tax dollars.

"We will oppose legislative and other measures to expand abortion," the letter said. "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."

"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 reforms," Cardinal George said.

On the economic front, Cardinal George advised Obama to make poor families and vulnerable workers a "clear priority," suggesting that recovery measures include new investments and ways to strengthen the public safety net. "We also support greater accountability and oversight to address irresponsible abuses of the system that contributed to the financial crisis," the cardinal's letter said.

Cardinal George also urged action to "ensure truly universal health care coverage" that would protect all life including unborn children and would provide access to health care for all, especially poor people.

Any health care reform measures must respect a person's right to choose from a variety of care options, Cardinal George said, while ensuring respect for the moral and religious convictions of patients and health care providers.

The letter addressed several concerns related to international affairs, including a responsible transition in Iraq so that the country is free of religious persecution. The letter also stressed the importance of ending the ongoing violent conflicts in the Holy Land.

Foreign aid should support programs to end hunger and poverty, fight diseases such as HIV and AIDS and reduce the impact of climate change on poor and vulnerable people, the cardinal wrote.

In addition, Cardinal George urged the new administration to "fix a broken immigration system which harms both our nation and immigrants."

He called for comprehensive immigration reform, which would include a path to earned citizenship for undocumented immigrants; the unification of families separated by arrest or deportation; protection of human rights for immigrants; and the adoption of development policies that positively affect the economies in countries from which immigrants come.

Cardinal George reiterated the church's firm belief that marriage is a "faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman and must remain such in law."

He also said the bishops will continue to support programs that give parents choices in education that best address the needs of their children.

The bishops welcome commitments by the federal government to empower faith-based groups as partners in overcoming poverty and other threats to human dignity, Cardinal George said.

"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," the letter said.

Cardinal George told Obama that the issues concerning the bishops go beyond those outlined in his letter. For a list of other concerns, he referred the administration and Congress to the bishops' "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," the document adopted in 2007 for the 2008 presidential election.

"We offer this outline as an agenda for dialogue and action," Cardinal George said. "We hope to offer a constructive and principled contribution to national discussion over the values and policies that will shape our nation's future."

"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," he said in closing. "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."

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