



Town Square

A service of the New Jersey Catholic Conference



Reflections from Jim King, Executive Director

Let's Civilize It, for a better kind of politics

"The development of a global community of fraternity based on the practice of social friendship on the part of peoples and nations calls for a better kind of politics." Pope Francis

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Town Square*, the newsletter of the New Jersey Catholic Conference. We hope it helps you better understand the work we do at NJCC.



I started writing this column in December focused on restoring civility in political discussions as a new year's resolution we could all share. Finalizing it was held up because the New Jersey Legislature quickly advanced one of the most permissive pro-abortion laws in the United States, the "Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act." We speedily attempted to prevent the bill's passage, which resulted in more than 11,000 emails from the Catholic community to legislators urging them to vote "NO" on this harmful legislation. Despite these efforts, the Legislature passed the bill on January 10, 2022.

Prior to the vote, I attended committee hearings on the bill where I listened to supporters argue why it was necessary for it to be signed into law. As no stranger to intense political debate, I sensed a growing temptation to vilify the bill's supporters. Immediately, I found my new year's resolution put to the test. I realized that giving in to the temptation to dehumanize those with whom we disagree politically might be easier than to respect them as people, despite their views. But the patience and kindness we show others - especially those with whom we disagree - is a requisite to living the Gospel message. Additionally, I asked myself, "is our position helped or hurt by making personal attacks and insults?" The very quick conclusion I drew was that no good will ever come by treating someone with a lack of respect and dignity.

Back to my new year's resolution: "What can we do to restore civility in political discussions?" To help answer this question, I offer the following: first, always remember that the Church's approach to politics is rooted in mutual respect and charity as followers of Christ; secondly, also remember that our participation in political parties or other groups with whom we are affiliated should be influenced by our faith, not the other way around, and; lastly, we should all learn how to apply our beliefs to policy issues in a respectful, civilized way. Even if unintended, a lack of civility is a great barrier to achieving the common good, or worse, obstructing another person's ability to encounter the love of God and His son Jesus Christ.

Finally, we must commit to our moral responsibility to participate in public life and contribute to the common good. Two resources exist to assist Catholics with political activities: [Civilize It: A Better Kind of Politics](#), and [Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#). Both seek to help Catholics apply a consistent moral framework to issues facing the nation and world, and shape their choices in elections in light of Catholic social teaching. I encourage all Catholics to read these documents.

The New Legislative Session: What we're Following

The mission of the New Jersey Catholic Conference is to advocate and interact with the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches of state and federal government for the Catholic Church's public policy agenda and to facilitate common pastoral efforts in the Catholic community.

NJCC staff monitors and analyzes bills introduced by the Legislature - - which can be as many as 10,000 during a typical legislative session - - and evaluates their potential impact on the Catholic Church in New Jersey. If a bill presents a risk to Catholic social teachings or threatens Catholic values, NJCC will voice its concern or opposition on behalf of the New Jersey Catholic Bishops. On the other hand, if a bill upholds the values and beliefs of the Catholic Church, NJCC will communicate with the Legislature expressing its support of the bill.

Some issues we will be following during the new legislative session include:

- **Life and Dignity of the Human Person:** We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death; that people are more important than things; and that the final measure of every institution is whether it enhances the life and dignity of the human person.
- **Environmental issues:** We advocate for laws and policies that protect and promote the proper use of creation, including animals, plants, and the Earth's natural resources.
- **Public safety:** The Catholic Church supports policies and programs promoting initiatives that make society a safer place for all people.
- **Immigration:** The Catholic Church believes that current immigration laws and policies have often led to the undermining of immigrants' human dignity and have kept families apart.

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We invite you to follow and like us on Facebook at [njcatholic.facebook](https://www.facebook.com/njcatholic). Here you will find insights, news, and other snackable content to keep you informed on our legislative and public affairs activities and other Catholic happenings. It's also a good opportunity to engage with us and fellow Catholics on the topics and issues that matter most to you.

Statement of the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey on the Passage of the Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act into Law

The Catholic Bishops of New Jersey join to express our profound disappointment and deep concern about the passage of S49/A6260 - - the Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act, which codifies into state law an individual's right to an abortion, including late-term abortions. This law departs from the fundamental Catholic teaching that all life is sacred from conception to natural death. Even more distressing is that the legal and ethical calculus that underlies this new legislation absolutely and forthrightly extinguishes the human and moral identity of the unborn child. Perhaps the legislators who rushed through this Act in the waning moments of their terms did not want citizens to understand fully its inhuman and lethal consequences.

We have failed as a society when a response to any pregnancy is fear rather than joy. Sadly, too often this fear is born out of the mother's uncertainty she will not be able to provide for herself and her child the resources necessary to live a flourishing life. We must do better. Therefore, we urge all Catholics and people of good will to actively participate in breaking down the economic, employment, social, racial, and emotional barriers that lead mothers into thinking that abortion is a better option than life.

For our part, the Catholic Church is committed to broadening and increasing awareness about the abundant resources and programs we offer that include life-affirming health and prenatal care, emotional support, assistance in bearing and raising her child, and basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing to pregnant mothers seeking or considering alternatives to abortion.

Respect Life

The five diocesan Respect Life offices in New Jersey exist to promote the Catholic Church's teaching on the respect, care, and protection of human life from conception to natural death. To learn more, click [here](#).

Walking with
Moms in Need



In celebration of the 25th anniversary of Evangelium vitae (The Gospel of Life) in March 2020, the U.S. bishops launched an exciting, nationwide initiative to serve pregnant and parenting mothers facing difficulties, entitled: Walking with Moms in Need.

To learn how to join Catholics across the country and New Jersey who have already responded to this calling, please click [here](#).

Catholic Schools Week: Jan 30 - Feb 5

Later this month begins the observance of National Catholic Schools Week (CSW), an annual tradition since 1974. CSW serves to honor Catholic education in the United States. The theme for CSW 2022 is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence. Service." Schools typically observe the week with Masses, open houses, and other activities for students, families, parishioners, and community members to celebrate and congratulate the great work and good news of Catholic schools.

Catholic schools have a specific purpose to form students to be good citizens of the world, love God and neighbor, and enrich society through faith and the words of the Gospel.

Academic excellence and growth of the whole person - - mind, body, and spirit - - is the hallmark of Catholic education. Service to community is also fundamental and is the core of Catholic discipleship. Service is intended to help form people as witnesses to Catholic social teaching and active participants in social learning. Let's follow the example of our Catholic educators and students, and strive to live in active service of Jesus and His mission as we join together to celebrate CSW.

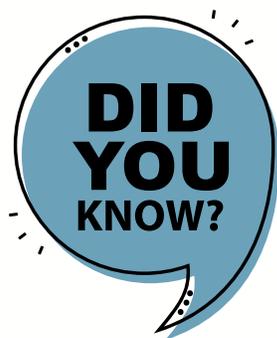


Catholic Charities

New Jersey's five Catholic charities serve every county in the state. Their mission is to provide assistance to all people regardless of faith or background. Their expansive services include crisis care, domestic violence refuge, child care, legal representation, job training, veteran's resources, and basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. The five Charities annually serve hundreds of thousands of our neighbors most in need. [Click](#) to learn more about NJ's five Catholic charities.

Did you know the creation of hospitals was largely a Catholic innovation?

When the Roman Empire allowed Christianity in the fourth century, Christian charitable traditions grew with great momentum. Sheltering the poor who were sick was the first step so they would not have to live with their illness while also homeless. These shelters evolved to include doctors and nurses to care for the sick and dying.



Catholic hospitals now make up the largest network of nonprofit hospitals in the United States. The large number of Catholic hospitals across the country is even more impressive when you consider that Catholics never constituted a majority of the United States population.

