

NOVENA FOR OUR STATE & NATION—FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP REFLECTIONS

OCTOBER 30—NOVEMBER 7TH

Amen I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
—Matthew 18:19-20

To be used with the Minnesota Catholic Conference's "Nine Days for Our State & Nation" novena, available at:

MNCatholic.org/novena

—Special thanks to St. Joseph's Catholic Community of Grand Rapids, MN—

October 30, 2016—Religious Liberty

Paragraphs 49, 72, 76 for reflection:

49. Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if **human rights are protected and basic responsibilities** are met. Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life. The right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately by individuals and institutions along with freedom of conscience need to be constantly defended. In a fundamental way, the right to free expression of religious beliefs protects all other rights. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. Rights should be understood and exercised in a moral framework rooted in the dignity of the human person.

72. US policy should promote **religious liberty** vigorously, both at home and abroad: our first and most cherished freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person, a fundamental human right that knows no geographical boundaries. In all contexts, its basic contours are the same: it is the “immun[ity] from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2). In the United States, religious freedom generally enjoys strong protection in our law and culture, but those protections are now in doubt. For example, the longstanding tax exemption of the Church has been explicitly called into question at the highest levels of government, precisely because of her teachings on marriage. Catholics have a particular duty to make sure that protections like these do not weaken but instead grow in strength. This is not only to secure the just freedom of the Church and the faithful here but also to offer hope and an encouraging witness to those who suffer direct and even violent religious persecution in countries where the protection is far weaker.

76. **Faith-based groups** deserve recognition and support, not as a substitute for government, but as responsive, effective partners, especially in the poorest communities and countries. The USCCB actively supports conscience clauses and other religious freedom protections, opposes any effort to undermine the ability of faith-based groups to preserve their identity and integrity as partners with government, and is committed to protecting longstanding civil rights and other protections for both religious groups and the people they serve. Government bodies should not require Catholic institutions to compromise their moral or religious convictions to participate in government health or human service programs.

October 31, 2016—Life and Bioethics

Paragraphs 64-69 and 71 for reflection:

64. Our 1998 statement, *Living the Gospel of Life*, declares, “**Abortion and euthanasia** have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others” (no. 5). **Abortion**, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed. **Cloning and destruction of human embryos** for research or even for potential cures are always wrong. The purposeful taking of human life by **assisted suicide and euthanasia** is not an act of mercy, but an unjustifiable assault on human life. **Genocide, torture, and the direct and intentional targeting of noncombatants in war or terrorist attacks** are always wrong.

65. Laws that legitimize any of these practices are profoundly unjust and immoral. Our Conference supports laws and policies to protect human life to the maximum degree possible, including constitutional protection for the unborn and legislative efforts to end abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. We also promote a culture of life by supporting laws and programs that encourage childbirth and adoption over abortion and by addressing poverty, providing health care, and offering other assistance to pregnant women, children, and families.

66. The USCCB calls for greater assistance for those who are sick and dying, through health care for all and effective and compassionate palliative care and hospice care. The end of life is a holy moment, a moment that marks a preparation for life with God, and it is to be treated with reverence and accompaniment. The end of life is as sacred as the beginning of life and requires treatment that honors the true dignity of the human person as created in the image of the living God. We recognize that addressing this complex issue effectively will require collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors and across party lines. Policies and decisions regarding **biotechnology** and human experimentation should respect the inherent dignity of human life from its very beginning, regardless of the circumstances of its origin. Respect for human life and dignity is also the foundation for essential efforts to address and overcome the hunger, disease, poverty, and violence that take the lives of so many innocent people.

67. Society has a duty to defend life against violence and to reach out to victims of crime. The Catholic Church has accepted the death penalty in the past for particularly egregious crimes when there was a serious continuing threat to society and no alternative was available. But our nation's continued reliance on the **death penalty** cannot be justified. Because we have other ways to protect society that are more respectful of human life, the USCCB supports efforts to end the use of the death penalty and in the meantime to restrain its use through broader use of DNA evidence, access to effective counsel, and efforts to address unfairness and injustice related to application of the death penalty.

68. Catholics must also work **to avoid war and to promote peace**. This is of particular importance, as there is a danger in the present time of becoming indifferent to war because of the number of armed conflicts. War is never a reflection of what ought to be but a sign that something more true to human dignity has failed. The Catholic tradition recognizes the legitimacy of just war teaching when defending the innocent in the face of grave evil, but we must never lose sight of the cost of war and its harm to human life. Nations should protect the dignity of the human person and the right to life by finding more effective ways to prevent conflicts, to resolve them by peaceful means, and to promote reconstruction and reconciliation in the wake of conflicts. Nations have a right and obligation to defend human life and the common good against terrorism, aggression, and similar threats, such as the targeting of persons for persecution because of their religion, including Christians. In the words of Pope Francis, people are being killed "for the sole reason of being Christians" (Homily, Feb. 17, 2015), and there are "more martyrs in the Church today than there were in the first centuries" (Homily, June 30, 2014). "The blood of our Christian brothers and sisters is a testimony which cries out to be heard by everyone who can still distinguish between good and evil. All the more this cry must be heard by those who have the destiny of peoples in their hands" (Message of Pope Francis to Patriarch Abuna Matthias of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, April 20, 2015). Indeed, the duty of nations to defend human life and the common good demands effective responses to terror, moral assessment of and restraint in the means used, respect for ethical limits on the use of force, a focus on the roots of terror, and fair distribution of the burdens of responding to terror. The use of **torture** must be rejected as fundamentally incompatible with the dignity of the human person and ultimately counterproductive in the effort to combat terrorism. The Church has raised fundamental moral concerns about **preventive use of military force**.⁷ Our Church honors the commitment and sacrifice of those who serve in our nation's armed forces, and also recognizes the moral right to conscientious objection to war in general, a particular war, or a military procedure.

69. Even when military force can be justified as a last resort, it should not be indiscriminate or disproportionate. Direct and intentional attacks on noncombatants in war and terrorist acts are never morally acceptable. The use of weapons of mass destruction or other means of warfare that do not distinguish between civilians and soldiers is fundamentally immoral. The United States has a responsibility to work to reverse the spread of **nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons**, and to reduce its own reliance on weapons of mass destruction by pursuing progressive nuclear disarmament. It also must end its use of anti-personnel landmines and reduce its predominant role in the global arms trade. The use of military force confronts us with urgent moral choices. We support the proportionate and discriminate use of military force to protect civilians in a way that recognizes the continuing threat of fanatical extremism and global terror, minimizes the loss of life, and addresses the humanitarian and refugee crises in war-torn regions, and the need to protect human rights, especially religious freedom.

Though we recognize the justifiable use of military force, we encourage the reallocation of resources from armed conflict to the urgent needs of the poor and the root causes of violence. Further, we support policies and actions that protect refugees of war and violence, at home and abroad, and all people suffering religious persecution throughout the world, many of whom are our fellow Christians.

71. **Children**, in particular, are to be valued, protected, and nurtured. As a Church, we affirm our commitment to the protection and well-being of children in our own institutions and in all of society. Pope Francis has stressed, “Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s development and emotional maturity” (Address on the Complementarity Between Man and Woman, Nov. 17, 2014). Children who may be placed in foster care or with adoptive parents have a right to be placed in homes with a married man and woman, or if not possible, in environments that do not contradict the authentic meaning of marriage. Child welfare service providers, consistent with their religious beliefs, have a right to place children in such homes rather than in other environments. We oppose contraceptive and abortion mandates in public programs and health plans, which endanger rights of conscience and can interfere with parents’ right to guide the moral formation of their children.

November 1, 2016—The Poor and Vulnerable

Paragraphs 53 and 73-79 for reflection:

53. In reference to solidarity, a special emphasis must be given to the Church’s **preferential option for the poor**. While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. A basic moral test for any society is how it treats those who are most vulnerable. In a society marred by deepening disparities between rich and poor, Sacred Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (see Mt 25:31-46) and reminds us that we will be judged by our response to the “least among us.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains:

Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a *preferential love* on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere. (no. 2448)

73. Economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Social and economic policies should foster the creation of **jobs for all who can work** with decent working conditions and **just wages**. Barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust **discrimination must be overcome**. Catholic social teaching supports the **right of workers to choose whether to organize**, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal. It also affirms **economic freedom, initiative, and the right to private property**. Workers, owners, employers, and unions have a corresponding responsibility to work together to create decent jobs, build a more just economy, and advance the common good. We also note with growing concern the increase in “excessive social and economic inequalities,” as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to it, and the shrinking middle class.

74. We support legislation that protects consumers from the excessive and exploitative rates of interest charged by many payday lenders. “Although the quest for equitable profits is acceptable in economic and financial activity, recourse to usury is to be morally condemned” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 341).

75. **Welfare policy** should reduce **poverty** and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training, and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and transportation. Given the link between family stability and economic success, welfare policy should address both the economic and cultural factors that contribute to family breakdown. It should also provide a safety net for those who cannot work. Improving the **Earned Income Tax Credit** and **child tax credits**, available as refunds to families in greatest need, will help lift low-income families out of poverty.

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77. **Social Security** should provide adequate, continuing, and reliable income in an equitable manner for low- and average-wage workers and their families when these workers retire or become disabled, and for the survivors when a wage-earner dies.

78. The lack of safe, affordable **housing** requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations. The USCCB continues to oppose unjust housing discrimination and to support measures to meet the credit needs of low-income and minority communities.

79. A first priority for **agriculture** policy should be **food security for all**. Because no one should face **hunger** in a land of plenty, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or Food Stamps), the Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and other nutrition programs need to be strong and effective. Farmers and farm workers who grow, harvest, and process food deserve a just return for their labor, with safe and just working conditions and adequate housing. Supporting rural communities sustains a way of life that enriches our nation. Careful stewardship of the earth and its natural resources demands policies that support **sustainable agriculture** as vital elements of agricultural policy.

November 2, 2016—Care for Creation

Paragraphs 51, 79, 86 for reflection:

51. We have a duty to **care for God's creation**, or as Pope Francis refers to it in *Laudato Si'*, “our common home.” We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of God's creation because “every creature is . . . the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 77). **Care for creation** is a duty of our faith and a sign of our concern for all people, especially the poor, who “both everyday experience and scientific research show” suffer “the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment” (no. 48). Pope Francis underscores that environmental degradation can often force the poor “to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children” (no. 25). The threats to the environment are many. Pope Francis, consistent with both St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI (World Day of Peace Message in 1990 and 2010), has recently lifted up pollution, climate change, lack of access to clean water, and the loss of biodiversity as particular challenges. He speaks of an “ecological debt” (no. 51) owed by wealthier nations to developing nations and he laments the weakness of many responses to the ecological challenges rooted in “complacency and a cheerful recklessness” (no. 59). In the face of this, we should aim for “a new lifestyle” (no. 203-208), one that strives to live simply to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and one that brings “healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power.” (no. 206). We have a moral obligation to protect the planet on which we live—to respect God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for human beings, especially children at their most vulnerable stages of development. As stewards called by God to share the responsibility for the future of the earth, we should work for a world in which people respect and protect all of creation and seek to live simply in harmony with it for the sake of future generations. Fully embracing this task amounts to what Pope Francis calls an “ecological conversion” (no. 219), by which “the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]” (no. 217). Such a conversion “can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems and in offering ourselves to God ‘as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable’ (Rom 12:1)” (no. 220).

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86. **Care for Creation** is a moral issue. Protecting the land, water, and air we share is a religious duty of stewardship and reflects our responsibility to born and unborn children, who are most vulnerable to environmental assault. We must answer the question that Pope Francis posed to the world: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 160). There are many concrete steps we can take to assure justice and solidarity between the generations. Effective initiatives are required for energy conservation and the development of alternate, renewable, and clean-energy resources. Our Conference offers a distinctive call to seriously address **global climate change**, focusing on the virtue of prudence, pursuit of the common good, and the impact on the poor, particularly on vulnerable workers and the poorest nations. The United States should lead in contributing to the sustainable development of poorer nations and promoting greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental blight, neglect, and recovery. It is important that we address the rising number of migrants who are uprooted from their homeland as a consequence of environmental degradation and climate change. They are not currently recognized as refugees under any existing international convention and are thus not afforded legal protections that ought to be due to them.

Our nation's efforts to reduce poverty should not be associated with demeaning and sometimes coercive population control programs. Such an approach is condemned by Pope Francis:

Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate. At times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of "reproductive health." Yet "while it is true that an unequal distribution of the population and of available resources creates obstacles to development and a sustainable use of the environment, it must nonetheless be recognized that demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 483). To blame population growth, instead of an extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption. Besides, we know that approximately a third of all food produced is discarded, and "whenever food is thrown out it is as if were stolen from the table of the poor" (Catechesis, June 5, 2013). (*Laudato Si'*, no. 50)

Our efforts should, instead, focus on working with the poor to help them build a future of hope and opportunity for themselves and their children.

November 3, 2016—Labor and Economy

Paragraphs 50, 52, 73 for reflection:

50. The economy must serve people, not the other way around. It is therefore necessary that an economic system serve the dignity of the human person and the common good by respecting the **dignity of work and protecting the rights of workers**. A "growth in justice," according to Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*,

requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality. I am far from proposing an irresponsible populism, but the economy can no longer turn to remedies that are a new poison, such as attempting to increase profits by reducing the work force and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded. (no. 204)

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers—to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative. Workers also have responsibilities—to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. Workers, employers, and unions should not only advance their own interests but also work together to advance economic justice and the well-being of all. Pope Francis has summarized well the Church's teaching on work in *Laudato Si'*. "Work," he writes,

should be the setting for . . . rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God. . . . Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 127-128)

52. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world. **Solidarity** also includes the scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us—including immigrants seeking work—by ensuring that they have opportunities for a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families and by ending the practice of separating families through deportation. In light of the Gospel's invitation to be peacemakers, our commitment to solidarity with our neighbors—at home and abroad—also demands that we promote peace and pursue justice in a world marred by terrible violence and conflict. Decisions on the use of force should be guided by traditional moral criteria and undertaken only as a last resort. As Bl. Paul VI taught, "If you want peace, work for justice" (*World Day of Peace Message*, January 1, 1972).

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November 4, 2016—Marriage and Family Life

Paragraphs 46, 70-71 and 75 for reflection:

46. The human person is not only sacred but also social. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. The **family**—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted. Respect for the family should be reflected in every policy and program. It is important to uphold parents’ rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to choose their children’s education.

70. The family founded upon marriage is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities. **Marriage** must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong exclusive commitment between a man and a woman, and as the source of the next generation and the protective haven for children.⁸ The institution of marriage is undermined by the ideology of “gender” that dismisses sexual difference and the complementarity of the sexes and falsely presents “gender” as nothing more than a social construct or psychological reality, which a person may choose at variance with his or her biological reality (see *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 224). As Pope Francis has taught, “the removal of [sexual] difference creates a problem, not a solution” (General Audience, April 22, 2015). “Thus the Church reaffirms . . . her no to ‘gender’ philosophies, because the reciprocity between male and female is an expression of the beauty of nature willed by the Creator” (Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, Jan. 19, 2013). This affirmation in no way compromises the Church’s opposition to unjust discrimination against those who experience “deep-seated homosexual tendencies,” who “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358).

Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should uphold the God-given meaning and value of marriage and family, help families stay together, and reward responsibility and sacrifice for children. **Wages** should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families to live in dignity. Such assistance should be provided in a manner that promotes eventual financial autonomy.

71. **Children**, in particular, are to be valued, protected, and nurtured. As a Church, we affirm our commitment to the protection and well-being of children in our own institutions and in all of society. Pope Francis has stressed, “Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s development and emotional maturity” (Address on the Complementarity Between Man and Woman, Nov. 17, 2014). Children who may be placed in foster care or with adoptive parents have a right to be placed in homes with a married man and woman, or if not possible, in environments that do not contradict the authentic meaning of marriage. Child welfare service providers, consistent with their religious beliefs, have a right to place children in such homes rather than in other environments. We oppose contraceptive and abortion mandates in public programs and health plans, which endanger rights of conscience and can interfere with parents’ right to guide the moral formation of their children.

75. **Welfare policy** should reduce **poverty** and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training, and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and transportation. Given the link between family stability and economic success, welfare policy should address both the economic and cultural factors that contribute to family breakdown. It should also provide a safety net for those who cannot work. Improving the **Earned Income Tax Credit** and **child tax credits**, available as refunds to families in greatest need, will help lift low-income families out of poverty.

November 5, 2016—Immigration

Paragraphs 81 and 70 for reflection:

81. The Gospel mandate to “welcome the stranger” requires Catholics to care for and stand with **newcomers**, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking. Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken

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As Pope Francis has said, human trafficking is a “crime against humanity” (Address, Dec. 12, 2013, and April 10, 2014) and should be eradicated from the earth. Trafficking victims, most especially children, should receive care and protection, including special consideration for permanent legal status. Additional education and mobilization efforts are needed to address the root causes of human trafficking—poverty, conflict, and the breakdown of judicial process in source countries.

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November 6, 2016—Education

Paragraphs 46, 82-83

46. The human person is not only sacred but also social. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. The **family**—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted. Respect for the family should be reflected in every policy and program. It is important to uphold parents’ rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to choose their children’s education.

82. Parents—the first and most important educators—have a fundamental **right to choose the education** best suited to the needs of their children, including public, private, and religious schools. Government, through such means as tax credits and publicly funded scholarships, should help provide resources for parents, especially those of modest means, to exercise this basic right without discrimination. Students in all educational settings should have opportunities for moral and character formation consistent with the beliefs and responsibilities of their parents.

83. All persons have a right to receive a quality **education**. Young people, including those who are poor and those with disabilities, need to have the opportunity to develop intellectually, morally, spiritually, and physically, allowing them to become good citizens who make socially and morally responsible decisions. This requires parental choice in education. It also requires educational institutions to have orderly, just, respectful, and non-violent environments where adequate professional and material resources are available. The USCCB strongly supports

adequate funding, including scholarships, tax credits, and other means, to educate all persons no matter what their personal condition or what school they attend—public, private, or religious. All teachers and administrators deserve salaries and benefits that reflect principles of economic justice, as well as access to resources necessary for teachers to prepare for their important tasks. Services aimed at improving education—especially for those most at risk—that are available to students and teachers in public schools should also be available to students and teachers in **private and religious schools** as a matter of justice.

November 7, 2016—Health Care

Paragraphs 65-66, 75

65. Laws that legitimize any of these practices are profoundly unjust and immoral. Our Conference supports laws and policies to protect human life to the maximum degree possible, including constitutional protection for the unborn and legislative efforts to end abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. We also promote a culture of life by supporting laws and programs that encourage childbirth and adoption over abortion and by addressing poverty, providing health care, and offering other assistance to pregnant women, children, and families.

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MINNESOTA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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