



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

2021 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
1150 Buffalo Road
Rochester, New York 14624
(585) 328-3210

February 12, 2021

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing to encourage your participation in the annual public policy weekend that highlights our advocacy in support of a particular legislative initiative. I ask that you offer your personal support this year for Nourish New York. This State initiative began as a response to some of the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nourish New York is a lifeline for food insecure families and a market support for farmers. Nourish-NY payments have not only provided food to New York residents in need, it also has helped keep farms afloat in a challenging financial environment.

The Covid-19 pandemic has tested us in many ways. We have been limited in our ability to gather to celebrate our faith together, limited in our ability to travel freely, isolated in times of illness and weakness, and challenged by changes to our everyday life. It would seem to go without saying that in the past year of pandemic, which is continuing in the New Year 2021, the opportunity to be fed with readily available and healthy food should not be among those privations.

If you are willing to support this initiative, please add your name to the petitions available at your parish and on-line. We will also be presenting the petitions developed last year in opposition to physician assisted suicide. That most vital and disturbing topic never advanced to the floor of the legislature, however, it continues to remain an extremely serious concern and threat to human life. If you would also take the opportunity to join the Catholic Action Network, you will learn immediately when items of general interest and concern for the Catholic Church in New York State might benefit from your support.

Be assured of my deep gratitude for your ongoing outreach to our sisters and brothers in need and for your profound reverence for God's gift of life from the moment of conception until natural death.

Remembering you in my prayers and asking a memento in your good prayers, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ,

+ Salvatore R. Matano

*The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester*

2020 ADVOCACY PRIORITY: OPPOSITION TO PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE - Update -

Last February petitions stating our opposition to physician-assisted suicide were gathered from across the diocese. Soon after, everything changed as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in our communities. The New York State Catholic Conference suggested that we delay sending the signed petitions to the Governor until the new year (2021). The Governor and state leaders were preoccupied with the pandemic and the assisted suicide bill was put on hold. We will send the 8,918 petitions signed by parishioners to Governor Cuomo and newly-elected members of the state legislature in January 2021. Our thanks to all who continue to advocate on this important sacredness of life issue.

EDUCATION PRIORITIES

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

"...in prison and you visited Me."

For years, the New York State Catholic Conference has supported the HALT Solitary Confinement Act. They write: "The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture has denounced solitary confinement that exceeds 15 days... On any given day, there are nearly 3,000 people in isolated confinement in New York State prisons, locked in concrete 6-by-10-foot cells for 23 hours a day." This year we ask parishioners to learn about and advocate for this bill which would "limit the time an inmate can spend in segregated confinement, end the segregated confinement of vulnerable people, restrict the criteria that can result in such confinement, improve conditions of confinement, and create more humane and effective alternatives to such confinement."

We also encourage education and advocacy on expanding parole for older incarcerated people. According to the organization Releasing Aging People from Prison (RAPP): "More than 10,000 people in NYS prisons -20% of the prison population are aged 50 or older. The vast majority are Black and Latinx people." The risk of contracting covid-19 in prison is significant, and particularly dangerous for older people. Older prisoners also have low recidivism rates. Releasing greater numbers of older prisoners would be a humane and cost-saving policy, especially during a pandemic.

HEALTH CARE:

Human Dignity & the Common Good

The COVID pandemic has amplified the reality that so many in New York State and across the country lack access to affordable, quality health care. The number of uninsured nationwide has been rising for the past few years. Individual consumers, small businesses, and non-profits face ever-increasing premiums, deductibles, and co-payments. In addition, many states struggle to get insurers to sell plans in certain markets, particularly rural areas. With Congress deadlocked on national solutions to this healthcare crisis, states are beginning to explore creative and cost-effective options available to them.

For Catholics, health care is both a human right and a demand of the common good: the dignity of the human person makes a claim of justice on access to health care, and health is a societal good that can only be attained by working together. As is even more clear in a pandemic, the exclusion of some from health care threatens the health of all. (Letter to Congress from U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, May 2020)

The Diocesan Public Policy Committee will develop education resources on this issue for use by parishes beginning Spring 2021.

ONGOING ISSUES OF CONCERN

The Diocese of Rochester Public Policy Committee continues to follow and advocate for other important justice issues including: **opposition to physician-assisted suicide and abortion expansion in New York State - Education Tax Credit - care for God's creation - federal immigration reform - child care subsidies for low-income working families - access to mental health care - opioid/addictions - energy efficiency/critical capital projects in religious/independent schools - war and peace**

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER PARISH-BASED ADVOCACY

PUBLIC POLICY WEEKEND FEBRUARY 13 & 14, 2021

NOURISH NEW YORK

“How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy

– directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.”

*(U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998)*

We are social beings. We realize our dignity and human potential in our families and communities. The family is the basic cell of society, it must be supported. Government has the mission of protecting human life, promoting the common good of all persons, and defending the right and duty of all to participate in social life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused a spotlight on **two vulnerable groups in New York State: farmers and our neighbors who are food insecure** – many are newly hungry due to job losses caused by the pandemic.

NOURISH NEW YORK is a New York State initiative that provides a lifeline for food insecure families and for farmers who have been struggling with changes brought on by COVID-19. The initiative provides funding to Food Banks to purchase New York State-produced farm products. This accomplishes two goals: it offers market support to farmers, the fishing community, and food processors who have been impacted by the economic effects of the pandemic, while getting high-quality food to individuals and families in communities across the state through the regional Food Banks and local food pantries.

NOURISH NEW YORK has provided \$35 million in funding during the period May 1 through December 31, 2020. To date, 4,152 New York farms have provided over 17 Million pounds of high-quality New York-produced food to New Yorkers in-need.

NOURISH NEW YORK initiative ended December 31, 2020. It is imperative that this effective program continue. Therefore, because of the current economic crisis caused by the pandemic, we call on New York State leaders to provide \$50 million for state fiscal year 2021-22 to make ***NOURISH NEW YORK*** an *ongoing* program to respond to the need for hunger relief and farm survival across New York State.

DIOCESAN PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE (DPPC)

Bishop Salvatore Matano appoints the members of the Public Policy Committee to assist him in discerning diocesan public policy priorities and to develop an implementation plan.

Chairperson:	Rev. Daniel J. Condon	Chancellor, Diocese of Rochester
Committee Members:	Jack Balinsky	Diocesan Director, Catholic Charities
	Carolann Darling	Immaculate Conception Parish, Ithaca
	Ann Marie Deutsch	Diocesan Catholic Schools
	Mark Keller	St. Kateri Parish, Irondequoit
	Judith Kiehl	Pax Christi
	Shannon Killbridge, PhD	Associate Director, Dept of Pastoral Services
	Sister Janet Korn	Sisters of Mercy
	Doug Mandelaro	Diocesan Communications Director
	Ellen Durrigan Santora	St. Paul Parish, Webster
	Jessica Shanahan	Pregnancy Care Program
	Mary M. Smith	St. Anne Parish, Rochester
	Sister Phyllis Tierney	Sisters of Saint Joseph
	Deacon Nicholas Valvo	Sacred Heart/St. Anne Parish, Auburn

Justice & Peace Ministry Staff - Catholic Charities (*denotes DPPC membership)

Monroe: ***Marcus Ebenhoe** (585-546-7220 x 6202 MEbenhoe@cfcrochester.org)

Chemung/Schuylers/Tioga: ***Kathy Dubel** (607-734-9784 x 2135 kathy.dubel@dor.org)

Cayuga/Ontario/Seneca/Yates/Wayne: ***Robert Vona** (315-789-2686 x 124 Robert.Vona@dor.org)

Livingston/Steuben: **Leigh Shepard** (585-658-4466 x11 Leigh.Shepard@dor.org)

Tompkins: ***Laurie Konwinski** (607-272-5062 x12 laurie.konwinski@dor.org)

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester

1150 Buffalo Road Rochester, New York 14624 (585) 328-3210 (800) 388-7177

www.dor.org (click on Offices/Ministry then select Public Policy)