



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

201 West Park Avenue, Tallahassee, Florida 32301-7715 * (850) 205-6820 * www.flaccb.org

Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops: Yes on Amendment 8

... 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:37-40

Following the Lord's admonition to serve the least among us, Christians have brought healing to the sick and food to the hungry for centuries. These efforts have given rise to Catholic and other religious organizations that carry on this work today, at times collaborating with state and local governments to best meet the needs of the vulnerable.

Many Floridians will be surprised to learn that the Florida Constitution contains an outdated and discriminatory provision rooted in 19th Century anti-Catholic sentiment that places participation by all religious organizations in state programs in jeopardy. Amendment 8 on the November 2012 ballot will repeal and replace this provision and align Florida's Constitution with the United States Constitution.

Background

Around the time of the Civil War, Congressman James Blaine sought to hinder the growth of Catholic schools which in Florida largely arose to serve children of freed slaves. Blaine sought to preclude public funding to religious schools in the United States Constitution. While his effort narrowly failed, a number of states adopted such provisions. Florida adopted a similar provision in the 1880s, and applied it not only to schools but to all institutions. It reads:

No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution (Article I, Section 3).

Modern Day Problems

Despite this provision, religious institutions – such as Catholic healthcare organizations, social service-agencies, disaster relief services, colleges and schools – have partnered with the state in a wide range of programs that Floridians view as part of our social fabric. Recent lawsuits show however, that all of these services and the very programs in which these organizations participate are at risk simply because the providers are religious. The appellate court in *Bush v. Holmes* (2004) declared a scholarship program for children in failing schools unconstitutional, and *Council for Secular Humanism v. McNeil* (2010) successfully challenged a faith-based substance abuse and transitional housing program.

Say “Yes on 8”

The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops supports Amendment 8 and urges a “yes” vote on the November ballot. Amendment 8 will protect religious freedom by ensuring that organizations and individuals have an equal and rightful place in the public square. If service providers can abide by requirements of a program, they should not be excluded simply because they are religious. With Amendment 8, longstanding popular partnerships between the state and multiple faith-based entities that provide secular services – such as Catholic organizations and others – will be preserved.

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