

Statement of Legislative Principles

For the 2009-2010 Legislative Session

California Church IMPACT

The Rev. Dr. Rick Schlosser, Executive Director
Elizabeth Sholes, Director of Public Policy
4044 Pasadena Avenue, Sacramento CA 95821
Phone: (916) 488-7300
Fax: (916) 488-7310
E-mail: impactinfo@calchurches.org
Website: <http://www.churchimpact.org/>

This statement represents the present thinking of the Board of Directors of California Church IMPACT, (hereafter referred to as we) which includes 49 Protestant and Orthodox judicatories, denominations and affinity groups in California. This statement reflects the consensus of the California Church IMPACT Board and does not claim to represent the viewpoints of all church members in California.

PREAMBLE

Our scripture and traditions proclaim the efforts of God's people to seek harmony with the environment, to proclaim justice and to learn how to live in peace in the human community. (Micah 6:8)

We believe that the government, as a legitimate arm of society, has a special responsibility to promote and secure the well being of its most vulnerable members.

We recognize the difficulty of giving specific social application to the truths of our faith, for there will be honest differences of viewpoint among Christians.

We have therefore sought to speak to current issues under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believing that these principles reflect the will of God as fully as we understand it at this moment of history.

I. LIBERTIES

A. Religious Liberty

We affirm our support of the special protection afforded to freedom of worship, freedom of conscience, freedom of thought and freedom of religion, realizing that these freedoms are the core of our American heritage and rights.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. maintain the proper separation of church and state.
2. recognize that congregations, and all agencies of the denominations are free from any government secret investigations, surveillance, intimidation or any other acts that attempt to interfere with God's call to justice and peace.
3. recognize the privilege of clergy to refuse to disclose penitential communications.

4. guarantee institutional residents the right to have religious services provided by chaplains who have met standards of preparation and who are recognized by their denomination.
5. guarantee a trained, permanent and continuous civil service chaplaincy for residents of publicly funded institutions.

We oppose policies that:

1. use government resources to undo the Constitutional protection of the free exercise of religion or to interfere with the free exercise of religion.
2. would impose on all Americans the religious viewpoint of any one denomination or religious group.

B. Civil Liberties

Freedom of thought, freedom of association, and the right to privacy are basic to human dignity. Full access to information, to diverse points of view, to religious, literary and artistic communication, is essential in a free society.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. provide the civil rights and equality of all persons in employment, state licensing, public housing, and public services.
2. protect the integrity of the family unit by providing necessary economic supports so that parents are able to care for the basic well being of their children.
3. promote citizen-supervised procedures for the public review of complaints against law enforcement agencies.
4. protect the right of dissent.

We oppose policies that:

1. allow wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping except under court order in limited circumstances.
2. allow the maintenance by government agencies of secret files on lawful organizations and individuals.

II. CHILDREN

We believe that society bears a certain responsibility to ensure that every child has access to the benefits of human provisions of intimate nurture, safety, health care, learning, guidance, and reasonable economic support.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. protect children from social, sexual, developmental or economic exploitation.
2. provide services necessary to ensure placement of a child in a stable, functional home.
3. provide adequate, convenient quality child care programs with uniform standards for low-income families.
4. ensure child support payments by a legally responsible non-custodial parent.
5. provide programs of diagnosis and treatment for problems of child abuse and neglect.

6. provide temporary shelters, group homes, foster homes, and other residential treatment programs for children and youth in need of services.
7. provide trained advocates for children within the juvenile justice system with the child's interest in mind.

III. CIVIL RIGHTS

We believe that discrimination due to age, race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation in employment, education, housing, banking and the criminal justice system are fundamental civil rights issues and of deep concern to people of faith.

A. Gender Issues

Both men and women are created to grow into mature persons who develop their own particular abilities, choose their own life plans, and accept others in a spirit of cooperation, becoming both independent and interdependent. We believe that public policies should encourage women to develop and exercise their full potential as persons created in the image of God.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. include women in decision-making roles and change behavior which treats women as subordinate persons.
2. facilitate equal rights for women, specifically in these areas:
 - a. Equal pay for work of comparable value;
 - b. Protection against sexual harassment at home, in the work place, and through media and advertising;
 - c. Affirmative action programs for women;
 - d. Family leave for both parents;
 - e. Supportive handling of victims and full prosecution in rape assault cases;
 - f. Provision of shelters for battered women and their children;
 - g. Job training and placement for displaced homemakers;
 - h. Credit and loan opportunities;
 - i. Conversion rights for previously-covered dependents of group health insurance plans.

B. Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Persons

Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, and Transgender persons are created in the image of God and are to be treated with dignity and as valued members of society.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. affirm civil rights and equal protection under the law in housing, health care, and employment.
2. establish state recognition of domestic partnership, with full legal rights and responsibilities, as the means for promoting stable, monogamous, life long relationships among couples of the same gender.
3. advocate for full state and federal marriage rights for same-gender couples, including immigration rights, tax rights, and all other rights and privileges guaranteed to legally married persons by the state and federal governments.

C. Aging

We believe that society has a responsibility to make adequate provision for aging people.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. ensure older persons are not deprived of affordable housing.
2. provide adequate and appropriate health care.
3. support the right of older persons to employment without discrimination on the basis of age.

D. Race and Ethnicity

All human beings, regardless of ethnicity, are created in God's image and represent the full expression of God's creative diversity.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. respect treaties and support the rights and opportunities of American Indians, particularly in relation to their land, water, treaties, culture and religious heritage.
2. ensure the rights and opportunities of African, Asian, and Hispanic Americans and all other racial and ethnic groups to full participation in California life.
3. promote affirmative action programs for persons of color.
4. support equal pay for equal work.
5. provide equal protection under the law and equal access to adequate legal counsel.

E. Disabled Persons

As God's creations, we are fashioned uniquely; each endowed with individuality of body, mind and spirit. Each has abilities; each seeks fulfillment and wholeness. Each of us has disabilities; each knows isolation and incompleteness.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. provide adequately for the basic needs of persons with mental, developmental, physical and/or emotional handicapping conditions.
2. bring down barriers that inhibit persons with disabling conditions to fully participate in California's social, economic, spiritual, and cultural life.

IV. IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

We believe that God's love embraces every member of the human race, and therefore we are called to extend help to those in need without regard to nationality, ethnic origin, religion, culture or legal status. "Welcome one another as I have welcomed you." (Rom 15:7) "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Mt. 25:35) Biblical stories relate that encounters with strangers may have divine significance. Because we believe that all people are made in God's image and exist under the reign of God, nations and their borders do not claim our ultimate allegiance. We support policies that promote the value and dignity of immigrants and refugees, recognizing the many and important contributions they make to our diverse state.

Therefore, we support policies that ensure:

1. adequate housing, nutrition, health care, safe working conditions and schooling for children on the move.
2. access for permanent residents to the same benefits citizens receive
3. full protection of human rights for all.

V. PUBLIC EDUCATION

We affirm the importance of quality public education for persons in California requiring all levels of government to comply with constitutional guarantees of equal educational opportunity for all children, youth and adults. We support the right of free quality public education for every child in California.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. provide for preschool child development programs with trained, certified teachers to ensure that children will be ready for elementary education.
2. provide funding for reduced class room size in all elementary grades.
3. provide funding for free before- and after-school programs for students attending schools which qualify for free and reduced school lunch programs.
4. ensure that special resources exist so that children may successfully move from grade to grade.
5. require teachers to be trained and qualified to teach and be required to demonstrate competence in the subjects they are assigned to teach.
6. mandate all classrooms be equipped with current textbooks, technology, instructional materials and supplies.
7. ensure that school building are renovated and brought up to basic state and local building codes.
8. provide sufficient funding so that each school district may offer equal education to its students regardless of the level of wealth in the district.
9. allocate funding for professional and competent counselors for students.
10. allocate funding for social and health services.
11. promote equal access to higher education for all by affirmative outreach and support for students from low income status.

VI. ECONOMIC JUSTICE

A. Employment

We believe that all people are created in the image of God and have the right to economic resources necessary to enable them to live with dignity.

Therefore, we support polities that:

1. ensure decent, safe jobs with livable wages sufficient to support a household's basic needs.
2. ensure adequate protections for vulnerable workers such as seasonal farm workers.
3. ensure equal employment opportunities for all people without regard to race, age, creed, national origin or ancestry, gender, martial status, disability, or sexual orientation.

4. advocate the right of workers to bargain collectively.

B. Food and Nutrition

We believe that adequate food and basic nutrition are essential for human existence. It is the responsibility of society to provide these necessities for low income persons.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. improve nutrition, especially for children, the elderly and those who are disabled.
2. provide for distribution of food among the most marginalized.

C. Housing

We believe that everyone has a right to decent shelter.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. increase very low, low and moderate income housing development and preservation.
2. enable renters to become homeowners.
3. provide funding for transitional housing programs for homeless families and individuals and adequately fund shelters as a temporary measure for California's homeless population.
4. provide adequate, affordable supportive housing for people with mental and physical disabilities, and the elderly.

D. Public Assistance

We believe that adequate support services which enable people to move from public assistance to employment must be created and maintained. When jobs are not available or people are unable to work, society has a responsibility to provide adequate income for a minimal living standard.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. provide quality child care and health care for parents and children which continues into employment until such time as wages support living costs.
2. provide adequate job training and employment supports to assist individuals moving from assistance to livable wage jobs.
3. provide transportation for people in job training programs.

VII. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it...(Ps. 24:1a) Earth-keeping today means insisting on sustainability--the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together. This requires human beings to practice wise, humble, responsible stewardship, after the model of servanthood that we have in Jesus. No interpretation of justice and sustainability is complete without an emphasis on frugality as a norm for all, especially the prosperous.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. fund research to determine population levels that can be adequately sustained.
2. protect human health and the environment from pollution, particularly in vulnerable communities.

3. promote planned urban and regional development with a priority of preserving prime agricultural land.
4. provide for balanced, diversified transportation systems.
5. promote energy conservation and research for alternative energy sources.
6. defend natural resources from degradation.

We support the principle that California may establish environmental regulations which are more protective of human health and the environment than federal laws require.

VIII. THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The world is becoming a holistic system of interdependent social, economic, and environmental systems. Though many social, economic and ecological problems can be resolved locally, regionally, or nationally, an increasing number are transnational in scope, and demand new expression of human solidarity that defy the political realities of sovereign independence.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. recognize human solidarity as essential to a sustainable global economy requiring new levels of international cooperation and responsibility.
2. recognize that our global economic interdependence places a premium on coordinated thought and action that puts a primary focus on just and sustainable human development.
3. call for debt cancellation with countries where that public debt is creating poverty.

IX. CRIMINAL JUSTICE

A. Incarceration

"Then they...will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you...sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?'" (Matthew 25:44)

We are concerned for people who are inmates of prisons. A large percentage of these people are poor, people of color, friendless, young, uneducated, unskilled, and products of unstable families.

We are concerned for people employed by federal, state, and local agencies to confine, supervise, and correct criminal offenders.

We are concerned for the general public. Most prisoners return to society. Surely it is in the best interest of our society that these persons return motivated and equipped to live useful and constructive lives.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. offer alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders as a viable option to incarceration.
2. improve institutional treatment, environment, rehabilitative and correctional programs at all levels of incarceration.
3. raise the standards for employment of correctional officers and other personnel to include psychological screening and appropriate training in the area of human behavior.

We oppose policies that:

1. incarcerate or house juvenile offenders with adult inmates.
2. try juveniles as adults.

B. Restorative Justice

We affirm the concept of restorative justice which seeks to repair injuries to victims, communities, and offenders, resulting from crime. Restorative justice requires these parties to work with government, and be actively engaged in the criminal justice process.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. encourage community access to institutions of detention in support of the rehabilitation process of those detained.
2. provide better services of physical, emotional and financial support of victims of violent crime.

C. Death Penalty

We believe that capital punishment cannot be condoned by an interpretation of the Bible based upon the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ; that as Christians we must seek the redemption of evil doers and not their death; and that the use of the death penalty tends to brutalize the society that condones it.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. abolish the death penalty.
2. expand the use of clemency.

We oppose policies that:

1. would expand the use of the death penalty.
2. criminalize the poor.

X. GAMBLING

We believe gambling is not a viable means of raising public revenues and is not a substitute for a progressive system of taxation.

Therefore, we oppose policies that:

1. expand legalized gambling in California.
2. attempt to support the public structure through gambling & taxes.

XI. HEALTH

A. Health Care

We believe that health and wholeness are central to the well being of society. In the Christian tradition, "health" is much more than mere physical well being; it is harmony and balance in life, encompassing the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

Therefore, we support public policies that:

1. establish a universal health care system for all citizens of California and provide quality health care for every person, a choice of providers, and is focused on the needs of patients rather than on the profits of health care institutions.
2. provide adequate substance abuse treatment for those persons who cannot afford it.
3. view gun violence as a public health epidemic and seek to curtail the production and sale of all weapons designed to harm human life.

B. Abortion

We endorse the 1973 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court on abortion recognizing the responsibility of the state to protect the life and health of the woman and of fetal life.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. provide public funding for access to reproductive health care.
2. provide accessibility to abortion services for low-income women.

We oppose policies that:

1. seek to restrict or limit the legal option of abortion for any woman who, in consultation with her physician, chooses to exercise her right to that option.
2. require parental consent for reproductive health care.

C. End of Life Issues

We affirm the right of all persons to die with dignity.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. encourage doctors and their patients to openly discuss medical issues surrounding the end of life.
2. empower patients to make appropriate decisions about living wills and pain management in consultation with appropriate medical professionals.

D. Stem Cell Research

Because we believe that health and healing are fundamental parts of our faith, and because the outcomes of stem cell research are as yet undetermined but hold enormous promise for the eradication of many diseases and afflictions, we recognize the importance of stem cell research to ascertain possible medical therapies and to prevent cell-related diseases,

Therefore we support public policies that:

1. Provide funding for research that uses adult, cord blood, and donated embryonic cells including the use of somatic cell nuclear transfer (therapeutic cloning).

We oppose policies that:

1. Fund or permit the implanting of cloned eggs to produce human fetuses.

XII. GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC

A. Tax Reform, the State Budget, and State Investments

The annual state budget is the collective public instrument which is vitally important in addressing many of the problems of our society. The state budget is a statement of our values and is the fiscal avenue for addressing challenges to the common good.

Therefore, we support policies that provide:

1. adequate funding for programs that will help all of California's population live as contributing citizens in a just society.
2. safeguards to prevent waste and irresponsible spending.
3. tax reforms to ensure that all citizens pay a fair and equitable tax in accordance with their ability to pay.
4. ensure that the investment of public and private funds honor human rights and peace with justice in local, national, and global markets.

We oppose policies that:

1. Permanently encumber, through initiative or referendum, present or future general fund revenues or revenue streams for single programs.

B. Campaign Finance Reform

The influence of money in political campaigns and abuses of the campaign laws has become a grave concern for California's citizens.

Therefore, we support policies that:

1. seek to improve the election process.
2. allow a combination of public and private funding to finance campaigns.
3. provide incentives for free political advertising as a community service by local TV, radio, and print media
4. designate a state income tax check-off system for a specified amount for political campaigns.