March 18, 2023

Catholic Days at the Capitol (CDAC)

Catholic Days at the Capitol are days designated by Florida Bishops for catholic men and women of Florida to gather at the state capitol and put their faith and civic responsibility into action. This is a yearly event at the beginning of the Florida Legislative Session.

Archdiocese of Miami participants started at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church located in Southwest Miami Dade at 5 am for the first bus pick-up and moved on to the second pick up at St. David Catholic Church in Davie in Broward County.

2023 CDAC was held March 7th through the 9th (including travel times).

After a couple of rest stops, we finally arrived at the Donald Tucker Civic Center, located in Tallahassee, around 2:15 pm for the Legislative briefing session. Opening prayers were offered by Bishop Parkes (from the Diocese of St. Petersburg). Michael Sheedy, Executive Director of the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishop, welcomed us and introduced his staff and this year’s priorities:

* [**Abortion Limits:**](https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/3Fno1CrRTU4ht7uvG_xQ0A)HB 7 (Persons-Mulicka) / SB 300 (Grall) would protect women and preborn children from abortion after six weeks gestation, as well as regulate chemical abortions. Additionally, the bills provide for increased funding (from $4 million to $25 million) and expansion of eligible services to assist pregnant women, families, and their children in the first years of life. (FCCB supports)
* [**Educational Choice**](https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/FC5Snh5ZK9rEowEz9KnJOw)**:** HB 1 (Tuck) / SB 202 (Simon) would make educational savings accounts (ESAs) available to all families, including homeschool students, regardless of income. (FCCB supports)
* [**Unanimous Juries in Capital Sentencing**](https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/bopqfOSDbtxmGrx3bh1k3g)**:** HB 555 (Jacques) / SB 450 (Ingoglia) would repeal current provisions requiring a jury to be unanimous to recommend a death sentence and require that only 8 of the 12 jurors recommend death. (FCCB opposes)

After debriefing, we moved on to our assigned diocesan rooms, where group leaders continued the briefing to further understand the issues and ask questions. A week prior to CDAC, group leaders worked tirelessly to secure appointments with assigned legislators at the Capitol.

We started out at 6:30am on Wednesday, March 8 to meet with all the Florida bishops, including Archbishop Wenski and Bishop Delgado. After our meeting, we made time for diocesan group and personal pictures. Archbishop Wenski welcomed us along with the legislators in attendance-- He thanked us all for being there to put our faith and civic responsibilities into action, while reminding us that no human being is a problem—including men and women on death row or babies in the womb. During the breakfast segment, the bishops presented two ‘Distinguished Catholic Leader Awards’. One of the awards was presented to Thomas A Horkan Jr, for his work with the people on death row and their families. A posthumous award was given to Kiera Camron, (who passed away in September 2022) for her many services to expectant mothers and families. The award was accepted on her behalf by her eldest daughter, Meredith Camron.

After breakfast, we hurriedly made our way to the Capitol for our visit to the legislators. Each group visited at least three legislators; my group visited five legislators. All group leader completed the report on each visit to the Legislators to include their stand on the issues, comments or if they needed more information on the priorities presented to them. These reports are submitted to the FCCB to follow-up if it is needed.

We stayed till 5 pm at the Capitol and journeyed to Co-Cathedral of St. Thomas More for the Red Mass of the Holy Spirit, celebrated every year during the CDAC. Red Masses are celebrated throughout Florida and the United States at various times during the year. Florida's Catholic bishops continue the Red Mass tradition by inviting the people who serve in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, and members of the legal profession, to join them in prayer and ask for the Lord's guidance in their service to the people of Florida.

The Most Rev. Erik Pohlmeier, Bishop of St. Augustine Diocese was the homilist. After mass, there was a reception for participants at the church parking lot and the church hall. We reached our hotel around 9 pm, very tired, but it was a very productive day.

On Thursday, March 9th at 6:30 am got on the bus to come back home to our diocese.

I am here to inform you that HB7-Abortion Limitation passed it first stop in the House on Thursday when the Healthcare Regulation Subcommittee found it favorable on a 13-5 vote.

HB 555- Unanimous Juries in Capital Sentencing was approved by the committee in a narrow 8-6 vote. This is where all of you comes in to Take Action, send message to urge your Legislator to oppose Eliminating Unanimous Jury requirement in capital sentencing. Register today with Florida Catholic Advocacy Network (FLCAN), if you are yet to do so, you will get these Take Action notices and you will get information on the priorities worked on.

HB 1-Education Choice also passed the bill by vote 83-27. The bill is in message to the Senate. Take Action: urge your Senator to pass SB 202/HB 1 and expand school choice to Florida Students.

This year we have 39 participants at CDAC from the Archdiocese of Miami, 19 of them are members of MACCW. My sincere gratitude to all participants and please save the date for the 2024 CDAC on February 6th through the 8th, 2024.

May the Our Lady of Good Counsel continue to give us courage to a loving leader of the church.

Respectfully,

Josephine Gilbert

NDCCW, Legislative Chairperson