

Calling Courageous Catholics to the Capitol

St. John the Baptist told King Herod to stop committing adultery. St. Thomas More refused to go along with King Henry VIII. Archbishop Oscar Romero publically demanded that the military in El Salvador end the murderous repression of the people.

How about you? Are you gutsy enough to tell your State Senator that even prisoners deserve humane treatment and poor people deserve health care? Or let your New York Assembly member know that you are against abortion?

The Catholic bishops of New York State are looking for a few good men, and women, and teens who are brave enough to speak truth to power, and to stand with vulnerable people on **Wednesday March 20** at the annual **Catholics at the Capitol Day**. This gathering brings 1,000 or so Catholics together to pray and to meet directly with state legislators in Albany.



It takes courage to talk to these elected officials; they're powerful people and we can get nervous, especially when they don't agree with us.

It takes fortitude to fight off the cynicism that tricks us into thinking "What does it matter if I speak up?"; after all, you're only one person among millions.

It takes discipline to get up before dawn to catch the ride to Albany; wouldn't it be great to sleep in instead?

But we are blessed. We are Catholic. We have the example of the saints to inspire us, and to teach us, in no uncertain terms, that it's our duty as Christians to build up the reign of God, to work for the Common Good, to speak out against injustice and to stand with Jesus, disguised in our day as the poor and vulnerable among us. We have the Holy Spirit on our side giving us the courage, fortitude and discipline we need to do this joyfully. And we have years of experience that prove that advocacy does indeed "make a difference".

Our U.S. Bishops put it this way in their document *Faithful Citizenship*:

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and **participation in political life is a moral obligation**. [Editor's Note: **Wow!** A moral obligation!] This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "It is necessary that all participate...in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" (nos. 1913-1915).

You probably know what happened to John the Baptist, Thomas More and Oscar Romero. They paid for their advocacy, for their commitment to justice and truth, with their lives. Their witness strengthens us but we aren't being asked for that level of sacrifice here. Yes, the trip is long and you do have to take the day off work or away from your home duties. Are you willing to do that for the Common Good?

Actually, it's not so hard; the event in Albany is really fun, and includes a beautiful Mass celebrated by Cardinal Dolan and even a free lunch. But it does take courage to put our faith into action in this way, and you are gutsy enough. Please step up and join in.

Issues We'll Discuss with Our Legislators during "Catholics at the Capitol" Day

1. Opposing legislation that could allow abortion in the third trimester of pregnancy and threatens the religious liberty of Catholic Hospitals that refuse to provide abortion services
2. Preserving Catholic schools and providing equitable resources for all school children
3. Ensuring that Medicaid redesign provides benefit to low income patients and does not diminish the quality of the health care they receive
4. Developing affordable housing for low-income and vulnerable populations
5. Supporting humane treatment for incarcerated individuals, particularly elderly and physically and mentally ill prisoners

Are you involved with prison ministry or Birthright or Habitat for Humanity?

Do you work in health care? Do you or your children attend Catholic school?

Do you, your friends or people served by your parish ministry live in subsidized housing?

Do care about these issues? If so, then you have a story that legislators should hear!

Learn more about these policies at www.nyscatholic.org/public-policy-day-training-materials

How to Join In

To participate in "Catholics at the Capitol" Day, go to the web site of the New York Catholic Conference and register at www.nyscatholic.org/public-policy-day-information/

Every county in the diocese is covered by one of the Justice & Peace Ministry coordinators of Catholic Charities. They'll be offering training to prepare participants on effective ways to speak with the legislators. They can also help connect you with rides to Albany. You'll find their contact information in the box below.



There will be a free bus for the event leaving from St. John Fisher College and stopping at the Geneva exit of the thruway. To reserve your seat, contact Monroe county staffer Ruth Marchetti. There will also be a van leaving from Elmira and picking up people in Owego. If you're from that area, contact Kathy Dubel in Chemung county for further information. Other folks from around the diocese will be making the trip in cars. If you need a ride or can offer to drive, please let your Justice & Peace staffer know!

In his homily at the Catholics at the Capitol Mass in 2010, Cardinal Timothy Dolan said that religion and politics "go together as naturally as a hot dog and a bun." Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E10yMbSI9s> to hear him preach about why we as Catholics care about all the many issues that we'll bring to the legislators.

Justice & Peace Ministry Staff of Catholic Charities

Monroe 585-546-7220 Marvin Mich ext. 7021; MMich@cfrochester.org / Ruth Marchetti ext 7099; RMarchetti@cfrochester.org

Chemung/Schuyler/Tioga Kathy Dubel 607-734-9784; KDubel@dor.org

Cayuga/Ontario/Seneca/Tompkins/Yates Laurie Konwinski 607-272-5062 ext. 12; LKonwinski@dor.org

Livingston Jack Balinsky 585-328-3228 ext 1323; Balinsky@dor.org

Steuben Lynda Lowin 607-776-8085 ext. 217; LLowin@dor.org

Wayne Deacon Jim Nail 315-524-2611 ext 18; JNail@dor.org