



Kentucky Bishops Urge a Reduction in Tobacco Use among Kentuckians Especially Children and Pregnant Women

Frankfort – Today on *World No Tobacco Day* the Catholic Conference of Kentucky joins other faith communities in the Commonwealth in the *Kentucky Faith United to Reduce Tobacco Use Campaign*. CCK invites Catholics and others of good will to promote human life by reducing tobacco use in Kentucky. At a press conference in the Capitol Rotunda in Frankfort there was a call for comprehensive and effective public policy measures recommended by the Center for Disease Control and other experts to prevent and reduce smoking and other tobacco use in the state particularly among children and pregnant women, including:

- Increasing Kentucky's tobacco tax rates to at least the nationwide state average to help fund Kentucky's health care needs;
- Prohibiting smoking in all workplaces, including restaurants and bars;
- Funding Kentucky's tobacco prevention and cessation programs to at least the minimum level of \$25 million per year as suggested by the CDC;
- Ensuring no state government preemption of local efforts to prevent and reduce tobacco use or its harms.

“With this Campaign we have an important moral opportunity to help people, especially children and pregnant women, to stop smoking and to eliminate the harmful consequences of tobacco use,” said **Fr. Paul Scaglione** pastor of St. Augustine Catholic Church in Louisville and Director of the Office of Pastoral Care for the Archdiocese of Louisville who spoke on behalf of CCK and the four Kentucky Bishops. “This tobacco reduction Campaign is also in our fiscal interest as individual taxpayers and as a state,” said **Ed Monahan**, CCK Executive Director. “If we seize this opportunity and spend a bit of money now, we can save significant money in the future. Kentuckians deserve a properly funded aggressive smoking cessation program in Medicaid.” Kentucky's Public Health Commissioner Dr. William Hacker recognized in the Cabinet's 2005 *Tobacco Use in Kentucky* report the extensive impact of smoking, “When a woman smokes during her pregnancy, the effects are seen in the short term, and generations into the future.”

What is the Number 1 public health threat in KY? *Tobacco use*. What is the leading cause of preventable death, disease and excess healthcare costs in the state? *Tobacco use*. This according to Ky's Cabinet for Health and Family Services. No wonder. KY ranks first in tobacco use in the country. The Cabinet tells us that 1 in 4 pregnant women smoke, 1 of 6 middle school students smoke. By high school 1 of 3 students smoke, and this carries over into adulthood where 1 in 3 adults smoke.

Fr. Scaglione said, “Of all states, KY needs this public policy initiative to reduce tobacco use.”

“Tobacco takes an inordinate toll in Kentucky in human life and has an adverse economic consequence which robs resources for other social needs in our state,” said **Steve Bogus**, Chair, CCK Social Concerns Committee. The Cabinet estimates health care costs in our Commonwealth attributable to smoking at \$1.2 billion annually.

With their commitment to the consistent ethic of life, Catholics are in a unique position to implement these tobacco public policy initiatives. In 2005, the four KY Catholic Bishops issued “Health Care is a Moral Right, a Safeguard of Human Life.” Because health care is the responsibility of each individual, they observed that “every family, employers, communities, health care providers, health care facilities, and state and federal governments share in the responsibility to insure health care for all and to safeguard human life.”

In that statement, the Bishops encouraged parishes to establish Health and Wellness Ministries to assist parishioners and their families to take responsibility for their own health by providing educational opportunities, by promoting skills for communicating with health care providers, and by providing opportunities for health care monitoring. **Jane Chiles**, Chair of the CCK Healthcare Committee, urged Catholic parish leaders to put into practice this tobacco reduction campaign in their churches, “We pray that these Wellness Ministries will join this campaign to promote health and human life by inviting parishioners to a tobacco free future.”

A copy of CCK's “Health Care is a Moral Right, a Safeguard of Human Life” is found under publications at www.ckky.org. Visit the Kentucky Faith United to Reduce Tobacco Use Campaign website for more information on the campaign: <http://www.kyfaithunitedtoreducetobaccouse.org/>.