



Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.  
*Archbishop of Denver*

Addresses

## What happens in Connecticut matters here

Denver, March 9, 2009

To fellow Catholics of the Church in northern Colorado:

One of the ironies of Catholic life is that, while outsiders often see the Church as a monolith, the opposite is true. Her real structure is much closer to a confederation of families. Each diocese or "local Church" is accountable to the Holy See and in relation to one another within the Catholic faith.

But - both under Canon Law and in practice - each diocese is also largely autonomous. The good news is that this ensures a healthy degree of diversity and freedom in local Catholic life. The bad news is that those who resent the Church can more easily attack the believing community in a piecemeal way.

Bigoted legislators, including some who claim to be nominally or formerly "Catholic," are thankfully uncommon. Most lawmakers, whatever their convictions, sincerely seek to serve the common good. But prejudice against the Catholic Church has a long pedigree in the United States. And rarely has belligerence toward the Church been so perfectly and nakedly captured as in Connecticut's pending Senate Bill 1098, which, in the words of Hartford's Archbishop Henry Mansell, "directly attacks the Roman Catholic Church and our Faith."

In effect, SB 1098 would give the state of Connecticut the power to forcibly reorganize the internal civil life of the Catholic community. This is bad public policy in every sense: imprudent; unjust; dismissive of First Amendment concerns, and contemptuous of the right of the Catholic Church to be who she is as a public entity. If Catholics want Caesar telling them how they're allowed to live their civil life as a community, this is exactly the kind of legislation to make it happen.

The legislative coercion directed against the Catholic community in one state has implications for Catholics in every other state. If bigots in one state succeed in coercive laws like SB 1098, bigots in other states will try the same.

I strongly encourage Catholics across the archdiocese to show their support for the bishops and faithful Catholic people of Connecticut by writing the Connecticut lawmakers behind SB 1098 and letting them know - respectfully and firmly - that this kind of prejudicial lawmaking violates common sense, damages the common good and offends Catholics around the country. One lesson we should learn from American history is this: If Catholics don't defend their Church, nobody else will.

*+Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.  
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**Web editor's note:** Contact Connecticut state Senator Andrew McDonald and Connecticut state Representative Michael Lawlor, co-chairs of the Connecticut state Judiciary Committee, to communicate your opposition to the bill. Senator McDonald can be reached at 1-800-842-1420 or by email at [McDonald@senatedems.ct.gov](mailto:McDonald@senatedems.ct.gov). Representative Lawlor can be reached at 1-800-842-8267 or by email at [MLawlor99@juno.com](mailto:MLawlor99@juno.com). The public hearing on this troubling legislation will be held Wednesday, March 11, 2009.