



Matthew 25

...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,
you did for me.

The Social Ministry Commission Newsletter
of St. Mary's Catholic Center, College Station, Texas

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Health Care Reform from the Catholic Perspective

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has long held that health care is a basic right, which flows from the sanctity and dignity of human life. In 1963, Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Peace on Earth* listed health care among basic human rights. In the same tradition in 1981, Pope John Paul II addressed the need for health care in *On Human Work*, where he focused on the availability and affordability of health care for workers. In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* published in December 2004, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace emphasized that the demands of the common good necessitate that the basic rights of persons in every country, such as health care, must be met and be a focus of national policies.

In the United States, the Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has long advocated health care for all. In their 1981 pastoral letter, *Health and Health Care*, the bishops called for a "comprehensive health care system that will ensure a basic level of health care for all Americans." In their 1993 document, *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform, Protecting Life, Promoting Human Dignity, Pursuing the Common Good* the U.S. Catholic Bishops gave the criteria for health care reform that they apply in their policy proposals.

The U.S. Bishops identified health care as an important question that Catholics should consider in future elections in their document *Faithful Citizenship* in 2003 and again in 2007: "Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right.... It is also an urgent national priority. Reform of the nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations." (www.usccb.org/sdwp)

U.S. Bishops Urge Congress to Observe Respect for Life, Access for All in Health Care Legislation

"Genuine health care reform that protects the life and dignity of all is a moral imperative and a vital national obligation," said Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., as

he outlined the policy priorities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on the issue of health care in a July 17 letter to Congress. The letter supported efforts to pass health care reform, but warned against inclusion of abortion. Writing on behalf of the bishops as chairman of their Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Bishop Murphy said the bishops have advocated comprehensive health care reform for decades and recommended four criteria for fair and just health care reform: respect for human life and dignity, access for all, pluralism and equitable costs.

"Two of these criteria need special attention as Congress moves forward with health care reform," Bishop Murphy said. On respecting life and dignity, he said, "No health care reform plan should compel us or others to pay for the destruction of human life, whether through government funding or mandatory coverage of abortion. Any such action would be morally wrong."

After citing protections from public funding of abortion in U.S. law, Bishop Murphy added, "Health care reform cannot be a vehicle for abandoning this consensus which respects freedom of conscience and honors our best American traditions. Any legislation should reflect longstanding and widely supported current policies on abortion funding, mandates and conscience protections

because they represent sound morality, wise policy and political reality."

On the issue of access for all, Bishop Murphy said, "All people need and should have access to comprehensive, quality health care that they can afford, and it should not depend on their stage of life, where or whether they or their parents work, how much they earn, where they live, or where they were born. The Bishops' Conference believes health care reform should be truly universal and it should be genuinely affordable."

He went on to cite that, even after the implementation of health care reform, some families, including many immigrants, will not be covered and urged Congress to adequately fund clinics and hospitals that serve as a safety net for these people.

The Facts

All of us, regardless of our level of income, share concerns about access to quality health care; even those of us who have health insurance worry about the economical burden of a grave illness on our families. In America, 47 million do not have health insurance, including many working people and over 9 million children. They cannot afford preventive care and thus delay medical attention until their symptoms become serious, which often leads to hospital visits and expensive treatments they cannot afford. Lack of proper health care takes an enormous toll: children are more likely to experience development and education losses, and poorer health in adulthood; adults are more likely to experience disabilities and homelessness

- Nearly 47 million people lacked health coverage in 2006, 14.8% of the total population or 16.8% of people under 65. (*Center for Disease Control, 2007*) In Texas alone, 5.5 million persons are uninsured one of the highest rates in the nation. (*US census bureau*)
- A recent study shows that based on the effects of the recession alone (not job loss), it is projected that nearly seven (7) million Americans will lose their health insurance coverage between 2008 and 2010. Urban Institute researchers estimate that if unemployment reaches 10

"In this, the wealthiest of nations, it is unacceptable that so many people do not have access to affordable health care." (USCCB)

percent, another six (6) million Americans will lose their health insurance coverage. Taking these numbers together, it is conceivable that by next year, 57 to 60 million Americans will be uninsured. (*www.nchc.org*)

- Over 9 million children lack a regular source of health care. (*Children's Defense Fund, 2007*)
- 80% non-elderly uninsured are from families where the head of household works, 58.7% of whom works full-time throughout the year. (*Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2006*)
- 33 % of Hispanic Americans and 16% of African Americans are uninsured compared to 10.5% of white persons. (*Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2006*)
- Lack of insurance is most common in families with low incomes. 53% of families with incomes under \$20,000 and 41% of families making between \$20,000 and \$40,000 were uninsured at some point during 2006. (*CDC, 2007*)
- 25 % Americans say their family has had a problem paying for medical care during the past year. Nearly 30 % say someone in their family has delayed medical care in the past year. (*www.nchc.org*)

"Social thinking and social practice inspired by the Gospel must always be marked by a special sensitivity toward those in distress, those who are extremely poor." (Pope John Paul II, 1979)



"Learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow." (Is 1:17)

What Can You Do

Pray for the sick and vulnerable, especially those who do not have access to health care.

Learn about Catholic social teaching and how it is applied to health care. Read the bishops' statements: "Health and Health Care" (1981), "A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform" (1993) (www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/health1.shtml) and recent letters from Bishop Murphy's to Congress on Health Care Reform Priorities and Concerns and from Cardinal Rigali to the House Energy and Commerce Committee urging support of Pro-Life Amendments (www.usccb.org/healthcare/)

Educate people in your parish or community about Catholic social teaching and health care. Visit websites for information about the state of health care in the U.S. and the position of the US bishops on the health care reform. (www.usccb.org/sdwp, www.usccb.org/healthcare/, www.chausa.org)

Advocate for a health care reform that followed the Catholic social teaching by contacting your elected officials and sharing with them the Catholic teaching on health care, the principles and priorities the bishops used in their health care reform framework and asking that they support pro-life amendments in the health care reform bill. Join a legislative network or look for sample messages at www.txcatholic.org, www.voiceofthepoor.org, www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/advocacy or advocacy.crs.org

"Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. Reform of the nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations. Religious groups should be able to provide health care without compromising their religious convictions." (Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007)

Living for a Just Society: a 7 weeks **Social Justice Bible Study** meetings at St. Mary's on Wednesday at 7:00 PM starting Sept. 30 to learn how to live in a way that moves us closer to God's purposes. See the parish bulletin for more info.