

Reflections on Poverty

Health Care

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Introduction

Catholic Charities USA *Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America* has four main priorities: to reduce hunger, to ensure universal health care coverage, to foster economic security and to create more affordable housing.

The purpose of this reflection paper is to provide Catholic Charities employees the opportunity to become better acquainted with the Campaign to Reduce Poverty and discover new possibilities for action at the local level concerning the issue of health care. The method employed is fairly simple. Participants will participate in a process that involves a series of prayer moments, information on church documents and CCUSA's Poverty in America, reflection questions, and group discussions. Through content, discussion, prayer, and reflection you will be able to discern your personal response and the response of your agency to the health care crisis in our world.

Opening Prayer

Leader:

Calling ourselves into the present moment, confident that God is always with us, let us pray.

Loving and gracious God, we believe in the sacredness and dignity of every person. Jesus ministered to the sick, healing bodies, minds and hearts. As we gather today to study the issues of health care, help us to be instruments of Your healing and a catalyst for justice in Your world. Grant us Your wisdom, Your compassion, as we listen to one another in the spirit of collaboration to help attain health care for all persons. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Health care in recent years has become a huge concern for millions of Americans. Rising medical costs and the rapid growth of health insurance premiums have left millions of Americans with a limited ability to seek needed and timely health care. There has been a dramatic increase in the uninsured and underinsured. Today 46 million Americans lack health insurance in the US and 9 million of these are children.

Two-thirds of the uninsured are low-income, and eight in ten come from working families. 81% of uninsured workers are employed by firms who do not sponsor health benefits or are not eligible for their employer's plan. The majority of the uninsured (79%) are American citizens; new immigrants (in the U.S. for less than 6 years) are only 10% of the uninsured population.

The uninsured are 3 times more likely than people with insurance to delay seeking care or not getting care at all even when major health conditions are experienced such as heart attacks, pregnancy, cancer and traumatic injuries. The lack of health care has serious consequences to the uninsured that increase their chances of preventable health problems, disability, and premature death.

Process

Have you or has someone you know been without health care or health insurance?

How did you feel about this?

Reflection

There are many stories throughout the Gospels of Jesus healing and attending to the sick. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches the importance of who we call neighbor and how we treat our neighbor. Believing in the dignity and sacredness of all people, this parable challenges us to recognize health care as a basic human need and that we are responsible to attain health care for the most vulnerable among us.

A reading from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 10:25-42)

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Process

What insights does this scripture passage give you in light of today's health care crisis?

How do Jesus' words "Go and do likewise" challenge your actions?

Prayer

Leader:

In confidence Lord, we lift our prayers to you.

For our church, that we imitate Jesus, who healed the sick and comforted those who suffer, through our ministry to all who are sick and suffering, excluding no one, we pray to the Lord,

All: Lord, please heal us.

Leader:

For our federal and state legislators, that they will legislate a moral budget which provides access for all people to health care and health insurance regardless of a person's economic ability to pay for needed treatment, we pray to the Lord,

All: Lord, please heal us.

Leader:

For the people of our country, that we don't pass by others who are suffering, but that as a society we stand in solidarity with them, we pray to the Lord,

All: Lord, please heal us.

Leader:

For our communities, that we will challenge and advocate to change unjust systems which prevent people from receiving necessary medical care by working for just solutions, we pray to the Lord,

All: Lord, please heal us.

Leader:

For the millions of people, especially children, the elderly, the poor, our neighbors, who do not have adequate health care or health insurance, that they will be treated with love and compassion promoting hope and healing, we pray to the Lord,

All: Lord, please heal us.

Leader:

Divine Healer, you challenge us to see Your face in the poor, the sick and the suffering. Help us to respond compassionately while offering comfort; give us wisdom to advocate to change unjust laws so that health care will be attainable for all, and grant us healing and hope to work towards a world where all are welcomed and respected. Amen.

Information on Church Documents

In *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, the United States Catholic Bishops write "Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. Any plan to reform the nation's health care system must be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the unique needs of the poor. We support health care that is affordable and accessible to all."

In their pastoral letter *Health and Health Care*, the US Catholic Bishops advocate for a "comprehensive health care system that will ensure a basic level of health care for all Americans." Health care is listed as a basic human right in Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Peace On Earth*. Pope John Paul II wrote about the need for health care that workers can access and afford in his encyclical *On Human Work* written in 1981.

The U.S. Bishops have advocated for many years that health care is a non-negotiable right to preserve the sacredness and dignity of each person. Catholic social teaching is explicit in that all people have basic rights for the integrity and dignity of a human person to be honored and respected. (See *Poverty in America*, page 6.)

Process

Why do so many people in our country not have access to health care and health insurance?

What are the systems which keep them from receiving necessary health care?

How do our church's writings reflect the living reality of many people today?

Reflection

A reading from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 5:17-20, 24-25):

One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set him in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, "As for you, your sins are forgiven." . . . he said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He stood up immediately before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God.

Process

The community of the paralytic was instrumental to his healing. What does this scripture passage teach us today?

How can we creatively rethink the health care dilemma today?

In this reading, others took direct action to get the proper care for the paralytic. What action can you take for someone in your family, your community, who needs help to receive necessary health care services?

Closing Prayer

God of Healing,

we pray for those who are sick, those who are dying, that they may know Your loving presence in all who minister to them.

God of Love,

we pray for the millions of people who are uninsured, who are in need of health care and do not have the means to pay for it, that their fears and anxiety will be relieved and that our hearts will be moved to help them.

God of Justice,

we pray for the leaders of our nation that they will work to change unjust laws and systems by providing access to health care and health insurance for every person.

God of Compassion,

we pray this day for the voiceless among us, the unborn, the elderly, the sick, those who are ashamed or discouraged to speak on their own behalf and demand the right to health care.

God of Power,

we pray that all people will stand in solidarity with the uninsured and those who lack health care by working collaboratively toward the common good for our country.

God of All Creation,

help us to be instruments of Your healing and a catalyst for justice in Your world. Bless those who work in health care, upon all people we serve at Catholic Charities, especially those marginalized by society. United in our common dignity, may we grow closer in the human family and build a culture of life filled with reverence and love for all. Amen.

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