

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Health Care is the Gift that Keeps on Giving

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Another Christmas holiday has passed and a new year has begun. During the Christmas season, we take time to meditate on “right relationships”, personal healing, renewal, rebirth, sharing, giving and opportunities to make others happy.

Martin Luther King once said, “Without justice, there is no peace.” Justice and peace are integrally linked. As people of faith we believe that in order for God’s realm to exist on earth today, there can be no divorce from justice. You don’t have to look very far to see examples of injustice in the world today: loss of jobs by companies taking their manufacturing jobs to small third world countries and closing plants here in the U.S. leaving thousands unemployed, the Wall Street debacle, mortgage crisis, religious intolerance, economic injustices that involve the state’s failure to provide individuals with basic necessities to life—such as access to adequate food and housing, unfair hiring procedures, lack of education and insufficient health care—to name a few. As people of faith we are called to speak truth to power, liberate the oppressed, care for the poor and comfort the afflicted. We are compelled by the teachings of Jesus to achieve equality and fairness for everyone.

In 2010 some of the injustices surrounding our health care system were addressed by the historic signing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act by the President of the United States. Grounded in values that inspired us to work on behalf of the common good, communities of faith promoted a moral vision for our health care future and raised our voices in support of affordable quality health care for all. At the core of the health care debate was and still is the age-old moral dilemma: Am I my brother’s/sister’s keeper? If we had failed to seize this opportunity to pass health care reform, we would have left a legacy of neglecting the “least of these.” That historic moment was a clear signal that persistent vigilance and diligence is needed when we are seeking “just” public policy reform.

Now there are those who seek to repeal health care reform by defunding or neglecting to appropriate funds for key components of the law. Dr. Jack Glaser, Sr. Vice President of Theology and Ethics at St. Joseph Health System, says that if justice is understood as a condition of right relationships, then injustice refers to relationships that are somehow out of balance and not aligned with deeply held shared values that affirm the common good. Would repealing aspects of the health care law be out of balance and not aligned with deeply held shared values that affirm the common good? I think yes. The Affordable Care Act is not without flaws, but it is a good faith step in the movement toward universal coverage. We gave the gift of health care to many in 2010. It would be a grave injustice and surely not peaceful if this gift is allowed to be taken away. Let’s make sure they get to keep it.

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