



Fisch-ing Lines

by Deacon Howard Fischer

Happy Mother's Day to all the Moms who have given us life and to all the women who have taught us to love with compassion, devotion and sacrifice!

The issue of health care reform has boiled on the national scene for many years. In the midst of this turmoil we must remember that health care is not simply a political or economic issue; it is pre-eminently a moral issue as well. As Pope Francis has said, "Health is not a consumer good but a universal right, so access to health services cannot be a privilege."

Our bishops have been urging Congress for many years to reform our health care system, long predating the Affordable Care Act in 2010. For decades our system has often left people without access to the care they need, with insurance coverage that has been hard to get and easily lost, and exposes families to financial ruin. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) writes, "[H]ealth care reform should be truly universal and it should be genuinely affordable. Every person is made in the image of God and possesses inherent dignity. A just community strives to see and address the needs of those who struggle on its margins, and each segment of society is called to build toward a common good that creates and maintains conditions aimed at true human flourishing. In our country's policies toward that end, we must not see health care as a luxury, but as a necessary building block to help individuals and families thrive and contribute to the good of the community and the nation."

To this end, the bishops teach that reforms need to honor key moral principles: access for all people to comprehensive, quality health care that is truly affordable, including extra consideration for pre-existing conditions; respect for life by preventing the use of federal funds for abortion; and conscience protections. The USCCB observes that the recent reform measure passed by the House of Representatives, known as the American Health Care Act, is lacking in many critical ways and they urge the Senate to fix the legislation,

particularly provisions harmful to the poor and which would leave millions of Americans without coverage:

“Even with efforts to improve the bill before passage, the American Health Care Act still contains major defects, particularly regarding changes to Medicaid that risk coverage and affordability for millions; it is deeply disappointing that the voices of those who will be most severely impacted were not heeded. The AHCA does offer critical life protections, and our health care system desperately needs these safeguards. But still, vulnerable people must not be left in poor and worsening circumstances as Congress attempts to fix the current and impending problems with the Affordable Care Act...When the Senate takes up the AHCA, it must act decisively to remove the harmful proposals from the bill that will affect low-income people – including immigrants – as well as add vital conscience protections, or begin reform efforts anew.”

In words that still ring true, the USCCB wrote several years ago: “Health care is not just another issue for the Church or for a healthy society. It is a fundamental issue of human life and dignity. Health care is a critical component of the Catholic Church’s ministry. The Church provides health care, purchases health care and picks up the pieces of a failing health care system. The Catholic community encounters and serves the sick and uninsured in our emergency rooms, shelters and on the doorsteps of our parishes. One out of six patients is cared for in Catholic hospitals. We bring both strong convictions and everyday experience to the issue of health care...Genuine health care reform that protects the life and dignity of all is a moral imperative and a vital national obligation.”

As disciples of the Lord, we must shape our attitudes and actions by the Gospel, not by political philosophy or economic gain. Let us urge our fellow citizens and our political leaders to pursue health care reform based on these essential moral principles. The USCCB’s advocacy site helps to make emailing our officials an easy task and outlines the onerous provisions which need to be modified/removed: www.votervoices.net/USCCB/home. If you wish to contact me, please leave a note in the Parish Office or send an email to deaconhwhf99@yahoo.com.